

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL –PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

DECISION NO:

22/00069

Unrestricted

Key decision: **YES**

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:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, I:

- 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
- 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.

Reason(s) for decision:

The proposal is 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, to address provisions pressures in Gravesham Borough.

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>

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.

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.

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.

The deficit of places will be further exacerbated by limited options for alternative expansions within the rural part of Gravesham district, unless new provision can be created. This seems unlikely at present as there are no sites on the horizon.

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.

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 was to add an additional 60 places taking the school PAN up to 200 for September 2021. It will be achieved through building additional accommodation and service space on the Meopham site.

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>

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.

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:

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.

Works Redesign: Following regular advice from Highways and Planning, several comprehensive redesigns have had to be undertaken.

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.

Financial Implications

Capital

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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

Revenue

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.

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

Human

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

Equality Implications

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 were identified.

Legal Implications

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. 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.

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

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

This proposal went to Cabinet Committee on 20 March 2020 in order to seek approval to progress the proposal to full feasibility study.

The Academy 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.

The Swale Academy Trust have considered the responses received from the consultation and have confirmed that they will proceed with the expansion proposal.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

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.

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.

If no action is taken, Kent County Council will find it extremely difficult to provide sufficient local secondary school places in Gravesham Borough.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken, and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

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signed

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date