

Proposed Closure of Wellington House

Formal representation from the Chair of Governors, Hill Park School

From	David Plant, Chair of Governors, Hill Park School
To	Councillor Mitchie Alexander; Councillor Bella Sankey
Cc	Councillor Emma Daniel; Councillor Jacob Taylor; Councillor Tim Rowkins; Councillor Jacob Allen; Councillor Trevor Muten; Councillor Gill Williams; Councillor Alan Robins; Councillor David McGregor; Councillor Sam Parrott; Deb Austin, Corporate Director, Families, Children and Wellbeing (deb.austin@brighton-hove.gov.uk); Democratic Services (democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk)
Subject	Urgent formal representation from Hill Park School: proposed closure of Wellington House

Dear Councillor Alexander, Councillor Sankey and colleagues,

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of Governors of Hill Park School, following consultation with and the unanimous support of all non-conflicted governors who participated. Staff governors did not take part because of their employment-related conflict of interest. Hill Park serves children and young people across our Primary, Secondary and Hive sites. I am also the parent of a 16-year-old attending Hill Park Secondary.

Hill Park values its constructive working relationship with Brighton & Hove City Council. As a maintained special school and a vital part of the city's SEND provision, we work closely with council officers and services to support some of Brighton and Hove's most vulnerable children, young people and families, and we are committed to continuing that partnership. We recognise the severe financial pressures facing the authority. However, we believe that the proposed closure of Wellington House would be a serious strategic mistake, removing essential specialist capacity at precisely the time when the evidence from our school indicates that need is increasing.

Please treat this as a formal representation opposing the proposed closure of Wellington House Day Options and asking the council not to proceed on the basis of the evidence currently available.

Wellington House is the city's last council-run day centre specifically serving adults with learning disabilities. Its closure would remove an important part of the council's direct provision and, in particular, a potential safety net for adults whose complex needs cannot readily or reliably be met through ordinary community activities, charities or independent providers.

Failure to assess future demand

To my knowledge, neither Hill Park's governing body nor its senior leadership has been approached during the consultation for information about the children and young people who are likely to require adult social care provision in the coming years.

This is a significant omission. Hill Park educates children and young people with severe learning disabilities, profound and multiple learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, medical needs and other complex support requirements.

Our direct experience is that the complexity and intensity of need within the Secondary cohort are greater than in previous years. This pattern continues through the younger year groups and into Primary. The evidence available to us therefore points towards an increasing need for specialist adult day provision, not a diminishing one.

These pupils are the future users of Brighton and Hove's adult social care services. No credible assessment of future demand can be completed without engaging Hill Park and other specialist schools and post-16 providers and examining the needs of their current cohorts.

Hill Park recognises that Downs View School, Link College and Life Skills College should also be consulted by BHCC to ensure the relevant feedback and data sets are included from both special school sites in the city.

Existing public evidence

This concern is consistent with the council's wider published evidence. The Care Quality Commission's December 2025 assessment rated Brighton and Hove's adult social care arrangements as "Requires improvement". It identified gaps in provision for people with complex and compound needs, limited local options and insufficiently developed commissioning information about what provision would be required and when. [1]

The 2023 Ofsted and CQC Area SEND inspection also found that preparation for adulthood was underdeveloped and that there was insufficient strategic involvement from health and social care in this work. [2]

The Parent Carers' Council's response to this consultation has similarly raised the absence of adequate future-demand modelling, the lack of demonstrated safe alternatives for people with complex needs and the financial fragility of parts of the independent market. [3]

Hill Park's latest published Ofsted inspection judged the school Outstanding. Its leaders, staff and governors possess substantial professional and direct evidence about the changing needs of the city's disabled children. That evidence should form part of the council's strategic planning for adult services. [4]

Local government reorganisation and future service planning

This proposal is also being considered during a period of major structural change in local government across Sussex and Brighton. The Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority was formally established in March 2026, while separate proposals for local government reorganisation remain under consideration. If approved, elections for new unitary authorities are proposed for May 2027 and new governance arrangements are targeted to become operational in April 2028. [5] [6]

This is therefore not an appropriate point at which to make an irreversible reduction in the city's directly operated specialist learning-disability provision. Before disposing of Wellington House, the council should establish how specialist adult social care will be planned and commissioned under the future arrangements, what needs exist across the wider area, and whether retaining the service could contribute to a more resilient regional network of provision.

Closing the facility now risks removing valuable public capacity immediately before responsibilities, commissioning arrangements and opportunities for regional service planning are reconsidered. At minimum, any decision should be paused until this work has been completed and independently tested.

The council should also avoid permanently dismantling directly operated provision at a time when the future funding, organisation and balance between public and outsourced delivery of adult social care are likely to be reconsidered nationally.

The financial case

I am not persuaded that the proposed saving has been demonstrated as a genuine net saving to the council or to the wider public sector.

Any proper financial assessment must include not only the operating cost of Wellington House but also:

- the cost and availability of comparable independent provision;
- transport and one-to-one or two-to-one staffing;
- clinical, behavioural, communication and personal-care support;
- the consequences of placements breaking down;
- increased pressure on family carers and respite services;
- emergency intervention and safeguarding costs;
- residential or out-of-area placements where suitable local provision is unavailable; and
- the cost of rebuilding provision if independent or charitable services subsequently withdraw from the market.

Removing a council-run service may reduce one budget line while transferring equal or greater costs elsewhere.

The Care Act requires the council to promote a sufficiently diverse, sustainable and high-quality care market and to secure services capable of meeting local needs. The Public Sector Equality Duty also requires the council to give

proper and demonstrable consideration to the impact of its decision on disabled people and their families. [7]

Actions requested

Before any recommendation is made to Cabinet, I ask the council to:

- 1 Produce a properly evidenced five- and ten-year forecast of demand for adult learning-disability day provision, incorporating anonymised cohort information from Hill Park and other specialist education providers.
- 2 Meet Hill Park's leadership and governors to understand the number, complexity and likely adult support requirements of pupils currently progressing through the school.
- 3 Publish the full financial model, options appraisal, market-sufficiency assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and transition risk assessment supporting the proposal.
- 4 Demonstrate, by category of need, where sufficient alternative provision currently exists for people requiring specialist buildings, personal care, clinical input, high staffing ratios, specialist communication support and management of behaviours that may present risks.
- 5 Assess alternatives to closure, including retaining and modernising Wellington House or developing it as a specialist centre of excellence alongside community-based provision.
- 6 Refer the proposal to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for examination before a final Cabinet decision is taken.
- 7 Confirm that this representation will be included in the formal consultation analysis and supplied in full to the councillors making the decision.

The council should not dispose of its final directly operated specialist day service without first establishing, through robust evidence, that future demand can be met safely, sustainably and affordably. At present, that case has not been made.

Please confirm receipt, whether this representation will be included in the decision papers, and the anticipated date and forum for the final decision.

Yours sincerely,

David Plant

Chair of Governors

Hill Park School - Primary, Secondary and The Hive

References

1. Care Quality Commission, Brighton and Hove local authority assessment (December 2025):
<https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/brightonhove-1225/summary>
2. Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection of Brighton and Hove (2023):
<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50218659>
3. Parent Carers' Council response to the Wellington House consultation:
<https://paccbrighton.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/BHCC-Consultation-Survey-Proposed-Closure-of-Wellington-House-PaCC-response.pdf>
4. Ofsted provider page for Hill Park School:
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/25/114687>
5. Brighton & Hove City Council, inaugural meeting of the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority (April 2026):
<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2026/inaugural-meeting-sussex-brighton-strategic-authority-take-place>
6. Brighton & Hove City Council, Local Government Reorganisation timeline:
<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/local-government-reorganisation-lgr/our-timeline-local-government-reorganisation-lgr>
7. Care Act 2014, section 5 (market shaping and commissioning):
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/5>