

**From: Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

**Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director for Children,  
Young People and Education**

**To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee,  
19 July 2022**

**Subject: Proposal to agree funding to expand Meopham School,  
Wrotham Road, Meopham, Kent DA13 0AH by increasing the  
Published Admission Number (PAN) from 140 places to 200  
places**

**Decision Number: 22/00069**

**Classification: Unrestricted**

**Future Pathway: Cabinet Member Decision  
of Paper**

**Electoral Division: Gravesend Rural, Bryan Sweetland**

**Summary:**

This report follows up the decision 19/00094 and provides details of the cost to facilitate a proposal to expand Meopham School by increasing the Published Admission Number from 140 places to 200 places in September 2021.

**Recommendation:**

The Children's, Young People and Education Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to:

- i. agree funding of £12.87m and to progress the proposal to permanently expand Meopham School, Wrotham Road, Meopham, Kent, DA13 0AH, by increasing the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 140 places to 200 places from September 2021.
- ii. authorise the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the General Counsel and Director of Education to enter into any necessary contracts / agreements on behalf of the County Council.
- iii. authorise the Director of Infrastructure to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Kent County Council (KCC) as the Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places are available. The County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent is a five-year rolling plan which is updated annually. It sets out our future plans as Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision across all types and phases of education in Kent. A copy of the current plan can be viewed from this link:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/education-provision/education-provision-plan>

- 1.2. The 2020/24 Commissioning Plan anticipated that there would be significant short and medium-term pressure for additional Year 7 places in the Gravesend and Longfield Non-Selective Planning Group with additional capacity needed for 2021/22, continuing for later years. The current Commissioning Plan does not indicate any easing of that pressure.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. KCC forecasts indicated a growing demand for Year 7 places in Gravesham from the start of the 2019-20 academic year. The Gravesend and Longfield Non-Selective Planning Group was forecast to have a deficit of 102 Year 7 places (3.5FE) from 2021-22 that increases to a deficit of 203 places (8FE) by 2023/24. This forecast has been borne out in the current Commissioning Plan.
- 2.2. The Gravesham Borough Council Local Plan (adopted September 2014), states an intention to build 6,170 dwellings between 2011 to 2028. About 20% of the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation area is sited in Gravesham. During the 5 year period 2013-18 a total of 1,023 houses were completed with an average of 205 per annum.
- 2.3. The deficit of places will be further exacerbated by limited options for alternative expansions within the Gravesham district, unless new provision can be created. This seems unlikely at present as there are no sites on the horizon.
- 2.4. Meopham School now has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 200 as per the proposed expansion. However, the school now needs the infrastructure to ensure they can maintain the increased intake in the future.
- 2.5. Meopham School is a popular school and the proposal to increase the number of secondary places at the school is therefore, in line with the expectation of expanding popular & successful schools. The proposal added an additional 60 places taking the school PAN up to 200 for September 2021. The permanent expansion will be achieved through building additional accommodation and service space on the Meopham site.
- 2.6. Ofsted has rated this school as 'Outstanding'. The report can be viewed here: <https://www.meophamschool.org.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=3&type=pdf>
- 2.7. The school is operated by the Swale Academy Trust.

- 2.8. A decision taken by the Cabinet Member on 25 March 2020, agreed to the principle of the expansion of Meopham School, subject to the final costs being determined and reported to the Cabinet Member. This report adverts the final costs, following a lengthy planning and design process.
- 2.9. The considerable delay between the 25 March 2020 decision and the publication of this report has been caused by a number of factors, which in turn, exacerbate the increase in costs. The reasons are:
- 2.10. **Highways improvements and car park works:** Highways has raised several holding objections at different times during the process to seek planning approval. This has resulted in three re-designs of the plan. This has impacted on total cost.
- 2.11. **Works Redesign:** Following regular advice from Highways and Planning, several comprehensive redesigns have had to be undertaken.
- 2.12. **Archaeology, Ecology and Arboriculture Survey:** Each redesign has required Project Managers to initiate additional surveys in response to Planning requirements. For example, the increased car park size has necessitated utilising some land that has up to now, been laid over as woodland and scrub.

### **3. Proposal Details**

- 3.1. This proposal was to permanently expand Meopham School by increasing the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 140 places to 200 places from September 2021. The school has been taking additional Year 7 students up to 200 per intake, since 2019.
- 3.2. The project will require the construction of a new teaching block, some internal work and refurbishment, and the installation and subsequent removal or temporary teaching accommodation at the end of the project. There is also a requirement to put in Highways mitigation, additional bus stop areas and enlarged car park areas, as required by Kent Highways.

### **4. Alternative Proposals**

- 4.1. There are seven secondary schools in the Gravesend and Longfield Non-Selective Planning Group. These are: Longfield Academy, Northfleet School for Girls, Northfleet Technology College, Saint George's CE School (Gravesend), St. John's Catholic Comprehensive School and Meopham School.
- 4.2. Of these, St George's CE School, Northfleet School for Girls and Thamesview School are either being expanded or have been identified as the subject of a future proposal to expand. Northfleet Technology College is under feasibility for an expansion and Longfield School and St John's Catholic Comprehensive School have been offering additional places under a local arrangement for several years. Meopham School is the only remaining candidate for expansion.

## **5. Financial Implications**

### **5.1. Capital**

5.2. A feasibility study was carried out in 2019, which estimated the cost of delivery being approximately £7.5m, wholly funded by the CYPE Basic Need Capital Budget. This feasibility did not at the time, factor in any need for Highways mitigation.

5.3. KCC Project Managers have undertaken detailed costing with the result that the school expansion scheme is now estimated to be more than the original estimate for 2019. The increase over the estimate is proportionate with the expected cost increase in materials and build costs over the three-year period.

5.4. The total base project costs (the new building) have been costed at £8,978,711. The abnormalities are being costed at £2,084,293. Increased costs for inflation are being estimated at £1,002,914. In addition, the cost for mobile classrooms must also be included, which amount to around £800,000. The total is therefore £12.87m.

5.5. Planning permission is currently being sought. KCC Highways have advised that additional improvements to local roads, car parking and bus turning areas will be required. These additional site improvements constitute slightly more than half of the abnormalities cost, at £1,232,786.

5.6. The total cost is still a proportionate amount for a 2FE secondary expansion, compared to similar schemes across Kent.

5.7. In addition, an allowance of up to £2500 may be payable to outfit each new teaching room with appropriate ICT equipment, such as touch screens or projection equipment.

### **5.8. Revenue**

5.9. Should the scheme progress, £6,000 per new learning space will be provided towards the cost of furniture and equipment. This will be given to the school to purchase the required equipment.

5.10. The school will receive pupil growth funding in accordance with the Pupil Growth Policy established by KCC and its Schools' Funding Forum.

### **5.11. Human**

The school will appoint additional staff as it grows over the years.

## **6. Governance**

6.1. The Officer Scheme of Delegation; under Appendix 2 part 4 of the Council's Constitution provides a clear and appropriate link between this decision and the actions needed to implement it. The proposed decision will authorise the Director of Infrastructure, Strategic and Corporate Services in consultation with the

General Counsel and Director of Education to enter into any necessary contracts/ agreements on behalf of the County Council.

- 6.2. It will also authorise the Director of Infrastructure, Strategic and Corporate Services to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

## **7. Legal Implications**

The expansion will be subject to a legally binding and enforceable contract being in place between KCC and the Trust.

## **8. Kent Policy Framework**

- 8.1. The 'Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision, 2020-24 identified a pressure on places in the Gravesham area. This was confirmed in the latest Kent Commissioning Plan 2022-2026.
- 8.2. The provision of sufficient school places is a statutory duty and contributes to the Strategic Business Plan Priorities to ensure that "Children and Young People in Kent get the best start in life".

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1. The Academy Trust held a consultation from 19 November 2019 to 16 December 2019, with a drop-in event for stakeholders to raise issues and concerns on 3 December 2019.
- 9.2. The Academy Trust have considered the response received from the consultation and have confirmed that they will proceed with the expansion proposal.

## **10. Equality Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in June 2019 and updated in October 2019. Meopham School is an inclusive, non-selective, co-educational school. No adverse impacts have been identified.

## **11. Data Protection implications**

- 11.1. The school are the 'controllers' under the General Data Protection Regulation and will ensure that any personal information is processed fairly and lawfully within any consultation work completed as part of the fast-track business plan application.

## **12. Views**

### **12.1. The Local Member**

Mr Bryan Sweetland was informed of the original proposal through the consultation mechanism. Further updates on the cost have been provided to Mr Sweetland.

### **12.2. The Trust and School**

The Trust leadership and governing body of the school are fully supportive of the proposal.

### **12.3. Area Education Officer:**

The analysis of the demand for secondary non-selective provision in the area, indicates that there are immediate and future pressures and we urgently need the additional capacity provided by this proposed expansion. I therefore support the proposal.

## **13. Conclusions**

13.1. Forecasts indicated a growing demand for Year 7 places in Gravesham from the start of the 2021-22 academic year. The Gravesend and Longfield Non-Selective Planning Group was forecast to have a deficit of 102 Year 7 places (3.5FE) from 2021-22 that increases to a deficit of 203 places (8FE) by 2023/24. The latest Commissioning Plan upholds that forecast.

13.2. All other schools in the planning group are either being expanded or are the subject of a future proposal to expand. Meopham School is the only remaining candidate for expansion.

13.3. Although the cost of the build has increased over the original estimate, it remains within expected increases in material and labour costs. The costs of the highways improvements push the cost higher, but the total remains within the expected parameters for a 2FE secondary expansion.

## **14. Recommendations**

**Recommendation:**

The Children's, Young People and Education Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to:

- i. agree funding of £12.87m and to progress the proposal to expand Meopham School, Wrotham Road, Meopham, Kent, DA13 0AH, by increasing the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 140 places to 200 places from September 2021.
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**15. Background Documents**

## 15.1. Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/education-provision/education-provision-plan>

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