

From: Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education
Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 01 March 2022

Subject: Refurbishment and reprovisioning of Science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Ashford

Summary: This report provides the Committee with the information regarding a request for additional funding for the refurbishment of science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre and the impact on the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget.

Recommendation(s):

The Children's, Young People's and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to

- I. Release an additional £450,000 from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital budget to reconfigure and reprovision science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre (Ashford), thus increasing the agreed allocation from £1,550,000 to £2,000,000.
- II. Authorise the Director of Education in consultation with the General Counsel to enter into any necessary contracts / agreements on behalf of the County Council.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2021, decision 21/00020 - The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford was made to release £1,550,000 from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget to support the addition of science classrooms at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre which would enable the School to accommodate an additional 1FE of pupils (27 pupils in Year 7 and 135 places in total) as and when required to support the need for additional secondary places in the Borough.
- 1.2 The cost forecasts have increased due to the Covid pandemic and redesigns that were required following further intrusive surveys. A further £450,000 will be required from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget to complete the refurbishment of the science facilities.

2. Background

- 2.1 In Ashford Borough secondary school rolls have risen significantly over the last 10 years. For a number of years, school leaders have temporarily offered places above their published admissions number to support KCC in being able to allocate sufficient places for National Offer Day.
- 2.2 The pressures for non-selective places in the Ashford Town non-selective planning group are particularly acute. The number of secondary aged pupils The latest pupil forecasts (figure 1) would suggest that there has been a slight reduction in the number of Year 7 places required from September 2022 (in comparison to the previous Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent), but there will still be a significant deficit in year 7 places which has to be addressed throughout the Plan period.

Figure 1: Forecast Year 7 surplus/deficit capacity if no further action is taken (KCP 2022-26)

Planning Group Name	2020-21 Capacity	2020-21 (A)	2021-22 (F)	2022-23 (F)	2023-24 (F)	2024-25 (F)	2025-26 (F)	2026-27 (F)	2027-28 (F)	2027-28 Capacity
Ashford North Non-Selective	840	12	-35	-52	-107	-69	-21	-81	-33	758
Ashford Selective	420	-13	-1	0	1	0	1	3	-2	420

- 2.3 The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre is a non-selective school in Ashford. This School, alongside all Ashford non-selective schools, has offered additional temporary capacity to support KCC in ensuring sufficient secondary school places are available.
- 2.4 Temporary provision has been added at The Towers School in each of the last three academic years and they will continue to do so, as required, until the opening of Chilmington Green Secondary School which has been delayed until the 2023-24 academic year at the earliest.
- 2.5 To support the need for additional Year 7 places a decision was made to provide £1,550,000 of Capital Funding from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget to enable the refurbishment and conversion of the existing science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre. This would enable the school to take an additional 1FE of pupils (135 places).
- 2.6 In addition, the improvement of science facilities enabled the school to permanently release two existing classrooms separate from the main building to provide an excellent facility for a special school satellite provision. This opened in September 2021, providing facilities for 24 Wyvern School students, increasing the number of special school places in Ashford and offering Wyvern students the opportunity to join mainstream lessons with the support of Wyvern staff.

2.7 The costs of the project have increased significantly. This is due to the Covid pandemic and redesigns that have been required following further surveys. The cost of the scheme is now £2,540,059. The County council has agreed funding to cover increases in capital expenditure due to the pandemic. Currently identified within the cost plan is £540,059.62 which has been assigned to the COVID relief budget. Due to essential redesign and additional items discovered during construction, there has been an increase in the cost plan of £391,129.16. In recent months the construction industry has seen significant inflation on materials and labour costs, although this could be related to the outcomes of the pandemic, any increases can no longer be assigned to a separate COVID budget. Therefore, an uplift £58,870 has been requested to cover any additional issues, providing a funding 'buffer' should any other issues arise as the project continues. Therefore, an additional £450,000 is being requested from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget.

3. Reasons for Increase in costs

3.1 When the scheme was originally costed, extensive and intrusive surveys were not possible due to the block being occupied by pupils. When possible, additional surveys were conducted. Additional asbestos was found and the internal walls were deemed unstable. This has resulted in additional Aluminium Composite Material removal and a decision to remove and replace the internal walls. In addition, during the early phases of construction, some leaks became apparent, and our contractor commissioned a roof survey, which has indicated that the roof requires localised repairs. To protect the refurbishment of the block, it was decided that a basic recovering of the roof should take place. Improved glazing will also be required will the school subsidising this with £40,000 of their own funding.

3.2 The design and preparation period for the refurbishment was in the first quarter of 2021. Due to Covid, the following months have seen significant industry turmoil in securing supplies and labour as well as increased materials costs. These costs have been accounted for with the total scheme budget. However, the current inflation figures and industry predictions indicate further increases in cost that cannot be attributed directly to Covid. To offset these additional costs a contingency is required.

4. Alternatives considered

4.1 During the early phases of construction some leaks became apparent and our contractor commissioned a roof survey, which has indicated that the roof requires localised repairs. To protect the refurbishment of the block, it was decided that a basic recovering of the roof should take place. While small patch work would have made a saving, to fully safeguard the works to the block the full covering was considered the best option. An alternative to replacing the internal walls was considered. This would have involved stabilising the walls and chasing out new electrical and plumbing connections. Replacing all the walls was the cheapest option.

- 4.2 The options of temporary provision at the other non-selective schools in the Borough has been considered. Additional places will be required in two or more of these schools in 2022 in addition to those offered at The Towers School. This and the fact that several schools have offered additional places in one or more of the last two academic years has limited their ability to offer places again without investment. Places offered at other schools cannot be seen as an alternative to what is required at The Towers.
- 4.3 Changing the scope and adding basic classrooms rather than science rooms has been considered but would not be appropriate. Prior to the project being considered, a Space Needs Assessment was conducted at The Towers. This identified a shortage in science facilities at the School should pupil numbers increase.
- 4.2 Consideration has also been given to allocating places outside of Ashford Borough as forecasts would suggest that there are surplus places for 2022-23 and onwards in adjacent District/Boroughs. However, the places available are not always in the most accessible location and would leave students having to travel to Canterbury or Dover to access a school place.

Expecting young people and their families to travel significant distances to access non-selective school provision is not ideal and would not be well received by families. In addition, KCC will be responsible for providing transport which would have a consequential impact on the Council's revenue budget.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The cost of the scheme is now £2,540,059. Currently identified within the cost plan is £540,059.62 which has been assigned to the COVID relief budget. Due to essential redesign and additional items discovered during construction, there has been an increase in the cost plan of £391,129.16. In recent months the construction industry has seen significant inflation on materials and labour costs, although this could be related to the outcomes of the pandemic, any increases can no longer be assigned to a separate COVID budget. Therefore, an uplift £58,870 has been requested to cover any additional issues, providing a funding 'buffer' should any other issues arise as the project continues. Therefore, an additional £450,000 is being requested from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget.
- 5.2 The works to the science facilities will enable the school to accommodate 135 secondary school pupils. Based on the total project the cost per pupil is £18,815. This is within the range of benchmark costs provided by AECOM for secondary rebuilds and refurbishments at £17,455 (20th centile) and £24,945 (80th centile). It needs to be noted that these figures were calculated in 2018 and do not account for recent inflation. Given that this is for science facilities which will cost significantly more than basic classrooms it still represents good value for money.
- 5.3 £1,100,000 has previously been included in the CYPE MTFP and developer contributions of £720,000 have been secured so far towards this project.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 Kent County Council (KCC) as the Local Authority has a duty to ensure sufficient school places are available. If this decision does not take place there will be a risk that we cannot meet our statutory duties to provide education provision.
- 6.2 A funding agreement is in place between KCC and The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre which links the funding to additional school places.

7. Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed prior to the initial funding being agreed. This assessment has been reviewed. It is believed that the proposal will benefit all, including protected groups, as the additional places created will support Ashford pupils in accessing secondary school provision in the Borough. No adverse impact on protected groups have been identified at this point.

8. The view of the local Member, Clair Bell, Ashford Rural East

Given the pressure on school places in Ashford and the increased costs resulting from Covid-19, the allocation of this additional funding to complete the science classroom refurbishment project at The Towers seems to be a sensible way forward. The report indicates that the cost per pupil is at the lower end of the range used for benchmarking and so appears to represent good value for money. I therefore fully support the proposal.

9. Other corporate implications

None at this point.

10. Governance

The Officer Scheme of Delegation; within the Council's Constitution, provides a clear and appropriate link between this decision and the actions needed to implement it.

11. Conclusions

The cost of the reconfiguration of the science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre has increased and additional funding will be required to complete the project. The cost increase being due to both the Covid pandemic and essential redesigns. A further £450,000 will be required from the Children's, Young People and Education capital budget to enable the project to be completed as planned. The addition places that this will enable the School to offer are still required and there is no suitable alternative. The average cost per place of £18,815 is within the range of benchmark costs and would still provide good value for money.

<p>12. Recommendation(s): The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on the proposed decision to:</p>
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">I. Release an additional £450,000 from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital budget to reconfigure and re-provision science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre (Ashford), thus increasing the agreed allocation from £1,550,000 to £2,000,000.II. Authorise the Director of Education in consultation with the General Counsel to enter into any necessary contracts / agreements on behalf of the County Council. |
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13. Background Documents (plus links to document)

Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2022-26

https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/131486/Commissioning-Plan-for-Education-Provision-in-Kent-2022-to-2026.pdf

Decision - 21/00020 - The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford.

[Decision - 21/00020 - The Towers School - additional Year 7 places \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

14. Contact details

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