

SCHOOL PLACES PLAN AND CAPACITY STRATEGY
Executive Director, People

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 To note the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2020-24. These were last approved by the Executive in January 2017 and have now been updated to cover the five-year period from 2020 to 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To note the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2020-24.**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.
- 3.2 The School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy are the essential tools employed by the Council to meet this duty.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None, it is business critical to undertake pupil forecasting to ensure the Council meets its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest is moving from a time of scarcity of school places to a time of surplus school places. Whilst secondary school numbers on roll are still rising, the birth rate and corresponding primary school intake numbers are decreasing across the Borough.

Forecasting School Places

- 5.2 A new forecasting system has been developed and adopted in 2019 following concerns that the previous forecasts were too high. This has been developed with input from Council officers in Education & Learning, Business Continuity, Public Health, Finance and the Borough Planners.
- 5.3 A new forum for managing and overseeing this work, the School Sufficiency Board, has been set up which meets quarterly with representatives from all the above Council teams.

Unrestricted

- 5.4 The Council has also employed the services of an external consultant to help create the new forecasting system and has exchanged information with relevant officer colleagues in neighbouring authorities, including the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough to share insights and good working practice.

School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy

- 5.5 The School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy is attached as Appendix A, which forecasts demand for school places for;
- Early Years
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Post 16
 - SEN

Sufficient School Places

- 5.6 Forecasts indicate that there will be sufficient school places across all mainstream sectors and in all planning areas to meet the forecast demand, and no new places are to be created by the council during the Current forecast period to 2024.

Bucklers Park

- 5.7 Previous forecasts identified the need for a new primary school at Bucklers Park (formerly known as TRL), and an agreement is in place with the developer Legal & General to provide a new, up to 2 FE primary school.
- 5.8 Actual pupil yields from the new housing have however been much lower than previously anticipated, and there is currently no forecast need for the new school to be built. The Council will closely monitor the pupil yield arising from the new housing as this development continues (as at April 2019 only 35 out of 1,000 houses had been built).
- 5.9 The Council is also undertaking regular discussions with the developer to ensure that the school is only built should the forecast demand for pupil places clearly demonstrate the need.

6. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal issues are contained within the report.

Director of Finance

- 6.2 The revised pupil forecasting model is expected to increase the accuracy of the data which in turn will improve decision making in respect of capital investments in schools. The current forecasts indicate a sufficiency of places, however, if new schemes are required, they will be presented for a decision through the council's normal budget setting process.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 SEN forecasts are included in the SPP. Compliance with needs for disabled access to new build school accommodation is achieved through Part M of Building Regulations. The requirement for disabled access to existing school buildings is set out in the Equality Act and the Council makes accessibility works a priority in its Planned Works programme for schools, details of which are set out in the Asset Management Plan for Schools.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The main factors affecting the planning and delivery of school places are:

ISSUE		RISK	COMMENT
1	Accuracy of forecasts	MEDIUM	A new forecasting system has been introduced in 2019 to mitigate this risk.
2	Co-ordination between Council teams and departments.	MEDIUM	A new School Sufficiency Board has been established including representatives from all teams to oversee planning for school places.
3	Sufficient school places	LOW	Forecasts suggest there will be sufficient school places for the forecast period 2020-24.
4	Surplus school places	MEDIUM	Forecasts suggest primary surpluses will increase, but secondary surpluses will decrease. Measures to reduce the surplus of primary places will mitigate this risk.
4	Council's ability to manage the supply of school places	MEDIUM	Academies may choose to depart from catchment area admissions policies and/or admit over their PANs. Maintenance of an effective dialogue with academy providers is essential.
5	Capital Cost Risk	LOW	Forecasts suggest there will be sufficient school places for the forecast period 2020-24.
6	Revenue Cost Risk to the Council	LOW	Surplus places reduce the likelihood that Home to School Transport will be incurred.
7	Revenue Cost Risk to Schools	MEDIUM	Surplus places increase the likelihood that some schools will have relatively low pupil numbers which can result in budget difficulties.

8	Reputation Risk	MEDIUM	The Council could stand to be criticised if there are too many surplus school places, emphasising the importance of strategic planning.
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7. CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 The School Sufficiency Board (SSB)

Method of Consultation

7.2 SSB were consulted at their meeting on 29/11/19.

7.3 PSG were consulted at their meeting on 16/12/19.

Representations Received

7.4 SSB approved the draft SSP for adoption.

Background Papers

Appendix A School Places Plan & Capacity Strategy 2020 - 2024

Contacts for Further Information

Rachel Morgan Assistant Director, Education & Learning
01344 354037 rachel.morgan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Chris Taylor Head of School Property, Places & Admissions
01344 354062 chris.taylor@bracknell-forest.gov.uk