

From: **Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education**
Richard Long, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

To: **Children and Young People's Education Cabinet Committee – 09 March 2021**

Subject: The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford.

Decision Title and Number: 21/00020 - The Towers School - additional Year 7 places

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Division: Ashford , Cllr Clair Bell

Summary: This report provides the Committee with the information regarding the pressure for non-selective secondary school places in Ashford Borough, the solutions available to KCC and the impact on the CYPE Capital Budget.

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 to:

- a) Release £1,550,000 from the Children, Young People and Education Capital budget to enable The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre, Ashford to accommodate additional pupils.
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure to take necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into necessary contracts or taking other legal actions as required to implement the decision, in consultation with the Director of Education and the General Counsel.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre is a non-selective school in Ashford. This School alongside all Ashford non-selective schools has offered additional temporary capacity to support KCC in ensuring sufficient secondary school places as larger year 6 cohorts have moved into the secondary sector.

1.2 Temporary provision has been added in each of the last two academic years and will continue to be required until the opening of Chilmington Green Secondary School. The opening of this school was initially planned from the start of the 2022-23 academic year, but this will be delayed.

2. Background

- 2.1 In Ashford Borough secondary school rolls have risen significantly over the last 10 years. Year 7 rolls have risen from 1,290 pupils in 2010-11 (the last low point) to 1,651 in 2020-21, an increase of 361 places or 12FE. For the last three 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.
- 2.2 The pressures for non-selective places in the Ashford Town non-selective planning group are particularly acute. Figure 1 outlines the forecast Year 7 and Years 7-11 surplus/deficit places in the Ashford North non-selective planning group published in the current Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2021-25. It should be noted that the forecasts do not include pupils expected from new developments. This identifies that we will continue to require additional non-selective provision across Ashford Town throughout the Plan period.

Figure 1: Forecast Year 7 surplus/deficit capacity if no further action is taken (KCP 2021-25)

| | 2019-20 capacity | 2019-20 (F) | 2020-21 (F) | 2021-22 (F) | 2022-23 (F) | 2023-24 (F) | 2024-25 (F) | 2025-26 (F) | 2026-27 (F) | 2026-27 capacity |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Year 7 Ashford Town Non-Selective | 818 | -16 | -76 | -47 | -73 | -123 | -104 | -41 | -88 | 758 |
| Years 7-11 Ashford Town Non-Selective | 3,850 | 381 | 163 | -7 | -147 | -303 | -394 | -357 | -398 | 3,790 |

- 2.4 To support the additional places in the academic year 2019-20, 2020-21 a small amount of capital funding has been required. Historic developer contributions have been used to support this. Growth funding has also been agreed to support the additional places. For the 2021-22 academic year, most additional temporary places can be achieved with little or no capital funding, the exception being the refurbishment and reprovision of science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre.
- 2.5 The opening of a new secondary school at Chilmington Green via the DfE 'Wave' programme is the long-term solution for permanent non-selective secondary school places for both the indigenous population and to service new housing. Initially, plans were for the School to open within the Chilmington Green Development from the start of the 2022-23 academic year, but this is now likely to be delayed until 2023-24 at the earliest. Consequently, further temporary provision is required until the School is open.
- 3. Additional science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre**
- 3.1 The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre has a PAN of 243. For the last two years (2019-20 and 2020-21) they have agreed to offer 270 places as of National Offer Day and they will do so again for September 2021.

- 3.2 To continue to admit additional pupils additional science facilities are required. The Governors and Trustees of the school have agreed that reconfiguration of their present science facilities in addition to the conversion of some adjacent classrooms, rather than a new build will give them sufficient provision to ensure the science curriculum can be delivered appropriately.
- 3.3 The refurbishment and conversion of the existing facilities would be in the region of £1,550,000 or £11,481 per place. This is a significant saving against the KCC benchmark rates which for new builds ranges between £16,277 (20th centile) and £20,933 (80th centile).
- 3.4 In addition, this will enable the School to release two existing classrooms separate from the main building which will provide an excellent facility for a special school satellite provision. The pressure for special school places in Ashford is as acute as it is for mainstream school places. These two classrooms will provide facilities for 24 Wyvern School students, offering them the opportunity to join mainstream lessons with the support of Wyvern staff. £30,000 has been committed to refurbish the rooms but no further capital funding is required. The AECOM benchmarking that has been used by KCC suggests that the cost per place for new SEND provision is in the region of £83,939 so this is a significant saving to the Capital budget.

4. Alternatives considered

- 4.1 There are four other non-selective schools in the Borough. All schools have offered additional places in one or more of the last two academic years and some are able to offer places for 2021-22. Additional places offered previously has limited their ability to offer places again in 2022-23 onwards without significant investment. In some cases, the opportunity to add further provision will be challenging as planning conditions, highways mitigation and the concerns of residents will have to be addressed. Consideration has been given to expanding one of the other schools in the Town, but this is deemed to be the most appropriate project now due to the value for money, the improved facilities it would give the current and future pupils and the opportunity to increase special school provision.
- 4.2 Consideration has also been given to allocating places outside of Ashford Borough as forecasts would suggest that there are surplus places for 2021-22 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. Demanding young people and their families 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.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 £1,550,000 is required to reconfigure classrooms to add additional science provision at The Towers School and Sixth form Centre.

5.2 Developer contributions of £720,000 have been secured so far towards this project.

6. 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.

7. Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. Additional places will ensure that all pupils, including those within a protected group will have access for secondary school provision. No adverse impact on protected groups have been identified at this point.

8. Other corporate implications

None at this point.

9. Governance

The Officer Scheme of Delegation; within the Council's Constitution, provides a clear and appropriate link between this decision and the actions needed to implement it.

10. Views of the Local Member- Cllr Clair Bell,

The refurbishment and conversion of the existing facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre will enable the school to continue to add the additional places required to support the growing number of secondary aged pupils in the Borough. As a cost effective solution, it will reduce the pressures on the Capital budget. We are aware of the increasing need for special school provision in the Borough. The opportunity this proposal gives to increase special school provision through a Satellite of The Wyvern School, for little or no cost, is one that we should not miss.

I am fully supportive of the proposal.

11. Conclusions

Additional Year 7 non-selective provision is required in Ashford Town to ensure sufficient secondary school provision is available to accommodate rising rolls. The delay in the delivery of the new secondary school at Chilmington Green will mean that temporary provision will be required for longer than had been anticipated. The reconfiguration of science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre at a cost of £1,550,000 will secure 1FE of provision for 2021-22 onwards and opens additional specialist provision via a satellite of the Wyvern School. This will provide good value to KCC. Additional provision for 2021-22 can be secured with little or no capital funding thanks to the support of the Headteacher and Governors of existing schools.

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| 12. The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet |
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Member for Education and Skills on the proposed decision to:

- a) Release £1,550,000 from the Children, Young People and Education Capital budget to enable The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre, Ashford to accommodate additional pupils.
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure to take necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into necessary contracts or taking other legal actions as required to implement the decision, in consultation with the Director of Education and the General Counsel.

13. Background Documents (plus links to document)

Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2021-25

https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/104675/Commissioning-Plan-for-Education-Provision-in-Kent-2021-to-2025.pdf

14. Contact details

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Appendix 1

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Richard Long,

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

DECISION NO:

For publication

Subject: The Towers School and Sixth Form, Ashford.

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform I agree to:

- a) Release £1,550,000 from the Children, Young People and Education Capital budget to enable The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre, Ashford to accommodate additional pupils.
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure to take necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into necessary contracts or taking other legal actions as required to implement the decision, in consultation with the Director of Education and the General Counsel.

Reason(s) for decision:

Additional Year 7 non-selective provision is required in Ashford Borough to ensure sufficient secondary school provision is available to accommodate rising rolls. The reconfiguration of science facilities at The Towers School and Sixth form Centre at a cost of £1,550,000 will secure 1FE of provision for 2021-22 onwards and opens additional specialist provision via a satellite of the Wyvern School. This will provide good value to KCC.

Financial Implications:

£1,550,000 is required to reconfigure classrooms to add additional science provision at The Towers School and Sixth form Centre. Developer contributions of £720,000 have been secured so far towards this project.

Equality Implication: (inc. link to EqIA)

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. Additional places will ensure that all pupils, including those within a projected group will have access for secondary school provision. No adverse impact on protected groups have been identified at this point.

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.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:
To be added after Committee meeting

Any alternatives considered:
Consideration has been given to expanding one of the other schools in the Town, but this is deemed to be the most appropriate project now due to the value for money, the improved facilities it would give the current and future pupils and the opportunity to increase special school provision.

Consideration has also been given to allocating places outside of Ashford Borough as forecasts would suggest that there are surplus places for 2021-22 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.

Demanding young people and their families 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:

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Signed

Date