

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

DECISION NUMBER:

23-00114

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*
- b) *be significant in terms of its effects on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions – which will include those decisions that involve:*
 - *the adoption or significant amendment of major strategies or frameworks;*
 - *significant service developments, significant service reductions, or significant changes in the way that services are delivered, whether County-wide or in a particular locality.*

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Proposed expansion of Snowfields Academy, Popesfield Way, Weaving, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 5GA

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills I agree to:

- a) *Authorise the allocation of £2,545,790.41 from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation budget to fund the permanent expansion of Snowfields Academy, by establishing a satellite of Snowfields on the Isle of Sheppey and increasing the Designated Number from 280 to 340 places from September 2024.*
- 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 Leigh Academies 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.*

Reason(s) for decision:

This proposal is part of the wider consultation process on the closure of Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey and the S10 process for the opening of two new secondary schools: Leigh Academy Minster on the existing Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey (Minster campus) and EKC Schools Trust Sheppey Secondary (Sheerness site). As part of Leigh Academy Trust's proposal for the new secondary school on the Minister site, it is proposed to establish a satellite of Snowfields for up to 60 students in separate bespoke accommodation on the mainstream school site. A decision is needed on the allocation of the High Needs Funding capital to align with the DfE/Secretary of State's decision on the closure of Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey and the process for the opening of the two new secondary schools with the two academy trusts and the issuing of the respective funding

agreements.

The 60 place satellite of Snowfields will help to address the numbers of children and young people with an EHCP who require a specialist place, travelling off the Isle to access an appropriate education. Snowfields (Cranbrook) already takes 17 children from the Isle of Sheppey. More than 160 children (primary and secondary with ASD/ PSCN /Speech Language and Communication needs) currently travel off the Isle for their specialist provision. This is displacing children who are new to the areas where the special schools are sited further afield to access their education.

Snowfields Academy has a local cohort of children from the Maidstone area, but also admits pupils from a wider area across the county. There is currently no special needs provision on the Isle of Sheppey for pupils with an EHCP for ASD and therefore pupils are travelling off the Isle to access a specialist place for their education. The provision of additional places on the Isle of Sheppey will reduce the travelling distances and times for future cohorts of pupils on Sheppey and provide much needed additional SEND provision.

This proposal will help to support Framing Kent's Future – Our Council Strategy (2022-2026) Priority 1 - Levelling up. 'To maintain KCC's strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high quality education provision for all families.'

This proposal also helps to meet the targets set out within KCC's Safety Valve Programme, providing additional maintained special school capacity that will support a reduction in placements within the higher-cost independent and non-maintained special school sector. It also provides specialist capacity on the Isle of Sheppey, reducing the numbers of children having to travel off the Isle for their provision, thereby improving the experience of the young people and reducing the costs to the SEN transport budget. This satellite has been included within Safety Valve calculations and targets.

The proposal also supports KCC's SEND Strategy 2021-2024. The aim of the SEND strategy is to improve the educational, health and emotional wellbeing outcomes for all of Kent's children and young people with special educational needs and those who are disabled.

Financial Implications

Capital

The project will ensure the satellite has its own dedicated accommodation of 5 classrooms and additional intervention spaces and dining facilities. The capital costs and total budget for the refurbishment will be £2,545,790.41.

The £2,545,790.41 will be funded through the High Needs Capital budget and would be subject to a Funding Agreement being put in place with the Academy Trust. The current total High Needs budget for 23-24 to 25-26 is £40.5m.

Revenue

Revenue costs supporting the set up of the new satellite and the ongoing revenue budget will be funded from the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant provided to the Local Authority by the Department of Education.

As per the KCC funding policy for schools a total of £6,000 per newly provided learning space will be provided to the school from the DSG growth budget. It has been agreed that a total of 9 learning spaces will be provided with a total of £54,000 for FFE.

The anticipated revenue budget, to be funded from the High Needs Block of the DSG, for the 60 places at the satellite will be based on the ASD need type rate which is currently £20,065

The cost of 60 places on the ASD rate per year would be £1,203.900.

It is anticipated the creation of these spaces will avoid the need to seek the equivalent places in the independent sector where the average cost of an independent special school place in the county is currently c£48,750 per annum per place. Therefore, achieving possible cost avoidance of up to £1.7m.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee will consider the decision on 16 January 2024

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

KCC did submit a bid to establish a special school for Profound, Severe and Complex Needs/ Communication and Learning/ Autistic Spectrum on the Island as part of its Safety Valve submission. This was one of three bids made, only two of which were successful (Swanley and Whitstable). KCC did not have a site to put forward for the special school on the Island and the bid was therefore not approved. The proposal for a satellite of Snowfields goes part of the way to meeting evidenced need on the Isle of Sheppey.

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