

TITLE	Secondary Strategy - Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	School Admissions Forum on 10 February 2014
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SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the Admissions Forum on further developments since the Council's Secondary Provision Strategy was adopted by the Council's Executive on 28th March 2013.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Forum notes the contents of the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- As noted above the Council's Executive adopted a secondary provision strategy in March 2013. The key components of this strategy were:
 - A new secondary school in Arborfield would meet medium term needs (up to 10 years)
 - Contingency plans for expansion of existing secondary schools
 - Investment in existing schools to secure appropriate school accommodation.
- The strategy will be refreshed in 2014. The refresh will take account of refreshed secondary school projections and developments since that date.
- Wokingham secondary roll projections were refreshed over the summer of 2013. These indicate (in line with the projections used in the development of the secondary provision strategy) that there are likely to be too few Year 7 places by the 2017/18 academic year (and a significant level of risk from 2015/16). It should be noted though that this projection simply extrapolates from current data. Should current admission patterns change the outcome could also change significantly. In particular cross border pupil movement is balanced, but there is no intrinsic reason for this. Changing patterns of preference (or availability of places) could change the balance. Significant issues here include:
 - The DfE agreement to a new Free School / Academy in East Reading (in the Maiden Erlegh & Bulmershe School designated areas as part of Maiden Erlegh School).
 - Bracknell Forest children being admitted to Wokingham Town schools (from outside the combined designated area).
 - Finchampstead / Swallowfield children being admitted to Yatley school.
- The projections do not take explicit account of the SDL developments in this period. There is though, an implicit development factor in that the model uses historic year on year roll year-group change rates – and these are in part the consequence of historic house building in the borough. Since the SDL build out programme is expected to lead to an increased annual rate of house building the SDLs can be expected to lead to an

increase in the number of children requiring school places, over and above current roll projections.

Current projections therefore support the adopted strategy.

5. There have been a number of developments regarding strategy funding. Since the strategy was adopted the DfE has confirmed Capital Funding for additional places (known as “Basic Need”) up until 2016/17 (£2.3 m total new funding for 2015/16 and 2016/17). This, together with general restrictions on Capital available to the borough, indicates that it is unlikely that the Council will be able to fund a new school in the next three year (2014 to 2017) period. Opening a new school in this period will therefore be dependent on securing funding from other sources. This could include S106 and DfE held Free School Capital funding.

6. Funding from developers through S106 agreements and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) will be crucial for the delivery of the new school, but the critical questions – when and how much – are yet to be answered. Most SDL S106 agreements for secondary place capital costs are still to be agreed. The Arborfield SDL has no current planning application. It is anticipated that an application will be made for the major part of the site (the garrison and associated land) in the summer of 2014 (an application made in 2013 was withdrawn). Once S106 agreements are signed and development commences payments will be made in stages, dependent on scheme build out rates. Therefore, although S106 funding will be essential in the longer term, it is far from clear when the Council will hold sufficient funds from this source to meet initial school construction costs.

7. As noted in the strategy any new school will be an Academy or Free School. It is clear from the capital funding position that the earliest opening date (September 2015) for the school can only be achieved as a Free School, through a direct bid to DfE by parents or promoters. This would attract capital and initial revenue start-up funding directly from DfE. Later opening dates (September 2016 onwards) could be achieved through a Free School bid or through a Wokingham led “Academy Presumption” process. This last is a process to create a new school where one is required to meet an expected shortfall in places. It requires the local authority to source the Capital Funding for the new school (from Basic Need, from S106, from CIL and from other capital resources such as receipts from land sales) and the revenue start-up costs from DSG. A combination of both processes is also possible. This might, for example, require DfE funding of the initial start-up costs, with school expansion costs being met by the Council.

8. Free School capital funds can only be applied to successful Free School bids by parents and other promoters. To date one group (South of Wokingham Free School Group) has formed and declared an intention to bid for approval to open a new secondary school in the south. The Council is keen to work with this group to support a bid that meets strategy objectives.

9. The Council is also working with local community members to refine school proposals. A number of meetings have been held (two public and two local working party meetings) to begin the process of co-design. A meeting was held in Finchampstead in January 2014 and further meetings agreed for February and March. If the school is built and funded by Wokingham then this partnership will feed directly into the school specification process. If a Free School bid is made under the national Free

School programme then this partnership work will inform the Borough Council's response and (it is hoped) lead to a better Free School proposal.

10. Issues that have been raised and discussed to date include:

- The location and accessibility of the new school
- Initial school size
- The phasing of school expansion
- The character of the school (e.g. Faith or non-faith based).
- Curriculum focus
- Sixth form provision.

11. Initial discussions indicate that community members would prefer a school that is at least similar in size (6FE / 180 places per year) to existing schools on opening (and so of sufficient size to support a sixth form) and that is accessible to existing and new communities. Phased expansion is tolerated – but the preference is for a limited number of phases to minimise the potential for disruption.

12. In view of progress on our new school proposal contingency plans with existing schools have not been developed in detail. Although affordability will be an issue it is thought that limited scale school expansion (noting this is a stop-gap until the Arborfield school can open) can be achieved by supporting school development plans (e.g. for enhanced sixth form accommodation).

13. It is anticipated that the borough will demonstrate its continued commitment to the wider secondary sector through an initial £2m investment into Emmbrook School in 2014/15. This is subject to member agreement later this year.

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