

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Cabinet

DECISION NO:

22/00101

For publication *[Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]*

Key decision: YES

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2023-27

Decision:

Cabinet agrees the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2023-27

Reason(s) for decision:

Background

The County Council is the Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision in Kent. The Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent (KCP) is an annual document which sets out how we will carry out our responsibility for ensuring there are sufficient high quality places, in the right places for all learners, while at the same time fulfilling our other responsibilities to raise education standards and promote parental preference. The Plan details the expected future need for education provision, thereby enabling parents and education providers to put forward proposals as to how these needs might best be met.

The KCP sets out the principles by which we determine proposals, and it forecasts the need for future provision. It also sets out in more detail, plans to meet the commissioning needs which arise in each district and borough in Kent during the next five years.

The updated KCP is a 'live' document which underpins our on-going dialogue and consultation with schools, district and borough councils, diocesan authorities, KCC Members and local communities, to ensure we meet our responsibilities.

Our Commissioning Intentions

The KCP 2023-27 identifies the need for additional permanent and temporary mainstream school and specialist places over the Plan period. This is based on forecasts which incorporate demographic changes such as the number of births, but also migration and the level of house building.

Financial Implications

The Local Authority as Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision has a key role in securing funding to provide sufficient education provision in the County, particularly in schools.

The pressure on the County's Capital Budget continues, particularly as demand for secondary places and for specialist places grows. The cost of delivering school places is currently met from Basic Need grant from the Government, prudential borrowing by the County Council, Section 106 property developer contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Government funding for 'Basic Need' is allocated on a formula based upon information provided by local authorities concerning forecast numbers of pupils and school capacity.

Basic Need funding is allocated by Government on the basis of a comparison of school capacity (not pupil admission numbers) against forecast mainstream pupil numbers from reception year to year 11 uplifted to provide a 2 per cent operating margin. Where capacity is lower than forecasts, the DfE provides funding towards the gap.

The allocations for the 2023-24 financial year are based upon the projected need for new places by September 2024 (the start of academic year 2024/25); Kent has been allocated £42.7m. The 'lumpy' nature of establishing new school provision means that the County Council incurs the majority of the capital costs at the outset of mitigating a forecast place deficit, e.g. expanding a school by a whole FE; whereas the Basic Need formula does not account for this and provides the Council with funding for places in an incremental way over a longer period of time.

One funding option which can assist with or overcome the challenges of forward funding new schools is the Free Schools programme. We encouraged promoters to submit bids to Waves 13 and 14, with some success. However, as the free school programme has become more restrictive, being targeted to certain geographical areas of the Country in relation to mainstream schools, and of limited number for special schools and alternative provisions, it will not be the answer to all our needs. Additionally, it is not risk free for the Local Authority. Delays in delivery can require the Authority to put in place temporary provision with the resultant unplanned expense.

Legal implications

Each project identified in the KCP will be subject to a separate consultation and decision-making process. The legal implications of each proposal will be identified at that time.

Equalities implications

The equality impact assessment considers whether the commissioning principles and guidelines contained within the KCP may have an impact (either positive or negative) on any protected groups and if so what action, if any, should be taken to mitigate the negative impacts. Separate, more detailed equalities impact assessments will be completed as individual project consultations come forward to consider the impacts on any protected group arising from that individual education proposal.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

This decision was considered and endorsed by the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee at its meeting 29 November 2022

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

The commissioning intentions outlined in the KCP are planned to ensure there are sufficient schools places, in the right locations and at the right time in order to fulfil our legal responsibility to offer an appropriate school place to all who require one.

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

26 January 2022

.....
date