



Cabinet

Discontinuance of Bradstow Community Special School and registered Children's Homes.

Paper No. 25-368

Date: 3 November 2025

Cabinet Member for: Children's Services

Details of Executive Director: Ana Popovici, Executive Director for Children's Services

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Bradstow School has a long-standing reputation for dedicated specialist provision, and over the years has seen many local authorities entrust the school, and Wandsworth Council with the education and care of their children with complex needs.
- 1.2 We deeply appreciate the unwavering dedication and expertise of Bradstow's staff, and this proposal is made with genuine regret, knowing how much the school has meant to so many children and families.
- 1.3 This proposal is in no way a reflection on the quality of education or support provided and arises solely from financial and commissioning challenges related to non-payment of fees by other local authorities, accruing £4.9m in debt, mostly with Kent County Council.
- 1.4 This paper sets out recommendations following a formal consultation on proposals to close Bradstow Community Special School and registered Children's Homes. The consultation ran from Monday 1 September to Sunday 28 September 2025 and is the third stage of a statutorily regulated process.
- 1.5 The Council received 149 responses to the consultation questionnaire. 147 questionnaire responses were received via the official consultation portal. Two questionnaire responses were received via paper copies. Other correspondence

included a written response from the Bradstow School Governors and Leadership Team and emails from two members of the public.

- 1.6 Suggestions from respondents to address the school and children's homes challenges have been fully reviewed, however, these are not considered sufficiently viable to resolve the school's position and ensure sustainability into the future. This is set out in paragraph 7.2 'You Said, We Did'.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Whilst we recognise the profound difference Bradstow has made to the lives of its students, this paper outlines the realities of the financial and commissioning challenges.
- 2.2 Therefore, we recommend the discontinuance (closure) of Bradstow Community Special School and registered Children's Homes with effect from 31 December 2025.

3. Context and Background

- 3.1. Bradstow is a community special school with registered children's homes maintained by the London Borough of Wandsworth.
- 3.2. The school is located in the coastal town of Broadstairs in Kent, providing education and accommodation to young people with severe learning disabilities who are on the autistic spectrum continuum. Wandsworth inherited responsibility for Bradstow School when the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was abolished in 1990.
- 3.3. Despite being located approximately 100 miles away from the Town Hall in Wandsworth, as a Wandsworth provision, the council holds the financial, operational and safeguarding responsibility for Bradstow School. Wandsworth also owns the land and buildings and is responsible for their maintenance and upkeep.
- 3.4. Community special schools providing accommodation to young people for more than 295 days per year are required to register as children's homes. These are inspected under the 2015 Children's Homes Regulations. For this reason, Bradstow was registered as a children's home in 2014.
- 3.5. As a community special school, Bradstow currently provides accommodation within its children's homes for up to 30 children during term time, returning to their families and carers in school holidays. Previously, the provision was made up of five 38-week homes, and two 52-week homes, each offering up to 8 bedrooms. At total

capacity there were 62 placements, consisting of 40 x 38-week placements, 16 x 52-week placements and 6 x Day-Only placements.

- 3.6. All children on roll have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as a SEN primary need.
- 3.7. The decision to reduce the provision to operate five smaller 38-week homes and cease the 52-week provision from September 2024 was in response to significant safeguarding concerns across the care provision, specifically in relation to the management of medication, and the leadership response to allegations made by children. Ofsted highlighted these issues in their inspections of the 38 week and Hawthorn Lodge provisions which were found to be inadequate. It was agreed that, to achieve and embed the required improvements and to sustain positive change for pupils and staff, a smaller provision that only operated during term time was necessary.
- 3.8. Since this change, the remaining registered children's home was recently graded by Ofsted to be 'Good'. The report clearly outlines the improvements that have been made by leadership and their staff to ensure children are kept safe and receive the support which enables them to progress.
- 3.9. National and local trends show a growing number of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those that have an EHCP.
- 3.10. In 2025, 2720 pupils with EHCPs attend Wandsworth schools (6.5% of the overall school population, up from 5.3% in 2021), with 905 of these attending one of our 7 special schools, an increase from 887 in 2021. It is worth noting that 32% of the pupils at our special schools reside outside of the Local Authority, compared to a national average of just 9%.
- 3.11. Wandsworth Council is committed to supporting children with SEND locally, keeping them educated and cared for within Wandsworth or as close to their homes as possible. This sits alongside the need to retain a sustainable school system that meets the needs of all our children.
- 3.12. To realise Wandsworth's collective ambition to give children the best care and keep children local to their family, friends and community wherever possible, the council has invested £41m in expanding SEND provision in Wandsworth creating over 271 places since 2021, of which £34m is on a purpose-built expansion of Paddock Secondary and Sixth Form School to improve our local provision for children with

complex special educational needs linked to their diagnosis of Autism and severe learning disability.

- 3.13. This is to enable all children with SEND to successfully retain their close links to family and friends. Historically, a lack of local sufficiency has meant that some children have been placed at Bradstow to best meet need. While this investment may not directly benefit the Wandsworth child that is currently placed at Bradstow, this can be considered a contributing factor to the reduction in consultations, in line with parental preference, for places at Bradstow in recent years.
- 3.14. Historically approximately 40% of pupils placed at Bradstow school have been placed by Kent County Council. However, since discussions on transfer of Bradstow School to Kent County Council ceased, and they became aware of the intention of Wandsworth to commence the statutory process on closure, Kent started to move children from the provision. Hence, at the start of the academic year 2025/26, there were 12 children placed at Bradstow, two pupils from Kent, 2 from Medway, 2 from Newham, 2 Havering, and the remainder from 4 other local authorities including Wandsworth, with 1 placement each. One of these children is due to leave mid-October.
- 3.15. This is a significant reduction on the number of children considering that there were 32 pupils on roll in January 2025 at the start of the statutory process on closure.
- 3.16. All of the remaining 12 children are 38-week placements at Bradstow.
- 3.17. The following table illustrates the councils and the numbers of pupils each has placed at Bradstow School as at the start of the 2025/26 academic year:

Council	Numbers of Children
Kent	2
Wandsworth	1
Medway	2
Newham	2
Havering	2
Richmond	1*
Hillingdon	1
Barking and Dagenham	1
TOTAL	12

**due to leave in October*



4. Financial Position

- 4.1 The school has not made an operational surplus for over 4 years; even without accounting for unpaid fees and any unrecoverable debts. Wandsworth funds all debt and deficits.
- 4.2 The school is forecast to lose another £670,000 between September 2025 and December 2025, bringing the overall deficit position to circa £1m.
- 4.3 Due to the considerable amount of fees owed to the school by other councils and the on-going operational revenue deficits, Wandsworth Council has to lend the school, as a minimum, the equivalent amount of money to support cashflow (which is nearly £6m at the time of writing this report). Without this loan, the school would be unable to pay their staff.
- 4.4 The debt held with other councils is currently £5.3m and will rise to circa £6.5m when Autumn 2025 fees are invoiced. The level of income this Autumn will be significantly lower than usual due to the low number of pupils at the school.
- 4.5 Of the £5.3m of total aged debt, £4.9m (and growing every day) is debt currently refused to be paid by other councils. Of the £4.9m, £4.6m is with Kent County Council and the remaining circa £300,000 with Surrey County Council.
- 4.6 Kent County Council holds 87% of the school's debt and has not paid for current placement fees in full for over 2 years. Prior to September 2024, Kent refused to pay inflationary uplifts or have challenged charges for additional 1:2:1 support required to sustain their placements safely. Since September 2024, Kent have not paid any fees at all.
- 4.7 The legal process to recover these fees has been initiated by Wandsworth and court proceedings are starting.
- 4.8 The size of the school's operational deficit is masked by the fact that the school's accounts do not include any of the £4.9m of debt the two councils are refusing to pay. If this were to be included, the operational deficit would be considerably higher.

The only reason the £4.9m debt is not included, is to not predetermine or jeopardise any outcome from the court proceedings.

- 4.9 It is currently forecast that there will only be 9 fee paying children of the 11 on roll on 31 December 2025. Kent County Council continues not to pay for their two pupils still on roll at the school. Although this means that Wandsworth has continued to subsidise the placement for Kent's 2 current children, we have taken a compassionate and supportive approach to not remove provision from these families and instead are pursuing the recovery of unpaid debts from Kent County Council through the legal route.
- 4.10 Although we recognise that Bradstow has been approached by local authorities for new placements in the current academic year, given the uncertainty of the school's future, with no current viable alternative to closure secured, it would not be appropriate to allow these additional admissions. While it would contribute to the school's financial position, it would not be in their best interest, and unsettling and disruptive to the child if required to transition to a new provision again at the end of the autumn term 2025. This approach would not align with Wandsworth Council's commitment to placing the needs and interests of every child and their families at the heart of everything we do.
- 4.11 Wandsworth have met with the Department for Education (DfE) to understand the available courses of action to recover the debt. They articulated that because councils are the commissioners and need to agree the charges, especially with regards to inflationary uplifts or changes in prices for existing placements, our ability to set prices is constrained. Any dispute over prices must be managed council to council and where this cannot be resolved it would require legal action to be taken to recover debt.

5. Rationale for formal consultation on closure

- 5.1 Bradstow School operates within a challenging financial landscape and the unwillingness of some councils to pay the levels of fees needed to maintain the quality of education and financial viability of the school has forced Wandsworth council to look at other options.
- 5.2 Wandsworth Council worked with Kent County Council for a 3-year period, to explore the potential for transferring the provision to Kent County Council. Despite initiating legal processes between February and May 2024 to collect the funds owed by Kent,

which makes up the majority of Bradstow's debt, these processes were paused during this period. This decision was taken so as not to jeopardise the negotiations that could have allowed the school to remain open, and to give Kent sufficient time to complete their due diligence on the transfer proposal. However, in October 2024, Kent County Council decided not to proceed with a transfer. This, combined with the financial pressures facing the school, left no other viable option at that time but to propose closure at the end of the academic year, and to reinstate the legal process to recover fees

- 5.3 Through the pre-publication consultation we made a commitment to prioritise transparency and inclusivity, giving families, staff and the wider community extensive opportunity to engage with the process and provide feedback. We provided a report in response to an e-petition and received a deputation from the Headteacher of Bradstow School in connection with the closure at Wandsworth Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2025.
- 5.4 Following this meeting, the Cabinet Member for Children's agreed to delay the decision to move to formal consultation until after 24 March 2025 to allow governors the opportunity to engage with academy trusts and select a suitable partner with whom to undertake the necessary due diligence to explore a secure future for the school.
- 5.5 There was also an agreement to support the leadership of the school to undertake a restructure to align resources and staff capacity with the school's income. Initial calculations showed savings of approximately £816k per annum achieved through a reduction of full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing of 7.2 and amending working patterns to match the reduction of the children's homes from 52 weeks to a 38-week provision.
- 5.6 Following this agreement, senior representative of Wandsworth Council met with 3 interested parties, Ambitious about Autism, Seva Homes and Cygnus Academy Trust to provide any required information to support the governors' decision to convert to an academy. One provider was not progressed by the governors, one provider withdrew their interest, with Cygnus the governors preferred Trust, and with whom an application to the Department for Education was made.
- 5.7 Throughout this process, Wandsworth Council has remained committed to open and constructive engagement with the school's leadership, governors, partners and interested trusts. We have worked collaboratively, to explore every possible avenue to secure a sustainable future for Bradstow School, guided by a shared desire to retain this provision for children with complex needs. Despite fully supporting this

process, Wandsworth Council was notified on the 29 July 2025 that the Department for Education (DfE) could not approve the application with Cygnus Academy Trust.

- 5.8 Given this academisation application decision, the impact of falling pupil numbers, which has worsened the school's financial position, and the aged debt the school already holds, Wandsworth Council had to take the difficult decision to re-instate the statutory process and formally consult on closure.
- 5.9 Parallel to our formal consultation on closure of Bradstow school, the DfE have been working with the Bridge Academy Trust, to explore an alternative to closure.
- 5.10 Due to the timings of the DfE notification of this new trust, of which we were informed on 29 July 2025, and their subsequent expression of interest to the DfE, of which the CEO of the trust advised us on 17 October 2025, to date Wandsworth have not been informed as to whether an application from the Bridge would be approved by the DfE and an academy order issued.
- 5.11 The decision to formally consult on the closure of the school was not taken lightly and was one we have collectively worked hard to avoid. However, given the ongoing financial risks and the worsening accumulated deficit, Wandsworth Council must prioritize the long-term interests and needs of Wandsworth children and families. While we have explored every possible alternative to closure and remain committed to supporting all children at Bradstow, our responsibility is to ensure that Wandsworth's resources are managed effectively to protect the sustainability of local services for our residents.
- 5.12 The financial sustainability of the school requires that the income generated and paid for by councils is equal to or greater than the expenditure (the costs of running the provision including maintenance, overheads and staffing costs).
- 5.13 With the significant fall in pupil numbers over the last year, the impact has been that costs have continued to exceed income even after undertaking the most recent restructure. Unfortunately, with only 12 children now on roll, and 2 of these still being Kent Council placements, with fees for this year unpaid and whose debt stands at £4.6m and growing, the costs significantly exceed the income.
- 5.14 The result is that the accumulated deficit, which is forecast to be circa £1m by 31 December 2025 (and before bad debts are accounted for) keeps growing every single day at an increasing rate.

- 5.15 The formal consultation gave another opportunity to those impacted to have their voices heard and to provide additional representation, so that Wandsworth Council could carefully consider all views before a final decision is made.
- 5.16 If the decision to close the school goes ahead, we will work with school leaders to ensure responsible local authorities liaise with families to put in place suitable alternative provision and plan a smooth transition for each child.

6. Statutory process for formal consultation

Statutory guidance

- 6.1 There is a defined statutory process in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 which must be followed before making a decision on the closure of a maintained school. The legislation is supported by statutory guidance, which the Council must have regard to.
- 6.2 There are five stages to the statutory process, and this formal consultation marked the third and representation stage of the process. The five stages are as follows:

Stage	Purpose / Process
Consultation	The views of interested parties are sought and considered by the local authority.
Publication	Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, the local authority decides whether or not to publish statutory notices regarding the proposed closure.
Representation	The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory notice and must last for a period of four weeks. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority, to be taken into account before a final decision is taken.
Decision	Within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must make a decision on the proposal.
Implementation	If the proposal is approved, the local authority must implement the proposal in the form approved, including any modifications agreed at the decision stage.

Formal Consultation

- 6.3 Between Monday 1 September and Sunday 28 September 2025, Wandsworth Council carried out a formal consultation on the proposal to close (discontinue) Bradstow Community Special School and registered Children's Home.
- 6.4 As statutorily required, a notice (Appendix 4) was published on 28 August 2025, in both a Wandsworth publication (Wandsworth Times) and a Kent publication (Thanet Extra) to ensure maximum coverage in recognition of the interest to residents in both areas. The full proposals were published on Wandsworth Council's Consultation page.
- 6.5 In accordance with the guidance, within one week of publication of the formal consultation, Wandsworth Council notified the following:
- The Secretary of State for Education
 - The Church of England representatives in Rochester and Canterbury
 - The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark Director of Education and CEO of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership.
- 6.6 To formally close the residential children's homes, we have been advised by DfE and OFSTED colleagues that this requires the submission of a voluntary cancellation form to cancel the registration for the homes and that of the registered manager. This is to be submitted to OFSTED once a final decision is made on closure, and for OFSTED to conduct any necessary checks in the interests of children and families.

Methodology and Engagement

- 6.7 The Bradstow formal consultation was hosted on the Wandsworth Council consultation webpage from Monday 1 September to Sunday 28 September 2025. The consultation was open to all interested parties, parents and carers – past and present, staff and governors, placing local authorities, Councillors both in Wandsworth and Kent, alongside the wider community local to the school and Wandsworth headteachers and residents.
- 6.8 We understand this has been a challenging and emotional time for the school community, especially for the children and their families, who have been supported by Bradstow with such dedication and commitment over many years. Wandsworth Council acknowledges the distress and uncertainty this process may have caused and remains committed to working closely with all those affected in a transparent and compassionate way, to ensure they are listened to, supported, and guided through the changes ahead.

- 6.9 We also acknowledge the support, time and valuable expertise of Council staff throughout this process.
- 6.10 The process included a statutory element of pre-publication consultation that lasted for 6 weeks to allow the widest possible opportunity for views and comments to be made by parents, carers, staff, residents, other stakeholders and professionals. The purpose of the consultation was for the local authority to seek the views of and engage with those that could potentially be affected by the proposed closure of Bradstow School. It was also an opportunity for interested parties to suggest other options for consideration on the proposed closure.
- 6.11 To encourage participation, the consultation was undertaken and promoted in the following ways:
- In-person meeting at Bradstow School for children's home and education staff, and an in-person/hybrid meeting held for parents of Bradstow pupils
 - Wandsworth Council consultation hub page containing the consultation documents and link to the online consultation survey.
 - A dedicated mobile telephone line to enable direct contact to answer questions/queries
 - An email address to allow parents, carers, staff, stakeholders to feedback on the consultation proposal.
 - Written correspondence with staff and parents of Bradstow pupils
 - Emails from the local authority to local headteachers
 - Messages from the headteacher to all Bradstow staff and parents
 - Updates and information included in headteachers' bulletin
- 6.12 Four documents were published to inform the formal consultation process (Appendices 1-4):
- Consultation proposal
 - Frequently Asked Questions (updated based on feedback to the pre-publication consultation)
 - Equalities Impact Needs Assessment (EINA)
 - Copy of the Statutory Notice

- 6.13 To ensure the material was accessible to all interested parties, the documents were also made available in printable and paper format. Other accessible formats were also available on request.
- 6.14 An Equality Impact Needs Assessment (Appendix 3) was undertaken to identify the potential impacts of the proposal on groups with protected characteristics, and any appropriate mitigation. Views on the Equality Impact Needs Assessment were sought as part of this consultation so that any appropriate modifications could be considered.

Consultation Questions

- 6.15 As part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to state the capacity in which they were responding and their postcode, to allow detailed analysis of responses across the local area.
- 6.16 The consultation questionnaire asked 5 main questions as follows:

Question	Response options
1) In what main capacity are you responding to this survey?	Tickbox – Are you: • Parent/carer of a child at Bradstow • Parent/carer of a child who previously attended Bradstow - free text box to specify which local authority • Parent/carer of child at a Wandsworth School • Staff member at Bradstow • Governor at Bradstow • Councillor or MP – free text box to specify • School leader, staff member, or Governor of a Wandsworth School • On behalf of a local group or organisation – free text box to specify • None of the above / other – free text box to specify
2) Please tell us where you live	• Wandsworth resident

	• Kent resident • Resident of another local authority (please specify)
3) Please tell us your postcode	• Free text box to specify
4) Having read the proposal to close Bradstow Community Special School, and the subsequent closure of the corresponding Children's Homes, by 31 December 2025, do you have any comments in support of, or objection to, the proposals?	• Two free-text boxes (one for expressing support for the proposal and one for raising objections)
5) Please tell us if you have any comments about the following? • The data used as the basis for the Equalities Impact Needs Assessment • The analysis of the impact of the data • Any mitigating actions suggested	• Free text box

Responses

- 6.17 The Council received a total of 149 responses to the consultation questionnaire. As respondents made comments in both the support and the objection text boxes and also provided comments on more than one theme, the total number of comments will exceed the total number of respondents.
- 6.18 There were also a number of responses in different formats which are detailed in the consultation response report (Appendix 5).
- 6.19 There were 143 respondents who indicated their area of residence on the questionnaire. 79% of respondents identified as Kent residents. 9% of respondents said that they were Wandsworth residents, while 8% said that they were a resident of another local authority.

7. Council response to matters raised by consultation respondents

- 7.1. The Council has addressed matters raised in response to the consultation questions, as follows:



- Having read the proposal to close Bradstow Community Special School, and the subsequent closure of the corresponding Children's Homes, by 31 December 2025, do you have any comments in support of, or objection to, the proposals?

7.2 There were 60 comments in support of the proposals, which are detailed below:

You Said	We Did
Negative comments about school management	A new headteacher was appointed in October 2024 and under their leadership the care provision at Bradstow has improved out of an OFSTED category. Although a responsibility of the governing board, to strengthen the governance of the school and children's homes, the council identified a social care professional who was appointed to the board until she left the councils employment in July 2025. Officers recently visited the school provision and noted that leaders have continued to be resilient in the face of uncertainty around the future of the school, as well as observing that the quality of education remains strong for pupils still at the school. The decision to propose closure is not a reflection of the quality of the current leadership and is one that is purely driven by the unwillingness of some councils to pay fees at a level needed to ensure the school remains viable.
Negative comments about staff work environment (morale/turnover/reliance on agency staff)	The schools link adviser visited on a termly basis and on each visit held focus groups with staff at all levels from both education and care to monitor morale and listen to any concerns and these were summarised in notes of visit shared with leaders, governors and local authority colleagues. The work environment/staff turnover and use of agency staff remain the responsibility of school leadership and governors as it forms the day to day delivery of the education and care of pupils placed at Bradstow.

	As we know from previous restructures, and hence why we avoid undertaking unless absolutely necessary, restructures create anxiety which results in potentially higher levels of staff turnover, and the reduction process in this case also resulted in the non-renewal of temporary contracts. Due to the potential of closure, staff leaving have not been replaced which presented as a valid reason to utilising agency temporary contracts rather than adding to permanent staffing with the potential of employment liability and further costs for dismissal to Wandsworth council.
Negative comments about the quality of care/support being provided to students	The decision to close the 52-week homes and not make a short-breaks offer in Summer 2024 was based on safeguarding concerns and concerns about the quality of care and support provided to children attending Bradstow. This allowed for training during the summer, to a smaller, permanent and better-quality workforce, as well as stronger management oversight (as span of responsibility was reduced).
Concerns about the safeguarding of students	All safeguarding concerns received by the LA from Ofsted or the DfE about Bradstow have been recorded, with dates and themes and followed up by our Education Safeguarding Lead. She was also part of a multi-disciplinary team (including social care professionals) that conducted an assurance review of the provision in June 2024, which included policy perusal, safer recruitment, staff induction offer and training, with clear recommendations.

7.3 There were 112 comments in objection to the proposal. The comments were analysed, and the most common themes are listed in the table below. Most comments replicated those received as part of the informal consultation and have been addressed in the 'You Said, We Did' section of the formal consultation proposal.

You Said	We Did
Perceived importance of Bradstow as a specialist provision	We want to acknowledge how deeply Bradstow School is valued as a specialist educational provision by its school community. Throughout our engagement with parents, carers, and the wider school community, we have been struck by the passion, commitment, and heartfelt concern they have shared regarding the future of Bradstow. Their voices have made clear the profound importance of the school—not only for the children who attend, but also for their families, the dedicated staff, and the broader community. The decision to consult on closure has come as a last resort, and one which has been driven by significant financial challenges—most notably, the refusal of some local authorities, such as Kent County Council, to pay fees for their placements at the school and the support their children have and continue to receive. This has created a situation where, despite every effort to find a viable solution, with no confirmed alternative to closure put forward, the financial position has become unsustainable for Wandsworth Council.
• Negative impact of closure on students (emotional distress, regression, lack of education opportunities) • Negative impact of closure on families/carers of students (emotional, financial distress)	We are sensitive to the impact of this proposal on the pupils and families of Bradstow. We have offered support to minimise this impact. We will continue to work with Bradstow to ensure children and families are supported throughout this process, helping leadership to address any issues as they emerge and ensuring change is handled efficiently and sensitively. Through our various touch points with the school and its staff, we are continually seeking the views, wishes and feelings of pupils to inform the support package that is being provided. The School and Community Psychology Service (SCPS) are available to work alongside the school's leadership team and help them to manage the impact of this proposal on staff, pupils and their families. Should this proposal progress, Wandsworth and other placing local

	authorities, and Psychology Services will work in collaboration with the school leadership to ensure that children's transition to a new school is managed as effectively as possible. These conversations and this work will be carefully planned and managed sensitively in discussion with the head and senior leadership to ensure they best meet the needs of the school community as they emerge and as needed.
• Positive impact of Bradstow on student/staff/family outcomes/wellbeing	This proposal is no reflection on the quality of teaching, skillset of staff and the current leadership of the school. We are fully aware and appreciative of the positive impact that Bradstow School has had on outcomes for many children, past and present. The decision to consult on the closure of the school is driven by the financial challenges outlined in this proposal. It was not a decision taken lightly and has come as a last resort.
• Respondent feels there is a shortage of SEND provision locally and nationally/there is a need for this type of SEND provision • Respondent feels there will be a negative impact on those who require SEND provision such as Bradstow's in the future	Although we understand and sympathise with the concerns of parents whose children attend Bradstow and who reside in Kent or near to the school, and their view on lack of local provision to meet the needs of their child, it is important to reiterate that it is not Wandsworth's responsibility to address SEND sufficiency in the local area to Kent; Kent County Council are statutorily responsibility for sufficiency in their local area. Kent was offered the provision and after 3 years of negotiation on a transfer declined. Kent County Council's recent SEND strategy outlines their sufficiency planning, and it does not address the impact of the loss of Bradstow as a local SEND provision. In order to realise the borough's collective ambition to give children the best care and keep children local to their family, friends and community wherever possible, we have invested in and developed local maintained provision and expanded our local special schools in Wandsworth. This has meant that we have needed fewer and fewer placements at Bradstow over the years. As outlined in Kent County Councils SEND strategy 2025- 2028, they have developed a SEND sufficiency strategy with current work including reviewing their special school offer to ensure it is appropriate to meet

	the needs of the most complex pupils through updating school designations. The 24 Kent Special Schools will have one of three designations with supporting admissions guidance, with one being Complex Learning needs - Profound, Complex Severe. We acknowledge that given the choice parents would wish to keep their child at Bradstow school. We have heard that parents have accepted placements which they do not deem to be as suitable, and, in the case of a Kent parent, might mean that their child needs to move further from home. In the same vein, part of Wandsworth's rationale is linked to local investment and the desire of Wandsworth parents to have their child in provision which is closer to where they reside. In response to sufficiency, through our own work with the 4 Wandsworth families whose children were attending Bradstow at the start of the pre-publication consultation in January 25, all have secured and accepted offers of suitable alternative placements, with 3 children already having transitioned, and the final child planning to move January 2026, should the decision be made to close. As part of our commitment to ensure children have access to suitable provision, an exercise was undertaken by Wandsworth's Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion at the beginning of the year to map provision in, or near, the local authorities with children remaining at Bradstow. Notwithstanding parents' concern about alternative placements, since we commenced the pre-publication consultation process in January 25, 19 children in total have moved from the school with parental agreement, indicating that there is sufficient suitable alternative provision to meet the needs of the cohort of children attending Bradstow school. As of September 2025, and the commencement of the formal consultation, 12 children remain. Thus, supporting the findings of our mapping exercise. At the start of the statutory process on closure, it was the recommendation to all other placing local authorities to
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	parallel plan with families and commence the consultation process for alternative provision. Thus, ensuring if the proposal to close is approved, responsible individuals in placing local authorities will have sufficient time to work with families and the staff at Bradstow school to support pupils to integrate smoothly into their new setting. The reduction of children at Bradstow is evidence that local authorities have followed this recommendation in the interest of their children and families.
Respondent feels there is a lack of suitable alternatives to meet complex needs	Wandsworth have increased the range and capacity of SEND provision locally in recent years to ensure the needs of our children are met. This proposal will reaffirm Wandsworth's commitment to exploring options for children to be educated and cared for in Wandsworth, or as close to their home as possible, to help them to remain connected to their networks and provide more consistent support and resources right the way through to adulthood. Similarly, through the due diligence process undertaken by Kent on the proposed transfer of Bradstow, they advised that following their SEND sufficiency review their intention was to repurpose existing assets to align with their identified needs. Hence their decision not to proceed with the transfer.
Alternative suggestions to closure (academisation, recoup unpaid fees, restructure, admit new students)	Academisation: Although it is the decision of Bradstow's Governing body to academise, a decision that is irreversible, Wandsworth liaised with the DfE prior to commencing the statutory consultation process on the closure of Bradstow School to ascertain if there might be any interested parties. Due to the school's complexity, both operationally and financially, at that time no suggestions were offered. However, DfE enquiries would continue with a view that initiating the proposal to close the school would enable interested academy trusts to come forward with an expression of interest. At Wandsworth Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2025., the Cabinet Member

	for Children's agreed to delay the decision to move to formal consultation until after 24 March 2025 to allow governors the opportunity to engage with any interested academy trusts and select a suitable partner with whom to undertake the necessary due diligence to secure the future of the school. Wandsworth Council fully committed to supporting transparent discussions about the school's position, including its financial viability. We have been open to considering the terms proposed by academies, with the cabinet deciding whether the local authority can support elements of the deficit, debt, aged invoicing, land, and building maintenance. Timely decisions are desirable, for the children, parents and staff at Bradstow and to preserve a precarious financial envelope as the high-risk financial liabilities associated with the school remain. As such, the council met with 3 interested parties, Ambitious about Autism, Seva Homes and Cygnus Academy Trust to provide any required information to support the governors' decision to academise. One provider was not progressed by the governors, one provider withdrew their interest, with Cygnus the governors preferred trust and with whom an application to the Department for Education was made. However, we were notified on the 29 July 2025 that the Department for Education (DfE) was not able to approve the application with Cygnus Academy Trust. Despite fully supporting this academisation process, with a 6 month pause to the statutory process, and with the delays further impacting pupil numbers which has worsened the school's financial position, Wandsworth Council was left with no option but to take the difficult decision to re-instate the statutory process and formally consult on closure. Parallel to our formal consultation on closure of Bradstow school, the DfE have been working with the
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	Bridge Academy Trust, to explore an alternative to closure. Due to the timings of the DfE notification of this new trust, of which we were informed on 29 July, and their subsequent expression of interest to the DfE, of which the CEO of the trust advised us on 17 October, to date Wandsworth Council has not been informed as to whether an application from the Bridge would be approved by the DfE and an academy order issued. Wandsworth Council has already experienced the uncertainty, and resultant further financial losses, of an unsuccessful academisation application. Given the ongoing financial risks to Wandsworth Council, with the accumulated deficit worsening, we are not able to continue to delay the decision on closure any longer, where currently no definitive or viable alternative exists. Recoup unpaid fees: Kent County Council, which owes approximately £4.6m and has not paid fully for current placements for over 2 years, are refusing to pay inflationary uplifts or are challenging charges for the additional 1:2:1 support required to sustain their placements safely and the overall provision. Legal process to recover these fees is underway, and court proceedings are starting. Restructure: During the 6 month period that the statutory process was paused, there was also an agreement to support the leadership of the school to undertake a restructure to align resources and staff capacity with the school's income. Initial calculations showed savings of approximately £816k per annum through a reduction of full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing of 7.2 and amending
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	working patterns to match the reduction of the children's homes from 52 weeks to a 38-week provision. With the significant fall in pupil numbers over the last year, the impact has been that costs have continued to exceed income even after undertaking the most recent restructure. Consequently, this approach is not considered a viable solution to the financial challenges faced by the school. Admit new students: Although we recognise that the school has been approached by local authorities for new placements in the current academic year, given the uncertainty of the school's future, with no viable alternative to closure secured, it would not be appropriate to allow any additional admissions. While it would contribute to the school's financial position, it would not be in the best interest of the placed children, who may then be required to transition to a new provision again at the end of the autumn term 2025, which can be unsettling and disruptive for the child.
Negative impact of closure on local community, including employment and SEND service needs	We recognise this is an unsettling time for staff and we have worked with the leadership team at the school to provide ongoing support to staff throughout this process. For those staff considering their next steps, we have commissioned a recruitment specialist to provide recruitment advice for all staff members. Staff will receive help with CV planning, interview techniques and matching their requirements to other jobs. Staff will also receive individualised support dependent on their circumstances. Staff will be fully supported to apply for roles; however, some may decide to take voluntary redundancy. Staff also have access to a 24/7 support helpline from an external provider. The provider's website also has a variety of additional resources.
Criticism of Wandsworth Council (consultation	We have endeavoured to remain as transparent and compassionate throughout the process on the proposal to close the school and children's homes, which we

materials produced/priorities/actions)	understand is an emotional and difficult time for children, parents and staff. However, we have adhered to all of the statutory requirements, whilst demonstrating flexibility around timescales in response to feedback and requests of leadership and the wider school community.
Positive comments about the work of staff	This proposal is no reflection on the quality of teaching, skillset of staff and the current leadership of the school. We are fully aware and appreciative of the positive impact that Bradstow School has had on outcomes for many children, past and present. The decision to consult on the closure of the school is driven by the financial challenges outlined in this proposal. It was not a decision taken lightly and has come as a last resort.
Negative impact of closure on staff	We recognise this is an unsettling time for staff and we have worked with the leadership team at the school to provide ongoing support to staff throughout this process. For those staff considering their next steps, we have commissioned a recruitment specialist to provide recruitment advice for all staff members. Staff will receive help with CV planning, interview techniques and matching their requirements to other jobs. Staff will also receive individualised support dependent on their circumstances. Staff will be fully supported to apply for roles; however, some may decide to take voluntary redundancy. Staff also have access to a 24/7 support helpline from an external provider. The provider's website also has a variety of additional resources.
Positive comments about the school's facilities	Bradstow has a wide range of facilities, however, even maximising the school's facilities to generate rental income wouldn't be sufficient to make the school viable. In addition, despite the facilities, the school building does require significant investment as outlined in the condition's surveys carried out by Wandsworth, Kent and interested Academy trusts. The condition and configuration of the building was one of the factors which resulted in the withdrawal of Kent from the transfer of the school. The financial position of the school means it is unable to carry out these improvement works, and Wandsworth doesn't hold capital allocation to invest.

Comments about pupil admissions, enrolment restrictions, and demand for places	There are currently 12 pupils placed at Bradstow School, with a further child due to move in mid-October. The school have indicated that they have been approached by local authorities for new placements since January 2025, and into the current academic year, however, as a special school maintained by Wandsworth Council, all placements must be agreed through the local authorities SEND service. We have been transparent and clear from the outset of the consultation that given the uncertainty of the school's future, with no viable alternative to closure secured, it would not be appropriate to allow these additional admissions. While it would contribute to the school's financial position, it would not be in the best interest of the placed children, who may then be required to transition again to a new provision at the end of the autumn term 2025 if the decision is taken to close, which we recognise can be unsettling and disruptive for the child.
General comments opposing the proposed closure/want the school to remain open	We wholeheartedly recognise the strength of feeling and the heartfelt concerns expressed by the Bradstow school community about the proposed closure. Before reaching this difficult point, we worked closely with all partners to carefully consider every possible alternative, as detailed in this report. Despite the pre-publication consultation stage closing in February 2025, Wandsworth decided to pause proceeding to the next stage of the statutory process to ensure further exploration of alternative options, such as academisation. This has equated to a period of approximately 7 months for full exploration of all options, none of which were feasible in addressing the school's challenges. Unfortunately, the difficult decision then had to be made to reinstate the formal consultation process.

8. Next steps

Statutory Requirements 53. The Education and Inspections Act and associated regulations require that a decision on statutory proposals is made by the local

authority within two months after the closure of the second ‘formal’ consultation. Therefore, with the formal consultation having closed on 28 September, the Council’s Cabinet will make a decision on the proposal on 3 November 2025 with the call in period expiring 7 November 2025.

Timetable

Statutory and OFSTED requirements have informed the following timeline, which will commence in June 2025, subject to approval:

Activity	Timeline
Cabinet– decision on the proposal following the formal consultation	Cabinet – 3 November 2025 Call in period expires 7 November 2025
HR staff consultation	November 2025 to 31 March 2026.
Submission of voluntary cancellation form to cancel the registration of the Childrens Home and registered manager	After 7 November 2025
Bradstow Closure	31 December 2025

8. Key considerations for the next steps

Children and families

- 9.1 We are working closely with the school’s leadership team to ensure that every child and family receives thoughtful support throughout this process. Together we strive to make any change as smooth and sensitive as possible, ensuring as challenges arise, they are addressed promptly and with care. By actively listening to the views, wishes, and feelings of pupils, through the dedicated efforts of staff, we are shaping our support to meet the unique needs of each child and family.
- 9.2 Our school and community psychology service has offered support to the school leadership to discuss transition plans and how information is communicated, which is informed by the needs of children and families on an ongoing basis.

Children Looked After

- 9.3 There are no children looked after at the school who will be impacted if the decision is taken to close.

Admissions

- 9.4 We understand that the greatest anxiety for parents and carers associated with this proposal is likely to be related to securing a suitable alternative provision for their child or young person should Bradstow close, as well as the impact of any changes.
- 9.5 The decision to instigate the statutory process on closure was notified to the school community in November 2024, and we have been transparent in the documentation and engagement of the timescales on closure, which we subsequently extended by 4 months to support the academisation work.
- 9.6 In this document we have outlined our due diligence on sufficiency of provision, which has included a matching exercise, the work with Kent County Council on transfer of the provision and their decision linked to their own sufficiency planning, and our ongoing communication with other placing local authorities to parallel plan in order to ensure children at Bradstow secure suitable alternative provision if the decision is made to close.
- 9.7 In the event this proposal is agreed we will continue to work closely with the school community and other Local Authorities in a planned way, to ensure children are adequately supported through transition.
- 9.8 Through the EINA we are aware that closure would particularly impact children who are post-16 years of age. As such it will be important that through transition planning there should be liaison with receiving schools and colleges to protect curriculum pathways, accreditation routes, and preparation for adulthood programmes, with personalised support for each student and their family. Placing authorities should work with parents and the school to review individualized needs and identify suitable alternative provision and if appropriate, settings which cater for their needs post -19 years of age. This would avoid the need for future placement changes at age 19 which is when children placed at Bradstow would ordinarily transition. The review would also consider positive learning opportunities.

Staff

- 9.9 We have worked closely with the school's leadership team to provide staff with ongoing support throughout this process, ensuring that any changes are handled with care, efficiency, and sensitivity. We deeply value the incredible dedication and expertise that the Bradstow staff community brings, and we understand that this period brings understandable anxiety about the future. Council officers, governors,

and school leaders stand alongside staff, offering guidance and support as we navigate the next steps together.

- 9.10 To ensure every staff member feels supported during this uncertain time, we are providing ongoing access to dedicated recruitment advice to enable them to consider their options reflective of their individual circumstances. School leaders and governors, with support from Wandsworth's Schools and Community Psychology Service, will offer emotional and practical support, as well as independent assistance through Benenden, so that each individual's needs and wellbeing are at the heart of our approach. We will reach out to the DWP locally to formally notify given the potential dismissals and to explore support that can be accessed through Job Centre Plus.

9. Financial Implications

- 10.1 Detailed financial considerations are contained within section 4 of the report.
- 10.2 The current debt accumulated of £5.3m in respect of the school will be a pressure upon Wandsworth Council's General Fund if the recovery action from other local authorities is unsuccessful. There is some bad debt provision that has been set aside that would absorb some of the unrecoverable amounts. This Council will consider this financial risk as part of its in-year budget monitoring that is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.
- 10.3 Alternative school provision for children from Wandsworth impacted by the school closure will continue to be met from within the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools grant.
- 10.4 If the school is closed, Wandsworth Council will need to undertake a full options appraisal in relation to the use of the site. This will need to fully consider the financial implications of each option and may generate a capital receipt for the Council.

10. Legal Implications

- 11.1 The Education and Inspection Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 are the governing Statute and Regulations for closures of schools, and the Statutory Guidance is contained in Opening and Closing Maintained Schools October 2024.

- 11.2 Legal advice and input have been sought throughout the statutory process and whilst recognising that the decision is a difficult one, the consultation and decision-making process to date has been lawful and appropriate.
- 11.3 The proposal of a new Trust has raised legal issues around the ability of Wandsworth Council to ensure that the decision-making process is lawful. Therefore, the proposal and any subsequent decision to close and the proposal of a new Trust by the DfE had to sit alongside each other, following each process in a parallel manner, to ensure lawful compliance with making a decision around Wandsworth Council's future plans and ensuring that the DfE's decisions and requirements around school provision were also adhered to.
- 11.4 There are no specific legal risks or implications arising from this report, but members are advised to be aware that any change in services including closure of schools carries a risk of legal challenge by way of Judicial Review by those who consider themselves negatively impacted by the decision to close.

11. Equalities Implications

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Council when exercising its functions must have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. An Equality Impact Needs Analysis (EINA) for the closure of Bradstow school was included as part of the consultation on the proposals and was updated to reflect the findings of the formal consultation, which can be found at Appendix 3.
- 12.2 Given the nature of proposals, there will be an impact on the protected characteristics of age, sex, disability, ethnicity, and religion, with the EINA highlighting the nature of these impacts in detail.

13 Conclusion

- 13.1 We fully recognise how difficult and emotional this period has been for the entire Bradstow school community, especially for the children and families who have benefited from the school's unwavering dedication and care over many years. This decision has not been made lightly, and we acknowledge the distress and uncertainty it may cause. Our priority remains to act responsibly in the face of significant financial

challenges, so that we can continue to support all children and families in Wandsworth and safeguard the future of our local education system.

Reference to any accompanying papers:

Appendix	Document
Appendix 1	Consultation proposal
Appendix 2	Frequently Asked Questions (updated based on feedback to the pre-publication consultation)
Appendix 3	Equalities Impact Needs Assessment
Appendix 4	Copy of the Statutory Notice
Appendix 5	Consultation responses report