

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>School Sufficiency Update</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 June 2023
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

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

That there will be sufficient school places to meet statutory need

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the report and attached paper are noted and the committee makes any recommendations that it sees as appropriate.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The report and attached place sufficiency analysis paper considers the sufficiency of primary and secondary (including post 16) mainstream school places. A brief summary of the current SEND provision position is also provided.

There are a number of issues that affect all phases of education. These include:

- International migration
- Birth rates
- Residential growth
- An increasing proportion of the child population with special education needs placed in special education schools.

International migration into the borough has increased substantially in both the 2021/22 and 2022/23 academic years, compared to earlier years. This has led to roll growth in both primary secondary phases.

Birth numbers have decreased after 2011/12. This has a significant impact on primary school rolls, and will have an impact on secondary Year 7 rolls from next year (albeit this may be masked by current high immigration rates into the borough).

House builders remain active in the borough. In Shinfield, the new communities are having a marked impact on demand for local primary school places. It is reasonable to assume this will be true for the Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park communities too, at some near future point.

In response to increased numbers of children placed in high cost, out of borough specialist settings, the council has entered the national "Safety Valve Programme" and has been successful in securing funding for two new special schools in the borough. Officers are working to reconfigure and to increase the number of Resource Base places in the borough's mainstream schools too.

The most significant issues in the primary sector are the high number of surplus places, particularly in younger age groups, the continued strong mid-phase growth and localised Reception Year pressure in Shinfield.

In the secondary sector officers, under the direct leadership of the Chief Executive, are working to increase the number of secondary school places, in accordance with the secondary strategy agreed in March 2022. Demand for secondary places has increased (as a consequence of high rates of migration into the borough) above the level forecast when the strategy was prepared.

In the SEND sector, officers are working to confirm arrangements for the two new special schools to supplement the new Oak Tree School, in Winnersh and the long established Addington and Chiltern Way Wokingham Schools. Works are in progress to expand Addington School too.

## Background

The council has statutory duties from the Education Act 1996 to ensure there are sufficient places for both children of statutory school age in the borough and students age up to 19. Under the Children and Families Act 2014 the council has duties to arrange education for children and young people with Special Education Needs aged up to 25 years old.

There is no duty to make formal plans, but Wokingham, in common with most authorities, makes plans to secure formal commitment to projects necessary to ensure there are sufficient places and for capital programme development. Wokingham's most recent primary provision strategy was adopted in 2018, with the most recent secondary and post 16 strategies adopted in March 2022.

Although the council has statutory duties, it has few formal powers, particularly as many borough schools (now all secondary schools) are academies or free schools. This means any change to school admission numbers has to be agreed with schools and their Trusts.

The council has a roll projection spreadsheet, revised in 2022. This is currently subject to external review. In earlier years place plans have also been able to call on ONS population projections to cross reference for longer term projections. These have not though, been updated since the 2018 base projections. As these projections predate Covid and recent increased rates of migration into the country (which have had an impact on the borough) they are increasingly of historic interest only.

There are two competing forces affecting the borough's population:

- Changing birth rates
- Changing migration patterns

Birth rates dropped after the 2011/12 academic year. This has led to falling primary school rolls and these reduced size cohorts will be entering secondary schools from 2024/25.

However, the borough also sees strong migration into the borough. Much of this is associated with new housing. As housing development is focused in specific communities, child growth associated with new housing is also focused on specific communities. In the mean time, the borough has seen a significant increase in the number of children moving into the borough, associated with international migration, in a more dispersed distribution. Apart from increasing demand now (with particular implications for both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3), if the current rate of immigration is maintained, this will more than offset the fall in birth rates. A key focus of the review of roll projections therefore has to be the likelihood of the high rates of migration into the borough being maintained in future years.

The council has limited resources. Although, as noted above, projects can only proceed with school agreement, the council can only agree to works that can be afforded within the available capital resources. Officers are therefore working with secondary schools to refine capital works scheme to be a better match to available resources.

## **Analysis of Issues**

### ***Primary Phase***

As noted above the council has three key primary phase issues:

Numbers of applicants for Reception places have fallen and there are a number of schools with high numbers of unfilled places. The council has agreed to reduce the PANs for a number of schools (in Earley, the north, and Finchampstead) to enable them to maintain efficient and lawful teacher to child ratios. Although it has been reported that in some areas it has been necessary to close and amalgamate schools, there are no current plans for such steps here.

However, significant numbers of children arrive in the borough and require mid-phase primary school places (this is not a new phenomenon, but numbers more than doubled (400 per year arriving mid-phase between 2021 and 2023, compared to 150 per year in the two preceding years). This has led to a significant capacity challenges for Years 5 and 6. A number of schools have agreed to take on additional children, and have been financially supported by the council. In addition the new St Cecilia's School in Emmbrook ward has opened, for Key Stage 2 only.

Planned residential growth in Shinfield has led to a requirement for additional school places. The Alder Grove Primary School opened in 2020, offering 30 Reception places that year. The school offered 60 places in 2021 and 2022, and this was sufficient to meet demand in the Shinfield area. However, in 2023 just less than 30 Shinfield children were offered places in schools in neighbouring areas, because Shinfield schools were full. Roll projections and NHS registration data point to Shinfield demand continuing to increase. However, there are a number of issues to be considered before a proposal can be brought forward. These include:

**Site options:** the Spencers Wood housing development includes a school site and funding through a S106 agreement. It is though within the AWE Burghfield Detailed Emergency Planning Zone, and our understanding is that the nuclear regulator would object to construction of the school. An alternative to this would be the expansion of an existing school (and the council has an option to acquire additional land to enable Alder Grove CoE Primary School to increase in size to offer 90 places a year).

**Funding:** A key task for the authority is managing capital commitments down to match available resources. The funding for the Spencers Wood School is strictly for that school alone, and, although it would largely fund a school expansion project, would require agreement from the developer to enable the funds to be used for other purposes. Further work on funding options, including a consideration of the value for money of such works, would be required.

**Sustainability:** Most of the planned homes in the Shinfield area have been delivered and planned delivery will be at a lower rate than has been the case in the recent past. New homes have a higher child yield than established homes, but this can be expected to reduce as communities age. It is possible therefore, that local child numbers will drop in the near future, in which case demand may fall.

**The impact on other schools:** Children coming out of Shinfield help keep schools in other areas viable and protect the quality of the education they provide.

## **Secondary Phase**

Agreement for 2023 admissions has been reached and agreement for 2024/25 admissions is close to being finalised. As set out in the 2022 strategy officers are working with the Circle Trust and Piggott School to finalise plans to offer additional places. However, the number of additional places required is very much dependent on the number of children moving into the borough. If immigration into Wokingham is reduced to 2020 to 2021 levels (analysis over a number of years indicates this was typical for such arrivals in earlier years – it was not a Covid related reduction) then the number of places required drops sharply and the 2022 strategy (which looked for a “bulge” in place provision that peaked in the 2022 to 2024 period) becomes viable (albeit needing additional places compared to 2022 expectations). If it does not the fundamental strategy may have to be revisited.

Two other issues are worth highlighting at this point:

- a) **The distribution of school places versus population geography:** Wokingham and Winnersh Schools serve wider areas. Although the Bohunt Wokingham and Oakbank Schools have opened within the last decade, the population of the south (which is still increasing as the SDLs are built out) exceeds local secondary school capacity. Shinfield in particular has seven entry classes into its primary schools, and is adjacent to the Lower Earley area (which is within the Maiden Erlegh designated area, but very few children are admitted to that school from that area), but Oakbank can only offer five Year 7 classes. The only identified option to solve this problem is in conjunction with a residential development proposal.
- b) **Wokingham Without:** This ward is largely served by the Edgbarrow School, in Bracknell Forest. Rising demand in the school’s designated area (which does not include the large Buckler’s Park development) has meant that the school could not offer places to nearly 30 Wokingham children living in the designated area. The school would be willing to offer additional places, provided they can be funded. The DfE have advised us that we are not empowered to fund additional places at the school, as it is not in our area. Equally Bracknell Forest have no reason to fund places for Wokingham children. Officers are looking for creative ways of improving the situation for our residents.

## **Post 16**

Current projections indicate a possible shortfall in provision, in the mid 2020s, unless capacity is increased. As noted above, the critical question is over the number of additional young people generated by movement into the borough. If numbers arriving reduce back to 2020/21 levels, the shortfall would not be apparent until the late 2020s. The analysis is less certain though, because young people also choose to attend colleges and schools in neighbouring boroughs. Farnborough Sixth Form College is popular, but rising demand in Hampshire and Surrey may mean Wokingham residents cannot be admitted at some point. Reading and Bracknell and Wokingham Colleges, conversely, can be expected to align provision to demand and already offer a mix of A Level (and other Level 3) qualifications and vocational courses.

Work continues to develop the Bohunt Sixth Form proposal, with a particular focus on better aligning scheme costs to available resources.

## Special Education Needs

As noted above the Council is working to increase capacity through a number of schemes.

- A) The new Oak Tree Special School for children with ASD is expected to open this September in Winners. This is a four way project between Wokingham BC, Reading BC, the DfE and the Maiden Erlegh Trust.
- B) The council was successful in securing funds for two all-through special schools for 100 pupils each. Work is proceeding to finalise the site selections. Under the conditions of the programme the council provides a free site, writes the school specification and agrees to use the school and so underwrite costs. The DfE builds the school and (after an engagement process run by the local authority) appoints the Trust to run each school.
- C) Addington School is growing through an on site temporary expansion and through the conversion of the former Farley Hill primary school site to be the Key stage 1 annexe of the school.
- D) The council is engaging with mainstream schools to create new Resource Bases. So far interest has been limited, but the Indigo RB scheme for children with ASD at Maiden Erlegh school is advancing.

Further information, including numeric data and graphs is included in the attached Appendix One.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	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

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

As this is an information only report, there are no recommendations requiring financial evaluation.

### Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

As an information report there are no cross-council implications.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

As an information only report, no equalities impact assessment is required.

**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**

As an information report, there will be no impact on the council’s carbon neutral objective..

**Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

**List of Background Papers**

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