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| <br><b>Brent</b> | <b>Cabinet</b><br>7 September 2026                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                   | <b>Report from the Corporate Director,<br/> Children, Young People and<br/> Community Development</b>                             |
|                                                                                                   | <b>Lead Member – Cabinet<br/> Member for Children’s Services,<br/> Employment and Climate Action<br/> (Councillor Jake Rubin)</b> |
| <b>Proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School on the<br/> Strathcona site</b>                 |                                                                                                                                   |

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| <b>Wards Affected:</b>                                                                                                                     | Preston                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>                                                                                                            | Key                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b><br>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act) | Open                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>List of Appendices:</b>                                                                                                                 | Two<br>Appendix 1: Statutory Notice<br>Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Background Papers:</b>                                                                                                                  | None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the formal consultation undertaken between 30 June 2026 and 27 July 2026 on a proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School by 50 places using the Strathcona site (Strathcona Road, Wembley, HA9 8QL). The proposal responds to increasing demand for special school places across the borough for children who present with autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

- 1.2 Formal consultation involves publication of a statutory notice (Appendix 1) and the opportunity for written responses, of which only 3 have been received. The report, therefore, recommends that Cabinet determines the statutory notice to expand Phoenix Arch Special School by 50 pupils through use of the Strathcona site in September 2027.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Notes the responses received during formal consultation on the proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School.
- 2.2 Approves the expansion of Phoenix Arch Special School by 50 places utilising the Strathcona site from September 2027.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword:**

- 3.1.1 This proposal will deliver an additional 50 local school places for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to meet increasing demand, as set out in the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 2<sup>nd</sup> refresh approved by Cabinet in November 2025. Use of the Strathcona site for additional specialist places for children with SEND was identified in a report to Cabinet in January 2026 setting out a second phase of SEND capital investment. The proposal will use the expertise of staff at Phoenix Arch Special School, a community special school, to support more children with ASC to attend a local school rather than provision out-of-borough.
- 3.1.2 School organisation and place planning supports the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life, by ensuring there are sufficient school places for children and young people in Brent and supporting every child and young person to access local high quality education in the borough that meets their needs.

### **Background**

- 3.1.3 The report to Cabinet in June 2026 seeking agreement to undertake formal consultation on the expansion of Phoenix Arch Special School provided detailed background on the increasing demand for local special school places that underpins the proposal. The number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has continued to increase annually as set out in the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 2<sup>nd</sup> Refresh approved by Cabinet in November 2025. There are currently 4420 children and young people with an EHCP (July 2026), reflecting a 10% increase over the past year. Needs associated with communication and interaction (CI), which includes children with ASC, predominate with 58% of the cohort having CI as their primary area of need.

- 3.1.4 While currently 48% of children with an EHCP attend a mainstream school, 37% of primary aged children and 49% of secondary aged children with an EHCP require a special school place. Many of these children attend special schools in Brent, but there are circa 250 Brent children with an EHCP placed in independent special schools and circa 210 placed in out-of-borough maintained special schools, alongside children receiving home tuition or attending mainstream schools waiting for a special school placement. As well as not supporting children to be part of their local community and being less convenient for pupils who must travel longer distances to school, out-of-borough and independent schools are putting increasing strain on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block and the General Fund schools transport budgets.
- 3.1.5 In January 2026, Brent Cabinet received a report setting out plans to provide more local special school places as a second phase of the Capital Investment Programme for School Place Sufficiency for Children and Young People with SEND, following successful delivery of 382 additional places. The report set out a business case for a programme of five special school expansion projects that would deliver 212 places, including use of the Strathcona site as a local special school satellite (50 place) subject to consultation.
- 3.1.6 Phoenix Arch Special School is located in Wembley at Drury Way, London, NW10 0NQ. Phoenix Arch is a local authority maintained special school with a current roll of 55 pupils. The school's building and land are owned by the Council. All children who attend Phoenix Arch have a diagnosis of autism spectrum condition (ASC). Some children who attend Phoenix Arch also have learning disabilities (LD).
- 3.1.7 The Strathcona site, located at Strathcona Road, Wembley, HA9 8QL, is owned by the Council. It is currently vacant, having been most recently used as a temporary location for Wembley Manor Special School while its building on London Road was under construction. Before this, the Strathcona site was used for primary school provision (under the leadership of Roe Green Infant School). The proposal to expand Phoenix Arch onto a former school site carries the added advantages that minimal capital works and time are required to create a provision of the highest quality, representing the potential to achieve excellent value for money.

## **3.2 Responses to the Formal Consultation**

- 3.2.1 The statutory guidance set out by the DfE in 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools (October 2024)' have been followed in taking the proposal forward. This recommends informal consultation prior to the statutory consultation process for significant changes that has four stages - Stage 1 Publication of a Statutory Notice, Stage 2 Representation (formal consultation for a period of 4 weeks), Stage 3 Decision and Stage 4 Implementation. Cabinet is required to make a decision on the proposal within 2 months of the formal consultation.

3.2.2 In June 2026, following a period of informal consultation (9 March 2026 and 20 April 2026), Cabinet agreed to move to formal consultation on the proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School using the Strathcona site. A statutory notice was published on 30 June triggering a 4-week period of formal consultation on the expansion of Phoenix Arch Special School onto the Strathcona site, specifically on the change in the number of pupils in a special school (Appendix 1). The establishment of a satellite site does not, on its own, require the statutory process to be followed.

3.2.3 During the formal consultation, a total of 2 responses were received via Brent Council's 'Have Your Say' online consultation portal, compared to 15 during the informal consultation. One respondent said they agreed with the proposal and one did not indicate if they supported it or not. The only comment received was in support of the proposal, stating it would provide better services for a disadvantaged group and reduce travel times linked to out-of-borough school placements.

3.2.4 Alongside these responses, the Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy received an email from the Chair of the South Kenton Preston Park Residents Association (SKPPRA) requesting a copy of the Transport Assessment mentioned in the detail of the statutory notice, which was subsequently provided on 27 July 2026. A late response from the Chair of SKPPRA was received on 29 July 2026, which has been accepted as a formal written representation. The response:

- raises a range of questions about the robustness of the travel survey that has been carried out and refers to previous experience of schools in the local area expanding without sufficient consideration of parking demand, with consequent negative impacts for local residents.

*The Council recognises that further work in relation to travel implications will need to take place during design development of the site's use for special provision and implementation planning, noting the concerns of residents and the need for mitigation measures to minimise impacts on the local community. The site is close to tube stations (South Kenton and Preston Park) and local bus routes, the use of which by school staff will be encouraged and included in a sustainable travel plan.*

- argues that the proposal is flawed and that the Strathcona site is not appropriate for SEND provision, that the area has among the lowest SEND need in the borough, and that there is no clarity on how the provision will work with the new SEND facilities at Preston Park. Many of these issues were raised during the informal consultation meeting.

*While Preston Ward does not have the highest prevalence in the borough of children and young people with SEND, specialist SEND provision is planned on a borough-wide basis. The Phoenix Arch provision on the Strathcona site will be for children with ASC for whom mainstream schools would not be suitable. This includes the Additionally Resourced Provision*

*at Preston Park Primary School that is for pupils who can spend a proportion of their time in mainstream classes.*

### **3.3 Overview of the Proposal**

- 3.3.1 Having taken responses to both the formal and informal consultation into account, the Governing Board and Local Authority officers remain of the view that the proposal is beneficial for children across the borough.
- 3.3.2 Cabinet is therefore asked to determine the statutory notice and approve the expansion of Phoenix Arch Special School by 50 places utilising the Strathcona site in September 2027.

### **4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 4.1. An informal consultation was held from 9 March 2026 and 20 April 2026 which enabled staff, governors, parents, carers and local residents the opportunity to comment on and ask questions about the proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School by 50 places utilising the Strathcona site.
- 4.2. A period of formal consultation was carried out between 30 June 2026 and 27 July 2026. A statutory notice (Appendix 1) was displayed adjacent to the main school gates of the school and placed on Brent consultation portal on the local authority's website.
- 4.3 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action has been kept updated throughout the statutory consultation process.
- 4.4 The Preston Ward members were notified of the report to Cabinet in June 2026 summarising the informal consultation on the proposal and of the subsequent publication of the statutory notice triggering formal consultation.

### **5.0 Financial Considerations**

- 5.1 This expansion forms a key element of the local authority's strategy to manage rising demand for specialist provision funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block, as set out in the Phase II Capital Investment Programme for School Place Sufficiency for Children and Young People with SEND (Cabinet Report, January 2026). The creation of 50 additional places at Strathcona site is intended to reduce reliance on higher cost out-of-borough and independent placements.
- 5.2 The financial case is supported by the differential in placement costs. The average cost of in-borough special school placement is £37,000 compared to £38,000 for an out of- borough maintained special school placement (not including any additional transport costs), with independent placements averaging significantly higher at £58,000 per place per annum.
- 5.3 By increasing in-borough capacity, the proposal supports cost avoidance through the provision of local placements at a lower average cost. Once fully

operational, the expanded provision is expected to deliver annual cost avoidance of approximately £1.05m, based on the cost differential between independent and maintained special school placements, assuming children with comparable levels of need are accommodated within the new local provision. This will contribute towards reducing financial pressures within the High Needs Budget, which currently has a cumulative deficit of £20.2m.

## **6.0 Legal Considerations**

- 6.1 The Local Authority has the power to consider and determine proposals published under Section 19 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006, pursuant to Section 21 (2) (f) of the Act and in accordance with Schedule 3 paragraph 3 of The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013.
- 6.2 Under sections 13 and 14 of The Education Act 1996, as amended by The Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local education authority has a general statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available to meet the educational needs of the population in its area. In fulfilling this duty, the Local Authority must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. It must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in their area and promote diversity and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty effectively, the Local Authority is required to undertake a planning function to ensure that the supply of school places is aligned with current and projected demand.
- 6.3 Although not part of the considerations for the Strathcona site given the proposed continuation of education provision on the site, any change of use from Education use and/or disposal requires the permission from the Secretary of State for Education under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Schedule 1 of the Academies Act 2010.

## **7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Local Authority when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics covered under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation. Due regard means giving relevant and proportionate consideration to the duty, in that whenever significant decisions are being made consideration must be given to the impact/affect that implementing a particular decision will have in relation to equality before making that decision. Brent Council also has a policy of considering Human Rights and socio-economic impact.

- 7.2 An Equality Analysis has been carried out on the proposals set out in this report and is provided as Appendix 2 to this report. It is not anticipated there will be any negative impact from these proposals on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation.

## **8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 8.1 This proposal supports reducing the carbon footprint through enabling an increase in the number of children with SEND being educated within the borough, reducing the need for placements out-of-borough that require longer journeys.
- 8.2 Sustainable modes of travel will be encouraged for school staff and children who are not eligible for home to school transport, in particular the use of local tube and bus routes.
- 8.3 Some capital works will be required at the Strathcona site to ensure that the building is suitable for the SEND cohort. These will improve the environmental standards of the building.

## **9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations**

- 9.1 The Governing Board is confident that they will be able to recruit staff for the new site.
- 9.2 The additional school site expands a community special school and the council would continue to be the responsible body and employer from a Health and Safety and statutory compliance perspective of the expanded Phoenix Arch, as it is currently.

## **10.0 Communication Considerations**

- 10.1 Formal consultation to change the provision is required under the statutory process for making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools (Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision-makers, Department for Education, October 2024) and Opening and closing maintained schools (Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers, Department for Education, October 2024). As Phoenix Arch Special School is a community school, the Local Authority has led this process.
- 10.2 The statutory notice was published in the Brent and Kilburn Times, on the Brent Council website and displayed on the school gate. Stakeholders were invited to submit written representations that set out their views and comments on the proposals.

10.3 Following the formal representation period, Cabinet is required to make a decision on this proposal within two months.

**Related document(s) for reference**

[Cabinet report June 2026: the Proposal to expand Phoenix Arch Special School on the Strathcona site](#)

[Cabinet Report November 2025: School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028 2nd Refresh](#)

[Cabinet Report January 2026: Phase II Capital Investment Programme for School Place Sufficiency for Children and Young People with SEND](#)

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

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