

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2024 AT 2.00PM

Agenda Item

No

6

OUTCOME OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED ENLARGEMENT OF LONSDALE SCHOOL FROM SEPTEMBER 2024 THROUGH THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE RESIDENTIAL OFFER AT THE SCHOOL ON 31 AUGUST 2024

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

Authors:-	Samantha Young, School Planning Manager (Tel: 01992 555754) John Short, Residential Provision Development Officer (Tel: 07968 875913)
Legal Review:-	Kevin Smith, Head of Finance (Children's Services) (Tel: 01992 555228) Lisa Toye, Head of Finance (Resources & Commercial) (Tel: 01992 588995)
Financial Review:-	Luis Andrade, Principal Lawyer (Tel: 01992 555504)
Executive Member:-	Caroline Clapper - Education, Libraries & Lifelong Learning
Local Member:-	Roni Hearn - Shephall

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the public consultation on the proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School, Brittain Way, Stevenage, SG2 8UT, a community special school for pupils aged 3 years to 18 years with Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI), from 112 places to 132 places from 1 September 2024, through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024.
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet approval to proceed with the publication of a statutory notice on the proposal set out in paragraph 1.1 above and the approval of the associated capital costs.
- 1.3 This report should be read alongside the accompanying Part II report.

2. Summary

- 2.1 On 18 September 2023¹, Cabinet approved the commencement of consultation on the proposed enlargement of Lonsdale School from September 2024, through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024.
- 2.2 Public consultation was held between 26 September and 30 October 2023.

¹ [Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet - 18 September 2023](#)

- 2.3 The Council is the decision maker for special community school proposals. A detailed breakdown of the consultation responses for those schools is included at Appendix 1.
- 2.4 Lonsdale School is currently full, with 112 pupils on roll.
- 2.5 The enlargement of Lonsdale School will increase the capacity at the school by 20 places which will be available for pupils who would otherwise not have a suitable Hertfordshire school place identified for September 2024.
- 2.6 The residential offer at the school has not been fully operational since 13 March 2020. It is proposed that the residential offer is formally closed from 31 August 2024 and that the accommodation formally used for the residential provision is converted to teaching areas to increase the capacity of day places at the school from 112 places to 132 places from 1 September 2024.
- 2.7 The Governing Body of the school support the public consultation process and will work with decision makers should the proposal be implemented. The Governing Body full response can be seen in Appendix 2.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Education, Libraries & Lifelong Learning Cabinet will consider a report on this item of business at its meeting on 5 February 2024. The Panel will be asked to decide whether it recommends to Cabinet that Cabinet:
- (i) authorises the Executive Director of Children’s Services to publish a statutory notice to enlarge Lonsdale School from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024; or
 - (ii) takes no further action; or
 - (iii) takes alternative action.
- 3.2 Should the Panel recommend 3.1(i) above, the Panel also recommend that Cabinet approves the capital costs associated with the proposal, as outlined in the Part II report.

4. Background

- 4.1 Demand for PNI school places in Hertfordshire:

In December 2020, Cabinet approved the Special School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023 (the Strategy)² which articulates that demand for special school places has grown significantly in recent years and that demand is forecast to continue to exceed supply.

- 4.2 Priority 1 of the Strategy includes ensuring that sufficient Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and PNI places are available to meet need. Significant work has been undertaken to increase capacity in this sector with an additional 177

² [Hertfordshire School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023](#)

SLD/PNI places being made available between 2018 and 2023. However, demand for places in this sector is still significantly higher than the number of places available.

- 4.3 There are two special schools in Hertfordshire for pupils with PNI needs: Meadow Wood, a 36-place primary special school in Bushey and Lonsdale, a 112-place all-through special school for pupils aged 3 years to 18 years in Stevenage. To meet the increasing demand for school places for pupils with PNI needs, both schools have been enlarged in recent years.
- 4.4 Analysis of the immediate need for places in the PNI sector indicates that a further 20 additional places are required to ensure that Hertfordshire's children with PNI are able to secure a suitable special school place that can meet their high level of need.
- 4.5 There is no further enlargement potential at Meadow Wood School. Therefore, the only opportunity to increase the number of PNI places in the county in the short term is to further enlarge Lonsdale School through the re-purposing of the first-floor accommodation, currently set aside for the residential provision. Feasibility work has indicated that the conversion of the residential area at Lonsdale School would increase the capacity of the school by 20 places, from 112 places to 132 places.
- 4.6 If the proposal is approved, the former Residential Education Provision (REP) accommodation will be remodelled to create teaching spaces for older pupils and alongside space dedicated to preparing for adulthood. This will allow all secondary aged pupils to have access to the provision and learn key skills required for developing independence, rather than the select few, who were able to access the REP when it was operational.
- 4.7 The closure of the residential offer at Lonsdale School:

Lonsdale School is designated as a PNI school and moved to the current site in January 2013. Lonsdale and Marriotts school share a site and a range of facilities under a Public Finance Initiative (PFI)³ agreement. The residential element of the school has the potential of up to 26 bedspaces in a purpose-built facility based on the first floor of the school site. The actual number of funded bedspaces has declined over time, from 26 to 23 and is now set at an average of 18.5. The residential facility has historically been open 4 nights per week, term time only with pupils being offered between 1 and 4 nights per week based on their education improvement targets (New Horizon System) and a health and care dependency score approach.

- 4.8 The offer of a residential place is not set out as a need in the pupils' Education and Health Care Plan (EHC plan). Given the origin of the funding, the primary need is deemed to be educational, a secondary gain being linked to providing broader support to the family and thus a residential place has often been seen as respite/a short break. Only a small proportion of the pupils using residential are supported by the 0-25 Service. Historically East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust has provided a waking night nurse which the school feel is

³ "Since the early 1990s the public sector used the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to build more than 700 public infrastructure assets such as roads, schools and hospitals. PFI deals involve the public sector entering a long-term contract with a private sector company". House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, Managing the expiry of PFI contracts, 2021.

essential, however, since 2014 the East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust has looked to review the need for nursing staff and has indicated a dedicated nurse is not required (a number of nursing reviews have commenced but not been concluded).

- 4.9 Funding is based on an occupancy top-up of £35,926 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) (2022-2023), i.e., a pupil that stays in the residential provision 4 nights per week for all three terms (full time). Given the occupancy factor⁴ of 84% the school had to fill 16.5 places per week to achieve the indicative residential budget. The reduction in numbers (from 26 to 16.5 pupils) has taken place over the years to help the school with declining levels of demand, to manage the budget and ensure sufficient staffing levels to meet the increasing needs of the pupils. The school has, at times, struggled to manage the residential staffing requirements given the needs of the residential pupils and the split shift pattern required in the evening and morning to support the overnight pupils; the school and the local authority have tried many times to review and find an improved shift/staffing framework and ways to overcome identified challenges.
- 4.10 There have been a number of reviews of the Lonsdale provision over the last 10 years and consideration has been given to a range of options to ensure full use/sustainability of the resource, such as becoming a children's home, becoming a short breaks provision, providing residential places to other schools, or pupils placed outside of Hertfordshire. None of these have been feasible given the PFI requirements, Ofsted requirements, the Residential National Minimum Standards, term-time and weekday opening and funding requirements that apply to the residential element of the school.
- 4.11 The residential provision closed as a result of Covid-19 in March 2020 and has not re-opened beyond a few nights of very partial occupancy. Initially this was due to Covid-19 / the complex needs of the pupils and subsequently due to the East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust being unable to provide nursing support as a result of staffing shortages. When the East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust were in a position to provide nursing support again in November 2022, the school no longer had the staffing capacity to open residential provision and identified that the provision was no longer sustainable. In March 2023, the residential provision at Lonsdale School was inspected by Ofsted and was graded as 'Requires Improvement to be good'.
- 4.12 Using the vacated residential area to enlarge the school by 20 places:
Utilising the existing residential accommodation will enable an enlargement proposal which will increase day-place capacity from 112 to 132. This will be achieved through the remodelling of the four flats on the first floor creating four separate tutor group areas which will be able to accommodate up to 32 Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils⁵. Each of the areas will include a large classroom, toilets and other learning areas. The accommodation will also include a large communal/dining space, additional staff facilities and enhanced outside space.

⁴ the occupancy factor has been developed to support the school, as it would not be possible to fill all of the beds all of the time due to pupils leaving and starting or due to sickness. This means that the school only require the beds to be full 84% of the time to receive their full indicative funding.

⁵ Key Stage 4 (KS4) - Age 14 to 16; Key Stage 5 (KS5) – Age 16 to 18

- 4.13 By moving up to 32 older pupils to the first floor, more space will be created on the ground floor for the younger pupils. This will accommodate the additional numbers, without putting a strain on existing core spaces such as toilets, dining and staff areas.
- 4.14 The converted accommodation for older children on the first floor will enable the school to further develop its preparing for adulthood offer. Children will be able to develop core life skills to support their independence as they transition into college or alternative pathways.
- 4.15 The accommodation will include mock living accommodation so that the pupils can prepare food together, practise making the bed/ folding laundry and putting it away in the wardrobe. The larger communal area can be used for enterprise initiatives such as cake or book sales.
- 4.16 The preparing for adulthood offer would take place during the school day or through wrap-around activities and would be available to all pupils, including the 20 additional pupils, rather than the small number who would have benefited from the previous overnight offer.
- 4.17 The intended decision-making timeline is shown below:

EL&LL Cabinet Panel	5 February 2024
Cabinet (to consider the outcome of the public consultation and to decide whether to publish a statutory notice)	12 February 2024
Statutory notice period	26 February – 24 March 2024
Chief Officer delegated decision (final decision if no objections received to the statutory notice)	19 April 2024
Cabinet (for final decision if one or more objections received to the statutory notice)	13 May 2024

- 4.18 Public consultation on the proposal was held between 26 September and 30 October 2023. A breakdown of the consultation responses is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.19 Copies of the consultation letter, attached at Appendix 3, were sent to:
- Parents/carers of pupils attending Lonsdale School;
 - School governors/trustees and staff at Lonsdale School;
 - All maintained schools, free schools, and academies in Hertfordshire;
 - MPs, County Councillors, District Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and Local Authority Chief Executives;
 - Trade Union representatives;
 - Church Diocese representatives;
 - NHS representatives;
 - Parent Governor representatives on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
 - Libraries and Citizen’s Advice Bureaux;
 - Headteacher Forums;
 - Herts Parent Carer Involvement (HPCI);

- Key officers within Hertfordshire County Council.

4.20 The consultation letters and online response forms were also made available on Hertfordshire County Council's website.

4.21 A total of 982 copies of the consultation letters were sent out. 53 responses were received.

5 Responses to the consultations

5.1 A summary of the responses is shown in the table below:

School	Total Responses	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Don't Know	%
Lonsdale School	53	16	30.2%	36	67.9%	1	1.9%
Total responses	53	16	30.2%	36	67.9%	1	1.9%

5.2 A detailed analysis of the key issues raised and officer responses is contained in Appendix 1.

5.3 Copies of the responses received will be available to Members prior to EL&LL Cabinet Panel on 5 February 2024.

5.4 The Governing Body responded indicating that it supported the decision to consult on the proposal and would work with the county council whatever the outcome. It noted that the residential provision had previously been a success but acknowledged that there are financial and operational challenges which mean it is not currently viable. It also agrees with and supports the need for additional day places in Hertfordshire for children with Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI) and welcomes the improvement to the preparing for adulthood offer that this proposal would deliver. Lonsdale School's Governing Body submitted a comprehensive response to the consultation (Appendix 2). Officers will continue to work closely with the school.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 Capital:

Capital funding is available to convert the residential area on the first floor to teaching accommodation which will support the enlargement of day places at the school from 112 to 132 places.

6.2 The Part II report provides Panel with the cost estimate, an assessment of risk and the funding sources.

6.3 Revenue:

Revenue funding for specialist provision is via the High Needs⁶ block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)⁷.

- 6.4 If places are not created at Lonsdale School, pupils with PNI needs would need to be placed in costly out-of-county, independent specialist placements. These placements would likely result in considerable additional social care and health costs as the placements would need to include a residential offer due to the distance from the child's home.
- 6.5 The estimated average cost of a PNI placement at an out-of-county specialist provision would be £68.4k more than the cost of a place at Lonsdale School.
- 6.6 The creation of 20 additional places at Lonsdale School could equate to a saving of £1.368m per annum and will also reduce the impact on the school transport budget, as pupils will be able to secure a more local school place.
- 6.7 Due to complex PFI contracting arrangements, the initiation of a High Value Change with capital works and change of school operational use of parts of the facilities will materially change several aspects of the PFI legal & facilities management services agreements. It is anticipated that due to the closure of a 24-hour school operational facility and change of use to school day place use, savings against the current unitary charge, revenue, will be achieved. These savings will primarily be realised by the school, which will help support the budget moving forward.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Hertfordshire County Council's Strategy has been formulated to assist in discharging the duties imposed by Part III of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.
- 7.2 The Council is required to keep local provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities under review, to co-operate with their partners to plan and commission provision for those children and young people and publish clear information on services they expect to be available.

⁶ High needs funding supports provision for pupils and students with SEND who require additional resources to participate in education and learning, from their early years to age 25 in schools and colleges (excluding students aged 19 to 25 who do not have an education, health and care (EHC) plan or students who are over the age of 25) and pre-16 pupils in alternative provision (AP) who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons, cannot receive their education in mainstream schools. High needs funding is provided to local authorities through the high needs block of the DSG, enabling them to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.

⁷ Dedicated schools grant (DSG) is paid in support of the local authority's schools budget. It is the main source of income for the schools budget. Local authorities are responsible for determining the split of the grant between central expenditure and the individual schools budget (ISB) in conjunction with local schools forums.

8. Equality Implications

- 8.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the Equality implications of the decision that they are making.
- 8.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure the proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 8.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix 4.
- 8.5 There are no implications for any persons with protected characteristics.

9. Sustainable Hertfordshire Impact Assessment

- 9.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 requires the UK government to reduce greenhouse gases by 100%, relative to 1990 levels, by 2050. As a local authority, the county council is committed to this target, having declared a climate emergency in 2019.
- 9.2 The Council has chosen to consider sustainability within its decisions, to identify suitable mitigation measures to address the impacts of climate change where required and practicable in all the circumstances, ensuring these are in line with the Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy.
- 9.3 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are aware of and have considered the sustainability implications of the decision that they are taking.
- 9.4 Positive impacts would be expected when creating more specialist provision: it will provide more local places and would avoid the need for children to travel greater distances, especially to access independent provision out of county. The proposals will encourage sustainable modes of transport, through the introduction of School Travel Plans. This will have a positive impact on transport, pollution, and health.
- 9.5 A Sustainable Hertfordshire Impact Assessment (SHIA) has been undertaken and this is attached at Appendix 5.

Background Information

Links provided within footnotes.

Consultation responses on the proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School through the closure of the residential offer:

Response to the consultation.

A total of 982 consultation letters were sent out for this proposal.

A total of 53 responses were received to the consultation of which 16 (30.2%) agreed with the proposal, 36 (67.9%) disagreed and 1 (1.9%) was undecided. A breakdown of the responses is shown below:

Capacity of respondent	Total responses	Agree	Disagree	Don't know / undecided
Parent / carer	20	1	19	0
School governor	3	1	1	1
Member of staff	4	3	1	0
Resident	0	0	0	0
Other	26	11	15	0
%	100.0%	30.2%	67.9%	1.9%
Total responses	53	16	36	1

Consultation responses / key themes and officer response

Key themes raised:

- 1. The Residential Educational Provision (REP) is essential for helping young people prepare for adulthood and gaining independence and key life skills.** (29 respondents)

The school is enhancing its preparing for adulthood offer for all pupils at the school which will be supported by the creation of dedicated preparing for adulthood areas in the vacated residential spaces. By making preparing for adulthood part of the school's core curriculum, it hopes to help all pupils gain vital skills to help them become independent. Approximately only one third of secondary aged pupils were able to access REP compared to all secondary aged pupils who will be able to access the new preparing for adulthood offer that is being proposed.

- 2. Staff are already under pressure to meet the children and young people's complex needs. Increasing the number of day places will place even more pressure on staff.** (22 respondents)

The safety of pupils and staff is paramount. The pupils' needs are complex and unique and therefore Lonsdale's staff are highly trained for emergency care and other responsibilities such as feeding pupils. If the proposal is approved, the county council would support the school with their recruitment process to ensure the school is appropriately staffed before increasing the number of available day places. Additional revenue place funding will be available to support the growth of staff at the school.

- 3. Many of Lonsdale's pupils already have limited life experiences compared to their mainstream peers. By closing the REP, you are taking away another key service from the young people and their families whilst reducing the quality of the existing school offer. (18 respondents)**

The county council is currently looking at the wider offer for all children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including what is available outside of school for children and young people in Hertfordshire. It is aware that there is a limited social offer available particularly for children with Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI) and is looking to improve this. This is a wider social care issue and officers from the county council will liaise with stakeholders, including Lonsdale's parents and carers, to discuss what type of services are most needed and to discuss other opportunities for short breaks and respite.

- 4. If the school is enlarged, will the county council consider the wider impact on the site such as the lifts, temperature control in the new classrooms, storage space and more vehicles in the carpark? (14 respondents)**

If approved, the county council will work with the school and contractors to design the new spaces and will take into consideration the pupils' needs, storage space for equipment, temperature control and facilities such as the lifts. The impact of additional vehicles bringing pupils to Lonsdale School will also be assessed.

- 5. The county council requires many more places and should look to open new special schools, rather than increasing the size of existing schools. (12 respondents)**

There is some crossover between the SLD and PNI sectors. The county council is working to create 300 extra SLD school places across the county. These new places will ensure that SLD pupils access the correct school place and as a result, some places within Hertfordshire's PNI schools will become available. It is expected that the additional 20 places at Lonsdale along with the additional capacity in the SLD sector should meet the demand for PNI places without the need for a new school.

6. The recent Ofsted rating of “Requires improvement to be good” is misleading. (8 respondents)

During the previous Ofsted inspection period (2021-2022), the provision was able to offer two overnight and two extended days per week with the limited offer. This was only available for a limited number of children. The staffing ratio was safe and appropriate to meet the needs of the children who were staying overnight, all be it a limited cohort. During the inspection in March 2023 there were no children, staff or activities to view or to observe. The outcome of this inspection was in accordance to the National Minimum Standards of which the service was unable to meet and comply with.

7. The county council should focus resources to reopen the REP instead of increasing the number of day places. (7 respondents).

The lasting impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, along with the NHS not being able to provide overnight cover and a shortage in qualified support staff, the REP has not been able to accommodate any pupils since November 2022. Prior to this, the REP was only available to a small number of pupils. Despite extensive efforts over the past three years, during which the county council has worked closely with the school, its Governing Body and staff, it has not been possible to reopen the REP.

8. If the proposal to expand the school from 112 to 132 places is approved, will the county council continue to admit more children above the 132 places? (3 respondents)

Whilst the county council believes the proposed new capacity of the school would be 132, it is important to note that in the event additional pupils are admitted via the SEND tribunal process, the decision to admit any pupils over the planned 132 places is outside of the county council's remit.

Lonsdale School Governing Board Consultation Reply

At the outset we would like to emphasise that the Lonsdale School Governing Board had confirmed support of the consultation process, not the proposal itself, as you noted in your letter of 26th September.

We welcome the opportunity to work with HCC and stakeholders at the end of this process. The Governing Body is open minded about the outcome and will work with HCC and others to provide the best possible outcome and most appropriate support for the young people in our school.

Whatever is agreed as part of this process we will need to discuss funding projections and potential other support that can be offered to meet the agreed commitment going forward. Without prejudging the consultation outcome, we can start this in the near future looking at a variety of scenarios, taking into account a variety of options and the impact on the school finances as well as the bigger picture of all support services (social services, education, health).

Whilst the education and support of our students is of paramount importance, we cannot allow the financial outcome of this provision to impinge on an already stretched school budget.

At this stage we remain impartial on the outcome but would like to use this opportunity to highlight a number of points that have come up in our various discussions and at the consultation meeting held at the school on 18th October.

In general terms:

- there is a current shortfall on the provision of PNI education places in Hertfordshire. The requirement for places is forecast to rise, and the needs of those requiring a provision is getting more complex. This consultation process is looking at addressing in part the short and medium term requirements. We strongly urge that HCC also now look at putting something in place now to meet the longer-term requirements, which may include a new school. We know that when we built the current school it was at least eight years between concept and opening in January 2013; this would imply at best a new school would not be available until 2030-31.
- The current school was built as a state of the art flagship, offering over and beyond the basic education provision. However, many things have changed since then, including the relationships between the various service providers (education, social services and the NHS), the needs are getting more complex, the legal and funding framework and the labour market. Conditions and offerings that existed then cannot necessarily be replicated in the same way or no longer financially viable.

- The main focus of the school has to be on education and learning to guarantee outstanding progress in all key stages. We have continually adapted to meet the current needs, as opposed to the perceived needs, as well as the changing needs of our pupils.
- Regrettably, we were compelled to close REP facility in November 2022, primarily because of the NHS's inability to provide overnight cover and partly due to a shortage of qualified support staff, together with the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. Despite extensive efforts over the past three years, during which the School and its Governing Body collaborated closely with HCC and staff, we were unable to fully reopen REP. In some instances, members of the Senior Leadership Team took on additional responsibilities, such as providing overnight cover to facilitate student stays. Despite these best efforts reopening REP has remained impossible.
- REP has always been recognised as an educational provision and funded as such by the DfE; it was never a facility that could be accessed by social services, nor to be treated as respite care. The school introduced a multi-discipline residential panel, reviewing entry and exit criteria to ensure that the educational aspect was paramount. Clubs and outings are also incidental to the residential provision; for children in mainstream school these are for the most part provided by the families outside the education provision.
- It is generally recognised that staff recruitment and retention within the care sector has fallen through the floor on a nationwide basis. There is no magic wand that the school, or the local authority, can wave to make this better. In addition, the split shift patterns across a 38 week year make it a difficult post to recruit for.

Retaining the residential element

- It is widely acknowledged that the residential provision has been a great success in both the current and previous school locations, and if money was no object, then would be retained without hesitation.
- We believe that everyone supports this as a compelling reason for continuing the provision but there are issues with the essential NHS support and diminishing income as the complexities of users increase and the per night income decreases. The provision needs to be financially viable in the medium to long term. This is not obvious at the moment and will need careful review.
- Since 2020 HCC and the local NHS Trust have been unable to guarantee providing nursing support in the residential provision. This is the most critical aspect of the situation – without nursing care we cannot open the facility.
- As the complexity of pupil needs goes up, as is forecast, then the numbers who will be eligible to access the provision will decrease. In addition, the numbers able to access the provision at any one time will decrease to ensure that the safety of all young people can be maintained. Income is on an occupancy basis and will not be sufficient to meet the potentially increased costs.

If the proposal is adopted:

- Whilst the school is currently over its original intended number, this is a result of decisions taken by the governing body(s) over the years to maintain financial viability. If the proposal is adopted, ultimately will lead to another 20 pupils contributing to the overall fixed costs (primarily PFI), although increasing the variable costs (primarily staff).
- The proposal goes some way to addressing the short and medium term requirements of the HCC PNI school place requirement in relatively short time frame. If not adopted, what is the immediate alternative for those 20 pupils without appropriate specialist provision? The school will be able to cater for more PNI pupils as the local authority provides more SLD opportunities elsewhere. This can be achieved without detriment to the overall education provision.
- The school is developing a Preparation for Adulthood programme, including an extended day offer and the Home Hub space. This offer will in essence be similar to the residential provision, but without the sleepover. All students will be able to access this as part of the curriculum. Undoubtedly, there will be issues arising, for example, transport arrangements, but we are confident that these will be overcome and are not deal breakers.
- Given the space available on the first floor we believe we should be able to adequately accommodate 37 pupils there and across the school. This reinstates the educational space ratios back to the original design capacity of 95 and returns the specialist areas that have been converted to classrooms, to their original purpose. This would also mean that we could limit class sizes and fix our PAN to a maximum of 132 to ensure that the quality of the education we provide is to the level expected by our students, parents and staff alike.

In summary:

- we recognise the contribution the residential provision has made to those who have enjoyed the provision over the years and that it has been highly beneficial in preparation for their journey to adulthood.
- there have been recent issues, most critically the inability to secure overnight and evening nursing support through the NHS. In addition, there have been staffing issues, which is sector wide and a national problem for which there is no immediate solution. We also have to review in more detail the medium to long term financial viability.
- It is recognised that there is shortage of PNI provision in the county; in the short term accepting the proposal would go some way to alleviating this. However, HCC are urged to put in place new solutions to cater for the longer term projection.

- Whatever the outcome of the proposal we look forward to working with HCC and others to provide the most appropriate support for the children and young adults at our school.

We look forward to reading the report following the consultation and what the next stage for Lonsdale School will be.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Governing Board.

Children's Services

School Planning
Hertfordshire County Council
Postal Point CHO134
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8DF
www.hertfordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 4043
Email: education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk
My ref: Lonsdale School
Your ref:
Date: 26 September 2023

Dear Consultee

Consultation on the proposed enlargement of Lonsdale School, Stevenage from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024.

Hertfordshire County Council is consulting you on the proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School, Stevenage, a community special school, from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024.

Why is this being proposed?

Lonsdale School ("the School") is currently full to capacity with 112 pupils on roll. The enlargement of the School will increase its capacity by 20 places, which will be available for pupils with Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI) who would otherwise not have a suitable Hertfordshire school place identified for September 2024. This proposal is consistent with priorities 1 and 3 of the Special School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023¹.

The residential offer at the School has not been fully operational since 13 March 2020. It is proposed that the residential offer is formally closed on 31 August 2024 and that the accommodation previously used for the residential provision is converted to

¹ [Hertfordshire School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023](#)

teaching areas to increase the number of day places at the School from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024. The governing body of the School supports this proposal.

Why the proposal to increase the number of day places?

Analysis of the immediate need for places in the PNI sector indicates that a further 20 additional places are required to ensure that Hertfordshire's children with PNI can access a suitable special school place that can meet their high level of need.

There are two special schools in Hertfordshire for pupils with PNI needs: Meadow Wood School, a 36-place primary special school in Bushey and Lonsdale School in Stevenage. To meet the increasing demand for school places for pupils with PNI needs, both schools have previously been enlarged.

There is no further enlargement potential at Meadow Wood School. The only opportunity to increase the number of PNI places in the county in the short term, is to further enlarge Lonsdale School through the re-purposing of the first-floor accommodation previously used for the residential provision. Feasibility work indicates that the conversion of this first-floor residential accommodation at Lonsdale School would increase the capacity of the School by 20 places, from 112 to 132 places.

Why the proposal to close the residential provision?

The residential element of the School has the potential of up to 26 bedspaces in a purpose-built facility based on the first floor of the School. The actual number of funded bedspaces has declined over time, from 26 to 23 and is now set at an average of 18.5.

The residential provision closed as a result of Covid-19 in March 2020 and has not re-opened beyond a few nights of very partial occupancy. Initially this was due to Covid-19/the complex needs of the pupils and subsequently due to the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust being unable to provide nursing support as a result of staffing shortages.

Through ongoing discussion with the county council since that time, the School has identified that the residential provision is no longer sustainable. In March 2023, the residential provision at the School was inspected by Ofsted and was graded as 'Requires Improvement to be Good'.

What would this mean for pupils at the school?

If, following this consultation, the decision is taken to enlarge the School through the closure of the residential offer, the four flats on the first floor will be remodelled, creating four separate tutor-group areas which will be able to accommodate Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils. Each of the areas will include a large classroom, toilets and other learning areas. The accommodation will also include a dedicated "preparing for

adulthood” space, large communal/dining area, additional staff facilities and enhanced outside space.

By moving older students to the first floor, more space will be created on the ground floor for the younger students. This will accommodate the additional numbers without putting a strain on existing core spaces such as toilets, dining and staff areas.

The School, county council and contactor will work together to limit any disruption to pupils’ learning as a result of the building work, including carrying out works outside of term-time wherever possible.

What would happen to the staff at the school?

No jobs will be at risk as a result of the proposal. If approved, the additional 20 day places would create a need for more staff.

Have your say.

No decision on the proposal has been made at this point. The county council would like to hear your views on the proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024. All comments must be received by **30 October 2023**.

The easiest way to submit your views is to complete the online response form at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/consultations.

If you do not have access to the internet you can visit your local library where free access is available to all Hertfordshire residents.

If you require help accessing or understanding this information please contact the county council by email at education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk or by calling 0300 123 4043. An interpreting service is available for those who need it.

Your response must be received by **30 October 2023**. The county council will not be able to acknowledge or respond individually to comments, but they will be taken into account as explained below.

How the decision will be taken and when?

This is a consultation and no decision has been made yet. All comments received will be made available to elected members who make the final decision. All responses may be made available in public reports, although personal details will be removed to respect individual privacy.

The following timetable outlines the decision-making process. Please note that meetings marked with * will be open to the public. Although it will not be possible to

inform everyone individually of the decisions made, you will be able to access this information throughout the process at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/committees.

Process	Date
Public consultation (5 weeks)	26 September – 30 October 2023
Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning Cabinet Panel*	5 February 2024
Cabinet*	12 February 2024
Subject to Cabinet approval	
Statutory notice period (4 weeks)	26 February – 24 March 2024
Cabinet* (for final decision if objections received)	13 May 2024
Implementation of decision	September 2024

* Denotes meetings that are open to the public.

Yours faithfully

Simon Newland
Director of Education

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) – Post Consultation

Proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School, Stevenage from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school on 31 August 2024

1. Who is completing the EqIA⁴ and why is it being done?	
Title of service/proposal/project/strategy/procurement you are assessing⁵	Proposed enlargement of Lonsdale School, Stevenage from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the school from 31 August 2024
Names of those involved in completing the EqIA	Adrian Bentley/Tom Stacey, Samantha Young
Head of Service or Business Manager	Kate Leahy
Team/Department	School Planning Team, Children’s Services
Lead officer contact details	Samantha.young2@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Focus of EqIA - what are you assessing?⁶	<p>To assess the possible equalities impacts on the protected characteristic groups (listed in section 3 below) associated with the proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School (“the School”), Brittain Way, Stevenage, SG2 8UT, a community special school, for pupils aged 3 years to 18 years with physical and neurological impairment (PNI), from 112 places to 132 places from 1 September 2024, through the closure of the residential offer at the school from 31 August 2024.</p> <p>The five-week public consultation closed 30 October 2023 on the proposal to enlarge the School from 112 places to 132 places from September 2024 through the closure of the residential offer at the School from 31 August 2024.</p> <p>Consultation letters were prepared and distributed to the stakeholders listed in the section immediately below.</p>

	<p>The consultation was also published on the Hertfordshire County Council website (www.hertfordshire.gov.uk). The consultation documents were available in other formats on request, including large print, braille and other languages. An interpreting service will be made available for those who need it.</p>
<p>Stakeholders</p>	<p>Parents/carers of all pupils attending the School, staff and governors at the School; Local Special, Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools; Local Pre-Schools, playgroups, Children’s Centres, toddler groups and day nurseries; MPs, County Councillors, District Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and Local Authority Chief Executives; Trade Union representatives; Church Diocese representatives; NHS representatives; Parent Governor representatives on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Hertfordshire County Council; Libraries and Citizen’s Advice Bureaux; Selected officers within Hertfordshire County Council and Herts For Learning. Herts Parent Carer Involvement (HPCI)</p>

2. List of data sources used for this EqIA (include relevant national/local data, research, monitoring information, service user feedback, complaints, audits, consultations, EqIAs from other projects or other local authorities, etc.)

A range of useful local data on our communities can be found on [Herts Insight](#) and on the [Equalities Hub](#)

Title and brief description (of data, research or engagement – include hyperlinks if available) being done?	Date	Gaps in data Consider any gaps you need to address and add any relevant actions to the action plan in Section 4
At the conclusion of the public consultation on 30 October 2023 all the responses received were carefully analysed and the issues raised considered in the light of the Protected Characteristics listed in section 3. The analysis concluded that the consultation responses raised no further issues and as a result the Action Plan in section 4 of this document remains unaltered.	Consultation ran from 26 September to 30 October 2023	No gaps have been identified at this stage.
Spring 2023 school census data on gender split, English as an additional language (EAL), ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, number of children with an Education, health and care (EHC) plan (code E) or SEN Support (code K).	Spring 2023 school census data (2022-23 academic year)	<u>Summary of data in the table below:</u> The percentage of Minority Ethnic Students at the School is lower than the countywide average. The percentage of pupils at the School with EAL is significantly lower than the countywide average. All pupils at the School have an EHC plan (code E) and none have SEN Support (code K). The percentage of pupils at the School who are eligible for FSM is significantly higher than the countywide average. The percentage of male pupils at the school is significantly higher than the countywide average and the percentage of female pupils at the school is correspondingly lower. There are significantly more male than female pupils at the school.

School Census Spring 2023 (2022-23 academic year)	Lonsdale School (R to Y13)	County (R to Y13)
Total number of pupils Reception (R) to Year 13	112	193508
Number Minority Ethnic Students (not White British and excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	28	69037
% Minority Ethnic Students (not White British and excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	25.0%	35.7%
Number EAL (English as an alternative Language) (First language Not English or believed not to be English excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	2	32625
% EAL (English as an alternative Language) (First language Not English or believed not to be English)	1.8%	16.9%
Number SEN code E (EHC plan)	112	7085
% SEN code E (EHC plan)	100.0%	3.7%
Number SEN code K (SEN Support)	0	24738
% SEN code K (SEN Support)	0.0%	12.8%
Total number SEN code E and K	112	31823
Total % SEN code E and K	100.0%	16.4%
Number Eligible for FSM (at date of Census)	45	28943
% FSM (Free School Meals) (at date of Census)	40.2%	15.0%
Number of Male Students	71	98411
% of Male Students	63.4%	50.9%
Number of Female Students	41	95094
% of Female Students	36.6%	49.1%

3. Analysis and assessment: review of information, impact analysis and mitigating actions

Protected characteristic group	<p>What do you know?⁷ What do people tell you?⁸</p> <p>Summary of data and feedback about service users and the wider community/ public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who uses the service? • Who doesn't and why? • Feedback/complaints? • Any differences in outcomes? Why? 	<p>What does this mean - what are the potential impacts of the proposal(s)?⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider positive and negative impacts on service users / the public • AND, where relevant, staff* <p>* if your proposals relates mainly to a staff restructure or reorganisation, you should use the template here</p>	<p>What can you do?¹⁰</p> <p>What reasonable mitigations to reduce or avoid the impact can you propose?</p> <p>How will you communicate/engage or provide services differently to create a 'level playing field' – e.g. consultation materials in easy read or hold targeted engagement events.</p> <p>If there is no current way of mitigating any negative impacts, clearly state that here and consider other actions you could take in the action plan in section 4.</p>
Age ¹¹		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of their age.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Disability ¹²		It should be noted that to date, there are no pupils accessing the residential offer at Lonsdale School and therefore it is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of their disability. By converting the unused residential accommodation into classroom space, an additional 20 day places will be created for pupils with physical and neurological impairment (PNI).	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Gender reassignment ¹³		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people with this characteristic disproportionately.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the

			Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Pregnancy and maternity¹⁴		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people with this characteristic disproportionately.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Race¹⁵		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of their race.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Religion or belief¹⁶		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of their religion or belief.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Sex/Gender¹⁷		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of issues around sex/gender.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.

3. Analysis and assessment: review of information, impact analysis and mitigating actions

Protected characteristic group	<p>What do you know ? What do people tell you ?</p> <p>Summary of data and feedback about service users and the wider community/ public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who uses the service? • Who doesn't and why? • Feedback/complaints? • Any differences in outcomes? Why? 	<p>What does this mean - what are the potential impacts of the proposal(s) ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider positive and negative impacts on service users / the public • AND, where relevant, staff* <p>* if your proposals relate mainly to a staff restructure or reorganisation, you should use the template here</p>	<p>What can you do ?</p> <p>What reasonable mitigations to reduce or avoid the impact can you propose?</p> <p>How will you communicate/engage or provide services differently to create a 'level playing field' – e.g. consultation materials in easy read or hold targeted engagement events</p> <p>If there is no current way of mitigating any negative impacts, clearly state that here and consider other actions you could take in the action plan in section 4.</p>
Sexual orientation ¹⁸		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of issues around sexual orientation.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Marriage and civil partnership ¹⁹		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of issues around marriage and civil partnership.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.
Carers ²⁰		It is not anticipated that the proposals will affect people disproportionately because of issues around caring responsibilities.	The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.

<p>Other relevant groups Consider if there is a potential impact (positive or negative) on areas such as health and wellbeing, crime and disorder, Armed Forces community.</p>		<p>It is not anticipated that the proposals will disproportionately affect people in any other relevant groups.</p>	<p>The position will continue to be monitored and if any issues in respect of the protected characteristic are identified then the Action Plan will be amended accordingly.</p>
---	--	--	--

Opportunity to advance equality of opportunity and/or foster good relations²²

Lonsdale School is a community special school for pupils aged 3 to 18 with physical and neurological impairment (PNI). The residential offer at Lonsdale School has not been fully operational since 13 March 2020. To date, no children access the residential offer as part of their Education, Health and Care Plan. It is proposed that the residential offer is formally closed from 31 August 2024 and that the accommodation formally used for the residential provision is converted to teaching areas to increase the capacity of day places at the school from 112 places to 132 places from 1 September 2024.

The county council and Lonsdale School are working together in a close partnership on the proposal to ensure sufficient information and support is provided to all stakeholders.

Conclusion of your analysis and assessment - **select one of the outcomes below²³ and summarise why you have selected i, ii, iii or iv; what you think the most important impacts are; and the key actions you will take.**

OUTCOME AND NEXT STEPS	SUMMARY
i. No equality impacts identified - No major change required to proposal	No major change required.
ii. Minimal equality impacts identified - Adverse impacts have been identified, but have been objectively justified (provided you do not unlawfully discriminate) - Ensure decision makers consider the cumulative effect of how a number of decisions impact on equality - No major change required to proposal	Ensure that the communications strategy takes into account the differing needs of the local community including staff. The position will continue to be monitored and any necessary action will be incorporated into the Action Plan
iii. Potential equality impacts identified - Take 'mitigating action' to change the original policy/proposal, remove barriers or better advance equality - Set out clear actions in the action plan in section 4	

iv. Major equality impacts identified

- **The adverse effects are not justified, cannot be mitigated or show unlawful discrimination**
- **You must stop and remove the policy [you should consult with Legal Services]**
- **Ensure decision makers understand the equality impact**

4. Prioritised Action Plan²⁴

Impact identified and group(s) affected	Action planned Include actions relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mitigation measures • getting further research • getting further data/consultation 	Expected outcome	Measure of success	Lead officer and timeframe
---	---	------------------	--------------------	----------------------------

NB: These actions must now be transferred to service or business plans and monitored/reviewed to ensure they achieve the outcomes identified.

<p>Explore ways of supporting parents, carers, governors and staff through the change process</p>	<p>Ensure the communication strategy recognises that some groups may require information in a different format for example if they have a disability or do not speak English as a first language.</p> <p>We are aware that the School may have its own communication strategy.</p>			<p>Samantha Young Review March 2024</p>
--	--	--	--	---

This EqlA has been signed off by:

Lead Equality Impact Assessment officer: Samantha Young

Date: 02/01/2024

Head of Service or Business Manager:

Kate Leahy

Date: 02/01/2024

Review date: March 2024

Please now send the completed EqIA to equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Please share your initial EqIA with the equalities team, equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk and the final/updated version at the end of the project.

Key EqIAs should be reviewed by the relevant Head of Service. Examples of EqIAs can be seen in the EqIA Library.

Please also ensure that the EqIA is referenced in and included as an appendix to reports to Management Boards Cabinet Panels and Cabinet so that decision makers can consider equality impacts before making decisions.

Sustainable Hertfordshire Impact Assessment Form – Post Consultation

Name of person completing this form	Samantha Young
Date completed	02/01/2024

1. About the project, service or policy

Name of project, service, policy or procurement	Proposal to enlarge Lonsdale School, a community special school for pupils aged 3 years to 18 years with physical and neurological impairment (PNI), from 112 places to 132 places from 1 September 2024, through the closure of the residential offer at the school from 31 August 2024.
Name of project sponsor	Simon Newland
Name of project lead or business manager	Samantha Young
Project Timeline	Implementation September 2024
Why is this project needed?	<p>Lonsdale School currently offers 112 day places for pupils aged 3 – 18 years old with physical and neurological impairment (PNI). The spring 2023 school census shows that all 112 places are full. There is a need to provide more PNI places in line with the county council's Special School place strategy. The residential offer at the school closed in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19. The residential offer has not re-opened beyond a few nights of very partial occupancy. The residential element of the school was recently inspected by Ofsted and was graded as 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. It is therefore proposed that the residential offer at the school is closed, and the accommodation repurposed to provide 20 additional day places from September 2024.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the public consultation on 30 October 2023 all the responses received were carefully analysed and the issues raised considered in the light of the Sustainability Impact issues listed in section 2. The analysis concluded that the consultation responses raised no further concerns and as a result the Action Plan in section 3 of this document remains unaltered.</p>

2. Sustainability Impact

Mitigation	Assessment of Impact: <i>Negative</i> <i>Neutral</i> <i>Positive</i>	Brief description of impact	If negative, how can it be mitigated or adapted? If positive, how can it be enhanced?
Air Quality	Positive	Without the creation of additional day places, pupils with PNI requiring a specialist school place will have to travel much further. By creating 20 local places, it will reduce carbon emissions as a result of pupils having shorter travel times.	Increased local provision of SEND facilities which would aim to reduce travel distances for pupils travelling to and from school.
Biodiversity	Neutral	The project will use an existing internal space and therefore there will be no change to access, size and quality of any natural habitat or green space.	
Education	Neutral	No impact expected as a result of this proposal	
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Neutral	No impact on greenhouse gases such as water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane and ozone – Passive design measures to be prioritised in order to adhere to the school's Environmental Strategy. A minimum BREEAM rating of 'very good' is contractually required to be maintained.	
Green Procurement	Neutral	No impact on the purchase of environmentally friendly products, services, and contractors.	Governance measures detailed within a High Value Change ensure a value for money assessment will be undertaken as part of the contractor's proposals.
Health Inequalities	Neutral	No change to access of green space, exposure to pollution, fuel costs, food security.	




Renewable Energy	Neutral	No impact on the provision of renewable energy in Hertfordshire.	
Waste	Neutral	No waste will be generated.	
Water & Soil Health	Neutral	No impact on the levels of soil nutrients or foul water entering local waterways.	
Water Resources	Neutral	No significant amount of extra water is consumed or quality of water sources affected.	
Adaptation	Assessment of Impact: <i>Negative</i> <i>Neutral</i> <i>Positive</i>	Brief description of impact	If negative, how can it be mitigated or adapted? If positive, how can it be enhanced?
Drought	Neutral	No change in water usage/levels of water.	
Flooding	Neutral	Levels of surface water run-off the same, flood risk not affected.	
Heatwaves	Neutral	No change.	
Storms	Neutral	No change to exposure of higher wind speeds.	

3. Action plan

Impact identified	Action to Reduce Negative Impact or Enhance Positive Impact	Timeframe/Date	Lead Officer

4. Sign off

	Name	Date
Head of Service/Business Manager	Kate Leahy	02/01/2024
Director	Simon Newland	02/01/2024

 Positive Impact
 Neutral Impact
 Negative Impact

