

**TO: EXECUTIVE**  
**DATE: 09 FEBRUARY 2021**

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**SCHOOL PLACES PLAN AND CAPACITY STRATEGY**  
**Executive Director, People**

**1 PURPOSE OF DECISION**

- 1.1 To approve the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25. These were last approved by the Executive in January 2020 and have now been updated to cover the five-year period from 2021 to 2025.
- 1.2 Forecasts indicate that there will be sufficient school places to meet the anticipated demand for 2021-25 across all mainstream sectors, with no indications of pressure points in any planning area.
- 1.3 The broad strategy continues to be to reduce the numbers of surplus school places in the Borough, and this is linked to the Council's Transformation Programme including creative provision for children and young people with special needs.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **To approve the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2021-25 in the attached Appendix A.**

**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**

Context

- 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.

School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy

- 5.2 The School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy is attached as Appendix A, which forecasts demand for school places for;

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- Early Years
- Primary
- Secondary
- Post 16
- SEN

### Sufficient School Places

- 5.3 Following a manifesto change in 2019, planning for secondary school places is now undertaken across the whole Borough rather than by individual planning areas. This has reduced the need for further school capacity projects at a time when there is an overall surplus of secondary school places, which in turn has significantly reduced the Council's capital costs.
- 5.4 This acknowledges that secondary aged pupils can travel between planning areas to secure a school place if their catchment area school is full. Planning for primary school places continues to be by planning area acknowledging that primary aged children have less mobility than secondary aged children when travelling to school.

### Costs and Funding – Capital

- 5.5 The DfE allocates capital grant funding for the delivery of additional school places on data submitted by local authorities in the annual Surplus Capacity and Places return (SCAP). The Council is unlikely to receive DfE capital Basic Need grant (BNG) in future years because of the current surpluses of school places.
- 5.6 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 2021-25 forecast period.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 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 2021 and 2024. Financing is in place for these costs.
- 5.9 There are projects 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. The DfE does not allocate capital grant to remove surplus places and these schemes have therefore been funded by the council.
- 5.10 The cost of creating additional SEN facilities required as part of this SPP is currently being financed from DfE specific grant for increasing SEN places (Special Provision Capital Fund). This is expected to be insufficient to finance the costs of some of the

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larger schemes currently being developed which will therefore be subject to bids of council funding through future capital programmes.

### Costs and Funding - Revenue

- 5.11 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.
- 5.12 In general, opening new schools creates a significant revenue pressure as schools tend to be built towards the start of housing developments and then fill up with pupils as building continues over a number of years. During these initial years after opening, additional costs are incurred as schools have relatively low pupil numbers and relatively high per pupil costs. These costs are not fully funded by the DfE and therefore place a pressure on budgets for all schools in the LA.
- 5.13 Schools are supported in their financial planning by providing a five-year income budget forecast based on the pupil forecasts in the SPP. The financial model to schools has been adapted to present the most recent October census to align to the DfE budget setting requirements.
- 5.14 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

The local authority has a statutory duty under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure sufficiency of school places in its area. The Plan attached is intended to ensure compliance with this legal requirement.

### Director of Finance

- 6.1 The revised pupil forecasting model, has, as expected, increased 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, including those associated with new SEN facilities and the removal of surplus places they will be presented for a decision through the council's normal budget setting process.

### Director of Place, Planning & Regeneration

- 6.2 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.

School Sufficiency Board (SSB)

- 6.3 SSB were consulted by email on 17/12/20, and comments received have been incorporated into the body of the report.

Capital Programme Steering Group (PSG)

- 6.4 PSG were consulted by email on 17/12/20, and comments received have been incorporated into the body of the report.

Schools Forum

- 6.5 SSB were consulted at their meeting on 14/01/21.

Diocesan Authorities

- 6.6 The Oxford CE Diocese and Portsmouth RC Diocese were consulted by email on 17/12/20.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.7 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

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

ISSUE		RISK	COMMENT
1	Accuracy of forecasts	LOW	A new forecasting system was introduced in 2019 and proved to be 98% accurate for the 2020 intake.
2	Co-ordination between Council teams and departments.	LOW	The 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 2021-25.
4	Surplus school places	MEDIUM	Forecasts suggest primary surpluses will increase, but secondary surpluses will decrease. Measures to reduce the surplus of primary places

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			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. Effective relationships with academies are essential.
5	Capital Cost Risk	LOW	Forecasts suggest there will be sufficient school places for the forecast period 2021-25.
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 – new schools	LOW	New schools require additional revenue funds in the initial years after opening. This is not fully funded by DfE and would likely require a top slice to existing school budgets to cover the additional cost.
8	Reputation Risk	MEDIUM	The Council could stand to be criticised if there are too many surplus school places. Reduction of surplus places is therefore a priority

Background Papers

Appendix A School Places Plan & Capacity Strategy 2021 - 2025

Contacts for Further Information

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