

TO: Executive
DATE: 21/03/2023

SCHOOL PLACES PLAN AND CAPACITY STRATEGY
Executive Director- People

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for Executive to consider and approve the final School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy. An earlier version of this strategy was presented and provisionally approved by Executive in April 2022, subject to further consultation with wider stakeholders. Consultation has now been completed and incorporated into this final document.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Executive approve the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2023-2028 and agree publication April 2023.**
- 2.2 **Executive agree that this document can be further amended to incorporate feedback from Executive before publication.**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places and an agreed vision and approach to doing this will be key tools in achieving this going forward.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 N/A

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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

- 5.1 Headteachers and FE providers have been consulted on what planning for school places should look like in the future at meetings in Nov 2021 to October 2022. Headteachers have welcomed this engagement and actively participated in helping shape the Council's vision and approach.

Vision for School Place Planning

- 5.2 The Council's proposed vision for planning for school places is set out in the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy however, which has been shaped by further consultation and review of current PAN numbers.
- 5.3 Purpose of strategy document and future forecasting and planning of places

Unrestricted

1. To ensure continued compliance with DfE guidance on forecasting and planning for school places.
2. To provide ongoing annual updates to the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy.
3. To capture and engage in ongoing consultation with schools over planning for school places.
4. To inform the education capital programme and its planning, development and provision of education places.

School Places Plan 2023-28

- 5.4 The above vision and approach will be used to inform the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2023-28.
- 5.5 It is anticipated that the specific needs to be identified at that time will include:
- Closely monitoring mainstream secondary school places and North Bracknell primary school places
 - Reduction of surplus primary places in South Bracknell and Crowthorne & Sandhurst
 - Creation of additional capacity for SEND

Future Capital Projects

- 5.6 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.

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.
- 6.2 The relevant legal implications are addressed within the main body of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2023-2028.

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).

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- 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.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.6 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

- 6.7 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	People Capital Strategy 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.

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5	Council's ability to manage the supply of school places	MEDIUM	There are 13 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 16 maintained schools.
6	Capital Cost Risk	LOW	Forecasts suggest there will be sufficient school places for the forecast period 2022-26. Due to increase with construction cost this may need to reviewed at a later stage.
7	Revenue Cost Risk to the Council	LOW	Surplus places reduce the likelihood that Home to School Transport will be incurred.
8	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

- 6.8 At this stage it is unknown what the climate implications would be. The CO2 reduction would be considered as part of the design process once the programme has been established.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.7 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

School Places Plan & Capacity Strategy 2023 - 2028

Contacts for Further Information

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