

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Cross Borough Secondary Place Planning / SDL</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 March 2018
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Director of Corporate Services - Graham Ebers

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

That there will be sufficient secondary school places to ensure Wokingham Borough can meet its school place sufficiency duty.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The report is provided for information purposes only.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Cross border planning of secondary place provision is carried out where required. Despite the significant volumes of movement between boroughs most planning is necessarily internal to each borough. This year the number of Wokingham resident children offered places out of borough balanced the number of out of borough residents offered Wokingham school places This also reflects the current statutory environment where most secondary schools are Academies and so responsible for their own admissions arrangements.

The change from provision through maintained schools to one based on Free Schools and Academies has reduced the requirements for consultation. New maintained school proposals were subject to a prescribed consultation process, with defined appeal rights. Where new provision is in the form of a Free School there is a requirement for consultation, but this is much less clearly defined than was the case for maintained schools.

Some movement occurs with respect to long standing admissions arrangements that give priority for admission to particular schools based on community areas that cross borough boundaries. These generally reflect arrangements established when Berkshire County Council was responsible for education services.

Movement occurs to faith schools and to grammar schools because some schools give priority based on faith grounds or academic performance, within a wider (than a single borough) area and some Wokingham resident children meet these criteria.

Finally, there is movement that reflects parental preference, but does not follow from any strategic decision by the Councils responsible for each area.

## **Background**

Cross border planning of secondary place provision is carried out where required. Despite the significant volumes of movement between boroughs most planning is necessarily internal to each borough. This also reflects the current statutory environment where most secondary schools are Academies and so responsible for their own admissions arrangements.

In 2017 there were 8,706 children in Year 7 to 11 (i.e. of statutory school age) living in Wokingham Borough attending a state funded secondary or all through (primary and secondary phases) school. Of these 82% attended schools in the Wokingham Borough area. At this point 1,504 children were living in the borough, but attending schools in other areas and 1,347 pupils attending schools in the borough, but were living in other boroughs.

The DfE statistics are at a local education authority level, but our admissions data allows some further analysis.

Looking at Wokingham resident children, only Edgbarrow takes a significant number of children (5%). The two Reading Grammars together also take about 5% of Wokingham resident children. No other single school stands out, Wokingham children have been offered places at a wide range of schools across the local area.

Looking at children resident in other boroughs, the schools that take significant proportions of their roll from outside the borough (greater than 10%) are Oakbank (49%), Bulmershe (47%), Forest (29%), Maiden Erlegh (12%). Other schools were 10% or less.

The admissions data indicated that for this year the numbers admitted to Wokingham schools from outside the borough and numbers of Wokingham children admitted to schools in other boroughs balanced.

Edgbarrow, Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh schools have designated areas that reflect historic school organisation planning. Oakbank too was originally set up with admissions arrangements designed to give cross border priority, in this case to Reading resident children.

Admission to Reading Grammar schools reflects the high levels of attainment exhibited by many of the borough's children.

## **Analysis of Issues**

Most secondary schools are now academies and responsible for their own admissions arrangements. This means the local authority has limited ability to manage the arrangements and so make changes to admissions and so influence the pattern of where children attend schools and movement within the borough and to areas outside. If changes were proposed by schools, local authorities can object to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, where the changes are seen as being contrary to the requirements of the statutory School Admissions Code. The arrangements include the Admission Number and the oversubscription criteria – and there is a clear statutory pathway for

increases in admissions numbers, even when these may disadvantage other local schools.

The national Free School programme can create capacity that sits outside the local authority planning processes. In the past there have been concerns that this has led to over provision of places.

The scale of need in this and neighbouring boroughs has been so great there has been no perceived need to collaborate on new secondary schools projects. The scale of change, whether related to new housing developments or to high birth rates has prompted the development of stand-alone school projects.

The change from provision through maintained schools to one based on Free Schools and Academies has reduced the requirements for consultation. New maintained school proposals were subject to a prescribed consultation process, with defined appeal rights. Where new provision is in the form of a Free School there is a requirement for consultation, but this is much less clearly defined than was the case for maintained schools. It is likely that fewer people will see consultations, they may have less information on which to base their response and there is no right in law to appeal against a decision.

Where secondary schools have been proposed and cross-border impacts (at least on long term agreed partnerships) are envisaged, local authorities do discuss changes. The recently opened schools in Arborfield (Bohunt Wokingham) and Binfield (Kings Academy Binfield) have been known to both local authorities (Wokingham and Bracknell Forest). Neither was envisaged as provision that would impact on the neighbouring authority, although once a new Academy is established it is free to pursue any path it wishes, within the limits of the School Admissions Code.

The long standing cross-border admissions arrangements are still important to local communities. The admissions arrangements for Edgbarrow School are of particular importance for most of the Wokingham Without parish area. To date there has been no attempt to change these to disadvantage Wokingham Without residents and it is a reasonable presumption that the joining together of that school and local Wokingham Primary phase schools under a single Multi Academy Trust will strengthen that partnership.

Some movement reflects parental preference. Admissions arrangements cannot give priority according to the borough of residence, in accordance with the Greenwich Judgement. They must give priority to looked after and formerly looked after children (wherever they live) and (in effect) give first priority to children with Education Health and Care Plans. So, even with heavily oversubscribed schools, there are routes in from outside the local area.

The admissions code gives Free Schools and Academies some discretion, for example there is a presumption in favour of a school increasing its admission number. They can also determine their age range, through their Funding Agreement with the DfE. There are though important safeguards in the Admissions Code and where a school has a place they must (with very few exceptions) offer it.

Therefore where a new school has capacity it cannot be protected for residents of the home borough (although defined areas can be given higher priority). The only way this

could be achieved would be through creating a small school from the outset and then growing it, but this would lead to higher capital costs and would work against the high standards the borough sets out to achieve.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
None.

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
None.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
School Admissions Code 2014

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