

TO: EXECUTIVE
DATE: 28 JANUARY 2020

SCHOOL PLACES PLAN AND CAPACITY STRATEGY
Executive Director, People

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

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

2. RECOMMENDATION

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

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

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

Forecasting School Places

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

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

School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy

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

Sufficient School Places

- 5.6 Forecasts indicate that there will be sufficient school places across all mainstream sectors and in all planning areas to meet the forecast demand.

Costs and Funding – Capital

- 5.7 The Council is unlikely to receive DfE capital Basic Need grant (BNG) in future years because of the current surpluses of school places. DfE calculate BNG on data submitted by local authorities in the annual Surplus Capacity and Places return (SCAP).
- 5.8 If proposed new primary school at Bucklers Park (formerly TRL) is built, then the Council will incur capital costs associated with overseeing the developer construct process estimated at £700k. Pupil yields from the new housing at Bucklers Park have been much lower than previously anticipated and unless pupil yields rise, there is no forecast need for this school to be built during the 2020-24 forecast period.
- 5.9 The proposed new primary schools at Amen Corner South and Warfield East have been put on hold, however agreements have been proposed as part of the S106 negotiations with the developers to keep the options to build the schools open up until 10 years after the commencement of each development allowing for these new schools to be built in future years if required. The land and construction costs would be expected to be provided as part of the future S106 agreements yet to be agreed.
- 5.10 The previously committed growth of Kings Academy Binfield will entail the Council paying the capital cost for furniture and equipment for the future classrooms as these come on stream between 2020 and 2024.
- 5.11 There are bids on the 2020/21 BFC Capital Programme to re-order school accommodation totalling £657k to facilitate future reductions in PANs and to support school improvement.
- 5.12 The cost of creating additional SEN facilities required as part of this SPP will be brought to the Executive as bids on the capital programme in future years.

Costs and Funding - Revenue

- 5.13 Schools are supported by providing a five-year income budget forecast based on the pupil forecasts in the SPP. The financial model to schools is adapted to present the most recent October census to align to the DfE budget setting requirements.
- 5.14 If the proposed new primary schools at Bucklers Park (formerly TRL), Amen Corner South and Warfield East are not built then there may be abortive capital costs equivalent to the expenditure so far incurred in the design of these new schools amounting to £126k. This would be financed from the balance held in the earmarked reserve created for this purpose.
- 5.15 Where pupils are offered a school place involving travel distances to school exceeding 2 miles for primary aged pupils or 3 miles for secondary aged pupils, Home to School Transport costs are paid by the Council. Parents are not however eligible for Home to School Transport if they have been offered a school place within the distance, but instead choose to take up a place at a school beyond the distance. Having surplus places reduces the likelihood that Home to School Transport will be incurred.

6. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

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

Director of Finance

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

Director of Place, Planning & Regeneration

- 6.3 The School Places Plan recognises the need to review the addition of Primary Schools at Bucklers Park, Warfield East and Amen Corner South. These were all identified as part of the Site allocations Local Plan. It will be important that the opportunity to secure these schools at a later date is not lost if pupil forecasts see a rise in numbers above current forecast levels.
- 6.4 The Draft Local Plan identifies the potential need for additional primary provision at the Jealott's Hill site, this will be important to serve this new community and reduce the need to travel for primary age children. At this time, it is considered that there is unlikely to be the need for new secondary provision as part of the draft plan. However, this matter will be kept under review.

Equalities Impact Assessment

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

Strategic Risk Management Issues

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

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

7. CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 The School Sufficiency Board (SSB)
- 7.2 Capital Programme Steering Group (PSG)
- 7.3 Schools Forum
- 7.4 Oxford CE Diocese
- 7.5 Portsmouth RC Diocese

Method of Consultation

- 7.6 SSB were consulted at their meeting on 29/11/19.
- 7.7 PSG were consulted at their meeting on 16/12/19.
- 7.8 Schools Forum were consulted at their meeting on 16/12/19.
- 7.9 The two Diocesan Authorities were consulted by email on 10/12/19.

Representations Received

- 7.10 SSB approved the draft SSP for adoption.
- 7.11 PSG observed that the increasing surplus of primary school places would potentially free up accommodation in schools for other compatible purposes.
- 7.12 Schools Forum noted the forecast reduction in primary school rolls and highlighted the need for individual schools to be aware of how and when this might affect them. Further consultation with individual schools will take place in the 2020 Spring term arising from this.
- 7.13 The Oxford CE Diocesan Authority noted that the surplus of places would mean that more parents would secure their preferred places at popular schools outside of typical catchment boundaries.

Background Papers

Appendix A School Places Plan & Capacity Strategy 2020 - 2024

Contacts for Further Information

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