

Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Schools Place Strategy 2013-2018
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	14 October 2013
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2735

Purpose of Report: To review the outcome of the public consultation and consider the subsequent amendments to the Strategy.

Recommended Action: To note the responses to the consultation and approve the proposed actions and the amended School Place Strategy.

Reason for decision to be taken: The recommended approach provides a strategic framework for school place planning, and a robust modelling tool to support the provision of pupil number projections.

Other options considered: As set out in the report

Key background documentation: None

Portfolio Member Details	
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Implications

- Policy:** The Schools Place Strategy provides a clear strategic direction for the provision of school places, against which future decisions will be considered
- Financial:** The School Place Strategy has implications for the capital budget. All works required to meet basic need provision are considered and prioritised within the capital budget for Education. However, an increase in basic need provision, whether for changes to existing schools or for new schools will have significant financial implications. The proposed Capital Strategy and Programme for 2013 - 2018 allows for the expected impact of basic need provision, including the potential costs of a new primary school for Newbury. However, depending on the amount of growth in pupil numbers over the next five years and the level of government funding, which is currently expected to reduce and to be inadequate for our basic need costs, it may be necessary to postpone or delete other schemes currently included in the programme in order to meet in full the budget pressures arising from basic need.
- Personnel:** N/A
- Legal/Procurement:** N/A
- Property:** N/A
- Risk Management:** The planning of school places carries the following risks:
 Impact on our ability to meet the statutory requirements for the provision of school places
 Impact on the placement of children in schools which are not near their home due to lack of places in their geographic locality (increased Home to School transport costs, poor publicity for the Council, dissatisfied resident parents).
 Increased and urgent pressure on capital budgets to cover off basic need requirements at short notice.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Not relevant to equality

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Councillor Gordon Lundie

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: OSMC meeting - May 2013. Responses incorporated into the paper and at Appendix C

Ward Members: Not applicable

Opposition Spokesperson: Councillor David Allen

Local Stakeholders: Consultation with parents and schools

Officers Consulted: Ian Pearson, Mark Lewis and Corporate Board

Trade Union: N/A

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The Schools Place Strategy 2013-2018 summarises the current position with regard to pupil places and outlines the principles and actions in relation to the planning of school places for the future. The Strategy encompasses maintained schools and academies, as the statutory responsibility for the provision of school places in West Berkshire covers both types of school, and addresses the complex balance of creating sufficient places whilst operating on a capital shoestring, without over-provision.
- 1.2 The Schools Place Strategy was initially approved for consultation, through the corporate cycle, with final approval at Executive in January 2013, where responsibility for reviewing the outcome of the consultation, resultant actions and approving the updated Schools Place Strategy was delegated to Councillor Neill.

2. Consultation Process

- 2.1 The consultation was promoted to parents through schools, early year's settings and on the Council's website. The consultation focused on the 4 key principles of the Strategy and explained how the Council will make decisions when it is planning the availability of school places. The consultation ran from 30 May to 22 July 2013.
- 2.2 In addition, the Schools Place Strategy and the associated Place Planning model were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission on 21 May 2013.

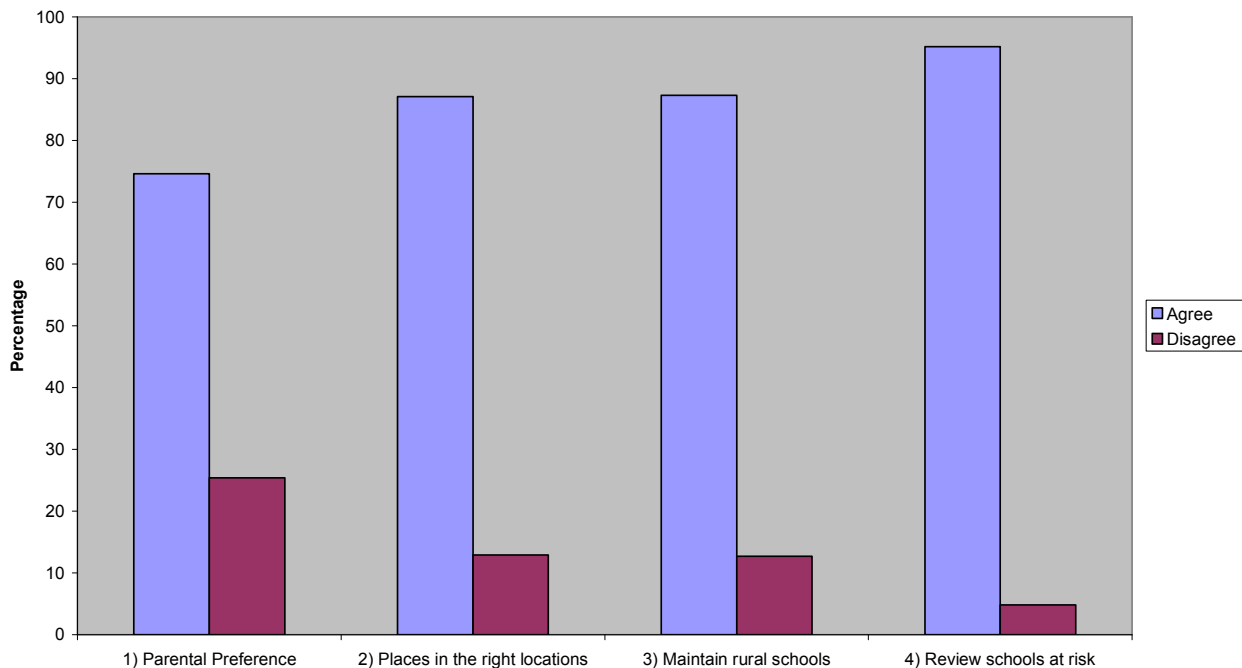
3. Response Rate

- 3.1 An online consultation form was created and received 65 responses, of which 60 came from parents. There were no verbal or written responses received via any other route.

4. Responses from online consultation

- 4.1 The questionnaire asked for responses in relation to the 4 Key Principles:
 1. To respond to **parental preference** and, where feasible, to enable popular and successful schools to expand
 2. To respond to predicted numbers and ensure an **appropriate number of places** are available in the **right locations**
 3. To recognise the rural nature of West Berkshire, and to **maintain small rural schools** where it is educationally and financially viable to do so.
 4. To **review the future of schools that are at risk** of becoming unviable due to low pupil numbers and the impact on financial sustainability and/or with low standards
- 4.2 The 4 Key Principles were strongly supported:

CONSULTATION ON KEY PRINCIPLES



4.3 Comments were received in relation to the 4 Key Principles, and also in response to the questions regarding other issues or concerns. The comments are summarised below (see Appendix B).

4.4 24 respondents offered to take part in a Focus Group, and this will be actioned as part of the Communications Strategy which is described as an action to take forward from the consultation.

5. Presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC)

5.1 Caroline Corcoran presented to OSMC in May 2013, and explained that the strategy for forecasting school places was underpinned by an analytic model and overlaid with local intelligence to produce a 5 year forecast of required school places across the West Berkshire.

5.2 A summary of the discussion is included at Appendix C.

6. Themes

6.1 As a result of the consultation, 6 key themes emerged:

1. Parents were most concerned about their ability to get their child into the school of their choice, whether it is the catchment school, near to their home but not the catchment school, or a popular school.
2. Parents were concerned about the impact of changes to their school on the education of their children and the culture of the school and the community.
3. Parents felt that the Council was not considering or understanding issues, and yet their concerns related to matters which the Council is well aware of and is taking into account or is already working to resolve.
4. Parents felt that the Council should ensure that all schools are good schools.

5. OSC agreed that the Council should pursue access to GP data, and will monitor progress to achieving this aim.
6. OSC noted that the Council should undertake robust discussions about cross-border effects on place planning with neighbouring LAs, especially Reading.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix A.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The responses raised relevant and reasonable matters for consideration and Themes 1 & 2 confirmed the initial assumptions, prior to the questionnaire.
- 8.2 Theme 3 demonstrated that the Council needs to improve communication and consultation with parents about school place planning matters. Theme 4 demonstrated that the Council needs to improve communication about school improvement activities. Both of these Themes link to areas where the Council is undertaking significant activity to deliver good outcomes, and it is clear that more needs to be done to communicate this good work.
- 8.3 Therefore, a Communications Strategy will be developed to address the communication issues, including offering face-to-face discussion meetings with parents, providing written materials, use of the media, and ensuring earlier interaction with parents and communities when changes are being planned. A Focus Group will be set up, drawn from those who responded a willingness to take part through this questionnaire.
- 8.4 By improving communication and consultation with parents in a timely manner, the Council can explain the work that it is doing to address the issues, obtain feedback and reassure parents.
- 8.5 Themes 5&6 are already included in the work programme, and meetings for Theme 6 are either planned or scheduled.

9. Actions

- Feedback on the outcome of the consultation will be circulated to parents via schools, early year's settings and Children's Centres. *September/October 2013*
- Meeting with Reading re: cross-border pupil movement *September 2013*
- An initial meeting of the Focus Group will be arranged to consider and comment on the draft Communications Strategy and to comment on the draft written materials and proposals for discussion meetings. *October/November 2013*
- The School Places Strategy Action Plan will address the confirmed issues and will be in line with the strategic principles of this Strategy. The Communications Strategy will be an integral part of the School Places Strategy Action Plan. *December 2013*

- The agreed actions within the Communications Strategy will be rolled out, with an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation based on parental feedback and engagement. *From January 2013.*
- Pursuit of GP data via the Strategic Director for Public Health. *Ongoing*

Appendices

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Consultation Comments

Appendix C – Summary of presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Commission

APPENDIX A

Equality Impact Assessment – Stage One

Name of item being assessed:	Schools Place Strategy
Version and release date of item (if applicable):	
Owner of item being assessed:	Caroline Corcoran
Name of assessor:	Caroline Corcoran
Date of assessment:	12/08/2013

1. What are the main aims of the item?
To agree a strategic framework for the planning of school places

2. Note which groups may be affected by the item, consider how they may be affected and what sources of information have been used to determine this. (Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation)

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this.
Pupils	<p>Pupils may not be able to get a place at the school of their choice.</p> <p>Pupils may have to travel further to the school that they are allocated.</p> <p>Pupils may not be able to get into the same school as their sibling(s) or friends,</p>	<p>Popular schools may be full.</p> <p>Waiting lists for places.</p>
Parents	<p>Parental preference varies from year to year and parents expect the Council to ensure there are sufficient places in popular schools, even though popularity changes constantly</p> <p>Parents may find that they have children in different schools, and this can impact on their ability to drop off and collect children in two places at the same time.</p>	<p>Complaints, feedback and admission appeals</p>

Further comments relating to the item:
There is an expectation that the Council will accommodate parental preference and that a high percentage of pupils will get their choice of school. The figures are reported in the press each year.

3. Result (please tick by clicking on relevant box)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	High Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No Relevance - This does not need to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment

1. What actions will be taken to address any negative effects?			
Action	Owner	By When	Outcome
Communication Strategy to increase parents understanding of the implications of their Admission choices	Service Manager (APGT, Education)	Ongoing from January 2014	The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure more parents are able to get the school of their choice.
Communication Strategy to ensure that the views of parents are collated earlier and are taken account of before decision are made, wherever possible	Service Manager (APGT, Education)	Ongoing from January 2014	Improved communication and consultation with parents and the local community

<p>2. What was the final outcome and why was this agreed?</p> <p>(Was the item adjusted, rewritten or unchanged? Refer to page 15 of <i>Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision Making</i> for more information.)</p> <p>The Action Plan associated with the Strategy will include a robust Communications Strategy.</p>
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<p>3. What arrangements have you put in place to monitor the impact of this decision?</p> <p>Annual review of the Strategy and the impact of the action plan.</p>
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Name: Caroline Corcoran

Date: 12/8/2013

APPENDIX B

Consultation Comments

Where suggestions have been made which are not allowable under the Admissions Code, these have been excluded, although the need for parents to understand what the LA can and cannot do is part of the Communications Strategy.

The figures in brackets below show the number of comments on the same topic. Within each question, the themes are ranked in terms of number of similar comments.

1) Parental Preference (26 respondents commented)

- The LA should ensure that all schools are good (8)
- Expansion may be detrimental for pupils and class sizes (8)
- Expansion may affect outdoor space (6)
- The impact on the school culture should be carefully considered (4)
- New schools would be preferred over expanding existing schools (2)
- Some schools are good because they are small (2)
- Expansion may be difficult due to the constraints of the school sites (1)
- Schools with longer waiting lists should be expanded (1)
- Schools where catchment children cannot get a place should be expanded (1)
- Consider using community facilities such as the village hall rather than removing other space within the school such as music rooms (1)
- Traffic and parking needs to be considered (1)

2) Right number of places in right locations (12 respondents commented)

- New schools are preferred (2)
- Don't add numbers to existing schools without expanding classrooms, adding teachers and considering the impact on the school culture (3)
- This is essential to sustain local economy and allow people to move into the area with children and be confident of a school place (1)
- Smaller schools (less than 24 pupils p.a. intake) should be prioritized for expansion/merger (1)
- Traffic and parking needs to be considered (1)
- Issues at the Reading boundary are not being addressed (1)
- Expansion may affect outdoor space (1)

3) Maintain small rural schools (12 respondents commented)

- Each school should have its own Headteacher – against the idea of an Executive Headteachers across a number of schools (6)
- Small rural schools get preferential treatment at the expense of less rural schools – do not support expansion of town schools to “protect” rural schools (2)
- Essential to maintain living communities in rural area and cope with new rural housing (2)
- Higher costs of maintaining small schools does not necessarily result in good education (1)
- This should only apply to very small schools, not moderate sized ones (1)

4) Review the future of schools at risk (12 respondents commented)

- Where schools are at risk of closure, there should be formal consultation with parents and the community (3)
- It would be impractical for parents to travel more widely to schools, and could lead to overlong commutes (2)
- Resources are finite and all options should be considered (1)
- The determination should be weighted towards ways to retain the school as a contributor to the local community (1)
- What do low pupil numbers mean? (1)
- If a school did close, would children be moved to a better school? (1)
- Financial consideration should not be a priority as a school is at the heart of a community (1)

Issues or concerns about school places in your area (44 respondents commented)

- Concern about getting a place at the school of their choice (8)
- Catchment area - specific boundary lines should be reviewed (5)
- Local school over-subscribed (5)
- Concerns about the Kennet catchment area (4)
- Concerns that some West Berkshire secondary schools are poorly rated by Ofsted (2)
- Siblings should be given priority over catchment children (2)
- Catchment area - preferred school is not the catchment school (2)
- Concern that parental choice is limited when some schools are not good schools (2)
- Traffic and parking needs to be considered (2)
- New primary school for Thatcham should be considered (2)
- New primary school for Newbury should be considered (2)
- Class sizes should remain below 30 (1)
- Concern that larger good school will be a target for expansion (1)
- Is West Berkshire Council planning to cope with higher numbers in future years? (1)
- Catchment area - concerns that boundaries may change (1)

How would you like the Council to talk to local communities about what it is doing to ensure a supply of school places? (40 respondents commented)

- Schools to give information to parents (11)
- Talk directly to parents and not through the school – discussion meetings (13)
- Nurseries, pre-schools and children centres to give information to parents (7)
- Clear, illustrative options and scenarios, accurate information, demographics – all simply presented for parents to comment upon (5)
- Email (5)
- Local media, including free newspapers (4)
- Questionnaires, including face-to-face questionnaires (3)
- Via Parish Council communications to residents (3)
- Joint talks with Reading and West Berkshire (1)
- Via post or letter drop (3)
- Website which parents can register on, and will email to alert them when it is updated (2)
- Community groups (1)
- Not during working hours (1)

APPENDIX C

Summary of presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Commission (May 2013)

Caroline Corcoran presented to OSC in May 2013, and explained that the strategy for forecasting school places was underpinned by a statistical model and overlaid with local intelligence to produce a 5 year forecast of required school places for West Berkshire.

The model is updated three times each year and a strategic school place planning group assisted in identifying issues, challenges, and potential solutions.

The system had been in development since October 2012 and had undergone strenuous testing using four years worth of past data, including the weighting of some factors. This year the accuracy of the model had proved to be within 0.6% of actual figures which provided confidence that the system was robust.

The system included a data dashboard which allowed contextual information to be overlaid, for example the inclusion or exclusion of planned housing developments. The overlay allowed local knowledge to be mapped to provide a more comprehensive projection which might highlight areas of concern.

The strategy had been developed alongside workshops with schools, and was now due for consultation with stakeholders and the public.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission raised a significant number of questions to clarify their understanding of the model. The Commission expressed particular concern about the number of children crossing local authority borders to attend school and it was noted that work in being done with neighbouring LAs, especially Reading.

Caroline Corcoran stated that projected pupil numbers underpinned the model and were based on a range of data sources. It was noted that the most accurate data for modelling would be GP data. However, this was not currently available within West Berkshire, and therefore child benefit data had been modelled which provided a very close match. Caroline Corcoran reported that the availability of GP data had been an ongoing concern. Nick Carter advised the Commission that the Strategic Director for Public Health was working to correct the issue, and as the data was now held within local authorities following the transition of Public Health to local authorities it was expected to be rectified very soon;

The Members of the OSC noted the significant contribution to developing the model and the Strategy.

OSC resolved that the pursuit of the provision of GP data would be monitored by the Commission.