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| Title of Report: | Demand for Primary School Places |
| Report to be considered by: | Stronger Communities Select Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 07/02/2011 |

Purpose of Report: To brief Members of the actions taken in relation to primary school places in West Berkshire

Recommended Action: To note the report

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| <p>The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPP2 – Raise levels of educational achievement – improving school performance levels</p> <p>The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Theme(s):</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT7 - Safer and Stronger Communities</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT9 - Successful Schools and Learning</p> <p>The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by: achieving a workable balance between the number of places available in the LA and the number of pupils for whom the LA will need places</p> |
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| Portfolio Member Details | |
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| Name & Telephone No.: | Councillor Barbara Alexander - Tel (01635) 201320 |
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| Date Portfolio Member agreed report: | 26/01/11 |

| Contact Officer Details | |
|-------------------------|--|
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Implications

Policy: N/A

Financial: Changes to the capacity of schools are carefully considered within the resources available, for example, some works are included within the Capital Programme, although this is reducing. If there are any financial implications contained within this report this section **must** be signed off by a West Berkshire Group Accountant. Please note that the report cannot be accepted by Policy and Communication unless this action has been undertaken.

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| Personnel: | N/A |
| Legal/Procurement: | N/A |
| Property: | The implication of any changes to school place planning are discussed with the Education Assets Team, who in turn liaise with Property as and when this is necessary. |
| Risk Management: | N/A |
| Equalities Impact Assessment: | Where a decision is required, Policy and Communication are not able to accept your report without an EIA being completed. These should be sent to P&C along with your report and should be copied to the Principal Policy Officer (Equality & Diversity). For advice please contact Principal Policy Officer (Equality & Diversity) on Ext. 2441. |
| Corporate Board's Recommendation: | To be completed after the Corporate Board meeting. |

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Authority (LA) has a duty to provide enough places for pupils resident in its area. In addition, the LA has a strategic planning role for the provision of sufficient places over time. The planning of school places therefore aims to achieve a workable balance between the number of places available in the LA and the number of pupils for whom the LA will need places. To meet this duty, the LA monitors and adjusts the number and type of places for pupils through forward planning.
- 1.2 During the 2010 Admissions allocation round, it was noted that other Authorities, including Kent and Hampshire, were experiencing difficulties with the demand for pupil places. This report provides information on the actions taken since February 2010 to review and improve the process in relation to the demand for school places.
- 1.3 In 2010, there were 2126 applications for primary school places. Of these 1858 related to West Berkshire residents (87.4%) with the remainder being out of area applicants.
- 1.4 Of the 1858 West Berkshire resident applications, 1398 (75.2%) were offered their first choice of place.
- 1.5 Of the total number of applicants, including out of area applications, 1510 out of 2126 applications were offered their first choice of place (71.0%)
- 1.6 It is too early to comment on the outcomes of the 2011 Admissions Round, as this information will not be available until March/April 2011.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 The following activities have taken place to address the concerns regarding the planning for the demand for school places
 - (a) Development of the School Place Plan (high-level summary).
 - (b) Area Review of Thatcham/North Newbury to address specific school place issues.
 - (c) Development of an improved model for school place planning, building on good practice from other LAs, whilst retaining the strengths of the existing West Berkshire system.
 - (d) Interim arrangements, where this is appropriate to meet the need for places, and fits within the overall strategic view.
- 2.2 The following will be implemented from April 2011:
 - (e) Implementation of a Rolling Programme of Area Reviews.
 - (f) Plans to improve the information outputs for school place planning.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 During 2010, there has been considerable activity to ensure that the Council is best positioned, going forward, to deal with the changing patterns of parental preference

and the demand for pupil places, within the current challenging financial constraints.

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 One of West Berkshire Council's stated aims is "to enable all children and young people to maximise their potential while intervening positively to ensure that the most vulnerable have an equal opportunity to succeed". To achieve this the Council provides high quality education through a diverse provision of school types giving a wide selection of school places in order to maximise meeting parental preferences as much as possible.
- 1.2 The Local Authority (LA) has a duty to provide enough places for pupils resident in its area. In addition, the LA has a strategic planning role for the provision of sufficient places over time. The planning of school places therefore aims to achieve a workable balance between the number of places available in the LA and the number of pupils for whom the LA will need places. To meet this duty, the LA monitors and adjusts the number and type of places for pupils through forward planning.
- 1.3 During the 2010 Admissions allocation round, it was noted that other Authorities, including Kent and Hampshire, were experiencing difficulties with the demand for pupil places. This report provides information on the actions taken since February 2010 to review and improve the process in relation to the demand for school places.

2. Admissions Round 2010

- 2.1 In 2010, there were 2126 applications for primary school places. Of these 1858 related to West Berkshire residents (87.4%) with the remainder being out of area applicants.
- 2.2 Of the 1858 West Berkshire resident applications, 1398 (75.2%) were offered their first choice of place.
- 2.3 Of the total number of applicants, including out of area applications, 1510 out of 2126 applications were offered their first choice of place (71.0%).
- 2.4 One example of an area where there were issues related to the broad geographical location serving Theale, Aldermaston, Mortimer, Sulhampstead, Burghfield and Mrs Blands. In this area, there were 220 applicants from catchment area children and 208 places, representing a shortfall of 12 places. This was addressed by three of the schools admitting additional pupils above their standard admission number.
- 2.5 It is too early to comment on the outcomes of the 2011 Admissions Round, as this information will not be available until March/April 2011.

3. School Place Plan

- 3.1 During the latter half of 2010, a West Berkshire School Place Plan was completed and contains the principles of school place planning, with an Area by Area summary analysis.

3.2 There are 6 Areas within West Berkshire Council, based on geographical and secondary provision:

Area 1 – Mortimer
Area 2 – Calcot
Area 3 – Newbury

Area 4 – Thatcham/North Newbury
Area 5 – West
Area 6 – Downs

3.2 The current pupil place planning system focuses on forecasting:

- total pupil numbers for all schools, for all Primary schools and for all Secondary schools
- pupil forecasts for individual schools

3.3 Forecasting for all schools uses historical data and survival rates as a basis for the numbers. This is then modified using local intelligence and data such as birth data, housing developments and building programmes.

3.4 Forecasting for individual schools uses historical Number on Roll (NOR) for 7 years and a popularity index (parental preferences, application, school performance information, waiting lists, local school factors) as well as birth data and information on housing developments and building programmes.

3.5 As we move forward, future projections will need to include academies and take account of sufficiency calculations and basic need considerations.

4. Area Review of Thatcham/North Newbury

4.1 During the Autumn 2010, an Area Review was undertaken covering Thatcham/North Newbury. The intake for September 2010 exceeded the capacity within the Thatcham catchment area. Temporary measures were put in place, with an additional 15 pupils being placed at Thatcham Park CE Primary School, increasing the size of the year group from the normal Admissions Number of 45 to 60 pupils.

4.2 As a result of this increase in pupil place requirements, an Area Review was undertaken, to enable a strategic view to be taken on whether this increase in numbers is likely to be sustained in coming years, and, if so, to deliver recommendations on how this could be managed.

4.3 As a result of the Area Review, the following recommendations were made:

a) The admission number for Thatcham Park School was increased. This recommendation was based on:

- The balance of children within the catchment area compared to the places available at the school shows that potential demand outstrips current provision.
- General demand for school places within the locality under review is exceeding demand.
- Potential on the school site to accommodate additional pupils.

b) The catchment areas for Francis Baily and Spurcroft schools were reviewed, in consultation with the schools, to establish a better balance between parental preferences and available places, whilst maintaining viability of school provision at both schools.

5. Development of a revised model for School Place Planning

- 5.1 During Autumn 2010, a study was undertaken to:
- Develop a strategic approach for the delivery of robust pupil place planning information which meets the school place planning needs of the LA and ensures effective engagement with schools.
 - Implement a structured process which produces high quality and robust information to inform decision-making in relation to school place management, with the objective of fulfilling West Berkshire parental preferences in relation to pupil places.
 - Ensure that LA responsibilities for delivery of statutory requirements are met, including delivering to statutory timelines and adherence to quality standards.
- 5.2 The study included liaison with representatives of schools to ascertain their needs, liaison with existing staff to understand the processes which currently exist in West Berkshire Council and researching the business outcomes and methods used in other LAs. This was especially useful in terms of looking at how much larger LAs operate and examining the potential for creating a model which takes account of existing good practice.
- 5.3 The strengths of the existing system were:
- Pupil projections are created using a structured methodology and appropriate source data.
 - Information is extracted to support decision-making.
 - Projections are compared with the January census and May count of pupils numbers to allow a retrospective review of whether the projections reflect reality over time, and to explore whether the pupil projection tool needs further refinement.
 - There is movement towards an Area Review model and a more structured approach.
- 5.4 Based on a robust analysis of the strengths and areas for development in the current system it has been proposed that three core components are delivered through the revised School Place Planning model, bringing a structured approach to activity which is currently happening on an ad hoc/emerging need basis, and clarifying the outputs which will be produced. These will feed into an annual planned programme of activity.
- 5.5 The primary benefits to this structured approach are:
- A level of confidence that the views of schools are being sought within a stated timeframe and all schools have an opportunity to be heard.
 - The opportunity for the assumptions underpinning projections to be scrutinised and intelligence gathered, allowing projections to be further refined.
 - Clear expectations for LA staff and schools about outputs, timeframes and availability of information.
- 5.6 Components of the model are:
- A rolling Planned Programme of Area Reviews with stakeholders. The rolling programme would be the primary mechanism for determining any changes

to admission numbers, net capacities etc. There would be a set process and timeline so that it was clear when an Area Review would take place, and the timeframe for the final report.

- The annual refresh of the School Place Plan, combining the outcomes of the Area Reviews into a single Plan which includes WBC principles and priorities and provides a retrospective review of actual pupil numbers in the recent allocation round and an outline of the future projections and decisions/actions which are being taken as a result.
- Clear information outputs, which would include the place planning spreadsheet, analysis of social deprivation and pupil mobility and individual school “dashboard” showing actual and projected pupil places.

5.7 The School Place Plan would provide an overview of school places at whole-Council level. It is also noted that the main content of the School Place Plan is the Area analyses, which would have been produced through the Planned Programme of Area Reviews (and, therefore, would include more detail than the summaries in the current School Place Plan).

5.8 The improvement in information outputs and engagement with stakeholders are key aspects of the model. Data analysis was already being done, and research has shown that the methods used were as robust as those used by other LAs. The new model addresses the need for clarified outputs, accessibility of information and greater transparency.

5.9 This new model will be implemented by April 2011. The rolling programme of Area Reviews will begin shortly, and the stakeholders will include the relevant Ward Members.

6. Interim Arrangements

6.1 In addition to formal reviews, a number of interim arrangements have been put in place for September 2011. This has been especially important to ensure that, despite reductions in capital funding, and taking into account the removal of the national focus on surplus places, every opportunity to maximise the number of places available to West Berkshire residents is explored.

7. Conclusion

7.1 During 2010, there has been considerable activity to ensure that the Council is best positioned, going forward, to deal with the changing patterns of parental preference and the demand for pupil places, within the current challenging financial constraints.

Appendices

There are no Appendices to this report.

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: Representative headteachers via consultative groups

Officers Consulted: Ian Pearson, Head of Education