

Central Bedfordshire Council

Executive

7 August 2018

Schools for the Future

Report of: Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Families, Education and Children, steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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 Executive is asked to:

1. consider the position reached on planning for schools for the future; and
2. agree the policy as set out in paragraph 29 of this report.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The Committee acknowledged the position reached on planning for schools for the future.
3. That the Committee support the policy as set out in paragraph 21 of the report to be presented to Executive on 7 August 2018.

Background

4. Central Bedfordshire is an area that will grow; with some 40,000 new homes expected by 2035.
5. As a local authority, we have always met our statutory responsibility for planning for school places on a five year basis through the development of our School Organisation Plan.

However, in the context of our local plan and the extent of growth expected across Central Bedfordshire, we now need to consider longer-term, strategic planning for education to ensure our children will have access to the right schools, in the right places and delivering the best education possible.

6. Our current forecasts suggest there will be an additional 9,700 children attending school in Central Beds over the next 5 years. Some of the additional places required to meet this increasing demand are already in place but we need to plan for more places as this growth develops.
7. Historically, Central Bedfordshire was made up of lower, middle and upper schools in a '3-tier' model. 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.
8. This has resulted in a mixed school landscape as set out in **Appendix A** which shows Central Bedfordshire has*:
 - 72 lower schools
 - 15 middle schools
 - 7 upper schools
 - 24 primary schools
 - 4 secondary schools
 - 1 lower / middle combined school
 - 2 extended secondary schools

(*excludes nurseries, pre-schools, special or alternative schools)

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. The current hybrid model can be confusing for parents and where changes occur to the age ranges of schools without coordination, this can negatively affect the viability of other schools in a local area.
12. The Council has the power to make age range changes for community schools only, and a duty under statute to ensure sufficient school places.

13. Given the growth we are anticipating locally, coordination will be more important than ever before. As a result, we are now seeking to develop a longer-term school organisation plan with our schools, mirroring the timescale of our local plan, to ensure suitable school places are secured in line with our housing growth.

Schools for the Future project

14. The Schools for the Future project has been set up to consider this pupil place planning for the longer term. We have set out a clear objective for this work which we have shared with local schools, Multi-Academy Trusts, the Diocese and with colleagues at the Department of Education:

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

15. We have also shared and signed up to commitments which will form the basis of this plan:
 - The plan will be in the best interests of our children and their education.
 - We will work collaboratively with other schools in each cluster in its development.
 - We will ensure we are 'joined up' and considering the impact on other schools through any potential change.
 - We will be coherent and transparent.
 - We will strive to achieve best value.
16. Given the alignment we are seeking to make with our local plan, the achievement of this work will require cross council support. As such, the project is being overseen by the 'Schools for the Future Project Board – chaired by Central Bedfordshire Council's Chief Executive and supported by other directorates.
17. Engagement with local schools in the creation of this plan is critical. Our schools meet in a number of local clusters (8 in total) to consider how they can work together to provide the best education for children. These local clusters in the main mirror our local planning area and we have therefore been working with them to model future school place requirements in each of these areas, in line with our expected housing trajectory.

18. The clusters are as follows:

- Ampthill and Flitwick
- Biggleswade
- Cranfield
- Dunstable and Houghton Regis
- Harlington
- Leighton and Linslade
- Sandy
- Shefford and Stotfold

19. The Schools for the Future team have worked closely with clusters and individual schools to understand their views and ambitions for the future, including where schools may expand, where new schools would be built and the structure of schools in the local area.

Our desired outcome will be to co-produce a coherent local plan for each school cluster area that is 'collectively' owned and supported by schools to prevent uncoordinated change.

Schools for the Future Work Programme

20. An intensive programme of work has been taking place to understand the school place provision required across Central Bedfordshire, in line with the growth in our Local Plan.

21. The following work has already taken place:

Analysis of housing growth and school place planning implications for each cluster

- Working alongside the planning team, we have been forecasting longer term school place planning requirements alongside local plan growth.
- This has included considerations for new schools and opportunities for expansions of current provision.

Engaging with schools in their cluster groups

- The local cluster level analysis of housing growth and school place requirements has been shared with all schools in their local cluster meetings.
- This approach has ensured all schools are aware of the work taking place and are able input together.

Individual dialogue with schools and multi academy trusts

- The project team has offered to meet all local schools (head teachers and chairs of governors) to understand individual views and ambitions for the future. To date we have met with 111 schools.

- We have also met with our local Multi Academy Trusts (MAT's) as well as the Diocese to understand their ambitions as we seek to secure coordinated plans for providing future school places.

Following this work, a well-attended 'Schools for the Future' briefing session for members was also held on 17th May 2018 to update on work to date and anticipated next steps in the programme.

22. As the end of the 2017/18 academic year approached, the findings of all the engagement and analysis work has been reported back in a series of cluster meetings.

Options for consideration

23. A number of themes have emerged from our engagement with schools for consideration as we work with them to develop our longer-term plan for schools for the future in Central Bedfordshire. This has included
 - A recognition that greater coordination is needed, with schools driven by what is in the best interests of children and broadly welcoming the council taking more of a leadership role.
 - An understanding that there can be uncertainties over exact timings and scale of housing growth.
 - A willingness to discuss options for the rising number of children with Special Educational Needs and future provision in this area.
 - Some anxiety over change but important reflections from schools that have gone through or are going through expansions or age range changes that coordination is needed.
24. The scale of growth that we are expecting means that we will have to build a large number of new schools for both primary and secondary age children over the course of the Local Plan. The type of schools that are to be built depends on the structure of education that exists in a local area.
25. Therefore, one of the key areas of discussion with our schools has been to understand schools' ambitions for the future on expansions or age range changes. Engagement to date has included discussions with schools on whether they want to change age ranges towards a primary / secondary model, or explore options to do so, as housing growth develops and new schools are required.
26. Whilst there are some schools that do not wish to explore this change, the majority of schools have stated that they have either changed age ranges already, would like to do so if possible or are open to working collaboratively with other schools in a local area and the council in exploring options to do so.
27. Several of the local clusters have stated an ambition to explore the potential of a change of age range in line with local housing growth.

Educational landscape within Central Bedfordshire

28. When planning new school places, 9 principles are 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.

29. In response to the engagement that has taken place with schools, and in line with the principles above, Executive is being asked to agree the following:

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

- *the appropriate resources are in place to do so;*
- *change is coordinated; and*
- *change supports improvements in educational outcomes.*

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

Next steps in the Schools for the Future programme

30. Initial engagement with all schools has taken place and we have now attended the 8 school cluster meetings to provide initial analysis of housing growth and school place requirements. Feedback on the one to one engagement with schools was provided to 6 of the 8 clusters in June.

31. The following next steps have been identified:
- Facilitating a number of local cluster working groups to begin to develop local cluster plans (Autumn 18)
 - Further 1-1s with schools as required to consider any individual implications (Autumn 18)
 - Cluster workshops to go through proposals (Autumn 18)
32. Subject to agreement by Executive on 7 August, and the support as outlined in paragraph 29 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.
33. 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

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

Council Priorities

35. Delivery of the Schools for the Future project supports the following Council priority:
- Improving education and skills

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

36. There will be statutory obligations to consult and a requirement to comply with the relevant statutory requirements for changes to individual schools which will emerge in due course.
37. The Executive Member for Families, Education and Children has the delegated power to exercise the Council's duty to determine proposals to alter the upper and lower age range of pupils in schools as prescribed by School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. The Director of Children's Services has the delegated authority to be responsible for the administration and planning of the review of organisation of schools within the Council's area.

In view of the significance of the proposed decision, it is recommended that Executive consider and take the decision.

Financial and Risk Implications

38. Preliminary work has been carried out as the work is not without financial implication (which includes revenue implications). Costing can only be established once the intention for each cluster area is known – with detail being considered further after the next cluster meetings.
39. 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

40. 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.
41. 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 and next Steps

42. 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 29 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

- (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>

(ii) Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee 'Schools for the Future' Item 10 July 2018.

<https://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=650&MIId=5603&Ver=4>

Report author(s): Peter Fraser, Assistant Director – Partnerships and Youth Services, peter.fraser@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk