

## CYPE CABINET COMMITTEE REPORT

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**From:** Christine McInnes, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

**Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

**To:** Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee –  
18 November 2025

**Subject:** Proposal to facilitate the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, Beechenlea Lane, Swanley, Kent, BR8 8DR

**Decision no:** 25/00086

**Key Decision:** It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions and Expenditure of over £1m

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** N/A

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

**Electoral Division:** Swanley, served by Dean Truder

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**Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes**

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### **Summary:**

This report sets out the proposal for KCC to facilitate the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy through capital investment, that will enable the school to increase its designated number from 120 to 192 and change its age range from 8 to 19 year olds (Year 4 to Year 14) to 4 to 19 year olds (Reception to Year 14).

### **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 as set out in the attached PROD.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) as a Local Authority, has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient high quality school places are available, 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 County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2025-2029 is a five-year rolling plan which is updated annually. It sets out KCC's future plans as Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision across all types and phases of education in Kent.

- 1.2 The Kent Commissioning Plan 2025-2029 indicated that there will be a shortfall in Special School provision in North Kent. Even though KCC's direction of travel is to increase Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in mainstream schools and associated Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs), due to already identified shortfalls and anticipated population growth in certain areas of North Kent, more specialist provision is required for children and young people with more complex needs.
- 1.3 KCC SEN Data for North Kent as at April 2025, evidenced that there were 237 children and young people waiting for a Special School placement, and 243 open cases, of which was anticipated that a large number would require a Special School placement.
- 1.4 In July 2023 KCC was informed that it had been successful in bidding for a new 250 place Profound, Severe, and Complex Needs (PSCN) Special School in North Kent (Swanley). The school had an initial target opening date of September 2026 and was to be funded and built by the Department for Education (DfE). However, for a number of reasons progress has been incredibly slow and there are now concerns that the school may not progress any further. Even if it were to continue, that school would not be built until 2028 at the very earliest and as the data shows, provision is required now. KCC Officers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills continue to push the DfE and Ministers for confirmation of the status of the proposed new Swanley Special School.

## **2. Key Considerations**

- 2.1 The proposal to facilitate the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will create 48 places of additional primary provision (Reception to Year 6) plus additional places for secondary aged pupils. The building project for this expansion will be managed by Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, while KCC Infrastructure will oversee the scheme from a quality assurance perspective.
- 2.2 If no further action is taken in the longer term, KCC will find it extremely difficult to provide sufficient state-funded Special School provision in North Kent.
- 2.3 Any works undertaken by Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy are to be overseen by KCC Infrastructure with all costs validated by the appointed Project Manager.
- 2.4 This report set out the proposals for consideration by the CYPE Cabinet Committee, to inform the decision to proceed with the next stage of detailed feasibility and plans, ahead of the final proposed decision being recommended to the Cabinet Member.

- 2.5 The decision itself, will only be taken when the planning process has progressed to a stage where KCC Officers feel they have greater certainty of the overall scheme cost.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is a Single Academy Trust and officially sits under the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) but is located in Swanley Kent. KCC is the main placing authority with the school.
- 3.2 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is a Special School for children and people aged 8-19 (Year 4 to Year 14) who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and Autism. Many of the students have additional needs including ADHD, Downs Syndrome and language difficulties. All students have Education, Health and Care Plans.
- 3.3 Following an inspection that took place in July 2025, Ofsted deemed Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy to be a 'GOOD' in 4 out of the 5 areas, and 'OUTSTANDING' in the area of Behaviours an Attitudes.
- 3.4 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is situated on an extremely large site, consisting of 78 acres of green and woodlands. Traffic congestion is kept to a minimal as the approach to the school from the main road is over ¼ mile long. The Academy own the land and buildings, as the school became a Foundation School prior to becoming an Academy.
- 3.5 The Principal of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is already admitting students over and above the designated number. Currently the number of students on roll is 135.
- 3.6 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy continues to admit students with more complex needs, whilst ensuring the quality of education for all students is maintained.
- 3.7 Due to the school's location RBKC now has limited interaction with the school and places a very limited number of children and young people there. KCC continues to be one of the main placing authorities with Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, placing 61 students out of a total school roll of 136 for the 2024/2025 academic year. For the start of this current academic year, 2025/2026, the school has 65 students placed by Kent out of a total school roll of 135 with no students placed from RBKC.
- 3.8 KCC has formed strong working relationships with the Senior Leadership of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, and the school has indicated its very clear desire to be recognised as part of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system in Kent.
- 3.9 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy has acknowledged the need for more specialist placements for children with complex needs predominantly across the primary age groups, and has therefore proposed to expand its age range from what is currently 8 to 19 year olds (Year 4 to Year 14) to 4 to 19 year olds (Reception to Year 14) to support need in the North Kent area.

- 3.10 North Kent is still encountering significant growth primarily in Dartford, but the other two districts of Gravesham and Sevenoaks are fast approaching completion of their new Local Plans, which will see significant housebuilding required for the period up to 2040 and beyond.
- 3.11 Due to delays regarding the proposed new PSCN School, the numbers of students in North Kent still requiring specialist provision at this time, and the fact that all Special Schools in the locality are already over capacity, there is a clear need for further expansion of state-funded specialist provision to ensure the current number of places can be maintained on a permanent basis.
- 3.12 This proposal is part of a plan to help alleviate current pressures and help mitigate future population growth across the wider North Kent area, alongside the expansion of SRPs and mainstream inclusion.
- 3.13 The Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy have consulted on this proposal and agree to proceed with the process to permanently increase the schools designated number by 72 places subject to physical expansion of the school's infrastructure. This proposal seeks capital investment to facilitate the expansion by building 4 modular classrooms, upgrades to outdoor areas and modifications to the main school building.

#### **4. Kent's Strategic Statement**

- 4.1 The County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2025-2029 is a five-year rolling plan which is updated annually. It 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 latest plan can be viewed from this link: [Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2025-2029](#).
- 4.2 The proposed decision supports KCC's strategic statement in the following ways:
- This proposal supports improved efficiency and timeliness in SEND services and compliments plans to also expand Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs) and increase mainstream inclusion capacity.
  - In line with Section 7 of the KCP: Commissioning Statutory School Provision by Districts, this proposal will assist in responding to housing growth and demographic pressures and help to ensure housing growth is sustainable.
  - In line with Section 5 of the KCP: Capital Funding, which outlines the use of developer contributions, Basic Need funding, and cautious capital investment strategies, this proposal promotes in-house provision where financially viable and reducing reliance on independent placements.
- 4.3 This proposal is necessary for KCC to continue to deliver the statutory duty, in a cost-effective way, in line with the guidelines described KCC's strategic statement. It will help to maintain KCC's strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high quality education provision for all families.

## **5. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk**

- 5.1 KCC has considered whether other Special Schools in the North Kent area are viable candidates for a permanent increase to their formal designated numbers. There is also a proposal to expand Broomhill Bank School, but this alone will not produce sufficient places to meet current demand, as that expansion primarily relates to additional places for secondary age children. Therefore, Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is the most appropriate and viable option to also increase its designated number. It is however, recognised there is no guarantee these places will be offered to Kent children, and we have no statutory intervention powers to secure these placements. Although this has been considered an acceptable risk.
- 5.2 By increasing their formal designated number through the physical expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, which is a state-funded provision, it protects the Local Authority from increased revenue costs. The proposal will help to mitigate against the need to place students further away from home and incurring additional transport costs, alongside incurring increased costs from placing a greater number of children in high-cost independent settings to alleviate the current pressures in KCC state-funded Special Schools in the area.

## **6. Financial Implications**

### **6.1 Capital**

- 6.1.1 Progression of the scheme will be dependent on the outcome of detailed feasibility and design work – these will inform the full overall cost of the scheme, at which point the formal decision will be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.
- 6.1.2 The project will be a school managed scheme and will be confirmed via legally binding funding and development agreements between KCC and Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.
- 6.1.3 The cost of the works will be borne by the CYPE High Needs Capital Budget; this is funded from a ring-fenced Capital Grant from the DfE.
- 6.1.4 From initial feasibility studies, the estimated cost for the whole scheme was £1,500,000.
- 6.1.5 However, after initial feedback from KCC Infrastructure colleagues, there is a possibility that costs may increase, primarily due to the possible need for additional Highways mitigations around the Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy site and other requirements on the refurbishments of existing buildings. Therefore, we will not be requesting the formal decision to be taken until such time that planning has reached a conclusion, and the full extent of the cost of the scheme is known. The latest estimates indicate the costs could increase to as much as c£3,000,000, but much work still needs to be undertaken with Planners and Highways to determine the extent of any mitigations that may be required.

- 6.1.6 For Special School capital projects, the average cost per student place for a school expansion in Kent is c£85,000. However, the higher estimated cost for this scheme equates to a cost per place of only c£42,000, which demonstrates good value for money. KCC Project Managers will be undertaking continuous checks to keep build project costs as low as possible.
- 6.1.7 The final estimated cost of the project will be reported appropriately through KCC internal governance routes before the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills is requested to make the formal decision.
- 6.1.8 KCC Project Managers will be undertaking continuous checks to keep build project costs as low as possible.
- 6.1.9 Should the Cabinet Member Cabinet Member for Education and Skills agree to progress the scheme; the Funding Agreement will be finalised and sealed. The agreement will set out the milestones for when funding will be passported to Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.
- 6.1.10 An allowance of up to £2,500 per teaching space may be payable to Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy; to outfit each new teaching room with appropriate ICT equipment, such as touch screens or projection equipment. This will be met from the overall Capital allocation for this scheme.
- 6.1.11 The High Needs Capital Programme has been running since 2020-21 with a total combined budget of just under £109m of which £67m has been either spent or committed to current known schemes (as at Quarter 1 2025 capital monitoring reported to Cabinet in September 2025). In the same way as the Basic Need programme is managed, to ensure all schemes are prioritised appropriately and expenditure is controlled within available funding, any proposed new or additional capital expenditure, first needs to be considered by KCC Officers through Education Asset Board, before being progressed through the formal governance processes and included in the capital programme.

## **6.2 Revenue**

- 6.2.1 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. This will be a cost to the General Fund.
- 6.2.2 State funded Special School places are commissioned by Local Authorities and paid based on a rate per place. The rate per place for Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is currently between £30,430 to £31,400 dependent on the Key Stage. The higher rate for Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is approximately c£30,000 less than a place in an independent Special School. Local Authorities use the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to pay for these places. Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will use the revenue income they receive to facilitate additional staffing requirements and increased running costs.

- 6.2.3 Whilst there are no direct General Fund implications to these proposals, ensuring children are educated as locally as possible, avoids additional school transport costs, which are a General Fund expenditure. In addition, the Council is currently overspending on its Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block by approximately £55m-£60m per year. The use of independent Special Schools rather than state-funded provision (mainstream to Special School), has been highlighted as a key contributing factor to this position.
- 6.2.4 Whilst the cost of Special School places do not directly impact the General Fund, the Council is part of the DfE Safety Valve Programme, for which the Council has agreed to contribute a total of £82m between 2022-23 and 2027-28 to help reduce the accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block. KCC's contribution is alongside an extra £140m from DfE.
- 6.2.5 The DfE funding is contingent on the development of a plan to achieve value for money within the existing SEN regulatory framework, and the aim is to reach an in-year breakeven position by the end of 2027-28. Reducing the Council's reliance on independent sector education placements is a key part of the strategy to achieve this. Therefore, alleviating unsustainable pressures on existing Special Schools who are over-capacity by securing additional state-funded Special School places will help to avoid future dependence on the independent sector.
- 6.2.6 It is noted, there is a financial risk that these additional places are being built in a non-KCC school, and the places cannot be ring-fenced for KCC children. However, this is technically the same for KCC Special Schools.

### **6.3 Human**

- 6.3.1 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will appoint additional staff as required; utilising revenue funding allocated through commissioned places for these additional students.

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1 Under the Children and Families Act 2014 KCC has a duty 'to support the child and his or her parent, or the young person, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes'. By ensuring we have appropriate provision as locally as possible, we are delivering on our obligation in accordance with this legislation.
- 7.2 Local Authorities need to deliver their statutory duties and be aware of non-statutory guidance and advice, which relate to children and young people with SEN. These are:
- Department for Education-Making significant changes to an academy 2025: non-statutory guidance on collaborative school place planning and making organisational changes to academies.
  - The Equalities Act which: places duties on Local Authorities to review support services and in doing so requires Local Authorities to have due regard to the way in which any changes will affect children and young people with a disability.

- The SEND Code of Practice places requirements on Local Authorities to: provide access to advice from a suitably qualified person as part of the EHCP process and subsequent “assess, plan, do, review” cycles, and make appropriate provision for those with an EHC plan in the 0-25 range.
- Sufficiency Duties: KCC is under a statutory duty to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education and secondary education are available to meet the needs of the population of their area: section 13 of the Education Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”).
- KCC must ensure that its education functions are exercised by the authority with a view to promoting high standards, ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and training, and promoting the fulfilment of learning potential by every person under the age of 20 and those over the age of 20 and for whom an EHC Plan is maintained: section 13A. By section 14, KCC must secure that sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education are available for their area, defined as being sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all students the opportunity of appropriate education.
- Under section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (“the 2014 Act”), KCC is under a duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made in its area (and outside it) for children and young people who have special educational needs or a disability. KCC must consider the extent to which its provision is sufficient to meet the educational needs, training needs and social care needs of the children and young people concerned.
- KCC, when carrying out its functions must have “due regard” to the provisions of section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, known as the ‘public sector equality duty’.

7.3 Planning permission will be required for the new accommodation to enable the expansion of the school’s accommodation. As part of the Funding Agreement, Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will be responsible for gaining the appropriate planning consent.

7.4 All individual proposals to either establish new, expand current or cease current provision will be required to go through the DfE process of making significant changes to an academy (non-statutory guidance on collaborative school place planning and making organisational changes to academies, August 2025).

7.5 The Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Director of Education will be overseeing the scheme to ensure public funds are utilised appropriately.

## **8. Equalities implications**

8.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) have been produced by KCC and Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy. No issues were identified in the early stage EqIAs to the proposed expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.



8.2 The proposed expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will not change the delivery of education with the school. Therefore, there should be no equalities implications.

8.3 The early-stage EqlAs will be reviewed as the scheme continues.

## **9. Data Protection Implications**

9.1 Any information that would have Data Protection implication was gathered by Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy, as its own Data Controller. Any protected data will be managed by the school.

## **10. Other corporate implications**

10.1 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy will consult with Planners and KCC's Highways and Planning colleagues as appropriate, throughout the planning process.

## **11. Governance**

11.1 The Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy are fully supportive of the proposal.

11.2 KCC Infrastructure Team are engaged in overseeing and ensuring that the funding is spent appropriately.

11.3 The decision itself, will only be taken when the planning process has progressed to a stage where KCC Officers feel they have greater certainty of the overall scheme cost.

## **12. Consultation**

12.1 The KCC Member for Swanley, served by Dean Truder, has been informed of the proposal.

12.2 The school is an Academy and so ran its own Public Consultation on the proposal, with assistance from KCC. The consultation ran from 27 June 2025 to 18 July 2025.

12.3 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy held a public drop-in session on 09 July 2025, which was attended by KCC Officers.

12.4 Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy is the data controller for the consultation. KCC will not handle any personal data relating to this consultation or subsequent decision.

12.5 The Assistant Director of Education, SEN, Educational Psychology and Admissions from RBKC is supportive of the proposal.

12.6 The consultation results were presented to the Governing Body who agreed on 27 July 2025 to proceed with the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.

- 12.7 The Assistant Director Education-North Kent, has said that the analysis of demand in North Kent shows that additional Special School capacity is required in the area. All alternatives have been considered, and the conclusion is to permanently expand Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.

### 13. Conclusions

- 13.1 The Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy agree to proceed with the proposal to increase the school's designated number from 120 to 192 and change its age range from 8 to 19 year olds (Year 4 to Year 14) to 4 to 19 year olds (Reception to Year 14) subject to physical expansion of the school's infrastructure.
- 13.2 The analysis of demand in North Kent shows that additional Special School capacity is required in the area. All alternatives have been considered, and the conclusion is to facilitate the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.

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### 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 as set out in the attached PROD.**

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### 12. Background Documents

- Kent Commissioning Plan 2025-2029
- EqIA

### 13. Contact details

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