

Item 8

Amendment to Motion

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Motion: Future Secondary School Provision on the Isle of Sheppey *(as amended)*

This Council Notes:

1. That Kent County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision forecasts continuing pressure on non-selective secondary (Year 7) places in the Sittingbourne and Isle of Sheppey planning groups, with a combined shortfall in the region of 100 to 150 places at points across the forecast period to 2034-35, and that the Plan separately identifies a need to commission 8 forms of entry of new secondary provision across Sittingbourne and Sheppey between 2030 and 2033 (Kent County Council, Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2026 to 2030, Figures 3b and 6d).

• That Kent County Council has advised that there is a forecast shortfall of secondary school places in Swale from 2026 onwards, with a deficit of up to five forms of entry (approximately 150 places).

2. That some children are already travelling significant distances to access education.

3. That children from the east of Sheppey are often required to travel past several schools before reaching their allocated school.

4. That Kent County Council's Commissioning Plan identifies continuing pressure on secondary school places in Swale and states that expansion of secondary school education will be required to meet future demand.

5. That admissions criteria for every secondary school in Swale are set by the school's own admission authority, being the academy trust, free school proprietor, or voluntary aided governing body, and not by Kent County Council. Criteria vary between schools and can include catchment distance, sibling links, faith, looked after child status, and, for grammar schools, performance in the Kent Test. Kent County Council's role is limited to operating the co-ordinated admissions scheme and allocating places within criteria set by others.

6. That Swale Borough Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, and that the Bearing Fruits 2031 Local Plan is out of date, meaning the tilted balance under paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework applies to most housing applications. Under the tilted balance, a shortage of secondary school places is unlikely on its own to justify refusing housing, provided the developer offers appropriate funding through a Section 106 agreement.

7. That, as a result, the delivery of secondary school places on Sheppey depends heavily on Section 106 education contributions being properly secured and their trigger points enforced as housing is built out, and that shortfalls in this area sit within Swale Borough Council's own planning practice.

8. That children from Iwade and Sittingbourne currently travel onto the Isle of Sheppey to access secondary school places, adding further pressure to schools on the Island beyond the needs of Sheppey's own population.
9. That Kent County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision identifies 6 forms of entry of new secondary provision required in the Sittingbourne planning group between 2030 and 2033, corresponding to the long-delayed all-through school on the Quinton Road site in Sittingbourne, which would help absorb demand from Iwade and Sittingbourne and reduce cross-boundary pressure on Sheppey. This school was first committed to by Kent County Council in 2020 and has been repeatedly delayed since, with no fixed build date.
10. That, in the interim, Kent County Council has managed the resulting shortfall in Year 7 places by temporarily expanding existing schools, including Westlands, The Sittingbourne School, and Fulston Manor, none of which relieves the pressure on Sheppey itself.
11. That Swale Borough Council has agreed, through a delegated officer decision, to amend the Section 106 education contribution trigger point on the Quinton Road development from 150 to 450 dwellings built and occupied, meaning three times as many homes must now be completed before the contribution becomes payable, further delaying the funding available towards a school that would help relieve Sheppey's shortage.
12. That on National Offer Day, 3 March 2025, 56 families on the Isle of Sheppey were allocated schools off the Island, and that Kent County Council confirmed at the time that this arose from the two academy trusts, not Kent County Council, choosing to reduce their admissions numbers, and that Kent County Council has no power to compel either trust to admit more pupils (Kent County Council, 'Statement on secondary school allocations on the Isle of Sheppey', news.kent.gov.uk).
13. That for the 2026 intake, Leigh Academy Minster proactively expanded its Year 7 admissions by a further 30 places ahead of National Offer Day, its second consecutive year of doing so, following engagement between the current Kent County Council administration and the Island's academy trusts, and that this appears to have eased pressure on Sheppey families this year (KentOnline/KM Media Group, 23 February 2026).

This Council Believes:

- Every child should have access to a suitable local school place.
- Long-distance travel places unnecessary burdens on pupils and families.
- Education infrastructure must keep pace with population growth and future demand, and responsibility for delivering that infrastructure must be clear rather than split across bodies with no power to compel one another.
- Collaborative working between Kent County Council and local academy trusts has improved the immediate situation for Sheppey families in 2026, but that this relies on individual trusts choosing to expand each year rather than on any guaranteed or permanent solution, and that the underlying structural problem, admission numbers being set by schools rather than by the local authority, remains unaddressed.

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This Council Resolves:

1. To express its concern regarding the projected shortage of secondary school places in Swale, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey, to welcome the improvement seen in 2026 following collaborative working between Kent County Council and local academy trusts, and to note that this improvement rests on individual trusts voluntarily expanding their admission numbers each year rather than on any structural guarantee, since it is the academy trusts, free school proprietors, and voluntary aided governing bodies who, as admission authorities, set their own catchment areas and admissions numbers, while Kent County Council is left to negotiate and fund a solution to any shortfall after the fact.
2. To ask Swale Borough Council's Planning Committee and officers to review the robustness of Section 106 agreements securing education contributions on housing developments across Swale, including trigger points, and to ensure that future agreements are structured so that funding for school places is delivered in step with housing completions rather than significantly behind them.
To request that Kent County Council provides a clear plan and timetable for delivering the additional secondary school capacity required on the Island.
3. To ask the Leader of Swale Borough Council to convene an urgent meeting involving Kent County Council, local Members of Parliament, Swale Borough Council representatives, academy trusts, and secondary school leaders, to discuss current pressures and to press the Government, through local MPs, to address the mismatch between admissions responsibility sitting with academy trusts and sufficiency responsibility sitting with Kent County Council, so that a long-term strategy for secondary school places in Swale can be agreed.
3. To ask the Leader of Swale Borough Council to convene an urgent meeting involving Kent County Council, local Members of Parliament, Swale Borough Council representatives, academy trusts and secondary school leaders to discuss current pressures and agree a long-term strategy to ensure sufficient secondary school places for children of Swale.
4. To write to the Secretary of State for Education setting out that the mismatch between school place planning and school funding in Swale is a consequence of Government policy, whereby academy trusts, free schools, and voluntary aided schools set their own catchment areas and admissions criteria independently of the local authority, while Kent County Council remains statutorily responsible for ensuring sufficient places exist, and to ask the Government to address this mismatch of provision and funding so that responsibility for admissions and responsibility for delivering places sit with the same tier, rather than being split between central government policy, academy trusts, and the local authority.
4. To ask Kent County Council and local MPs for their support in securing the necessary investment and educational provision for Swale.

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Original Proposer: Cllr Moore - Original Seconder: Cllr Bowen

Amendment proposed by: Cllr Richard Palmer - Amendment Seconded by: Cllr Chris Palmer

~~Proposer: Cllr Moore~~
~~Second: Cllr Bowen~~