

TO: EXECUTIVE
DATE: 26 APRIL 2022

SCHOOL PLACES PLAN AND CAPACITY STRATEGY
Executive Director, People

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 To approve the latest School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy and to agree the vision and approach to planning for school places going forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To approve the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2022-26 in the attached Appendix A.**
- 2.2 **To note the journey for co-production and co-delivery of the future vision and approach for planning for school places between the Council and schools as set out between paragraph 5.6 and 5.13 in the report**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, which means that the Council has an ongoing role in planning for school places in Bracknell Forest.
- 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 Options are set out in the body of the report.

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The latest forecasts indicate that there will be sufficient overall school places to meet the anticipated demand for primary and secondary in 2022-26 across all mainstream sectors, with only small indications of pressure points in some planning areas in some years.

Background

- 5.2 In 2018 having highlighted the issue of the growing surplus of primary school places, the Council has taken measures to reduce surplus places which can be summarised below:
- The proposed new primary schools at Bucklers Park, Amen Corner South and Warfield East were put on hold until such time as future admission numbers might justify their construction, and this resulted in removal of 180 proposed new primary intake year places or 6 Forms of Entry (FE) from the system.

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- A largely paper exercise was then undertaken to update school net capacity assessments to align admission numbers with current accommodation and to remove old surge classrooms that were no longer needed by re-allocating these teaching spaces to alternative school use, and this resulted in the removal of a further 162 primary intake year places or 5.4FE.
- The proposed migration of Warfield CE primary school from All Saints Rise to Woodhurst would remove a further 30 primary intake year places or 1FE from the system, subject to consultation and decision by the Council.
- Following this the Council has worked with those schools which have requested to reduce their admission numbers for organisational or financial reasons, and this has resulted in the reduction of a further 135 primary and 62 secondary intake year places which is 4.5FE and 2.1FE respectively.
- In November 2021 the Executive approved the general approach to creating its future School Capacity Strategy for Bracknell Forest going forwards which included:
 - Primary Reducing surplus places
 - Secondary Monitoring numbers on roll going forwards
 - Post 16 Undertaking a review of post 16 later in 2022
 - SEND Increasing capacity, and it was hoped that surplus mainstream school accommodation might be re-purposed for SEND use.

School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2022-26

- 5.3 The School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy for 2022-26 is attached as Appendix A, which forecasts demand for school places for;
- Early Years
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Post 16
 - SEN
- 5.4 The SEND Capacity Strategy is likely to include a clear high-level plan for the short, medium and longer term for special school provision; a review of the existing SRP provision across the Borough determine what additional provision is needed, where and when and within this for best value; early indications are that two new SRP may in any case be required for secondary provision with one in South Bracknell and one in Crowthorne and Sandhurst; a Primary and Secondary Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Hub may be required
- 5.5 This plan is an update of the previous School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25 approved by the Executive in January 2021, but the Executive will note there is significantly more information in this Plan on SEND that in previous years reflecting the work that has taken place this year on current SEND provision and forecast future needs.

Co-Production and Co-Delivery of Planning for School Places

- 5.6 In November 2021 three workshops were then held with the Primary School Headteachers in North Bracknell, South Bracknell and Crowthorne & Sandhurst to invite expressions of interest from schools in making further reductions in admission numbers and for creation of SEND facilities on mainstream school sites. Headteachers welcomed this engagement although no schools offered to reduce their admission numbers as a result.
- 5.7 Primary Headteachers did however suggest that the Council should create a vision for planning for mainstream and SEND school places, including to suggest specific future proposals arising from this.
- 5.8 Both primary and secondary Headteachers have also responded with a number of expressions of interest to host new SEND facilities on their school sites, and these are currently being evaluated.
- 5.9 Council officers will work with Headteachers, Chairs of Governors and academy Trustees to develop the processes around co-production of a strategy leading to co-delivery.
- 5.10 The following is a draft vision for School Place Planning in Bracknell Forest going forwards.

Mainstream:

1. Ensure sufficient pupil places for all designated area residents.
2. Seek to maintain sufficient overall headroom of up to 5% to allow for the expression of parental preference in school admissions.
3. The Council will explore options to reduce surplus places where these exceed 10% in any planning area.
4. Re-purpose vacant accommodation to suitable alternative use following reductions in surplus places until pupil numbers recover.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

5. A need to co-produce a vision for SEND (through working with children, families, settings and schools) to create a vision and a service that works for all, which underpins all other principles.
6. Increase provision of SEND capacity in Borough wherever possible.
7. Create locally based SEND facilities in each planning area.
8. Provide a mixture of provision in suitable accommodation within the borough including the Kennel Lane School, Specially Resourced Provision (SRP) units on mainstream school sites and support the inclusion agenda in all mainstream schools.

General

9. Ensure continued compliance with DfE guidance on forecasting and planning for school places
10. Provide ongoing annual updates to the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy
11. Engage in ongoing consultation with schools over planning for school places

Strategic Approach to School Place Planning

- 5.11 The following options for the future strategic approach to planning for school places have been considered based on an officer assumption of the need for sufficient overall headroom of up to 5% overall capacity to allow for the reasonable expression of parental preference:

Approach 1 Local Leadership and Management Solutions

Council Officers will work with Headteacher, Governors and Trustees to help identify and support local solutions to local challenges seeking best education outcomes and value for children and young people. Local leadership and management solutions could include using PAN outside traditional forms of entry of 30 for example, hard federation; use of mixed age classes etc. This option could be considered in consultation with each governing body/academy trust.

Approach 2 Numbers on Roll (NOR)

To propose reductions for larger 3 Form Entry (FE) and 2FE schools to reduce in size where their Year R NOR falls below an FE threshold. For example, if a 90/3FE school NOR fell below 60 then the school would reduce their Published Admission Number (PAN) to 60/2FE. These schools could be reduced in size without detriment to parental preference or to the school organisation or funding, which would already have been reduced to support the lower pupil numbers. This option could be considered in consultation with each governing body/academy trust.

Approach 3 Protection of 1FE schools

Unless there are overwhelming education grounds, there is support to protect our smaller 30/1FE schools who are less able to withstand rising surpluses of places because of their already reduced financial viability. If surplus places continue to rise and smaller schools are not protected, then this could ultimately result in school closures. Whilst allowing school closures would minimise the financial burden arising from surplus school places, this could be avoided if nearby larger schools were reduced in size.

Where it can be shown that the larger school is drawing pupils from the catchment of the smaller school the Council could engage with the larger school to explore the possibility of reducing their PAN. There would need to be a proviso that both schools have the same Ofsted grades otherwise this could prejudice parental preference. This option could be considered in consultation with each governing body/academy trust.

Approach 4 Invite schools where appropriate to consider PAN reductions

This was done as part of the Primary School Headteacher Workshops held in November 2021, however no schools volunteered to make new PAN reductions. Whilst surplus

places remain, we should however keep the door open for schools to volunteer to make PAN reductions in the future should they wish to do so. This option could be considered in consultation with schools.

Approach 5 Academies and Local Authority Maintained Schools

To note that where the Council's approach affects academies, PAN reductions will be requested from the Trust. Maintained schools could in theory be directed to make required PAN reductions, but the Council would prefer however to request rather than direct in this matter. Direction unless for overwhelming education reasons could be seen as treating state-maintained schools differently and in a divisive manner.

Approach 6 Subsidising Smaller Schools

It would be possible to subsidise smaller 30/1FE schools which had significant surpluses of places. If surplus places continued to rise however, the cumulative financial burden on other schools could eventually become unbearable and so above options should be considered before agreeing to any subsidies, so this is not currently an attractive approach.

Approach 7 Do nothing

Doing nothing is not really an option because it conflicts with the Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient pupil places. The likely impact of doing nothing in a time of reducing primary pupil number would be for smaller schools to experience growing difficulties in achieving financial viability to the detriment of education standards. The Council must act to provide a sufficient balance of school capacity is available to meet the current and anticipated levels of need. This approach has therefore been ruled out.

Approach 8 Reduce Capacity at all Schools

Reducing PANs at all schools would be treating all schools the same but this would adversely affect smaller 1FE primary schools obliging them to move to mixed age teaching or even to close. The 1FE model is already less financially viable than 2 or 3FE schools so reducing pupil numbers at 1FE schools would create significant difficulties for school managers. The preferred approach is to look for reductions at larger 2FE & 3FE schools only, so this approach is not recommended.

Approach 9 Designated Area-Based Approach

To consider PAN reductions at all 2FE and 3FE schools where more than 50% their intake year comes from outside the DA. This would mean reducing capacity of popular schools to benefit less popular schools. This would be difficult to justify to parents and so is not recommended.

Approach 10 Surplus Places Approach

To consider reductions at larger 2FE and 3FE schools whose intake year surplus of places exceeds 25%. For example, a 90/3FE school with less than 67 pupils in YR would reduce to 60/2FE. It could be argued however that the school is part full rather than part empty and this approach would also mean taking away places that parental preference might otherwise have taken up. This approach is not recommended.

- 5.12 It is proposed to shape the Council's strategic plan around approaches 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 above, and schools will be re-engaged over the draft vision and strategic approach to

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planning for school places later in the 2022 summer term. before this is brought back to the July meeting of the Executive for approval.

- 5.13 The future plan arising from this process will led into the next School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2023-27, which will be brought back to the Executive in 2023.

Costs and Funding

- 5.14 Future capital projects arising from the School Capacity Strategy will be brought to the Executive as bids on the future capital programme. Funding sources will include DfE grant including for Basic Need and SEN, Developer contributions and the Council's own funding.

6. CONSULTATION AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Legal Advice

- 6.1 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.

Executive Director of Resources: Finance

- 6.2 The proposed strategy sets out plans to improve the key financial areas of surplus places in primary schools, which can lead to reduced revenue budgets thereby creating financial difficulties for some schools and the shortage of local specialist SEND provisions that subsequently requires high numbers of expensive external placements that increases pressure on the High Needs Block Budget (HNB).
- 6.3 In respect of the HNB budget, many LAs are facing significant financial challenges and whilst the Department for Education is currently liable for financing accumulated deficits, this is expected to return to an LA liability at April 2023 which current estimates indicate at around £23m. An effective plan therefore needs to be developed to manage the deficit.
- 6.4 A significant factor in the deficit is the high number of pupils transported out of the Borough to specialist providers. Increasing local capacity by reprovisioning surplus school places to specialist SEND provisions would likely deliver substantial financial benefits over the longer term, both to the overall Schools Budget and the council funded school transport budget. This would also result in more pupils being educated within their local communities and a reduction in carbon emissions.
- 6.5 Any financial implications from the proposed Education Capital Strategy will need to be considered as part of the council's overall capital budget setting process. The strategy will need to maximise external funding, including S106 contributions, DfE grants, specifically those relating to creating additional SEND places and land sale at school sites where there are surplus places. A clear policy for sharing receipts from land sale needs to be agreed for this.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.6 School Sufficiency Board were consulted on 10/03/22, and comments received have been incorporated into the body of the report and the School Places Plan.

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- 6.7 Schools Forum will be consulted in June 2022, and comments received incorporated into future versions of the report and the School Places Plan.
- 6.8 The Oxford CE Diocese and Portsmouth RC Diocese will be consulted on 22/03/22 , and comments received incorporated into the body of the report and the School Places Plan.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.9 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 and new school buildings is set out in the Equality Act and the Council makes accessibility works for specific pupils and staff 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

- 6.10 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 so far has proved to be 95% accurate. |
| 2 | Co-ordination between Council teams and departments. | LOW | The School Sufficiency Board includes 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 2022-26. |
| 4 | Surplus school places | MEDIUM | Forecasts suggest overall 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 | There are 11 academy and 4 voluntary aided schools in Bracknell Forest who set their own admissions arrangements. The Council can only set the admissions arrangements in the remaining 18 maintained schools. |
| 5 | Capital Cost Risk | LOW | Forecasts suggest there will be sufficient school places for the forecast period 2022-26. |

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|---|----------------------------------|--------|---|
| 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 | Where significant surplus primary places occur, this may cause financial difficulties for smaller less popular schools, who may seek additional revenue funds from the Schools Block. |

Climate Change Implications

- 6.11 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO₂.
- 6.12 The reasons the Council believes that this will have no impact on emissions are because it is intended to bring surplus primary accommodation into alternative use including for SEN.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.13 Having sufficient school places in the right locations is consistent with the key priority in the Council's Learning Improvement Plan for every pupil to be able to access to a high-quality school place. Increasing and widening the scope of SEN provision in Bracknell Forest will prevent some pupils from being sent out of Borough to secure the right type of school place.

Background Papers

Appendix A School Places Plan & Capacity Strategy 2022 - 2026

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