

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

### DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

### DECISION NUMBER:

25/00086

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

### Key decision: YES

Savings or expenditure of more than £1m

Affects 2 or more Electoral Divisions

### Subject Matter / Title of Decision

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

### Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, I agree to:

- I. APPROVE the requisite funding from the Children Young People and Education High Needs Capital Programme that will be required for the expansion of Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy
- II. DELEGATE authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Head of Law and Director of Education to enter into any necessary contracts or other legal agreements as required to implement the decision; and
- III. AGREE for 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:

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).

#### 1. Background

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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. Kent's Strategic Statement**

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](#).

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.

This proposal is necessary for KCC to continue to deliver the 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.

## **3. Financial Implications**

### Capital

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.

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. 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. From initial feasibility studies, the estimated cost for the whole scheme was £1,500,000.

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.

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. KCC Project Managers will be undertaking continuous checks to keep build project costs as low as possible.

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.

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.

## Revenue

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

#### **4. Legal Implications**

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.

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).

#### **5. Consultation**

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

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. 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.

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

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.

#### **6. Equalities implications**

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

#### **7. Data Protection Implications**

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.

#### **Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:**

To be completed following consideration at Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 18 November 2025.

**Any alternatives considered and rejected:**

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.

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.

**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