

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

DECISION NO:

To be allocated by
Democratic Services

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

Key decision: YES / NO

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

- a) result in savings or expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000); or

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Refurbishment and reprovisioning of Science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford.

Decision:

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

- I. Release an additional £450,000 from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital budget to reconfigure and reprovision science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre (Ashford), thus increasing the agreed allocation from £1,550,000 to £2,000,000.
- II. Authorise the Director of Education in consultation with the General Counsel to enter into any necessary contracts / agreements on behalf of the County Council.

Reason(s) for decision:

Background

In Ashford Borough secondary school rolls have risen significantly over the last 10 years. For a number of years, school leaders have temporarily offered places above their published admissions number to support KCC in being able to allocate sufficient places for National Offer Day.

The pressures for non-selective places in the Ashford Town non-selective planning group are particularly acute. The latest pupil forecasts (Figure 1) would suggest that there has been a slight reduction in the number of Year 7 places required from September 2022 (in comparison to the previous Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent), but there will still be a significant deficit in year 7 places which has to be addressed throughout the Plan period.

Figure 1: Forecast Year 7 surplus/deficit capacity if no further action is taken (KCP 2022-26)

Planning Group Name	2020-21 Capacity	2020-21 (A)	2021-22 (F)	2022-23 (F)	2023-24 (F)	2024-25 (F)	2025-26 (F)	2026-27 (F)	2027-28 (F)	2027-28 Capacity
Ashford North Non-Selective	840	12	-35	-52	-107	-69	-21	-81	-33	758
Ashford Selective	420	-13	-1	0	1	0	1	3	-2	420

To support the need for additional Year 7 places a decision was made to provide £1,550,000 of Capital Funding from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget to enable the refurbishment and conversion of the existing science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre. This would enable the school to take an additional 1FE of pupils (135 places). In addition, the improvement of science facilities enabled the school to permanently release two existing classrooms separate from the main building to provide an excellent facility for a special school satellite provision. The refurbishment and reconfiguration work on the science facilities have commenced and the satellite of The Wyvern School has opened.

Since scheme was originally costed, extensive and intrusive surveys which were not possible at the outset due to the block being occupied by pupils have been completed. Additional asbestos was found and the internal walls were deemed unstable. This has resulted in additional Aluminium Composite Material removal and a decision to remove and replace the internal walls.

In addition, during the early phases of construction some leaks became apparent a roof survey has indicated that the roof requires localised repairs. To protect the refurbishment of the block, it was decided that a basic recovering of the roof should take place. Improved glazing will be required which the school will subsidise with £40,000 of their own funding.

The design and preparation period for the refurbishment was in the first quarter of 2021. Due to Covid, the following months have seen significant industry turmoil in securing supplies and labour as well as increased materials costs. These costs have been accounted for with the total scheme budget. However, the current inflation figures and industry predictions indicate further increases in cost that cannot be attributed directly to Covid. To offset these additional costs a contingency is required.

Financial Implications

The costs of the project have increased significantly. This is due to the covid pandemic and redesigns that have been required following further surveys. The cost of the scheme is now £2,540,059. The County council has agreed funding to cover increases in capital expenditure due to the pandemic. Currently identified within the cost plan is £540,059.62 which has been assigned to the COVID relief budget. Due to essential redesign and additional items discovered during construction, there has been an increase in the cost plan of £391,129.16. In recent months the construction industry has seen significant inflation on materials and labour costs, although this could be related to the outcomes of the pandemic, any increases can no longer be assigned to a separate COVID budget. Therefore, an uplift £58,870 has been requested to cover any additional issues, providing a funding 'buffer' should any other issues arise as the project continues. An additional £450,000 is being requested from the Children's, Young People and Education Capital Budget.

Although there is a substantial increase in the costs for this scheme, it still represents good value in respect of the provision for pupil places. When complete, the scheme will cost £2,540,059 providing for an expansion of 135 secondary school pupils. Based on the total project the cost per pupil is £18,815. This is within the range of benchmark costs provided by AECOM for secondary refurbishment.

Legal implications

Kent County Council (KCC) as the Local Authority has a duty to ensure sufficient school places are available. If this decision does not take place there will be a risk that we cannot meet our statutory duties to provide education provision.

A contractual agreement between KCC and the Trust to offer the agreed temporary expansions is already in place and agreed.

Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of the initial decision. This has been reviewed and there continues to be no adverse impact on protected groups have been identified at this point.

Data Protection implications

No DPIA was require.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The decision 21/00020- The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford was considered by The Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 09 March 2021.

This decision will be considered by The Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 01 March 2022.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

During the early phases of construction some leaks became apparent and our contractor commissioned a roof survey, which has indicated that the roof requires localised repairs. To protect the refurbishment of the block, it was decided that a basic recovering of the roof should take place. While small patch work on the roof was considered and would have made a saving, to fully safeguard the works to the block the full covering was considered the best option. An alternative to replacing the internal walls was considered. This would have involved stabilising the walls and chasing out new electrical and plumbing connections. Replacing all the walls was the cheapest option.

The options of temporary provision at the other non-selective schools In the Borough has been considered. Additional places will be required in two or more of these schools in 2022 in addition to those offered at The Towers School. This and the fact that several schools have offered additional places in one or more of the last two academic years has limited their ability to offer places again without investment. Places offered at other schools cannot be seen as an alternative to what is required at The Towers.

Changing the scope and adding basic classrooms rather than science rooms has been considered but would not be appropriate. Prior to the project being considered, a space needs assessment was conducted at The Towers. This identified a shortage in science facilities school pupil numbers increase.

Consideration has also been given to allocating places outside of Ashford Borough as forecasts would suggest that there are surplus places for 2022-23 and onwards in adjacent District/Boroughs. However, the places available are not always in the most accessible location and would leave students having to travel to Canterbury or Dover to access a school place. Expecting young people and their families to travel significant distances to access non-selective school provision is not ideal and would not be well received by families. In addition, KCC will be responsible for providing transport which would have a consequential impact on the Council's revenue budget.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

NA

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signed

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date