

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services **DATE:** 14th July 2015
Scrutiny Panel

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PART I

FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION

SCHOOL PLACES STRATEGY 2013-2022

1. **Purpose of Report**

To update Members on the pressures, emerging risks and progress made in delivering schools places in the borough and to raise awareness of the financial plan.

2. **Recommendations**

The Panel is requested to note:

- a) The present over supply of secondary places and the risks it presents;
- b) The projects in progress; and
- c) The approach to school places planning as set out in the report.

3. **Introduction**

- 3.1 The Council has a legal obligation to ensure sufficient school places for all Slough children. The key principles and approach of the strategy developed in 2013 are attached as Appendix A. In broad terms the strategy involves developing new places which will best satisfy the needs of the children and young people of the borough, to take the opportunity of free schools where they satisfy those needs and to plan for a flexible supply of expansions and new schools to match the dynamic environment of school place demand.
- 3.2 Population profiles, supply and demand are kept under regular review and in particular emerging risks are being recognised and tackled. Place planning follows the adopted strategy and in the face of fluctuating projections takes both a planned and opportunistic approach.

- 3.3 The plan period of the strategy now embraces the conclusion of long-standing agreements for school expansion pre-dating late 2013 and projections of both supply and demand have been developed to 2022. This has also enabled financial planning to be developed into the future.
- 3.4 This report seeks to bring all the elements of forecasting, place planning, free schools and council-funded projects and the financial plan together for members.

4. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

4.1 **Wellbeing Priorities**

Economy and Skills

The delivery of school places for Slough residents will support delivery of skills and qualifications to young people in Slough and improve their life chances. However, some uses of land may have greater value to the town's economy if used for purposes other than education.

Health

The delivery of well-designed schools with adequate outdoor space will provide an opportunity for young people to live active lifestyles and contribute to improved fitness and the reduction of childhood obesity and other health risks.

Regeneration and Environment

Using land to deliver school places may have regeneration value and may deliver environment improvements or damage (e.g. through increased traffic levels.) Other uses may have higher regeneration value and different environment consequences.

Housing

There is an acute shortage of developable land in the borough and a high pressure for both housing and education land. Decisions on the use of land must balance the two needs as well as other needs for community services.

4.2 **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances

The delivery of sufficient school places in an appropriate mix for local children and young people will offer the opportunity for educational attainment and positive life chances.

The Council's income and the value of its assets will be maximised

Selective use of council land, expansions on existing school land and identification of sites inside and outside the borough will ensure a balanced use of the available land and maximise community benefit. A balanced use of council grant and free school opportunities will maximise the funding available.

5. **Other implications**

5.1 **Financial**

Delivery of sufficient school places will be dependent on:

- The effective use of the Basic Needs grant and other education funding that

- may be available; and
- Support for government-funded free schools where they meet the needs of the borough.

The full financial plan is set out below.

5.2 Risk Management

A full table of risks is set out as Appendix B. The key risks are:

- Shortage of sites within the borough whether for stand alone schools or annexes
- Mismatch of supply and demand and the pressures and destabilising effects on the school community. This short term risk currently is an over supply of secondary places that may in time transform into an acute shortage.
- Funding shortages in the medium to longer term. These are dealt with below.

5.3 Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications of the proposed action.

5.4 Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out for Slough's strategic approach to school place planning; it does not suggest that any changes are required. The positive impacts identified include:

- All Slough children (including new arrivals which comprise a high percentage of BME families) obtaining a school place with a variety of admissions choices/options available.
- All new places being highly disabled accessible.
- SEN places expanding.

There may be a negative impact caused by:

- Free schools opening with selective admissions policies
- Opening non-selective places which would shrink the percentage of selective places (whether by ability or by faith, gender etc) as a percentage of the total places.

Both these negative impacts are an acceptable consequence of increasing provision and choice.

Decisions on individual projects will be supported by appropriate prior assessments where required.

5.5 Property and site issues

A shortage of suitable sites within the borough boundaries remains one of the biggest risks to delivery of sufficient places during the plan period. This risk is greatest for secondary schools because of the level of demand and scale of site required. The demand for sites for school places must also be set into the acute need for housing and needs for other facilities to serve our population.

Expansions of existing schools and bulge classes will generally use existing school land and not impact other council plans. Subject to the agreement of

individual schools, this has been a successful way of satisfying primary needs. This approach is naturally limited by the number of schools which are willing or able to expand further.

The Cabinet has previously agreed to work towards providing leases for the former Arbour Vale School and Castlevale sites for new free schools. The arrangements for the former site also involve changes to the playing fields of St Joseph's Catholic High School to permit a new community sports facility to be built on the released land. The detailed agreement with the DfE is in its final stages.

A site is required for the approved Free School, SASH2. Options being considered include council land as well as identification of private sites. Expansion of some existing secondary schools has also been explored.

The SEN expansion programme includes a number of options that may require use of vacant sites.

At this stage site identification in a borough built to its boundaries remains the biggest obstacle to delivery of the strategic aim for school places for young people in Slough to the end of the plan period and forces the council to look outside its boundaries.

5.6 Carbon Emissions and Energy Costs

The expansion of school places has and will continue to increase Slough's energy consumption, a natural result of a larger population. All new buildings will comply with current building regulations which include energy efficient buildings and will meet the requirement to provide 10% of energy consumption through renewables where applicable. Where existing schools are expanding Slough will aspire to allocate funding towards improvements to the current building for items such as new boilers, windows, roofs etc.

6. Supporting information

6.1 **Previously identified pressures – December 2013**

- 6.1.1 School place predictions are based on birth rate, known pre-school children, known primary school children and an estimate of growth based on inward migration. In addition to population pressures, Slough also has high demands on particular schools from outside the borough, most notably on selective secondary schools and to a lesser extent on faith and on the girls' secondary school.
- 6.1.2 As a result, whilst Slough provides the appropriate number of secondary places to serve residents, about 25% of secondary places have typically been taken up by young people from out of borough. Consequently, the provision of places for Slough young people delivered outside our boundaries (Churchmead and Burnham Park Academy) is critical in our planning.
- 6.1.3 In a dynamic population, forecasting beyond three years remains extremely uncertain. Slough has refined forecasting models to achieve less uncertainty. Reports to members in 2013 and 2014 provided a strategic update on forecasts and planned growth and predicted that Slough would require up to 15 new forms of entry at primary level and 38 new forms of entry at secondary level by 2021/22. It was predicted that a corresponding increase in special needs placements would also be required.

6.2 New assessment of pressures – May 2015

6.2.1 The 2013/14 forecasts have proved sufficiently accurate for planning purposes and have also been used to lobby government to manage free school supply more sensitively.

Primary pressures

6.2.2 The scale of demand is now less than the corresponding demand for secondary places. Planning and delivery is more dynamic and requires a very flexible approach.

6.2.3 For 2014-15 there are 82 forms of entry available in the borough. Current forecasts suggest that demand will rise for 2 years, in 2015-16 and 2016-17, before reducing back to current levels in 2017-18. For each of the 2 interim years, up to 5 additional reception classes will be required.

6.2.4 The council is therefore planning for a temporary rise in demand for 2 years. As well as 5 additional forms of entry, a further 2 forms are required to replace the 2 bulge classes that opened at Foxborough and Penn Wood in 2014-15, altogether up to 7 new forms of entry may be required. There will be provided for 2015-16 by:

- +1 Permanent form of entry at Claycots Town Hall;
- +3 A new Free School at Langley Academy;
- +2 Temporary 'bulge' classes at Cippenham Primary; and
- +1 Bulge class, location still to be agreed.

6.2.5 Note that the second bulge class at Cippenham Primary and the extra bulge class will only open as required, and will be deferred to 2016-17 if not required at all in 2015-16.

6.2.6 The permanent new forms of entry created in 2015-16, will mean there are 84 permanent forms of entry available. Up to 3 additional bulge classes will be required for 2016-17. These have yet to be identified although discussions are ongoing with schools.

6.2.7 The fall in birth numbers in 2012-13 (the first drop since 1996), means that demand for reception places in 2017-18 should approximately match that for 2014-15. Current plans mean provision will exceed forecast demand by 2 forms of entry. When the new birth data for 2013-14 is received in August 2015, it will be possible to understand if the reduced birth data in 2012-13 was a blip or the start of a downtrend trend.

6.2.8 Inward migration: On average there is a net increase of over 25 pupils into every primary year group during each curriculum year. In the past, with new schools and new forms of entry opening regularly, it has been possible to manage this demand within existing projects, if birth rates continue to drop or level off then it may become necessary to open additional bulge classes in higher year groups (Years 1-6). It may become possible to use empty classes to accommodate the growth in higher years but this would only be possible if there has been a significant reduction in demand in the lower year groups freeing up some classrooms.

6.2.9 Should the demand for primary school places diminish in future years, it is anticipated that bulge classes and temporary provision can be removed before there is a threat to existing schools. The Project Board continues to seek possible expansion or new solutions to be prepared should the anticipated reduction in demand not arise.

Secondary pressures

6.2.10 Attached at Appendix C is a table setting out the current projection of over supply and deficit in secondary schools serving the borough. The original forecast of 38 FE for the plan period 2013-2022 remains sufficiently accurate at 37. The profile of supply versus demand is the challenge. There has been a rapid expansion of free school provision. Whilst welcoming the provision, the council lobbied to defer such openings in line with demand. This has met with some limited success.

6.2.11 New free schools already opened are providing approximately 17 forms of entry. The borough has typically been reliant about 6 FE provided in two non-selective schools in neighbouring authorities. Together this provision currently amounts to an over supply for Slough usage in 2015-16 of about 7FE. This has resulted in a significant lack of applications for the two out of borough schools and a modest shortfall in take up in Slough schools.

6.2.12 An over supply of 3FE is predicted for 2016-17 and is also likely to be concentrated in out of borough schools. This puts at risk the viability of those schools on which Slough will be reliant in the future.

6.2.13 Most recently in recognition of that over supply and to stabilise their pupil numbers and staffing two in-borough secondary schools are considering reducing their Planned Admission Numbers (PAN) for 2015-16. The advantage of this approach is that it will mean that any new applicants will be allocated to those schools which still have vacancies within their PAN. This will temporarily reduce the apparent over supply and these admission numbers can be reinstated in year if demand should rise.

6.2.14 Supply and demand reaches reasonable equilibrium in 2017-2018 on the assumption that a site is identified for SASH2 and there is partial opening in that year. It also assumes that a similar level of places currently available to Slough young people in non-selective schools outside the borough remains stable during the plan period.

6.2.15 In the longer term we predict a shortfall of 13 forms of entry by 2022, with a deficit of places predicted in 2018-19. 30. Currently there are plans and opportunities as follows but these largely remain.

- Langley Grammar Expansion 1 FE Agreed by Cabinet. Project to coincide with a rebuild as part of the Priory School Building Programme 2
- Heatherden Hall Arts Academy 2.5 FE Bid was not successful in the latest bidding round but a re-submission is expected
- Expansion of existing Slough schools 4.5 FE Agreed in principle

- Expansion of other schools 3.3 FE Discussions held

Special Education Needs (SEN) pressures

- 6.2.16 Forecasting for SEN places is based on the assumption that the current proportion of the population requiring such places will remain constant e.g. a 50% forecasted growth in the year group over a five year period, would assume a 50% rise in demand for SEN and Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) places over the same time period.
- 6.2.17 Based on the above methodology, it is predicted that an additional 269 places will be required across mainstream schools, special schools and resourced units. The majority will be required in special schools, with over half the required need at the secondary level.
- 6.2.18 In addition to the new resourced units that have been opened in the borough, the council and new SEN School Organisation Group are exploring the options for expanding existing provision to deliver an additional 325 places in the borough based on opportunities within existing special schools to satisfy some need. SASH is also considering exploring the opportunity of a special Free School bid.

Financial planning

- 6.2.19 Slough's main source of funding for creating new school places is through Basic Needs Grant, a grant allocation for which the council bids annually on the basis of forecasted need. Since 2007-8 Slough has worked with schools to plan, prioritise and deliver an expansion programme to meet the annual demand for new places. New proposals take into account the views of headteachers and governors who have their own pressures and concerns about performance, manageability and over-development. The majority of primary schools have already expanded at least once; others are on sites that cannot expand further, are in the wrong place or are in Ofsted categories needing to improve. This situation is further complicated by the increasing number of schools becoming academies, which have increased autonomy and can decide not to expand even if requested by the Council.
- 6.2.20 The principal route to building 'new' schools is via the government's Free Schools programme. Slough has limited control over these schools; Council's are consulted for their views on new proposals but the final decision by the Department for Education on whether to approve an application may not take account of the Council's assessment of need, timing, location or type of school.
- 6.2.21 The Strategy seeks to seek opportunity from the Free Schools programme, whilst using Basic Needs for targeted expansion. As the council becomes more confident of that it has the potential resources to satisfy need, the Board is considering how the potential remaining resources can be used to enhance the other facilities, e.g. school halls, of expanded schools and how other education projects can be financed.
- 6.2.22 Appendix E shows the School Places Capital Programme 2014-20. This shows the current financial projections for completing the delivery of school places for the plan period based on the predicted needs and proposals set out above. Of the currently available £62 million, £26 million is committed to specific schemes,

with a further £30.5 million allocated provisionally, leaving an unallocated sum of £6 million.

6.2.23 The council will expect to attract further Basic Needs Grant and S106 in future years and will also continue to support appropriate Free School bids.

6.2.24 The present financial forecast shows a relatively healthy position with some current leeway for investing in projects beyond volume places.

Revenue risks

6.2.25 The expansion of school places presents a short term revenue risk for individual schools as the school census catches up with formula funding. The council is working with the Schools Forum to use Growth Fund within the DSG to mitigate the impact. This pot is restricted by external controls and there is a growing demand arising from the planned expansions. Funding for new SEN places is entirely controlled and there is an increasing risk that new SEN places will be under funded. Officers are working with Schools Forum to identify and mitigate this risk.

6.2.26 Both constraints may impact on the willingness of schools to expand and this is a key concern in negotiations for expansion.

7. Conclusion

This report updates Members on the strategy to deliver school places for all young people in the borough in the period to 2022. There are considerable obstacles and risks and some turmoil in the system. Within those limits the Board is working to a programme with the potential to fulfil need during the plan period.

8. Comments of Other Committees

The Cabinet endorsed the approach to school places planning set out in this report on 22nd June 2015.

9. Appendices Attached

- 'A' - Principles of the School Places Strategy
- 'B' - Risk Management
- 'C' - Secondary School Places
- 'D' - SEN and PRU places
- 'E' - School Places Capital Programme

9. Background Papers

- '1' - Agenda papers, Cabinet 22nd June 2015