

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Secondary School Sufficiency</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

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

That there should be sufficient 11 to 16 secondary school places to meet the needs of Wokingham's children.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the contents of this report are noted and the committee makes recommendations as it sees fit.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

All children whose parents made "on time" applications for September 2021 Year 7 places received an offer on national offer day 2021 (1<sup>st</sup> March 2021). Although the total number of offers exceeded the number of previously agreed places, additional places were offered at two schools. Further places were then agreed at a number of schools across the borough, and by September 75 additional (additional to these schools' Published Admissions Numbers) children were allocated to four schools. By the beginning of September, the total number of allocated children had fallen by 74 from offer day. This reduction in the number of children allocated is quite common and is driven by factors including children being withdrawn from the admissions round to take up places in independent schools.

Although the total number of allocations at the beginning of September is now less than the number of Year 7 places originally available in all Borough schools, the additional capacity was (and is) required because of the Council's inability to make use of places available at the Forest School. As a boys' school the Forest School cannot provide places for girls who cannot be offered a preferred place. Where additional places are agreed at other schools, admissions law requires these offers to be made from waiting lists in accordance with each school's oversubscription criteria. Since places could only be agreed at co-educational schools, these additional offers have necessarily included boys, and this has increased the number of unfilled places at the Forest School.

It is currently projected that the number of children requiring Year 7 school places will increase until 2023/24, dropping to current levels by the end of the decade (2028/29). As a consequence the total number of children requiring 11 to 16 places is projected to increase over the decade, peaking in 2027/28. Although the projection does not run beyond the 2028/29 year, the Office for National Statistics population projections for the borough, the primary school projections and the number of children born to borough residents up until 2019/20 points towards 11 to 16 numbers falling into the 2030s.

Demand for Year 7 places in Earley, Woodley and communities to the north of the A329M is projected to peak in 2024/25 and then drop back towards current levels by 2028/29.

Conversely demand for Year 7 place in Wokingham Town, Winnersh and south Wokingham communities is projected to grow until 2023/24 and then remain relatively constant (subject to annual fluctuation) for the remainder of the decade. The fall in the north is likely to reflect the impact of falling birth numbers since 2012/13, while south Wokingham demand is bolstered by the movement of families into the new homes in the large-scale residential developments in this area.

Discussions with school leaders indicate that there can be little or no reliance on capacity in existing schools to meet these additional needs, at least without supporting investment. This reflects the ongoing challenge of accessing Forest School places and rising rolls (through mid-phase allocations) at other schools with capacity. It will therefore be necessary to agree a significant programme of school expansion. Although some permanent expansion is required, projected need indicates that some additional places will only be required to meet need in peak years.

Preliminary discussions have been held with a number of school leaders concerning the ability of their schools to help meet this increase in demand, and with the Council's finance team to agree a suitable budget for the 2022/23 year onwards to enable these needs to be met. It is intended that a programme of school expansion (at least sufficient to meet needs in 2022/23) will need to be agreed. The Council will also set out to work constructively with the Forest School to develop actions that will ensure that a much higher proportion of that school's capacity can be filled in future years.

## Background

This report considers both the immediate challenges being faced by the Council and community and the short and longer term planning to ensure that sufficient places are available. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places. To ensure that it can meet these needs proactively it prepares primary and secondary school phase sufficiency plans.

The starting point for recent secondary place strategies has been the number of children in the primary sector, who would in time require secondary places and the ongoing impact of housing development. Until 2016 the Council significantly increased the number of primary school places to meet the need generated by increasing numbers of children born in and moving to the borough. After this point the reduced number of births since 2012/13 had led to falling demand for Reception places across the borough. Subsequently, primary school capacity expansion has been focused on the needs of the large scale new residential areas developing in the SDL areas around Wokingham, Shinfield and the Arborfield Garrison. It has always been expected that these children would need additional secondary school places, and the borough opened a large new secondary school, the Bohunt School, Wokingham in 2016.

After opening, this school opted to offer 240 Year 7 places per year, and a number of other secondary schools opted to increase their admission numbers too. At that point there was insufficient demand to fill all Year 7 places and a number of schools saw falling rolls.

The most recent strategy for secondary school places was for the period 2017 to 2020 and is now in the process of being updated. This strategy saw a possible need for 100 additional Year 7 places by 2019/20 (which would not necessarily require additional or new permanent accommodation) and for 270 new permanent places (based on 60 places per year). New or additional places were not necessarily required for the initial 100 places because the recent history of low levels of recruitment to a number of schools was creating surplus capacity. This projection noted though that if the proportion of children admitted from outside the borough reduced there might not be a need for additional capacity in the strategy period.

Although, the analysis below is not focused on variance from the 2017/20 strategy figures, it is important to note that much of the challenges experienced in 2021/22 (and expected to be a significant issue in subsequent years) is the challenge presented by the interaction of parental preference and the Forest School's single gender intake, leading to a significant number of single sex boys places being unfilled, but insufficient places for girls, which is greatly exacerbating the place shortfall, particularly for girls.

As noted above work is now underway to prepare a new secondary school places strategy, for the period 2021 to 2031. An initial needs analysis is attached as Appendix one. This is being used as the basis of an ongoing consultation exercise, which will inform the development of the subsequent action plan.

Post 16 needs (including sixth forms) will be the subject of a subsequent strategy. Post 16 provision is made in schools (6<sup>th</sup> forms), Further Education Colleges in neighbouring Reading and Bracknell, in sixth form colleges (such as Farnborough 6<sup>th</sup> Form College) and through apprenticeships and by other registered training providers. The Council will wish to consider how it can work with local education settings to promote an increase in

the number and proportion of Wokingham students achieving Level 3 (A level equivalent) courses, with a strong focus on the role of new “T” level vocational courses. It may be necessary to increase the number of sixth form places in the Borough (noting here that the Bohunt Wokingham School has planning permission for an extension, that would enable the creation of a new sixth form). However, there is no indication from the projections and current outcome data that there is an immediate need for these places, so this work, although important, does not have the urgency of work to resolve the Year 7 supply issue.

Outside of the changing need for school places, and the issue of the Forest School, there are three context issues that will affect (and have affected) the development of the needs analysis and the action plan:

- Covid 19 has had three significant impact. Firstly, it has led to significant delays in the delivery of the Council’s capital programme, as contractor’s and suppliers staff have fallen ill or been subject to other restrictions. Secondly, it has led to a reduced level of building activity and therefore capital receipts from developers, which has necessitated a reduced capital programme and will have reduced the number of arrivals into the borough, at least in 2020. Finally, it has diverted resources from future planning to pandemic management, which has had a negative impact on the Council’s ability to develop future projects. Although it is assumed that the direct impacts of Covid 19 are now managed, there is a continuing risk of unforeseen impacts, particularly from new virus strains and from “knock on” impacts on finance, costs and future needs.
- Brexit: An issue that has been raised nationally is the possible movement of formerly UK resident families back to their countries of origin. Although no definitive data is available, rolls and language analysis (from census returns) indicates there has been no significant movement out of the Wokingham area, so far.
- Construction cost increases: the data presented in the Financial Analysis and in Appendix 2 do not take account of the ongoing major increase in construction costs (related both to staff and construction cost materials). This is due to a number of factors, although the major issues are likely to be Covid related, as this is an international issue.

## **Analysis of Issues**

All children whose parents made “on time” applications for Year 7 places received an offer on national offer day 2021 (1<sup>st</sup> March 2021). Although the total number of offers (2,232) exceeded the number of agreed places (the total of the Published Admissions Numbers for the borough’s schools) (2,176 places) additional places were offered at two schools. Further places were subsequently agreed at a number of schools across the borough, and by September 75 additional children were allocated at four schools. At this point 2,158 children were allocated places, a reduction of 74 from the position on offer days. This reduction in allocations between offer day and the start of term is quite common and is driven by a number of factors including children being withdrawn from the admissions round to take up places in independent schools.

Although the total number of allocations in September is now less than the 2,176 places available before additional capacity was agreed, the additional places were (and are)

required because of the Council's inability to make use of all the places available at the Forest School. Initial allocations must be made in accordance with parental preferences and school oversubscription criteria. At the point of allocation prior to offer day, the Council found that while there were places available at the Forest School, other schools were fully allocated but there were a significant number of children of both genders who could not be offered places and who would therefore need to be offered places at a non-preferred school with capacity. As a boys' school the Forest School cannot provide places for girls who cannot be offered a preferred place. Where additional places are agreed at other schools, admissions law requires these offers to be made from waiting lists in accordance with each school's oversubscription criteria. Since places could only be agreed at co-educational schools these additional offers have necessarily included boys, and this ensured that all children received offers, but these places have also increased the number of unfilled places at the Forest School.

Current projections are that the number of children requiring Year 7 school places will increase until 2023/24 (with a maximum deficit against all places, including the Forest School of 125 places, or just over 6 classes), dropping to current levels by the end of the decade (2028/29). Therefore, the total number of children requiring 11 to 16 places is projected to increase over the decade, peaking in 2027/28, when an additional 485 places may be required. Although the projection does not run beyond the 2028/29 year, the Office for National Statistics population projections for the borough, the primary school projections and the number of children born to borough residents up until 2019/20 points towards 11 to 16 numbers falling into the 2030s.

Demand for Year 7 places in Earley, Woodley and communities to the north of the A329M is projected to peak in 2024/25 (with a local deficit of 101 places) and then drop back towards current levels by 2028/29. Conversely demand for Year 7 place in Wokingham Town, Winnersh and south Wokingham communities is expected to grow until 2023/24 and then remain relatively constant (subject to annual fluctuation around the level of current school capacities) for the remainder of the decade. The fall in the north is likely to reflect the impact of falling birth numbers since 2012/13, while south Wokingham demand is bolstered by the movement of families into the new homes in the large-scale residential developments in this area.

Although the focus is on Year 7, it should be noted that Years 8 and 9 are also under pressure, although not to the same extent. These needs will also be dealt with through the developing action plan.

It is likely that the action plan that comes out of the needs analysis and secondary places strategy will reflect the needs of specific communities. To date the Twyford area has been identified as an area where additional capacity in the local school (the Piggott School) would be beneficial, not least because this would ensure that south Twyford children would not need to be transported to school by vehicle. There may be other areas where local solutions are also required.

Although it is known that some schools have unused capacity, current analysis indicates that this cannot be relied on to meet needs in 2022/23 and beyond. Work is ongoing though to confirm current capacities with a number of schools.

This new analysis reflects discussions with school leaders (preliminary discussions have been held with a number of school leaders concerning the ability of their schools to help meet this increase in demand) and the ongoing challenge of accessing Forest

School places. Rising rolls (through mid-phase allocations) and the risks of expansion to school standards mean that these unused places may either not be there when required or will require investment for this use to be acceptable to school leaders. It will therefore be necessary to agree a significant programme of school expansion, from 2022/23. Although some permanent expansion may be required, projected need indicates that many of the additional places will only be required in peak years, and therefore high-quality temporary accommodation may be appropriate.

Discussions are ongoing with the Council’s finance team to agree a suitable budget for the 2022/23 year onwards through the normal annual budget making process, to enable these needs to be met. The Council will also set out to work constructively with the Forest School to look at steps that would ensure that a much higher proportion of that school’s capacity can be filled in future years.

To inform the development of the new secondary school places strategy and to develop a plan of action meetings with schools both collectively (a meeting is scheduled for 13/09/21) and individually are occurring over the Autumn term 2021.

The provisional investment programme (and agreed additional places in 2021/22) is set out as Appendix 2. It will require an additional £2.8m (on top of the £3.9m already budgeted for) to create 534 places.

Revenue costs would be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant Growth Fund.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0		Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2.2M	£1.7M	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£1.9M	£1.4M	Capital

### **Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

N/A

### **Cross-Council Implications**

N/A

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>	
N/A	
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