

EXECUTIVE DECISION

From: **Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education**

To: **Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

Subject: **Proposed expansion of New Line Learning Academy**

Key decision: *It involves expenditure or savings of maximum £1m*

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Maidstone South – Paul Cooper

Summary: This report sets out the proposed expansion of New Line Learning Academy, Boughton Lane, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 9QL

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member, concerning the proposals to:

- a) authorise the allocation of £6,900,000 from the Children Young People and Education Services Basic Need Capital Budget to fund the permanent expansion of New Line Learning Academy by 1FE, increasing its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 180 to 210 from September 2025.
- b) 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 with The Future Schools Trust.
- c) 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. Variations to contract value to be no more than 10% above the capital funding agreed by the Cabinet Member without requiring a new Record of Decision.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The expansion of New Line Learning Academy is proposed in response to the significant demand for places within the Maidstone non-selective planning group indicated in the County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-28 (KCP). The planning group has a forecast deficit of 129 places in 2024-25, which is set to increase throughout the Plan period.

- 1.2 In recent years, schools within this planning group have admitted over PAN, creating additional capacity. We anticipate this pattern to continue and will accommodate some of the forecast deficit. However, up to 90 temporary places via bulge provision within the existing Secondary schools will be needed to meet the demand initially, prior to permanent expansion works of up to 3 FE from 2025-26.

2. Body of the report

- 2.1 The Future Schools Trust, with support from Kent County Council (KCC), is proposing to expand New Line Learning Academy by 1FE, increasing the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 180 to 210 from September 2025 to meet the forecast demand. The proposed expansion will form part of Kent County Council's (KCC) co-ordinated response to the forecast demand.
- 2.2 New Line Learning is a co-educational non-selective school for students of 11-16 years that converted to academy status in September 2007 and is now part of. The academy was rated 'Good' by Ofsted at its November 2019 inspection. The academy and the trust are keen to expand the school and welcome the opportunity to temporarily expand in September 2024 prior to the proposed permanent expansion in September 2025.
- 2.3 Following discussion regarding the accommodation needs of the school, KCC has agreed with The Future Schools Trust that, should this proposal go ahead, it will be a trust managed scheme, with KCC providing the Basic Need funding and the Trust undertaking the necessary capital works.
- 2.4 The proposed works would include remodelling space within the New Line Learning that is currently used by the neighbouring Tiger Primary school. KCC space assessment has highlighted that Tiger is short on core teaching space and therefore this scheme will include new teaching accommodation on the Tiger site to re-provision the primary school space within New Line Learning.
- 2.5 The Trust has previously undertaken capital works relating to school improvement and maintenance and has the organisational infrastructure to manage such schemes.

3. Securing Kent's Future

- 3.1 The 'Securing Kent's Future' strategy outlines the measures that KCC intend to take to ensure that Kent remains financially stable, now and in the future. It describes the statutory priorities, one of which being the statutory duty, as the Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision in Kent, to ensure sufficient school places are available to any child or young person who requires one.
- 3.2 The KCP is a five-year rolling plan which is updated annually that sets out KCC's future plans as Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision across all types and phases of education in Kent. A copy of the plan can be viewed from this link:
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/education-skills-and-employment-policies/education-provision>

- 3.3 The KCP highlights significant demand for additional places in the Maidstone non-selective planning group over the coming years. Therefore, the proposed expansion to New Line Learning is necessary for KCC to continue to deliver its statutory duty, in a cost-effective way, in line with the guidelines described in the Securing Kent's Future strategy. It will help to maintain KCC's strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high quality education provision for all families.

4. Alternative options

- 4.1 The short to medium term expansion options within existing Maidstone schools are limited, with 2 of the town centre schools having already expanded in recent years, whilst others are constrained by site and infrastructure limitations. KCC are working with a number of schools within the planning group to formulate expansion proposals over the coming years and New Line Learning is the first scheme to proceed to the detailed feasibility stage.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Capital Funding: In depth feasibility work has been undertaken which estimates the total cost of additional accommodation to be £6,900,000. The cost of this project will be funded through the CYPE Basic Need Capital Budget that was agreed at County Council in February 2024.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the first phase of works will be a school managed scheme, with the roles and responsibilities of each party formally set out through a legal contract between KCC and New Line Learning. KCC will monitor progress regularly during the building works to ensure that the accommodation needs are being met.
- 5.3 Revenue Funding: There is no General Fund revenue funding requirement. Should the scheme not proceed through to completion, any costs incurred at the time of cessation would become abortive costs and are likely to be recharged to Revenue. This would be reported through the regular financial monitoring reports to Cabinet
- 5.4 Should the scheme progress, £6,000 per new learning space would be provided towards the cost of furniture and equipment. This would be provided to the school to purchase required equipment. In addition, an allowance of up to £2,500 may be payable to outfit each new teaching room with appropriate ICT equipment, such as touch screens or projection equipment. The school would receive funding for the additional pupils that it admits in line with the funding allocated to schools through KCC's funding formula. All school related revenue costs will be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant as ring-fenced from the Department of Education, the expansion will fall into Kent's Growth Funding Policy.

6. Legal implications

6.1 The expansion will be subject to a legally binding and enforceable contract being in place between KCC and The Future Schools Trust. The Trust will need to secure planning permission for the new accommodation.

7. Equalities implications

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and no issues were identified in the early stage EqIA, but the assessment will be reviewed as the project continues.

8. Governance

8.1 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 with New Line Learning Foundation Special School. It will also enable 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.

9. Consultation

9.1 In accordance with the DfE's Statutory Guidance 'making significant changes to an existing academy', the expansion proposal can be fast tracked without the Trust having to provide a full business case to the EFA. However, the academy is required to carry out a public consultation with stakeholders as part of their fast-track application.

10. Views

10.1 The View of the Local Member

The KCC Member for Maidstone South – Paul Cooper, have been consulted on this proposal.

10.2 The View of the Assistant Director Education – West Kent

The Assistant Director fully supports this proposal as provides additional places that will help to meet the substantial pressure for non-selective places in the Maidstone area.

11. Conclusions

11.1 This report sets out a proposal to expand New Line Learning by 1 FE to help meet the significant demand for places within the Maidstone non-selective planning group. The building works will be managed by the trust, who have previously demonstrated their ability to successfully complete capital works. The roles and responsibilities of each party will. be formally set out through a legal contract between KCC and The Future Schools Trust to ensure the accommodation requirements are met.

11. Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member, concerning the proposals to:

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12. Background documents

Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-28

13. Contact details

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