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| TITLE | WBC School Places Strategy |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 March 2024 |
| WARD | None Specific; |
| LEAD OFFICER | Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Wokingham Borough School Places Strategy provides a clear strategic direction for the delivery of the Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient local mainstream education places, in line with community demand. The development of this Strategy marks an important first step in the ongoing management of the Council's obligations in this respect, in the context of a diverse range of challenges.

RECOMMENDATION

That Overview & Scrutiny note the content of the accompanying School Places Strategy and the plans for its future development.

To note that it is intended to take the Strategy to the Executive for formal approval, prior to publishing on the WBC website.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Wokingham Borough School Place Strategy 2024/25 to 2029/30 assesses the sufficiency of education provision over this period and, where deficiencies are identified, proposes remedial measures and options. This report provides an overview of the key elements of the Strategy, as well as the plans for its future development.

Background

The Wokingham Borough School Place Strategy 2024/25 to 2029/30 assesses the sufficiency of education provision over this period and, where deficiencies are identified, proposes remedial measures and options. The strategy considers the needs of children and young people in the key education phases of Early Years (pre-statutory school age); mainstream statutory school age (age 4 to 16); and post-16 in the Borough. This breadth reflects the Council's core statutory duties for education. The Strategy also considers longer term needs, tied to developing Borough development plans for the period to 2037/38. The analysis is underpinned by the most recent 2023 roll projections, which extend to 2027/28 for the primary phase and 2030/31 for the secondary phase, backed by a range of relevant contextual housing, planning and demographic data.

Analysis of Issues

As indicated above, the Strategy is divided into four core components.

Early Years:

The Strategy indicates that there is a broad sufficiency of Early Years provision in the Borough. A small 26-place shortfall is forecast for next year, although proposals for new provision that would more than meet this deficit are already in the pipeline. As such, no substantial proposals for future development are currently set out in respect of this area of the Strategy.

Primary:

The Borough-wide forecasts for the primary sector are presented in the below table:

| Year | YR | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 | Total |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| 2023/24 | 311 | 240 | 54 | 57 | 63 | 47 | -71 | 701 |
| 2024/25 | 360 | 254 | 179 | 67 | -4 | 27 | -15 | 868 |
| 2025/26 | 322 | 305 | 194 | 191 | 5 | -38 | -35 | 944 |
| 2026/27 | 288 | 267 | 246 | 207 | 139 | -29 | -102 | 1016 |
| 2027/28 | 288 | 233 | 207 | 259 | 156 | 108 | -97 | 1154 |

As can be seen from the above, there is a substantial surplus of places projected for the Borough over the forecast period. However, these figures mask variance within the Borough's seven primary planning areas, which can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Type I – Surplus at KS1 and deficit at KS2 – Earley; Wokingham Town East; and Woodley.
- Type II – Small surplus at KS1 and KS2 – North; South East; and Town West.
- Type III – Deficit across KS1 and KS2 – South West.

The Strategy develops proposals in line with these three demand profiles:

- Type I – potential for opening a Year 6 class at St. Cecilia's C of E Primary School
- Type II – proposed PAN reductions that will need to be agreed in partnership and proactively managed in future.
- Type III – expansion of a primary school in the Shinfield area.

Secondary:

The Borough-wide forecasts for the secondary sector are presented in the below table, alongside the Council's previously agreed strategy for managing the forecast places shortfall:

| | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | 2029/30 | 2030/31 |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Y7 Shortfall | -177 | -162 | -182 | -256 | -268 | -204 | -140 |
| St Crispins | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Emmbrook | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Piggott | 46 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 |
| Bohunt | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Oakbank | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Waingels | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The Holt | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The Forest | 90 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| Maiden Erlegh | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bulmershe | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Total Extra Places | 274 | 243 | 243 | 243 | 243 | 243 | 243 |
| Balance | 97 | 81 | 61 | -13 | -25 | 39 | 103 |

As can be seen from the above, there is a substantial 9FE shortfall forecast to 2028/29. In order to meet this demand, the Council has agreed to fund the expansion of 5 schools, creating c. 8FE worth of additional capacity. There is a small level of excess demand forecast in 2027/28 and 2028/29, which could be mitigated by reduced migration, or else by a 1FE bulge. In this respect, it is critical to ensure that places are not oversupplied, in view of the long-term forecast of reduced rolls in primary transitioning to falling numbers at a secondary level.

Post-16:

The forecasts for demand at post-16 are based on three different models, as shown in the below table:

| Year | Total places | Standard Forecast | Surplus / Deficit | WBC Increase | Surplus / Deficit | Alt. Capacity | Surplus / Deficit |
|------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 2024 | 2,286 | 2,141 | 145 | 2,151 | 135 | 2,542 | 391 |
| 2025 | 2,286 | 2,319 | -33 | 2,318 | -32 | 2,602 | 284 |
| 2026 | 2,436 | 2,547 | -111 | 2,536 | -100 | 2,752 | 216 |
| 2027 | 2,586 | 2,814 | -228 | 2,775 | -189 | 2,902 | 127 |
| 2028 | 2,586 | 3,013 | -427 | 2,918 | -332 | 2,902 | -16 |
| 2029 | 2,586 | 3,141 | -555 | 3,009 | -423 | 2,902 | -107 |
| 2030 | 2,586 | 3,174 | -588 | 3,033 | -447 | 2,902 | -131 |

The third model (represented by the final two columns) accounts for local flexibilities in intake (limited to the impact of endogenous WBC growth), as well as the fact that building capacity requirements are less rigid than for compulsory-age facilities (with some sixth forms already operating over capacity). On this basis, the Council anticipates being able to deliver places within the existing estate to 2027, supplemented by some already agreed additional capacity at Bohunt. This will allow time for the Council to undertake a review of the current post-16 offer, with a view to increasing its breadth at the same time as supplementing capacity, so as to ensure that it is aligned with local educational demand and skills needs.

Future Development:

As stated above, this represents the first iteration of the Strategy and it is proposed to more fully develop this into a School Organisation Plan over the course of the next year, in line with the below timetable:

| Action | Date |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rebuild Forecasting Model | April – June 2024 |
| New Forecasts Produced | July 2024 |
| Revise Options Appraisal | July – September 2024 |
| Stakeholder Engagement I | October – November 2024 |
| Draft 2025-2030 Strategy | December 2024 – January 2025 |
| Stakeholder Engagement II | February – March 2025 |
| Final 2025-2030 Strategy to Executive | April 2025 |

Critical developments within the next iteration will be the following:

- A review of the forecasting model.
- Coproduction with key partners (schools; admissions authorities; parents/carers).
- Integration of sections focusing on SEND and Alternative Provision.
- A synthesised approach to estate management / sufficiency (seeking to intelligently repurpose vacant spaces to meet demand in other areas).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

There are no direct financial implications of the Strategy, as all of the proposals / options contained therein have been / will be the subject of distinct Executive decision-making processes and consequent inclusion within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

| Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision |
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| <p>The synthesis of these proposals within a single document consolidates strategic planning of the places programme as a whole, which should provide opportunities for estate rationalisation and consequent capital cost efficiencies in future iterations of the Strategy.</p> <p>In addition, the further development of the options contained within this strategy should provide for a reduced reliance on home to school transport and consequent amelioration of pressures on the associated council budgets.</p> |

| Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?) |
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| <p>It is important to ensure that new developments are provided with sufficient local school capacity. As such, there is a substantial overlap between the contents of the strategy and the wider planning agenda, insofar as the former should be developed in alignment with the Borough's strategic plans for housing development.</p> |

| Public Sector Equality Duty |
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| <p>Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. An equalities assessment is not required at this stage but may be required in relation to the development of future iterations of the Strategy, especially in view of the ambition to incorporate planning for SEND provision.</p> |

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| <p>Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</p> |
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The Strategy's core purpose is to ensure that local education provision is well aligned with demand, in terms of both its form and overall capacity. In delivering against this goal, there is a related benefit of reducing the need / incentive for families to undertake journeys in low-capacity transport, with an increased emphasis on sustainable modes of transport, such as walking and cycling.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Wokingham Borough School Places Strategy 2024/25 – 2029/30.

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