

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	17 April 2023
Subject:	School Places Strategy 2023-27
Lead Member:	Councillor Hulme, Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills
Chief Officer:	Neil Hoskinson, Interim Associate Director: Education
Contact Officer:	Tony Madden, Development Manager
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	Yes
Exempt:	No
Decision Subject To Call In:	Yes
Appendices:	A - School Places Strategy 2023-27

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the School Places Strategy 2023-2027 for comment and endorsement by the Cabinet.

Recommendations:

1.2 The Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the School Places Strategy 2023-2027 attached at Appendix A.

Reason:

1.3 The revised and updated School Places Strategy sets out the current place planning position and projected requirements for Slough for nursery, primary, secondary, post-16 and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Strategy is a key document ensuring every resident pupil entitled to a school place is offered one.

Commissioner Review

This report has been reviewed by the Commissioner and approved for consideration.

2. Report

Introductory paragraphs

- 2.1 The School Places Strategy 2023-2027 sets out the Council's proposals for ensuring there are sufficient, suitable, high quality school places for every resident child and young person in Slough over the next 5 years. Also included are the key principles and approach taken by the Council when planning expansion or contraction of school provision.
- 2.2 Between 2001-2 and 2010-11 the number of births in Slough rose by 48%, this growth is still working its way through the school system and is the single most significant factor affecting school place planning. The impact of this growth together with the inward migration levels to the town has required a major expansion in provision across all education sectors. The primary and secondary school estates have been expanded by around 50% since 2008.
- 2.3 The number of births in Slough peaked in 2010-11 and 2011-12, both these years saw 2760 births, since then births levels have been steadily declining and there were 2157 births in 2020-21, a fall of 22%. This reduction has affected the west of Slough much more than other areas of the town.
- 2.4 The other key factor affecting demand is in-year applications from new arrivals to Slough. This continues to fluctuate from year to year, with most years seeing a net rise in cohort size. These fluctuations make forecasting future demand more challenging.
- 2.5 The latest demographics and School Census data will be monitored for changes that affect the forecasts and actions presented within the Strategy. Any significant changes will be reported back to Cabinet.

Primary Places:

- 2.6 Since the last published version of the Strategy, primary place planning has changed from a single planning area to three separate planning areas: west, central and east. This makes sense in place planning terms as there are different pressures and issues in each area. In summary:
 - **West** Planning Area: There is a growing surplus of Reception places due to this area seeing a dramatic reduction in birth numbers. All year groups have surplus capacity and this is expected to remain the situation. Priory School reduced its Planned Admission Number (PAN) from 4 to 3 forms of entry for September 2021 and St Anthony's will remove 30 places by reducing from 3 to 2 forms of entry for September 2023. Further reductions may be required. Falling numbers on roll at individual schools will lead to reduced income and could lead to schools going into a deficit and would need additional support.
 - **Central** Planning Area: There is some surplus capacity in Reception and Year 1 due to the opening of Grove Academy but other year groups are under pressure. With this area of the town likely to see significant development of new housing in coming years it is expected that there will remain a pressure on places.

- **East Planning Area:** There is a pressure for places in all year groups in the east of the town which can mean options are limited for in-year applications. Options for adding additional capacity are being developed.

2.7 A certain level of surplus is planned in all year groups to accommodate new arrivals to Slough. More surplus places are required in lower year groups to ensure there is sufficient capacity for the growth in cohort size from new arrivals to Slough from Reception to when they leave at Year 6.

2.8 A number of schools have reduced their admission number as a result of the increase in surplus capacity in lower year groups and others are likely to be considering a similar reduction. The reduction in admission numbers will need to be coordinated by the Council where possible to ensure sufficient capacity remains available in all parts of the town. Shortfalls in an area can mean pupils travelling longer distances for a school place and can increase the Council's home to school transport costs if pupils need to travel more than the statutory minimum distance.

Secondary Places:

2.9 A high number of secondary new academy schools have opened in Slough including Grove Academy which opened for September 2017: in total they have provided 22 new forms of entry (an extra 660 Year 7 places). In addition to this, the Council has funded 5.5 new forms of entry at Westgate School, Wexham School and Langley Grammar, adding a further 165 Year 7 places.

2.10 September 2023 will see the largest Year 6 cohort applying for secondary school places before numbers start to reduce as a result of the declining birth numbers – meaning this year is the expected peak in demand. There are sufficient Year 7 places available for this peak and forecasts suggest no further forms of entry are required for the period of this Strategy.

Post-16:

2.11 Post-16 numbers at Slough schools are rising year-on year and are forecast to rise by almost 500 places by 2029-30, when they are expected to reach their peak. Three academy schools have delayed the opening of their sixth forms to focus efforts on school improvement, this has meant fewer pupils than expected started in Year 12 for 2022-23. Any forecast growth is dependent on these places becoming available. Alternative places are available at local colleges.

SEND Places:

2.12 The majority of pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are educated in mainstream schools. However, a proportion require specialist provision. Those requiring full time specialist provision attend a Special School while those pupils whose needs can be met through a combination of mainstream and specialist facilities will be allocated a place in a mainstream school. Over the last 10 years the Council has significantly increased specialist provision including expanding and opening new resource bases and units; in addition Slough's existing special schools have been expanded. Some children with social, emotional and mental health needs may be placed in alternative provision (AP) where this is appropriate to meet their needs. The current places available in Slough schools are shown in Appendix 1 of the Strategy.

Alternative Provision places:

2.13 Alternative Provision caters for those pupils who have been excluded, are at risk of exclusion or cannot attend school for any reason. Some pupils can be educated in Littledown School, which is a special school that can cater for short term needs. New facilities are planned for Haybrook College who cater for secondary pupils, this will increase places for pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues where this provision best meets their needs and improve facilities for existing pupils.

Centre of Slough

2.14 Over the next 15 years the centre of Slough may see up to 9000 new flats built. Through a house-to-house survey the Council has robust data on the number of children that live in new flats built in Slough. This level of development will result in a very high number of pupils living in an area with few primary schools nearby. Current modelling suggests that the reducing pupil population, due to long term falling birth numbers, may release sufficient capacity to accommodate most, if not all, of the projected new resident pupils. Should birth rates start to rise then this would significantly change the modelling and this conclusion. A key concern is that the surplus capacity particularly for primary pupils would be more than 2 miles away, with much of the surplus in the west of Slough. This may increase home to school transport costs and mean additional traffic on Slough roads at pick-up and drop off times.

2.15 More work is required to assess the full impact on place planning and how best to address the schooling needs of primary and secondary pupils that live in this zone. One solution that will be considered is innovative transport solutions rather than building new schools close to the centre of Slough. Each development will include on-site nurseries secured through section 106 developer agreements to be operated by an independent nursery provider.

School Consultation

2.16 The draft School Places Strategy 2022-27 was circulated to all schools for comment. One comment was received from a maintained nursery "I would expect an increase in the number of children under 5 with EHCP's and additional needs. The trend in the increase of level of children needing additional support is definitely not going to change and the impact of Covid is only unfolding now."

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 Publication of the School Places Strategy does not have any direct financial implications on the Council. However, any decrease in pupil numbers does have an impact on school funding.

3.1.2 Mainstream schools and academies are funded through the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) which is based on numbers on roll in each school or academy. With a falling birth rate, the expectation is that funding to individual school may decrease.

3.1.3 The Growth Fund (part of the DSG) is set aside annually to support schools while they are growing. Only Wexham School qualifies for this funding in the academic year 2023-24.

- 3.1.4 There can be transport cost implications for the council if pupils need to travel further than certain specified distances to find a suitable school place. These costs are being managed as part of the Home to School Transport savings plans for 2023-24.
- 3.1.5 The growth in pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) is funded from the High Needs Block (HNB) part of the DSG. The funding limits of the HNB are set annually by the Department for Education (DfE) and this has led to continuing pressures on the HNB caused at least in part by the rising number of pupils.
- 3.1.6 Capital requirements have been reducing year-on-year as the number of new primary and secondary school places that need to be built have reduced. Current forecasts indicate that no new primary or secondary places are required over the next 5 years. It may be necessary to respond to area specific pressures by adding bulge classes or reopening closed classrooms. The only planned expansion projects over the next 5 years relate to places for SEND pupils. Any capital projects agreed by the Council will be funded by DfE grant or section 106 developer contributions and would be subject to separate Cabinet approvals.

3.2 *Legal implications*

- 3.2.1 Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires a local authority to secure that sufficient schools are available at primary and secondary stages of education for their local area. Sufficient means sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education. Appropriate education means education which offers such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of (a) the pupils' different ages, abilities and aptitudes, and (b) the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school and includes practical instruction and training appropriate to pupils' different needs. A local authority must exercise its functions under this section with a view to security diversity in the provision of schools and increasing opportunities for parental choice. This duty applies to pupils of compulsory school age only. In exercising its functions under this section, a local authority shall in particular have regard to (a) the need for securing that primary and secondary education are provided in separate schools (except that this duty does not apply to special schools), (b) the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs, and (c) the expediency of securing the provision of boarding accommodation for pupils for whom education as boarders is considered by their parents and the authority to be desirable.
- 3.2.2 The Council also have general duties under s.13 and 13A of the Education Act 1996 to contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of its community by securing that efficient primary and secondary education and further education are available to meet the needs of the population of their area and that its education functions are exercised with a view to promoting high standards, ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and training and promoting the fulfilment of learning potential.
- 3.2.3 School places are provided at a variety of state funded provision, including maintained schools (schools controlled or aided by the Council), academies (funded directed by the Department for Education). The methods of expanding, making changes and opening new schools differs depending on whether it is a maintained

school or an academy. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires that where there is a need for a new school, proposals must be sought to establish an academy. This applies for mainstream and special schools and alternative provision.

3.3 Risk management implications

Risk	Mitigating action
Legal - Challenge from parents on the basis the Council has not provided sufficient school places in accordance with its statutory duty.	Agree, publish and deliver a comprehensive school places strategy.
Planning challenges.	Sound holistic planning case to demonstrate that sites are best suited.
Equalities Issues – Rise in demand for SEND provision exceeds the availability of places leading to possible challenge and costly placements outside of the borough.	<p>Deliver the DSG Management Plan in full.</p> <p>Continue to work with schools to develop their inclusive practices.</p>
Demographics – Future demographics may change and be higher or lower than forecast.	<p>Higher than forecast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare contingency projects that can be brought forward if required. <p>Lower than forecast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate a reduction programme.
Traffic risks.	Sound transport planning - transport issues will be considered on a site-by-site basis as part of statutory process for expanding existing schools and as part of the planning process.
Communications and community support.	Formal consultation will take place as part of the statutory process for expanding existing schools and as part of the planning process, where planning permission is required.
Timetable for delivery – projects delivered later than required for pupils, or not delivered as planned as schools choose not to cooperate or do not have the capacity to expand.	<p>Forward planning. From approval, large projects are likely to take at least 24 months to complete and open places to pupils.</p> <p>Projects need to start in good time with the possible risk that this provides some short-term overprovision.</p> <p>Work closely with schools and heads' groups to ensure buy-in.</p> <p>Allocate adequate funding for projects.</p>

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 There are no environmental implications as a consequence of this report. Any development required to expand school places will impact green space

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 The equality implications of individual proposals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The positive impacts of expanding provision 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 accessible to children with disabilities and additional needs, and
- SEND and alternative provision places expanding.

3.6 *Procurement implications*

3.6.1 There are no procurement implications as a consequence of this report.

3.7 *Workforce implications*

3.7.1 There are no workforce implications as a consequence of this report.

3.8 *Property implications*

3.8.1 There are no property implications as a consequence of this report. Where individual projects have land implications approval will be sought on a site-by-site basis.

4. Background Papers

None