

A Review of School Places

by a working group of the
Children, Young People and Learning
Overview and Scrutiny Panel



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All those who have participated in the review have been thanked for their contribution and have received copies of this report.

1. Foreword

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, and the impact of rising rolls and new housing has made this an important issue for Bracknell Forest, carrying significant financial implications.
- 1.2 Demand for school places is rising locally and nationally and the actual number of primary school age children nationally is projected to rise from a low point of 3.95 million in 2009, to 4.51 million by 2018. This increase of more than half a million will take the national primary school population to its highest level since the late 1970s.
- 1.3 Demand due to new housing developments has resulted in pupil numbers in Bracknell Forest rising and our provisional pupil forecasts indicate that we are facing twice the national increase in primary pupil numbers (24%) in half the time.
- 1.4 Over the past four years the Council has successfully responded to rising rolls by creating sufficient new pupil places to meet demand through a significant programme of construction works on school sites. This programme of work has met demand.
- 1.5 The Working Group met on five occasions with various members of the Council who work in the planning for the school places in the Borough covering in great detail many aspects of this process which involves a continuously evolving number of children applying for school places in a given year.
- 1.6 This was my first working group since becoming a parent governor representative in the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel and I found this a very informative and fantastic insight into the work done by all concerned in providing school places for the children of Bracknell Forest Council.
- 1.7 I would like to thank the Working Group and representatives from the Bracknell Forest Council for all their time, preparation and support in this research project. I would also like to express my appreciation for all the help and support I received from Andrea Carr in booking the meetings, preparing the minutes and the report presented from this Working Group.
- 1.8 I commend the findings and recommendations to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, Councillor Dr. Gareth Barnard.

Mr Robin Briscoe, Primary Parent Governor Representative
(Lead Working Group Member)

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In the light of growing national concerns over insufficient numbers of school places, it was agreed to add this review to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work programme in 2013/14 to enable the Panel to establish a working group to undertake a review of the planning and provision of school places in the Borough to ensure that demands are being met.
- 2.2 During the course of the review the Working Group gathered information and evidence from many sources in order to appraise the Council's arrangements for planning and providing places for children and young people in Bracknell Forest's schools, including the school admissions process and national comparisons. These sources included research, the Allocations Whiteboard which provided information concerning school place allocations, and Council officers who provided background information, data and knowledge. Members had regard to relevant documents including the School Places Plan 2013 – 2018, primary and secondary admission arrangements 2014/15, an analysis of preference allocation, primary and secondary allocations breakdown, pupil place planning risk factors, the Department for Education (DfE) School Admissions Code and the National Audit Office's report concerning capital funding for new school places.
- 2.3 This report describes the work of the Working Group between September 2013 and May 2014 and sets out its findings. The report is organised in the following sections and Members hope that it will be well received and look forward to receiving responses to their recommendations.

Part 1 Lead Member's Foreword.

Part 2 Executive Summary.

Part 3 Gives background information in respect of the allocation of school places and summarises how the review was undertaken.

Part 4 Summarises the information and evidence gathered by the Working Group.

Part 5 Contains the conclusions reached following the review.

Part 6 Sets out the Working Group's recommendations to the Council's Executive.

- 2.4 The Working Group comprised:

Mr Briscoe (Lead Member)
Councillor Mrs Birch
Councillor Kensall
Councillor Mrs Temperton

3. Background

- 3.1 In the light of growing national concerns in respect of insufficient numbers of school places, the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel decided to add this review to its work programme in 2013/14 to enable it to establish a working group to undertake a review of the planning and provision of school places in Bracknell Forest to ensure that current demands were being met.
- 3.2 There was also a need to meet projected increased future demand for school places owing to the significant new residential developments in the Borough which, together with further properties on smaller sites, were anticipated to create an additional 8,900 dwellings approximately and, in addition, to the displacement of pupils from adjoining unitary authorities into Bracknell Forest schools as they experience rising demand for school places.
- 3.3 The rise in children born in England between 2001 and 2011 was the largest ten year increase since the 1950s and increased the demand for primary school places. Between 2001 and 2011, live births rose by 22% to 688,000. Between 2006/07 and 2011/12, the number of children starting in reception classes in primary school increased by 16% to 606,000. Previously, many local authorities faced falling school rolls and had reduced primary places by 5% nationally between 2003/04 and 2009/10.
- 3.4 In May 2012, nationally 20.4% of primary schools were fully subscribed or at over capacity. Numbers of children in infant classes (up to age seven) of 31 or more pupils have more than doubled in five years, from 23,200 in 2007 to 47,300 in 2012. Rising demand for places can have a significant impact on children's average journey times to school and for children required to travel more than either two or three miles, depending on their age, to school, authorities must arrange transport at no charge to parents. Appeals as a percentage of primary school admissions to infant classes increased from 1.7% in 2004/05 to 4.8% in 2010/11. This high demand for school places resulted in councils not always being able to meet parents' preference for a particular school.
- 3.5 The Working Group's research has identified that, despite a net increase of almost 81,500 primary places from 2010 to May 2012, a need has been estimated by the National Audit Office (NAO)¹ for 256,000 new primary and secondary school places in England by 2014/15. The DfE is allocating £4.3bn in capital funding to local authorities for new school places in England from 2010 to 2014, excluding March 2013's Targeted Basic Need Programme. The NAO estimates that there have been 12,000 additional pupils in reception classes in England each year to 2014. Although forecasts of future need are inevitably uncertain, the demand for school places is projected to increase beyond 2014/15 and possibly an additional 400,000 further places could be required by 2018/19.
- 3.6 In 2011/12, 6.8 million 4 to 16 year olds attended state funded schools in England, 3.9 million were in primary schools, 2.8 million in secondary schools, and 78,000 in special schools. Around 600,000 children start reception classes in primary school each year.

¹ NAO report re: Capital Funding for New School Places 15.03.13

- 3.7 The number of children starting school fluctuates annually, increasing if the birth rate and inward migration grow. New school places may be needed to meet increases in demand, initially in reception classes and later in other primary and secondary classes. A lack of sufficient places can create local 'hotspots' where demand outstrips places available within a local area, even though the local authority may not have an overall shortage of places.
- 3.8 Appendix 2 shows roles and responsibilities for providing school places. The DfE is responsible for the policy and statutory framework and makes a substantial financial contribution to local authorities' costs in delivering places, and is accountable for overall value for money delivered from its funding. It aims to give parents "the choice of a good local school" for their children, and "to use available capital funding to best effect to provide sufficient places in schools parents want to send their children to". Although there is a planning assumption regarding the scale of surplus places required to support some degree of operational flexibility and parental choice, local authorities' statutory duty for providing sufficient school places does not oblige them to maintain a surplus of places for parental choice.
- 3.9 Local authorities are statutorily responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient schools, and therefore school places. Authorities assess demographic changes and then plan and finance new school places, including using funding provided by the DfE. There is a range of possible solutions to provide new places, mainly as follows, and local authorities' costs in providing places vary depending on the mix of solutions they use and local prices:
- building new schools;
 - permanent or temporary school extensions; or
 - converting existing spaces within schools for use as classrooms.
- 3.10 Local authorities rely on co-operation from individual schools to expand existing provision although space on existing school sites may be constrained. An authority can direct the expansion of community and voluntary controlled schools, but not others. There are legal limits on the size of certain primary classes.
- 3.11 Although the DfE considers that all local authorities have met their statutory duty to provide sufficient schools to date, there are indications of stress and pressure on school places in some parts of the country.

4. Investigation, Information Gathering and Analysis

Introductory Briefing and Discussion

- 4.1 At the first meeting of the Working Group the Director of Children, Young People and Learning and the Head of Property and Admissions gave an introductory briefing in respect of pupil place planning in Bracknell Forest with reference to the School Places Plan (SPP) 2013-2018². There was a robust system of place planning in the Borough which had been examined by an external expert two years previously to give a further perspective on the related data set. The expert, who brought a broad knowledge base and experiences of other local authorities, made suggestions for some minor improvements. The Director was confident of pupil number forecasts which had been extremely accurate for the past two years with 84% of pupils receiving places at their first preference school in the September 2013 intake whilst overall 95-96% were placed at one of their preference schools.
- 4.2 The admissions process was now on-line and generally functioned smoothly. All parents registering for a school place received a letter inviting them to apply on-line or request a paper application form by a set date. Acceptance letters were also sent electronically unless parents requested a paper version. The Council followed the national school admissions code which included a school place notification date. The range of electronic devices available was being explored to maximise functionality. The window for application for places in September 2014 was open until 31 October 2013 for secondary schools with 63% applying on-line and 15 January 2014 for primary schools with 70% applying on-line.
- 4.3 The SPP was the main forecasting tool which captured all relevant data including birth rates and new housing developments. The Plan was updated and refreshed each year which represented a considerable work stream. The next aspect of this year's work stream would be to interpret data and intervene if necessary by pursuing building projects through the capital programme as required before undertaking the associated admissions. Popular schools with sufficient site space were expanded as part of the programme. A flow chart depicting the high level admissions processes was circulated to the Working Group.
- 4.4 A restructure in 2006 merged the Council's admissions and education property functions bringing the admitting officers and construction co-ordinators together in the interests of joint working and continuity.
- 4.5 The forecasting model included the ability to calculate the proportion of children of primary and secondary ages that could be expected from new housing. Factors were based on a door to door survey of new housing, undertaken every three years. The latest survey was in 2013. It was acknowledged that the Children, Young People and Learning Department made every effort to accurately predict pupil place requirements. The Admissions Team forecast an actual absolute number of expected primary and secondary numbers on roll (NOR) rather than a range of NOR. Forecasting work concentrated on the next five years as the accuracy and reliability of longer forecasts, such as the

² <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/school-places-plan-2013-to-2018.pdf>

unpublished five to fifteen year forecasts involving predictions of future birth rates, diminished. The Office for National Statistics predicted a 20% increase in demand for primary places over the next ten years, however, the demand locally was predicted to rise by 30% owing to Bracknell Forest's location and anticipated future residential development. For this reason the Council found its own forecasting more reliable than general national data. The year to year pupil yield calculated from the mix of new housing was calculated by dividing the total primary yield by seven, and the total secondary yield by seven. There was pressure on upper year groups from in-year admissions where children moved into the Borough and this greater densification was difficult to forecast on a year group basis but could be predicted on a general level. Private rented houses in parts of the Borough in multi-family occupation led to a greater number of children per household than the factors included in the forecasts.

- 4.6 Three areas of the Borough were under pressure from proposed housing developments. Plans were made one year ahead to identify areas requiring 'surge' classrooms or the need for new forms of entry (FE), enabling the necessary building work to be carried out before additional pupils arrived. Some other local authorities did not provide extra classrooms until they knew the number of pupils to accommodate. Extra capacity for September 2013 had been constructed by January 2013 and building was currently taking place to meet demand in September 2014. A surge class provided for an additional thirty pupils in the intake year and remained as one extra class as the pupils progressed through the school whilst an extra FE provided an additional class at all age groups. The present pupil population showed a bulge in numbers in the lower years. It was anticipated that after six years capacity would be full and additional secondary school places would be required. For example, new housing at Jennett's Park would fill spare capacity at Easthampstead Park School in the future. The proposed residential development at the Blue Mountain site would include a new 5 FE secondary School, a 2FE Primary School and a 52 place attached nursery to serve north Bracknell and it was estimated that the Borough would require additional special educational needs (SEN) school capacity. Children were tracked through primary schools by their post code and date of birth. Predicting the need for secondary school places was calculated by taking pupil numbers in year 6 in primary schools and multiplying by 'staying-on' rates to secondary schools. Although Bracknell Forest was a net exporter of secondary age children to schools outside the Borough, such as St Crispin's School in Wokingham where approximately 25% of pupils lived in Bracknell Forest, and Charters School in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, as capacity in neighbouring boroughs' schools reduced, demand for places in Bracknell Forest from its own pupils displaced from such schools and children from adjoining boroughs was growing. Schools in the south of Bracknell Forest such as Edgbarrow received pupils from outside the Borough as part of Wokingham Borough fell into the designated area (DA) of the school. Any changes to Charters' admissions arrangements would also impact on this Borough. Some children in all year groups attended private schools, such as the Licensed Victuallers' School which was local and took children of primary and secondary age, however, the recession and school fee increases could reduce that number, leaving more children in need of places in Bracknell Forest schools. The free school to be provided by Eton College at Holyport, which included some residential accommodation for children of service personnel, was due to open in September 2014 and could possibly take some Bracknell Forest children. Some children of secondary age attended grammar or catholic secondary schools outside the Borough. The Council

sought to provide sufficient places to facilitate parental preference without costly over provision.

- 4.7 The Director advised that schools receiving an Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) inspection grading of good or better were eligible to expand. The local authority had approached all Bracknell Forest primary schools to gauge which might be interested in expansion. A meeting was held with school representatives and they were invited to write with an expression of interest if they wanted to discuss the possibilities of expansion further, which included the new schools. There were various models emerging nationally such as an executive headteacher of two schools, a federation of infant and junior schools as a primary school, one headteacher operating several schools on separate sites. Members did not favour an arrangement resulting in excessive travelling for school staff/governors or additional transitions for pupils but appreciated the merits of expanding popular and successful schools.

Scoping Exercise

- 4.8 The Working Group considered the scope of the review with reference to a draft scoping document. The related discussion focused on school place planning anomalies, DAs, the level of parental satisfaction with admission outcomes and the education capital programme.
- 4.9 Factors that were difficult to predict in forecasting included multi-family occupation leading to unusual household child densities, families in bed and breakfast accommodation, and displacement of pupils from private schools. The rules in respect of free schools were changing and in future they could only be provided where there was a local need. A poor Ofsted inspection outcome could lead to an academy school being established. There were limited resources to build new schools and one could not be justified in an area with existing surplus places.
- 4.10 Schools had a DA, a geographical boundary for prioritising applications for school places from which children normally attend. It was necessary for schools to be viable and this may involve DA boundary changes which could present difficulties and were subject to a statutory consultation exercise. DAs were established where new schools were constructed in response to new housing.
- 4.11 The Working Group was advised that the school preference scheme, under which parents expressed preferences for particular schools, was an equal preference scheme and that the three preferences invited were not ranked in order. Although reminders were sent to parents of children in Council schools, a small proportion did not meet the admissions deadline and this limited their options to schools with remaining vacancies, which could lead to dissatisfaction. This could also be the case with in-year admissions. Although records were kept of admission appeals which indicated that parental preference had not been met, there was no other data in respect of the level of parental satisfaction. It was therefore suggested that an on-line questionnaire could be utilised to obtain satisfaction feedback concerning school preferences from the parents of all Year 7 pupils who transferred to secondary school in September 2014.

- 4.12 Members felt that the review should not consider the education capital programme in particular depth.
- 4.13 The draft scoping document was expanded to reflect the Working Group's views concerning the above and approved at the following Working Group meeting.

The School Admissions Process

- 4.14 The Senior Admissions Officer gave a presentation in respect of the primary admissions process which featured the date of birth range for school starters, school year groups, the registration process, the statutory school age, options for summer born children, the school age structure within the Borough, Bracknell Forest schools, pupil numbers, types of school, the admissions criteria, school DAs, the equal preference scheme, parental considerations, the application and allocations process, waiting lists and late applications.
- 4.15 In the presentation it was explained that date of birth dictated which year group a child would join, with the eldest in any year group being born on 1 September and the youngest on 31 August of the following year. Parents were encouraged to register for school places on-line to assist with capturing information concerning future pupil numbers and ages for planning purposes and ensuring that all pupils were offered a school place. Although all children were offered a full time school place in the September following their 4th birthday, they could opt to attend part time or delay attendance until reaching the statutory school age (the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday) and parents were encouraged to discuss the alternatives with the headteacher. Summer born children with dates of birth on or between 1 April and 31 August would not reach statutory school age until the following September (Year 1) and would have a choice of joining school in September, January or April of the reception year or re-applying to start in Year 1 which would necessitate forfeiting their place in the reception year.
- 4.16 The infant, junior and primary school age structure was explained together with the age of transfer to secondary school. The pupil number in each year group of every school was limited by the planned/published admission number (PAN) which reflected factors including classrooms, toilets and ICT facilities. Parents were also advised of the different types of school in the Borough, namely, community, voluntary controlled (VC) and voluntary aided (VA). VC and VA were the two main categories of Church of England Schools (other than academies). It was the state, via the DfE or local authority that 'controlled' or 'aided' a school; the local authority therefore had more technical responsibilities in VC schools and the Diocese had in VA schools. Both had an Instrument of Government which includes a Church of England Statement of Ethos. The local authority was the admissions authority for community and VC schools whilst the governing body of VA schools was the admissions authority. To date, only one secondary and no primary schools in the Borough had become academies. Academies set their own admissions criteria. All relevant information was provided in a booklet published on the Council's website. The Council's admissions criteria applied to every application received for a community or VC school where there were more applications than pupil places to determine who would be allocated the places. The criteria were based on factors such as the designated area, siblings and, for VC schools, church attendance. Bracknell Forest utilised a combination of criteria ranking designated area and sibling first, followed by designated area, and then sibling followed by all others. The radial

distance from the centre of the school site to the midpoint of the applicant's property was measured to rank waiting lists in distance order in the event of oversubscription. Child care locations were not taken into account. Parents had no right in law to choose a school but could express up to 3 preferences. They were advised to consider their options carefully, particularly if considering applying for an out of Borough or out of designated area school place as this could affect a sibling, and to visit their designated area school. The Council was obliged to offer all children living in the Borough a school place and if a child was not offered a place in any three of the preferences expressed, a place at the nearest school with space would be offered. Although DAs did not apply to some VA schools, as place offerings were based on religion, all community and VC schools in the Borough were allocated a DA. It was possible for classes to be increased from 30 to 31 pupils to avoid separating twins. Proof of address in the form of a Council Tax bill, the child's birth certificate and possibly other papers e.g. to confirm church attendance, were required to support applications. There were means to check addresses in the event that any doubt arose, such as home visits, in order to prevent the allocation of places due to fraudulent applications. Although on-line applications were encouraged, parents were also able to make paper applications for a school place. House moves during the application period caused complications. Offers of places would be e-mailed or posted to applicants on the offer date. Although a couple of days grace could be allowed in the case of delayed applications, the statutory allocation process would commence on the day of the deadline. Offers were to be accepted by the deadline and applicants would automatically be added to the waiting list for any higher preference school than the one offered. The highest preference on the application form would be offered once all the criteria had been applied. The Council could also offer places based on the second preference, then the third preference, and add pupils to the waiting list for their first preference school, disregarding the third preference.

- 4.17 For aided schools the Council passed a list of applicants expressing one of their preferences for a place to the relevant school which would apply its own admissions criteria, rank applicants according to the criteria and return the ranking to Bracknell Forest. The Council would then apply the equal preference criteria to the ranking, which was unknown to the VA school, and offer places to those who had listed that school as a first preference.
- 4.18 The presentation was based on that delivered to parents each year in order to boost parental knowledge and satisfaction with the admissions process. There are two occasions when this happens: it was presented to parents of Year 5 pupils on five occasions in June in relation to secondary admission and again on nine occasions in October relating to admission to primary or infant schools. Approximately 1,000 parents attended the presentations in each round. After attending presentations in June, parents would have the opportunity to visit schools of interest prior to the summer break before receiving information packs in September. As parents often lacked knowledge concerning school year groups and points of transfer this information was included in the presentation. There had been changes to the admissions process in recent years. The mandatory School Admissions Code, which stemmed from Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, determined the process which was followed by the Council. The admissions criteria of all schools in the Borough were published.
- 4.19 Applications for school places were managed via, and offers were made through, the home local education authority to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

This was therefore the case for Bracknell Forest pupils transferring to out of Borough schools. Applications for school places for children moving into the Borough were managed by Bracknell Forest Council whilst places for pupils moving out of the area were managed by the receiving authority. This could lead to some safeguarding concerns. The admissions co-ordination process was prescriptive with the application and offer closing dates for secondary schools falling on 31 October and 31 March respectively, and on 15 January and 16 April for primary schools' admission. These dates were fixed across the country.

- 4.20 The feedback from the last round of admissions had been very positive and efforts were made to inform parents and explain the allocations process. Travelling difficulties and waiting lists were amongst the issues to be tackled and solved and every effort was made to meet parents' needs and wishes. In the event that an offered place was not taken up, it would become available for another child.
- 4.21 Further to questions and discussion arising from the presentation, the following points were made:
- a) Although Jennett's Park School was oversubscribed, particularly in the intake years and Year 4, the development sales office continued to promote it widely as a good school. It was recognised that parents new to the area with several children would wish them to attend the same school. As Jennett's Park was a VA school, it undertook its own admission arrangements. The headteacher and chairman of governors had been approached by Council officers to establish if they were prepared to expand the school and their answer was awaited. There were alternative primary schools in the locality including Great Hollands where an additional 210 places were planned in the form of additional FEs. The related technical feasibility and costings had been undertaken and the school was agreeable to expansion if necessary. It was anticipated that some older children living in Jennett's Park would attend nearby secondary schools in Wokingham Borough although the allocations would be made via Bracknell Forest Council as their local education authority. Parents were encouraged to visit local schools and read their Ofsted reports before making preferences.
 - b) Older children joining oversubscribed schools were not prioritised as it was necessary to offer and reserve a place for all children allocated one in the reception year. Although some children, particularly the summer born, missed one to two terms or initially attended for mornings only, the majority of schools succeeded in encouraging parents to send their children to school at the earliest opportunity to prevent them from becoming educationally disadvantaged and to assist teaching and bonding. In the event that children did not attend their allocated school by statutory school age, Education Welfare Officers would investigate to ascertain the reason.
 - c) School censuses, which were statutory returns, collected information regarding individual pupils and schools. The individual pupil information collected included free school meal eligibility, ethnicity, SEN, attendance and exclusions. Pupil numbers were used to calculate funding for the following academic year, including the dedicated schools grant and pupil premium. Budgets were based on the NOR during the October prior to

the relevant financial year. As funding was allocated on the basis of the numbers of pupils attending school on Census Day, it was acknowledged that this system could financially disadvantage schools with sickness absences on that day.

- d) In the case of a preference application to a VA school which did not fully meet its criteria, a place could be allocated in the event of free places following the application of the criteria to all other applicants.
- e) There were occasions when pupils living in close proximity to their designated area school had not been offered a place despite having expressed a preference for it. The reason for this was that the school was oversubscribed and other children living in the designated area met further criteria such as sibling or church attendance and were ranked higher for a place.
- f) Although efforts were made to keep families together, places could not be guaranteed. Over the past four years 80% of applicants had received a place at their first preference school and 90% had been allocated to one of their preference schools. The reason for this sustained success in meeting preferences was that 1,200 new school places had been created through new schools, expansion and surge classrooms from capital programme funding. Schools were keen to expand as it was an indication of their popularity and success. Modular units were added as a last resort. Investment was required to achieve admission success.
- g) A Member suggested that parents should be encouraged to visit schools earlier in the admissions process and attend school open days in order to facilitate well informed preferences.
- h) Co-ordination of in year moves had previously been the responsibility of the receiving home local education authority, however, from September 2013 the ability to manage moves into the Borough had ceased, particularly if applications had been made from outside the Borough.
- i) In terms of safeguarding and tracking pupils who left Bracknell Forest schools, it was not possible for the Council to manage allocations where out of Borough applications were made. In the case of absenteeism, schools were responsible for tracking missing pupils and the headteacher's permission and a suitable explanation were required for in-term holidays/absences. New welfare guidance required pupils to remain on roll until their school was aware of what had become of them e.g. an in year transfer. There was an electronic web system where absent pupils' names were posted and only deleted when their whereabouts had been ascertained. It was thought that the extended age of participation could result in names remaining on rolls until the age of 18 when pupils' whereabouts could not be tracked in circumstances such as non notification of emigration. This would have a negative impact on schools' attendance statistics.
- j) The admissions process for children with a statement of SEN differed from the regular system. The statement named the school that would best meet the pupil's needs, whether it was a special or mainstream school, and they attended accordingly. There had been a reduction in the number of children receiving statements as only those with severe needs

were generally statemented. The receiving school was allocated the associated funding to manage which included transport costs.

- k) Home education was an alternative to attending school and although this was a matter for parental choice, every effort was made to secure school attendance. An Education Welfare Officer would visit parents to discuss their statutory responsibilities in the case of no schooling at the statutory age. In the event that parents opted for home education, the pupils would be visited and the standard of their work assessed. Parents would be responsible for the purchase of all books and equipment and examination costs. A Welfare Officer would report on whether the child was progressing sufficiently although they had no power to insist s/he joined a school in the case of underachievement. Some religious groups which did not favour English schooling would educate their children at home, often in groups, which could be successful. Parents could not be forced to apply for a school place.
- l) Some pupils were entitled to paid school transport based on the distance from home to school. Charters was an example of one school outside the Borough with a DA which included part of Bracknell Forest and local children living within the designated area were entitled to paid transport. Bracknell Forest had two schools, one junior and one primary, which fed 90 pupils per year into Charters. In the event that Charters decided to restrict its intake or change its designated area to exclude Bracknell Forest, this would create a difficulty as this Borough would retain a statutory duty to provide these pupils with a secondary place and Garth Hill College, its nearest secondary school, was fully subscribed. Pressure for school places was greatest in north Bracknell and temporary additional capacity would be provided at Garth Hill to cater for additional students until the proposed new secondary school was constructed at the Blue Mountain development site to serve the area. This Council undertook monitoring of the admissions criteria of schools in neighbouring boroughs whose intake included Bracknell Forest children to ascertain whether it was fair and, if it found that it was unfair, would approach the school in this regard. In the event of no resulting action, Bracknell Forest could report the matter to the Schools' Adjudicator for review. Additional pressure from new development in Wokingham near the Borough boundary was also anticipated as surplus capacity in St Crispin's School would reduce and displaced children would need to be found places in this Borough. Further pressure arose from increases in the birth rate several years ago.
- m) As planning permission for proposed new significant residential developments in the Borough had not yet been granted, the number, size and building timeline of houses was unknown and associated Section 106 funding (contributions sought by local authorities from developers under that section of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended, towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure to meet needs arising from a new development) towards the provision of new school places was to follow. Therefore, planning of places was based on an assumption reflecting previous developments, the Site Allocations Development Local Plan agreed in July and the survey to capture data to give a pupil yield. New development normally triggered the need for new and expanded schools and was provided after a certain number of houses had been constructed causing a time lapse between

the construction of housing and the opening of new schools. However, as there was existing need for school places an accelerated project to speed the provision of new schools at Blue Mountain was being pursued. Although there were land use, site acquisition and planning permission issues and also risk associated with the early incurring of design costs, this would bring school provision forward by two years and it was anticipated that the new primary and secondary schools at Blue Mountain would open in September 2017. In addition to the Blue Mountain schools, four new primary schools and three new FE were proposed in north Bracknell.

- n) Although there had been no designated boundary changes since Bracknell Forest had become a unitary authority, the new schools would necessitate some changes which should not disadvantage any schools or limit parental preference. The process required a statutory public consultation and registration by the DfE. Designated area changes could have an impact on siblings and this could be taken into consideration when allocating places to affected children.
- o) It was reported that a Freedom of Information request had revealed that 679 in-year application forms had been received in 2012/13 in which parents had given reasons for their preferences. A random sample of 20 applications revealed that the reasons were: 6 x distance; 4 X recommendation; 4 x siblings; 3 x Ofsted and other reports; 2 x distance and siblings; and 1 x house move.

Academies and Free Schools

- 4.22 The Working Group learnt that academies were state funded schools in England which were directly funded by the DfE and independent of direct control by the local authority. Academies were self-governing and all were constituted as non-profit charitable trusts. They may receive additional support from personal or corporate sponsors, either financially or in kind, and must meet the same national curriculum core subject requirements as other state schools and were subject to inspection by Ofsted. Although the majority of academies in England were secondary schools, some primary schools also had academy status.
- 4.23 Free schools were a type of academy which were free to attend, not controlled by local authorities and governed by non-profit charitable trusts that signed funding agreements with the Secretary of State. Like other state funded schools, free schools were subject to the School Admissions Code, which stipulated that they could prioritise admissions for founders' children. To establish a free school, founding groups submitted applications to the DfE. Groups included those run by parents, education charities and religious groups. Ongoing funding was on an equivalent basis with other locally controlled state maintained schools, although additional start-up grants to establish the schools were also provided. Free schools could select their own syllabus and were expected to offer a broad and balanced curriculum and were subject to Ofsted inspections and expected to comply with standard performance measures. Unlike other schools, it was not necessary for free school teachers to have teaching qualifications.
- 4.24 The creation of academies and free schools in the Borough presented some risks in the form of cost, time and meeting the duty to provide a school place for

all applicants. As the Council was powerless to intervene, it monitored the situation and had plans in place to respond. Although there were currently no free schools in the Borough, one was being founded in Holyport in a neighbouring local authority by Eton College and some Bracknell Forest children had applied to attend from September 2014. Whilst one school in Bracknell Forest had transferred to an academy, this had minimal impact on school places in the Borough as it had been a VA church school previously with the power to decide its own admission arrangements, subject to the national Admissions Code, using faith criteria in prioritising pupils for admission. Also, the school continued to buy into many services provided by the Council. However, the adoption of academy status by a local community school could lead to a boundary change or deletion of a designated area, possibly leaving part of Bracknell Forest without a designated school.

The Capital Programme, New Housing Developments and Demographic Trends

- 4.25 The Head of Property and Admissions gave a presentation in respect of the capital programme, new housing developments and demographic trends. The presentation covered progress to date, background, two new schools, demographics, primary and secondary demographic trends, new housing developments and sites, estimating pupil yields, spatial requirements, provisional timescales, costs and funding, capital funding in 2013/14, capital programme, and procedures and oversight.
- 4.26 In terms of progress to date, the first meeting of the Working Group had featured an introductory briefing, preliminary review scoping discussion, and future meetings and activities. At its second meeting, the Working Group agreed the amended scope and received a presentation in respect of school admissions.
- 4.27 The background addressed the rising birth rate, significant new housing construction, rising school rolls across the Borough, the Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient school places and the capital programme to meet basic school place need. 1,700 new school places had been created since September 2010 at existing schools and two new schools, namely, Garth Hill College which was re-provided in 2010 and Jennett's Park Primary School which opened in 2011. It was difficult to locate new schools in developed areas as approximately two hectares of land were required to accommodate one.
- 4.28 The latest version of the SPP, which covered the period 2013 – 2018, had been agreed recently by the Council's Executive and would be circulated to the Working Group. The SPP included demographic information in the form of the number of births notified by the NHS, new residential development supplied by the Council's town planners, pupil yield sourced from commissioned research and existing school capacities. With regard to demographic trends, the SPP contained primary and secondary school forecasts. The primary (at statutory school age) and secondary numbers on role showed actual numbers from 2008 - 2013 and forecast numbers from 2014 - 2018. At primary level numbers had risen from approximately 8,500 in 2008 to 9,100 in 2013 and a 24% increase over the next five years was indicated. Secondary numbers had grown from around 6,400 in 2008 to 7,100 in 2013 and a further increase of 12% was anticipated by 2018. Although both primary and secondary numbers had dipped in 2009/10, it was expected that the current rising trend would continue in the future. Forecasts were compared with actual numbers retrospectively. The current bulge in primary pupil numbers would feed into secondary schools

in coming years as pupils transferred, however, numbers were monitored as some diverted to private or out of Borough schools.

- 4.29 Although there was pressure on school places in the neighbouring boroughs of Wokingham and Windsor & Maidenhead, there was more capacity in Surrey and Hampshire. 20% of pupils attending St Crispin's School were from Bracknell Forest owing to the School's capacity, however, this was likely to reduce as new housing was constructed in Wokingham resulting in local children being displaced back into this Borough's schools. On a national scale, there was a need for 38,000 new primary and 35,000 new secondary school places at an estimated cost of £5b. School place pressure in Bracknell Forest was greater than the national average due to residential development and displacement. The resulting need for the construction of more school places boosted the local economy. In-year admissions were difficult to manage and with 16 new pupils moving into fully subscribed areas of the Borough during the last summer term, 2013 had witnessed a 100% increase over the previous year. Officers had met colleagues in Wokingham in October to share school place planning and housing development information. Although the DfE had advised in 2006/07 that a 15% surplus of school places was inefficient, this number had subsequently been revised down to 10% and was currently 2% which left a narrow margin for parental choice and unexpected fluctuations in numbers.
- 4.30 The Council's Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) had been adopted in July 2013 and included six major housing sites located at east and west Warfield, Blue Mountain and Amen Corner in Binfield, and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) and Broadmoor in Crowthorne. In addition to the 4,995 dwellings that would be generated by these developments, there would be a further 3,900 properties from smaller sites. The provision of a new school at Jennett's Park had been delayed and problematic owing to the staggered nature of the development as a result of the deflated housing market at that time and negotiations with the developer had been necessary to obtain the Section 106 contributions towards the construction of the school.
- 4.31 Research had been commissioned to estimate the pupil yield of new developments to assist school place planning and a survey of new households provided over the past five years had indicated an average yield per household as follows:
- 1 bed unit = none
 - 2 bed unit = 0.15 primary and 0.05 secondary
 - 3 bed unit = 0.58 primary and 0.17 secondary
 - 4 bed unit = 0.43 primary and 0.35 secondary
 - 5+ bed unit = 0.62 primary and 0.43 secondary
- 4.32 The presentation included the anticipated number of new dwellings and the primary and secondary yield for each development site. It was necessary to estimate the mix of dwellings in a development until planning applications were submitted. Forecasting would be based on mix and yield in Jennett's Park and The Parks as they were the most recent developments in the Borough. Tensions arose as developers sought higher densities than the planning function wished. Social housing, which were one or two bedroom units, were built first so the pupil yield increased later as the larger houses were constructed. The site allocation plan for Amen Corner included two new primary schools which would feed into the secondary school to be provided at Blue Mountain. The Amen Corner site was adjacent to the boundary with

Wokingham Borough and it was anticipated that land on the far side of the boundary would be developed also increasing pressure for school places. Providing space for a third form of entry would assist with meeting future demand. Children emanating from the developments at Warfield would feed into Garth Hill College or Blue Mountain School necessitating a change to the College's designated area in order to align with new and expanded schools. Shared designated areas were possible and there were some in Bracknell Forest. Work was currently being undertaken in respect of the review of designated areas. Changes to designated areas, which could be contentious, needed to be decided 18 months in advance of the opening of a new school. They were the subject of consultation and publication.

- 4.33 A two FE school would be provided to serve the TRL development and pupils would feed into Easthampstead School together with pupils from Jennett's Park, filling its spare capacity. There would be insufficient new houses to warrant a school for the Broadmoor development. Wildmoor Heath School was located nearby and would be expanded to cater for the additional pupils who would subsequently attend Edgbarrow School, or possibly Sandhurst School in which case a change to its designated area would be required. There was currently a surplus of approximately 30 pupil places at the latter school. Although the provision of a 6th form unit at Edgbarrow School had freed some space, one additional form of entry would be required to meet the extra demand and pressure in its designated area. A planning pre-application had been submitted in respect of the Broadmoor site. Blue Mountain would offer a combination of primary, secondary and special educational needs schools in a learning village and the secondary school would cater for the local development, north Bracknell, Warfield and Amen Corner. Expansion of the primary schools in north Bracknell would be required.
- 4.34 In terms of spatial requirements, the pupil number and site area needs for all six development sites had been calculated and sites sufficient to meet anticipated pupil numbers had been included in all of the development plans in the SALP. Negotiations with individual landowners / developers were underway and would be progressed as soon as land was allocated for housing.
- 4.35 Provisional timescales for the earliest that the new schools could be provided were September 2016 for Amen Corner, TRL and Warfield West; September 2018 for Blue Mountain; and September 2019 for Warfield East. However, some slippage was possible, particularly if housing construction was delayed, and risk management was undertaken. The timescales were subject to site acquisitions, planning permissions, funding, identifying suitable providers and designated area consultations. As in the case of Jennett's Park School, pupil numbers would be controlled when new schools opened and additional forms of entry would be added as developments progressed to reflect the growing demand without having spare capacity which could be sought and occupied by pupils from outside the area ultimately disadvantaging those living in the designated area.
- 4.36 Annual admission arrangements were reviewed every year, published and subject to consultation prior to agreement by the Executive. A national School Adjudicator ruling had specified that siblings did not have a higher priority than designated area pupils and therefore a change made to the local arrangements in favour of siblings had been reversed removing some flexibility. School place offer letters made it extremely clear that siblings could be disadvantaged if

offers were accepted by out of DA pupils although twins were an exception to that treatment.

- 4.37 Estimated costs and funding sources associated with all proposed new schools were provided. There was capital funding of £7.5m in 2013/14 derived from DfE Targeted Basic Need Grant Allocation of £2.9m, applied for DfE Targeted Basic Need Grant of £3.8m, developer contributions of £0.1m and other contributions such as planned maintenance totalling £0.7m. Continuity of budget periods assisted with planning school place provision and the Government had invited bids for future funding need, which were demonstrated and supported by the SPP. The cost of new school places, including Jennett's Park School, had been covered by DfE capital grants and developer contributions over the past three to four years and it was hoped that this position would continue with similar levels of capital grant funding being made available by the Government in future years, however, that was not known at this stage. Although design work relating to the proposed new schools was funded, construction was not funded and therefore financing remained a risk. The Council's capital programme was agreed by the Executive each year.
- 4.38 The Working Group received an oversight of school place procedures which explained the process, governance arrangements and member involvement in relation to the triggers, strategic aspects, planning measures and delivery arrangements. The process consisted of the SPP, School Capacity Strategy, Capital Programme and finally implementation. Governance was carried out via the Pupil Places Planning Project Board, the Education Capital Project Board and Executive approval. Member involvement consisted of the Executive Members for Children, Young People and Learning and for Transformation and Finance, Portfolio Review Groups and the Executive. The Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning was a member of the Pupil Places Planning Project Board. Although the SPP was no longer a statutory document, unlike some councils, Bracknell Forest continued to prepare one as it was considered to be key to planning school places. Following approval by the Executive, the Plan was agreed by full Council.

School Place Planning Anomalies

- 4.39 In order to highlight school place planning anomalies, the Chief Officer: Strategy, Resources & Early Intervention explained the school place planning process. He advised that although the School Places Plan was no longer a statutory document, unlike some councils, Bracknell Forest continued to prepare and publish one each year as it was considered to be a useful tool to forecast demand for and plan school places.
- 4.40 On becoming an unitary authority, the Borough had inherited the school place planning system utilised by the former Berkshire County Council, which had been computer mainframe based and had become dated. As the system lacked flexibility, became increasingly difficult to operate and maintain, and did not meet the demands of an area such as Bracknell Forest experiencing significant new housing developments, it was reviewed. A new system was then developed and introduced in 2012 which incorporated a sophisticated spreadsheet generating various forecasting models and scenarios. The new system took account of new housing forecasts and processed local data provided by sources including GPs, the NHS and the Office for National Statistics. Although it was challenging to predict future school place needs, officers were confident that the new system provided accurate forecasts and a

degree of certainty. Review of actual outcomes compared with forecast outcomes over the past few years helped to inform this statement. The factors which impacted on school place planning varied from borough to borough and whilst multi-ethnicity played a part in Slough, this was not the case in Bracknell Forest where new housing development was the most significant factor. A survey was undertaken every three years to establish the numbers of children in new houses to inform school place forecasting. This was last undertaken in 2013. The forecasting model calculated the amount of pupils likely to be generated by the number of bedrooms in a property. Although the Department liaised closely with the Council's town planning section regarding the type and timeline of new houses, it was more difficult to predict and monitor expansion of existing properties, through extension or conversion of space, particularly when planning permission was not required.

- 4.41 Bracknell Forest had always fulfilled its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places and typically 80% were in the pupil's home designated area. Although a 15% surplus of school places had been the target in the past, the DfE had advised in 2006/07 that this amount was costly and inefficient and therefore the contingency percentage had been reduced to 5% generally across the Borough and was only 2% in some areas reducing to zero in specific wards, risking the Council's ability to fulfil its duty. This reduction in spare capacity together with expansion had enabled an additional 4,000 new school places, 3,500 at primary and 500 at secondary, to be provided in Bracknell Forest over the past four years. Expansion of schools by the addition of surge classrooms to provide an extra form of entry and new school build assisted with meeting demand. Jennett's Park School had been designed to have three forms of entry if required. All schools had been surveyed over the past three to four years to ascertain whether they had sufficient space to allow expansion. Additional classes had been added at Meadowvale, Holly Spring, Crown Wood and Sandy Lane schools and some schools offered three forms of entry. There was added pressure when people moved into the Borough after the allocation of places and created pressure for more school places. The 16 additional pupils who moved into Bracknell Forest closely following the allocation of places in summer 2013 had been accommodated with some difficulty. When placed in a school more than two miles from their home, primary pupils were entitled to transport funded by the Council, for up to 7 years, and therefore all efforts were made to place them within that distance.
- 4.42 Co-ordinating new school build with housing development was problematic as the first to take up residence often moved in before construction of the school serving the development had been completed, as was the case with Jennett's Park. However, spaces had been available at nearby Great Hollands School and a new footpath link to that school had been provided. There were indices to calculate Section 106 contributions from developers towards the provision of new school build based on the retail price index which could fluctuate. As balancing finances and maintaining a cash flow were challenging, it was sometimes necessary for the Council to borrow money to fund building work if the number of houses built at the time was insufficient to trigger the payment of a contribution. The Jennett's Park development consisted of 1,500 houses and the trigger had been the 456th house constructed. The building of new schools at the beginning of a development by developers to the Council's specification at their own cost was preferable to collecting contributions and this approach would be pursued with future developments. As this lowered school construction costs and good local new schools were an incentive to house buying, this approach would benefit both the Council and builders. Although the

two form entry school built at Jennett's Park was due to cost £6.5m, the construction cost had been £2m lower as the developer had built the school. The re-provision of Garth Hill College had cost approximately £40m with no additional costs falling to the Council's budgets.

- 4.43 School place waiting lists were maintained for one year at a time after which a pupil would need to re-apply for a place on the list for next year. However, most children were content once they had settled into a school and parents decided to avoid the upheaval of moving them. When application forms were processed places were allocated firstly to those who had completed the form on time where places were available. A subsequent allocation round then followed to process late application forms. Some parents disadvantaged themselves by incorrectly completing forms, for example by making one preference only when three were invited or by selecting the same school for all three preferences. A Member highlighted the importance of parents making timely visits to potential schools and having discussions with headteachers before forming preferences. The Admissions Code was complex and the Council offered assistance and support to parents making applications which included staff visiting schools and giving presentations to explain the applications process for which they received positive feedback. School place offer letters and e-mails were despatched on a Friday and a small team of staff would work on the following Saturday morning to offer advice and respond to queries and concerns. The letters highlighted that parents needed to give careful consideration to matters such as siblings and transport when accepting place offers, particularly for out of designated area schools.
- 4.44 As there were ten more places at Ascot Heath Infant School than at its Junior School this was an issue. Although the Council had approached the Junior School with a view to increasing the number of school places, this had proved unsuccessful and as it was a VC school the Council had no power to intervene. Reducing the number of places at the Infant School would not be pursued as they were required. The planning authority had stated that expanding the site of the Junior School would be problematic owing to access issues. The expansion of New Scotland Hill School was also sought although this was prevented by the entrance which was inadequate to cater for additional pupils.

Designated Areas

- 4.45 The Chief Officer: Strategy, Resources & Early Intervention gave a presentation in respect of school designated areas which were geographical boundaries for prioritising applications for school places. Residence in the DA was the highest priority for the majority of school places. Changes to designated areas were subject to statutory consultation and could be contentious and politically sensitive. Although there had been no DA changes in the Borough over the past four years associated with the provision of the additional 4,000 school places, it would become necessary to review boundaries owing to the proposed new housing developments.
- 4.46 The Working Group received maps of the current designated area boundaries of primary and secondary schools in the Borough, which identified three shared primary designated areas, one in north Bracknell and two in Sandhurst. The shared areas were historical and not favoured as they could cause confusion and concern for parents. The impending review of designated area boundaries would seek the creation of areas for the proposed new schools, adjustments to existing boundaries and the removal of shared areas. The school(s) to which

the shared areas were allocated would reflect the associated consultation outcomes.

- 4.47 Members were advised that in March 2012 the Executive had deferred the decision to change designated area boundaries pending the approval of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document which identified sites for new housing developments. The document was subsequently approved by the Executive in July 2013. The new housing programmes were driving the timescales for the new schools and plans for the three new schools at Amen Corner, Warfield West and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) site were now well advanced. The approach to changing designated area boundaries consisted of detailed briefings for Executive and Ward Members, internal consultations with headteachers and governors, separate statutory public consultations for each new school, reflection of Bracknell Forest's vision of 'local schools for local people, wherever possible', sufficient designated area pupils for each school to operate efficiently and successfully, schools not to be in competition for pupils, sufficient allowance for parental preference, and an open, fair and transparent process. The Working Group was reminded of the estimated opening dates of the six proposed new schools although some slippage was possible.
- 4.48 It was feasible that the review of designated areas would be undertaken in two phases. As there was no guarantee that the developments would occur, options to manage the process were being considered. It was necessary to consult on designated area boundary changes 18 months prior to the September opening of a new school and therefore timescales were tight and, as building was at the developer's discretion, the Council's control was limited. As VA and private schools did not have designated areas this complicated the admissions process. It was estimated that 15% of pupils living in new developments attended private schools and it was possible that this was also the case with existing housing. It was envisaged that planning applications for some of the new developments would be under consideration shortly which would bring some clarity to the process and timescales. Of the 1,200 new homes to be constructed in Warfield West, the developer had indicated that 87 would be built in the first phase. It was felt that TRL, where 400 new dwellings were to be constructed, may be one of the earlier sites to be developed. This amount of housing would generate sufficient pupils for a two form of entry primary school. An adjacent area in Wokingham Borough, at Hatch Ride, was also due to be developed and it was possible that some children living there could also attend a school at the TRL site. Reference was made to cross Borough border movement concerning Charters Secondary, Oaklands and Hatch Ride Primary Schools.
- 4.49 It was acknowledged that the infrastructure of Bracknell Forest facilitated walking to local schools without crossing main roads.

Annual Admissions Arrangements

- 4.50 The Working Group was briefed in respect of annual admissions arrangements. The arrangements set out Bracknell Forest's:
- Published Admission Numbers
 - Selection criteria
 - Application dates
 - Siblings criteria

- Waiting lists
- Cross border issues
- Admissions appeals
- In year admissions
- Application Process

4.51 Statutory duties were stated in the School Admissions Code 2012. As an Admissions Authority, the Council was obliged to produce and consult on its admissions arrangements annually with the consultation meeting the following timescales:

- Consultation between 1 November and 1 March
- Executive/Executive Member sign off by 15 April
- Publication on the website by 1 May
- Publication of admissions booklets by 1 September

4.52 Secondary Admissions for September 2014 were as follows:

Numbers:

- 1285 places were available in Bracknell Forest schools for year 7 pupils.
- 1177 applications had been received from Bracknell Forest residents for a variety of schools (1000 of these were for Bracknell Forest schools and 177 were for schools outside the Borough).
- 257 applications had also been received from non Bracknell Forest residents for places in the Borough's schools (these applications may not be first preference for local schools).

Process:

- The closing date for applications was 31 October 2013.
- Allocation was ongoing.
- Offer e-mails would be circulated on 1 March and offer letters posted on 3 March, 2014.
- On-line applications – 767.
- Paper applications – 410.

4.53 Primary Admissions for September 2014 were as follows:

Numbers:

- 1491 places were available in Bracknell Forest schools for children commencing in the reception year (there was room for expansion in schools if necessary).
- At the time of the meeting 1512 applications had been received from Bracknell Forest residents.
- The Council was aware of a further 59 Bracknell Forest children who were yet to apply and two reminders had been circulated. However, it was possible that some would not apply for places as they were intending to attend private schools or move out of the Borough.
- On-line applications – 1058.
- Paper applications – 513.

Process:

- The closing date for applications was 15 January 2014.
 - Offer e-mails and letters would be despatched on 16 April 2014.
- 4.54 Although the cross border circumstances led to Bracknell Forest's secondary schools experiencing an overall ingress of out of Borough pupils, this was not the case at primary level where a net egress of local children occurred.
- 4.55 Whilst primary school places in September 2014 were currently oversubscribed by approximately 71, this number was expected to reduce in the meantime and could change until the first day of term. Surge classes were in place in key areas and additional funding of £10k was available to provide additional school places although this would not be spent unless it became necessary.
- 4.56 Much work had been invested in successfully developing the new electronic on-line application system which was less cumbersome to operate than a paper system. The new system facilitated automatic cross referencing checks on designated areas etc and although some need for manual checking currently remained, particularly in the interests of testing a new system, the whole process would become automatic in the future. As the small Admissions Team became under pressure owing to the increase in work during the admissions process, additional staffing resources were utilised. The work required certain skills and therefore regular experienced staff were appointed in place of agency staff, who covered maternity leave.

Allocations Whiteboard

- 4.57 The Working Group viewed the School Places Allocations Whiteboard which was created by the projection of an Excel spreadsheet onto a white display board (an image of the Allocations Whiteboard at the time of the meeting is attached at Appendix 4). By setting out the planned admission number (PAN) and the number of places allocated for each year group for every school in the Borough, the Allocations Whiteboard provided up to the minute information concerning school place allocations at a glance and was utilised and greatly appreciated by other officers of the Council, such as town planners and accountants, in addition to admissions officers. The Allocations Whiteboard also indicated which schools had waiting lists, surge classes and nursery classes and those where caution should be applied when allocating places, for example, designated area pupils only in order to balance the number of pupils with SEN or conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). By showing the existence of waiting lists and the number of places allocated in each year group of schools, the Allocations Whiteboard also provided an instant indicator of parental preference, the waning or increasing of the popularity of schools, and expansion to accommodate the growing number of pupils starting school in recent years. Surge classes were generally added to cater for more children in lower year groups, but in theory some could be added to higher year groups to accommodate in-year admissions. Although increasing pupil numbers created difficulties for accommodating in-year admissions, the instant visibility of the Allocations Whiteboard assisted; for example on the day of the meeting the admissions officers had been able to offer places at the same school to three children of a family which had recently moved into the Borough. Where the preferred school was fully subscribed, in-year applicants were placed on a waiting list for one term in accordance with legislation and then asked if they wished to remain on the list. It was common for parents to decline

this offer once their child had settled into the allocated school in order to avoid the disruption of changing schools. However, VA schools sought entries to remain on their waiting lists for the entire academic year.

- 4.58 30 April was the school place acceptance deadline and 400 reminders had needed to be sent out. At the date of the meeting, 24 late applications had been received and more were expected. The narrow margin of spare places was anticipated to be sufficient to accommodate late and in-year applications. The on-line application system continued to operate successfully and the Council's Customer Services team could accept on-line school place offers on behalf of parents if requested.
- 4.59 The Allocations database was updated as soon as a school place offer was made and the update was saved overnight. Although the system had been in use for two years, it was not possible to derive allocation trends from it. Officers had been advised that it would not be feasible to re-provide the Allocations Whiteboard in Time Square following the re-location of the Children, Young People and Learning Department to that building. Although the existing process and system would continue at Time Square and admissions officers would be able to view the spreadsheet on a computer screen, other staff would not have such rapid access to the information without the Allocations Whiteboard. The Working Group felt that there must be means to re-provide the Allocations Whiteboard and suggested that efforts should be made to continue this valuable allocations tool. A copy of the Allocations Whiteboard screen and current waiting list information was e-mailed to the Working Group for its information.
- 4.60 It was not anticipated that pupil numbers in existing schools would reduce following the provision of new schools in the north of the Borough. However, the new schools would ease pressure for places.
- 4.61 Attention was drawn to examples of schools with classes of up to 36 pupils in other boroughs. In response, officers advised that the only reason a class in Bracknell Forest would rise above 30, the number limited by infant class size legislation at Key Stage 1, would be due to a successful appeal allowed by an independent Appeals Panel.
- 4.62 In-year applications were made to the maintaining authority. In-year leavers were monitored via leavers' forms which were submitted to the Council by schools. Moves between Bracknell Forest schools were simpler to track than moves into or out of the Borough and the arrival of new children could be unknown unless applications for school places were made. There were regulations governing children missing from education and cases would be referred to Education Welfare for investigation. Occasionally, telephone reporting of school age children seen out of school during school hours occurred and on receipt the Council would network and liaise with adjoining local authorities on such matters.
- 4.63 The military covenant concerning the schooling of children of members of military forces could be an issue as there was a requirement for the Council to respond to posting orders to place such children in their local school and to provide a place in a local school when a member of the military finished their service and settled in an area. This impacted in particular on College Town Junior and Sandhurst Secondary Schools, as they were local to the Royal Military Academy, but could impact on any school. As postings changed and

children left the area, there were currently available school places in the area giving some flexibility to accommodate new arrivals. People retiring from the armed forces would apply for school places for their children in the usual way. The covenant was designed to avoid giving the armed forces any advantage or disadvantage in the school system. As there was some slight confusion as to whether the covenant referred to 'local school' or 'designated area school', which could have implications, it was suggested that the wording and interpretation of the covenant be clarified.

- 4.64 The Government's assumption was that new school places would be provided in academies or through the expansion of an existing good or outstanding school, possibly on a different site. If a school expanded then the senior management would need to be structured to best effect, for example an existing headteacher might take responsibility for both sites or there could be an Executive Headteacher responsible for a federation of two schools, with a deputy headteacher at both. There was a requirement for the original school to be judged as good or excellent in order for it to pursue academy status. Academies were able to refuse entry to a child and where all schools were academies in a borough this could be problematic.

Analysis of Preference Allocation Trends

- 4.65 The Working Group considered a trend analysis of preference allocation over recent years in order to gauge success and likely parental satisfaction. The analysis, which is attached to this report at Appendix 3, provided the number of secondary and primary applications received each year from 2010/11 to date together with the percentage of parents offered one of their preferences over that timeframe and the percentage offered their first, second or third preference in 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- 4.66 Parents were encouraged to choose realistic preferences and state the maximum of three preferences invited on the application form to maximise the possibility of being offered a place at a preferred school. For example, if a parent identified a preference for an out of area school or one for which they did not meet the application criteria, such as church attendance, their application may not be as successful as if they had expressed realistic preferences, particularly if, as a result, they missed the opportunity for their child to attend the local school. The preferences were intended to be equal and the admissions criteria were applied to all preferences. In the event that a child met the criteria of two or more preferences, a place would be offered at the school with the highest listing on the application form where the criteria were met. Waiting lists were composed in the order that criteria were met and places would be offered on that basis also. The Working Group was reminded that home to school distance was measured to distinguish between children living in the designated area competing for a school place, with the shortest distance taking priority, whereas children with SEN took priority for placements as statements would usually identify the school that a particular pupil should attend and related discussions would take place between the admissions and SEN teams. There were occasionally exceptional circumstances where admissions criteria were not adhered to and there had been no instances of siblings being denied places in the current admissions round.
- 4.67 The Working Group received details of the allocations of primary and secondary places in 2014/15 based on the initial allocation of applications received by the respective deadlines together with the combination of allocation criteria

categories for each school. This information provided parents with a statement on how places were allocated at their preferred school should they wish to exercise their right to make an appeal.

Pupil Places Planning Board and the Education Capital Programme Board

- 4.68 The Working Group discussed the Pupil Places Planning Board and the Education Capital Programme Board with officers.
- 4.69 The Pupil Places Planning Board comprised various officers of the Council involved in planning pupil places, including admissions, early years, pre and post-16 and town planners, who discussed factors that influenced it such as the risk schedule, housing completions and parental views. Data was fed into a plan, based on the pupil place projections. An external company had advised on the process and reviewed forecasts and estimates to ensure that they were sufficiently robust. A two page risk summary document (attached at Appendix 5) was circulated to the Working Group.
- 4.70 The Education Capital Programme Board governed the capital programme with a view to meeting demand for new school places focusing on areas of need for additional places and establishing whether there was potential for expansion of existing schools or whether new build was required. Projects were progressed through briefing, design and building stages. The Board met monthly and was chaired by the Director of Children, Young People and Learning. Membership included the Executive Members for Children, Young People and Learning and for Transformation and Finance. The programme included planned maintenance works and smaller projects concerning matters including disabled access, Legionella and asbestos. The Board was subject to much scrutiny and a project initiation document was forwarded to the Working Group.
- 4.71 In this connection, the Working Group was advised that the Head of Property and Admissions was a member of the national Education Building and Development Officers Group (EBDOG) which provided an opportunity for education building and development officers, normally working within the confines of their own local authority, to discuss the impact of proposed changes and issues arising, meet in a different forum, and share experience and knowledge. The Group had been successful in accessing DfE funding streams recently.

5. Conclusions

From its investigations, the Working Group concludes that:

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest has a legal duty to provide school places to children and young people of statutory school age. The demand for school places is difficult to forecast as many factors are outside the Council's control. Also, the Council needs to operate efficiently and not have too many unused school places. This is a difficult balancing act.
- 5.2 The Council has a robust school admissions process in place and meets its statutory obligation to provide sufficient school places for Bracknell Forest often in challenging circumstances such as new residential development resulting in increasing pupil numbers and the displacement of pupils from neighbouring local authorities into Bracknell Forest schools. This conclusion is confirmed by the DfE's view that all local authorities are meeting this obligation to date.
- 5.3 Officers are progressing plans to provide new schools and places to meet future demand resulting from the proposed new residential developments in the Borough in a timely and robust manner.
- 5.4 To ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligation to provide sufficient school places for Bracknell Forest, the allocation of school places and designated areas should be reviewed in the future following the provision of new schools in the Borough and the proposed new housing developments.
- 5.5 The high level of school place preferences allocated is an indicator of parental satisfaction with a successful admissions process. The fact that no siblings were denied a place at the same school in 2014/15 is a further indicator of this. However, as there is no data to confirm parental satisfaction other than the number of admission appeals submitted, a survey of parents of all Year 7 pupils who transferred to secondary school in September 2014 would be informative.
- 5.6 Publicising the presentations given to parents in respect of the allocations process will increase attendance and improve knowledge and understanding of criteria and issues of oversubscription leading to informed preferences and possible improved outcomes for children and parents. Encouraging parents to visit schools earlier in the admissions process and attend school open days will also facilitate well informed preferences.
- 5.7 As there are no free schools in the Borough it is not possible for the Working Group to assess their impact on school places. The conversion of one school to an academy has had minimal impact on school places in Bracknell Forest as it is a VA church school with the power to decide its own admission arrangements. Also, the school continues to buy into many services provided by the Council. However, the adoption of academy status by more schools would have an impact, particular in the case of a local community school which could lead to a boundary change or deletion of a designated area, possibly leaving part of Bracknell Forest without a designated school. The fact that only one school in the Borough has opted to assume academy status is a testament to the support and effective services offered by the Council to its schools.

- 5.8 The Council has been successful in obtaining DfE funding to provide additional schools places and its good budgetary skills and management of the capital programme have been demonstrated.
- 5.9 Full consultation, including meetings with parents, in respect of proposed changes to designated areas associated with new school places provision should be undertaken.
- 5.10 The needs of local children and young people with SEN are being catered for within Bracknell Forest and proposals for additional SEN provision are included in the planning for new schools. The Working Group feel that it is important for such pupils to be educated within their local area to maintain community links and minimise travelling, reflecting the Council's aim to provide local schools for local people, wherever possible.
- 5.11 The wording of the military covenant should be checked to clarify whether it relates to local or designated area schools as the implications of this are significant.
- 5.12 The Allocations database is a useful admissions tool and consideration should be given to re-provision of the Whiteboard in Time Square when the Children, Young People and Learning Department relocates to that building.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning that:

- 6.1 To ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligation to provide sufficient school places for Bracknell Forest, the allocation of school places and designated areas be reviewed in the future following the provision of new schools in the Borough and the proposed new housing developments.
- 6.2 A survey of parents of all Year 7 pupils who transferred to secondary school in September 2014 be undertaken as a further means to gauge parental satisfaction with the admissions process.
- 6.3 The presentations given to parents in respect of the allocations process be publicised to increase attendance and understanding of criteria and oversubscription leading to informed preferences and possible improved outcomes for children and parents.
- 6.4 Parents be encouraged to visit schools earlier in the admissions process and attend school open days in order to facilitate well informed preferences.
- 6.5 Full consultation, including meetings with parents, in respect of proposed changes to designated areas associated with new school places provision be undertaken.
- 6.6 The wording of the military covenant be checked to clarify whether it relates to local or designated area schools as the implications of this are significant.
- 6.7 Consideration be given to re-providing the Admissions Whiteboard in Time Square when the Children, Young People and Learning Department relocates there to maintain the efficiency of the admissions process.

7. Glossary

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BFC	Bracknell Forest Council
CE	Church of England
DA	Designated area
DfE	Department for Education
EBDOG	Education Building and Development Officers Group
FE	Forms of entry
NAO	National Audit Office
NOR	Numbers on roll
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
O&S	Overview and Scrutiny
PAN	Planned/published admission number
SALP	Site Allocations Local Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SPP	School Places Plan
TRL	Transport Research Laboratory
VA	Voluntary Aided
VC	Voluntary Controlled

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
2013/14**

WORK PROGRAMME 2013 – 2014

Terms of Reference for:

SCHOOL PLACES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Purpose of this Working Group / anticipated value of its work:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | To undertake a review of the Council's arrangements for planning and providing places for children in Bracknell Forest's schools, to include the school admissions process and national comparisons. |
|----|--|

Key Objectives:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | To establish whether there are sufficient school places in Bracknell Forest to meet current and future demand. |
| 2. | To determine whether the planning and provision of school places is sufficiently robust. |
| 3. | To consider the greater complexity introduced by the Academies and Free Schools legislation in the planning of school places. |
| 4. | To explore whether the school admissions process is sufficiently robust and not hampered by a shortage of school places. |
| 5. | To review the education capital programme and the availability of funding for school places. |

Scope of the work:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | The planning and provision of school places. |
| 2. | The implications Academies and Free Schools have on pupil place planning and provision. |
| 3. | The school admissions process. |
| 4. | The education capital programme. |
| 5. | Birth rates, demographic trends and the impact of new housing. |
| 6. | School place planning anomalies. |
| 7. | Designated areas. |

Not included in the scope:

- | | |
|----|------------------------|
| 1. | Private school places. |
| 2. | |

Terms of Reference prepared by:

Andrea Carr

Terms of Reference agreed by:

School Places Overview & Scrutiny Working Group

Working Group Structure:	Councillors Mrs Birch, Kensall & Mrs Temperton and Mr Briscoe
Working Group Lead Member:	Mr Briscoe
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Dr Barnard
Departmental Link Officer:	Chris Taylor

BACKGROUND:

1. In the light of growing national concerns over insufficient numbers of school places, it was agreed to add this review to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work programme in 2013/14 to enable the Panel to establish a working group to undertake a review of the planning and provision of school places in the Borough to ensure that demands are being met.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL TO ADDRESS:

1. Are there sufficient school places in Bracknell Forest to meet current and future demand?
2. Is the planning of school places sufficiently robust?
3. Is the education capital programme meeting the funding of any additional school places required?
4. Does the planning of school places give parents a reasonable preference over which school their child attends?
5. Is the school admissions process sufficiently robust?

INFORMATION GATHERING:

Witnesses to be invited / met

Name	Organisation/Position	Reason for Inviting / Meeting
Janette Karklins	BFC, Director of Children, Young People & Learning	To provide information on planning and provision of pupil places.
Chris Taylor	BFC, Head of Property & Admissions	To provide information on planning and provision of pupil places.
School Places Planning Board	BFC	To explore the pupil forecasting and school place planning processes.
Education Capital Programme Board	BFC	To explore the funding of additional school place requirements.
Councillor Dr Barnard	BFC, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning	To provide the Executive Member's perspective on school place provision.

Site Visits

Location	Purpose of visit
None	-

Key Documents / Background Data / Research

1. School Places Plan 2013-2018
2. School Places Executive Report and Annexes 16 October 2012
3. Work to secure sufficient secondary school places in Bracknell Forest - Action arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission 01.07.13
4. Capital Funding for New School Places National Audit Office / DoE 15 March 2013
5. School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as amended)

TIMESCALE

Starting: Autumn 2013

Ending: Spring 2014

OUTPUTS TO BE PRODUCED

1. Report of the review with findings and recommendations.

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

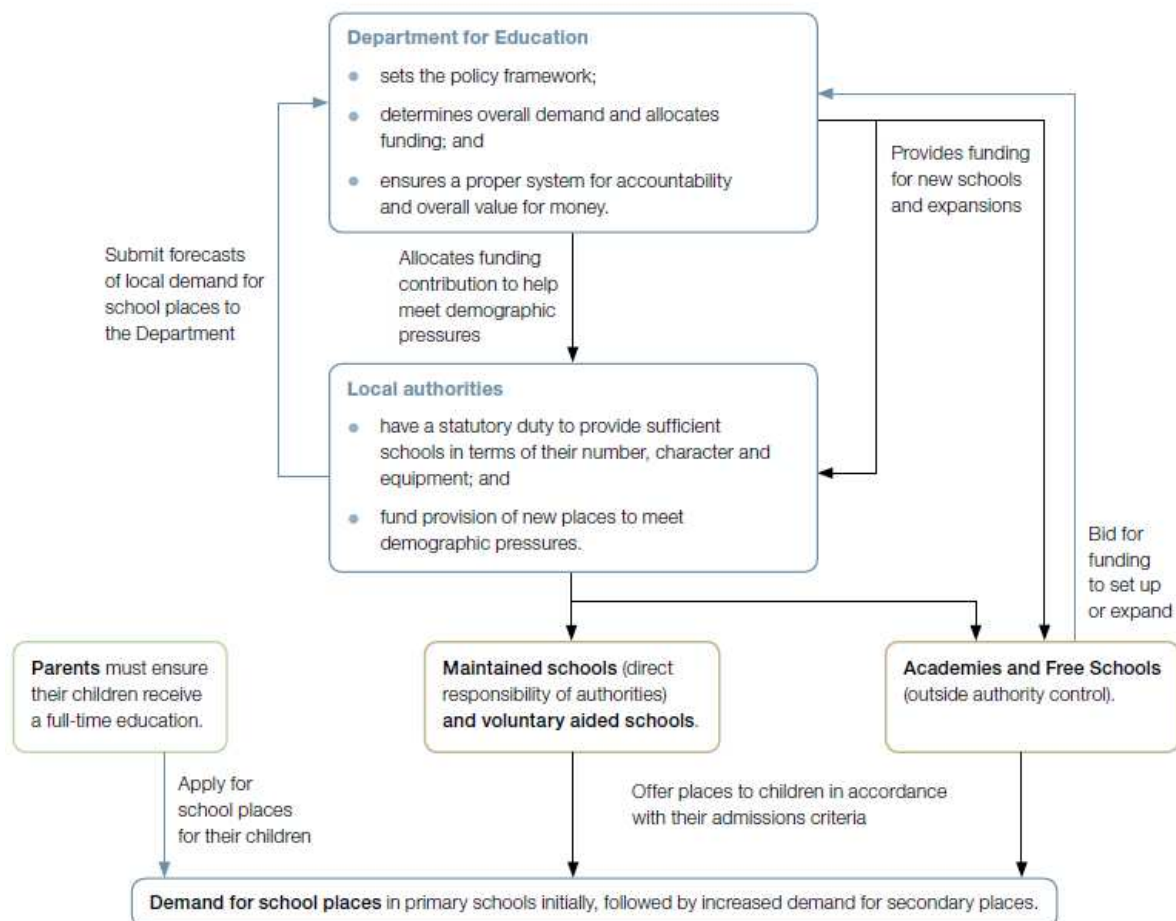
Body	Date
Report to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel.	11 June 2014

MONITORING / FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Details	Date
Reporting to Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel by Executive Member.	Oral or written report	2014

Roles and responsibilities in providing school places

The Department is responsible for the policy framework and overall value for money. Local authorities are responsible for delivering sufficient schools



- Funding body ➡ Information flow
- Funded school ➡ Funding flow
- Parents

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education documents and legislation

Analysis of preference allocation

Secondary Admissions

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
No of Applications	1163	1175	1195	1082	1211
Offered one of their preferences	96%	97%	94%	96%	93%

	2013/14	2014/15
Offered 1 st preference	81%	78%
Offered 2 nd preference	10%	11%
Offered 3 rd preference	5%	4%

Primary Admissions

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
No of Applications	1338	1410	1519	1496	1512
Offered one of their preferences	94%	95%	93%	96%	97%

	2013/14	2014/15
Offered 1 st preference	84%	87%
Offered 2 nd preference	9%	8%
Offered 3 rd preference	3%	2%

For further information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest, please visit our website on <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/scrutiny> or contact us at:

Overview and Scrutiny, Chief Executive's Office, Bracknell Forest Council, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 1AQ,
or email us at overview.scrutiny@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
or telephone the O&S Officer team on 01344 352283

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