

Central Bedfordshire Council

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 July 2018

Schools for the Future

Report of: Executive Member for Families, Education and Children
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This report relates to a decision that is Key

Purpose of this report

1. This report sets out the approach being taken to consider long term school place planning (15 – 20 year period).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the position reached on planning for schools for the future
2. Comment on the policy as set out in paragraph 19 of this report to be presented to Executive on 7 August 2018

Background

2. Central Bedfordshire is an area that will grow; 43,000 new homes are expected by 2035 (23,000 homes already have planning permission and an additional 20,000 new homes are planned).
3. We already plan for school places on a five-year basis (through the School Organisation Plan) but given the scale of growth, we need to consider longer-term, strategic planning for education across Central Bedfordshire.
4. Our current pupil forecast suggests there will be an additional 9,700 children attending school in the next 5 years for which we have to ensure sufficient places. Some of these are already in place but we need to plan for additional places as this growth develops.

5. Historically, Central Bedfordshire was made up of lower, middle and upper schools. However, this has been changing more recently because individual schools have had more freedom to change the age range they cater for and effectively becoming a 'primary' or 'secondary' school. This has resulted in a mixed school landscape in Central Bedfordshire as set out in **Appendix A**.
6. The current hybrid model can be confusing and changes taking place – where they are not co-ordinated - can create problems for other schools. For example, some changes to age ranges can have implications in terms of the viability of other schools.
7. There is an added complexity as changes in legislation have reduced the role of the council. Schools can now choose to become independent of a council by becoming an academy. These schools are funded directly by Central Government. As of 10 July 2018, 43% of schools within Central Bedfordshire are academies and 57% are council-maintained schools.
8. Governing Bodies of foundation and voluntary aided schools can propose an age range change of up to 2 years (except for adding or removing a sixth form) by following the non-statutory process.

Schools for the Future Project

9. The Schools for the Future project has been set up to consider pupil place planning in the longer term.

We want to develop a coherent and transparent plan for our future educational landscape that is shaped by all our schools, mapping out where existing schools can expand, what additional schools we will require and the structure our schools will take over the next 15 – 20 years. This plan will help to ensure we achieve the best educational outcomes possible for our children making best use of public money

10. The project is being overseen by the 'Schools for the Future Project Board – chaired by Central Bedfordshire Council Chief Executive.
11. Schools are organised into school clusters and the Schools for the Future project team has been working closely with clusters and individual schools to understand views and ambitions, consider where schools may expand, where new schools would be built and the structure of schools in the local area.
12. The clusters are as follows:
 - Ampthill and Flitwick
 - Biggleswade
 - Cranfield
 - Dunstable and Houghton Regis
 - Harlington
 - Leighton and Linslade
 - Sandy
 - Shefford and Stotfold

13. A desired outcome of the project would be to co-produce a coherent local educational landscape plan for each school cluster area that is 'collectively' owned and supported by schools to prevent uncoordinated change.

Schools for the Future – Work Programme

14. An intensive programme of work has been taking place to understand the school place provision required across Central Bedfordshire. This has included:

Analysis of housing growth and school place planning implications

- Forecasting longer term school place planning requirements alongside local plan growth.
- Considerations for new schools and opportunities for expansions of current provision.

Engaging with schools in their cluster groups

- Sharing cluster level analysis of housing growth and school place requirements.
- Ensuring all schools are aware of the work taking place and are able input together.

Individual dialogue with schools and multi academy trusts

- Actively engaging schools (head teachers and chairs of governors) to understand individual views and ambitions (111 schools).
- Exploring the ambitions of multi academy trusts to seek to secure coordinated plans for meeting future school places.

A well attended 'Schools for the Future' briefing session for members was also held on 17th May 2018.

15. Points raised from the engagement with schools to date include:

- the school community is driven by what's in the best interest of a child's education;
- a recognised need for greater coordination of changes;
- schools broadly welcoming the council to take more of a leadership role (facilitating not directing);
- anxiety about change;
- variety of views about future housing developments;
- recognition of the difficulties of dealing with housing development uncertainties (volume and speed;)
- passion and need to focus upon current cohort of children and families while also planning for the future;

- rising SEND and need for additional provision – and lots of willingness to discuss ways forward;
- lessons learned / reflections from schools that have or are going through expansion or age range changes.

16. At the time of preparing this report, further engagement is taking place with local members, and the findings from the 1-1 meetings with schools are being reported back to clusters.

17. Next steps are set out in paragraph 20 of this report.

Education Landscape within Central Bedfordshire

18. When planning new school places, 9 principles are currently applied:

- The need to provide local schools for local children, ensuring a sense of community belonging whilst also promoting sustainable modes of travel.
- The need to create schools that are of sufficient size to be financially and educationally viable.
- The ability to support the expansion of local popular and successful schools, or to link expanding schools with popular and successful schools.
- The potential to further promote and support robust partnerships and learning communities.
- The ambition to achieve a single phase of education 0 to 19 and reduce school transfer points.
- The need to support the raising of the participation age.
- To seek opportunities to create inspirational learning environments for the school, and to maximise community use.
- To promote the diversity of provision offered in Central Bedfordshire to increase opportunities for parental choice.
- To support vulnerable learners in area special schools and integrate appropriate special educational needs provision within mainstream schools.

19. In response to the engagement that has taken place with schools, and in line with the principles, Executive is being asked the following, at its meeting of 7 August 2018:

(i) To support schools and clusters that want to work towards a primary and secondary model, taking into account that:

- *the appropriate resources are in place to do so*
- *Change is coordinated and doesn't negatively affect other schools in an area*
- *Change supports improvements in educational outcomes*

(ii) To actively promote that any new schools that will be built will be primary or secondary

20. Next steps would include:

- Developing cluster based plans (Autumn 18)
- Further 1-1s with schools as required to consider any individual implications (Autumn 18)
- Cluster workshops (Autumn 18)

- Subject to agreement by Executive on 7 August, and the support as outlined in paragraph 19 above, a phased approach would be taken to considering change at individual cluster level – taking into account the timing of housing development. This would include further engagement with schools and stakeholders, and with the community.

21. The New School Places programme will continue to operate until cluster plans are agreed, in order to ensure the Council meets its school place planning statutory duty as well as policy principles. Where possible provision for new school places will be future proofed for any changes that may take place within the cluster.

Reason/s for decision

22. To develop a longer term coherent and transparent plan for our future educational landscape - shaped by all our schools. Ensuring the Council is best place to deal with the growth agenda.

Council Priorities

23. Delivery of the Schools for the Future project supports the following Council priority:

- Improving education and skills

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

A strategic and planned approach to schools planning is to be welcomed, as this provides transparency in the process. There are statutory obligations to consult on individual school changes, which will emerge in due course and which will require a legal sign off to assure members that the statutory requirements for changes to individual schools are met.

Financial and Risk Implications

Preliminary work has been carried out as the work is not without financial implication. Costing can only be established once the intention for each cluster area is known – with detail being considered further after the next cluster meetings.

The New School Places Programme is funded by developer contributions and Basic Need grant income from the Department for Education (DfE) and on current planning assumptions the programme gross expenditure is £14.1M (net nil) in 2017/18, £4M (net nil) in 2018/19, £8.5M (net nil) in 2019/20 and £12.3M (net nil) in 2020/21.

Equalities Implications

Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

So as to consider local needs and implications, an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out alongside the development of cluster plans – subject to agreement by Executive on 7 August, and the support of schools and clusters.

Conclusion

24. The Schools for the Future project is taking place to assist the Council in ensuring it is best placed to consider the growth agenda in respect of long term pupil place provision. The policy decisions as set out in paragraph 19 of this report are intended to support the planning of the future educational landscape - shaped by schools.

Appendices

Appendix A: Diagram of Central Bedfordshire current school landscape

Background Papers

The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:

- (i) School Organisation Plan
<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/school/organisation/place.aspx>
- (ii) Schools for the Future information – available on the Council website
<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/school/schools-future/overview.aspx>

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