

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	School Place Planning Strategy
Meeting date	21 September 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The School Place Planning Strategy is a non-statutory strategy intended to provide information about the forecast supply and demand for school places for the coming years, and to set out principles for organisational change. The intended audience includes BCP elected members, schools and academies, the Department for Education and its agencies, the wider community. The strategy does not make proposals for organisational change, such as the opening of new schools, school closures, or change of admission numbers: it provides information to enable strategic planning.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: (a) the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and comments on the attached School Place Planning Strategy 2021-2024 (Appendix 1)
Reason for recommendations	The School Place Planning Strategy is an informative document which sets out information about the supply of school places in Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole in the recent past and forecast numbers for the future. It sets out approaches for dealing with future scenarios. It does not make any proposals for change. It provides an indication of potential questions which may need to be addressed in coming years.

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

Background

1. As a Children’s Services Authority Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council is responsible for ensuring there is a sufficient supply of school places for children living in the council area. At one time councils were required to publish a school organisation plan, but this is no longer the case. However, it is of benefit for decision makers to be informed about the supply and demand of school places. This strategy provides such information for the benefit of the council, school governing bodies, academy trust boards, diocesan boards of education, the Department for Education and its agencies such as the Education and Skills Funding Agency, parents and the wider community. This is the first school place planning strategy published since the formation of Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council on 1st April 2019.

School Place Planning Strategy 2021-2024

2. The School Place Planning Strategy 2021-2024 can be found at Appendix 1. It sets out data about recent demand for school places and forecast future demand. It does this by planning area. These are sub-local-authority areas which broadly reflect natural recognised communities. The areas are those used for the annual School Capacity (SCAP) return all local authorities make to the Department for Education, and all the data in the strategy is consistent with the SCAP.
3. Forecasts are not made at individual school level. Individual schools are affected by many school specific factors which can make their numbers vary considerably from year to year. Forecast accuracy is generally good at local authority level, but becomes more volatile at smaller scale, and especially so at individual school level. From a strategic perspective it is the planning area that provides the best scale for thinking about the future need for school places.
4. There are more primary than secondary planning areas. This is because a) parents generally expect to access a school more locally for younger children than they do for older children; and b) there are many more primary than secondary schools.
5. Forecasts are extrapolations of past data, informed from a variety of sources including geo-coded NHS data, and historic trends of admissions to school. They do not account for new housing developments. These have to be considered separately.

6. The main observations to be made about the future demand for school places are a) that primary school numbers will fall; and b) that there will be a short-term bulge in secondary school numbers.
7. Primary school numbers will fall because fewer children have been born in the part four years than in the preceding period. This is partly because birth rates have fallen and partly because the number of women of child-bearing age in the population has declined. The population tends to come in waves – a boom generation is echoed by another boom generation about 25 years later. This means that school place planners often see rising and falling numbers of children over medium term periods. Birth rates can be volatile, so it is possible that numbers may start to rise again in about five years, however this is highly uncertain.
8. The forecast bulge in secondary school numbers is relatively certain, as those children are currently in the primary phase. The peak is likely to occur over the next two years. There is surplus capacity at several schools in BCP which will accommodate some of this, and plans are in place for adding bulge classes at some schools. Once the bulge has passed through it is likely that numbers will drop back to a level similar to the present.
9. This broad demographic phenomenon is common to many local authority areas nationally and regionally. It is not unique to BCP.
10. The strategy sets out the data relating to future demand so that decision makers can anticipate the sort of issues they may have to address in coming years. Decision making is highly dispersed in England, with local authorities having responsibility for ensuring a sufficiency of school places, but much decision making resting with academy trusts, and the Secretary of State for Education represented by Regional Schools Commissioners and the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
11. The strategy also sets out some broad principles and policies for dealing with potential scenarios. These are in accordance with relevant legislation and guidelines. It does not propose specific changes. It is not intended to constrain decision makers in the future, but rather to provide a context for strategic planning.

Options Appraisal

12. It would be possible for the council to have no school place planning strategy and simply take school organisation decisions in the context of changing circumstances and in accordance with the relevant legislation as and when required. However it is preferable if decision makers have an understanding of the strategic context of the demand for school places, now and in the future.
13. A school place planning strategy could be used to make specific proposals for organisational change. However no such changes are anticipated in the coming year which have not already been accounted for. For this reason the strategy focuses on information and the broad context.

Summary of financial implications

14. There are no direct financial implications arising from the strategy. It should be noted that school funding is largely driven by pupil numbers, both at local authority and at individual school level. When numbers rise or fall this affects the

allocation of dedicated schools grant to the local authority and, in turn, schools' budget shares. Other Department for Education grants are also driven by pupil numbers – particularly basic need grant, which contributes towards the expansion of school accommodation where numbers are forecast to exceed capacity within an area.

Summary of legal implications

15. There is no statutory requirement for a school place planning strategy.
16. Any proposals for school organisation change to maintained schools must be made in accordance with The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. Changes to academies are a matter for the relevant Academy Trust and the Secretary of State for Education.

Summary of human resources implications

17. There are no direct human resources implications arising from the strategy, although the level of staffing required in schools may change as pupil numbers rise and fall.

Summary of sustainability impact

18. There are no direct sustainability implications arising from the strategy, although the efficient use of the school estate can contribute to making better use of resources and energy efficiency. In the long term the location of schools in relation to the distribution of the population can help reduce home to school travel distances.

Summary of public health implications

19. There are no direct public health implications arising from the strategy, although the organisation of schools can assist in promoting public health. The strategy is not proposing specific changes. [Public health and wellbeing should be at the heart of every decision, seeking the most health benefits for the investment. To assist with this section ask yourself key questions such as “what will this do for the health and wellbeing of the population?” and “will this reduce health inequalities locally?"]

Summary of equality implications

20. There is no EIA for this strategy as it does not propose any changes that would affect people or communities with protected characteristics. It mainly provides background statistical data which may be relevant if changes to school organisation are required in the future. Any specific proposals for change would require an EIA.

Summary of risk assessment

21. There are no risks associated with the strategy itself, however there are risks associated with the potential changes in school numbers as a result of demographic change.
22. If numbers at a particular age phase, or in a particular area, rise, then parents may be less likely to secure a place at one of their preferred schools. It may

become difficult for the council to fulfil its duty to offer a school place to children whose parents apply for one. The mitigation for this is to add places when required. Decisions have already been taken to add capacity at the secondary phase in anticipation of a “bulge” cohort expected to reach age 11 (year 7) in the next two years. Existing unfilled capacity will also be available. The scale of any bulge in the next few years is unlikely to present a problem that cannot be managed.

23. If numbers fall there is a risk that some schools could find it more difficult to set a balanced budget or to provide a broad and balanced education. In extreme cases schools could be at risk of unviability. A nationwide fall in primary age numbers is expected in coming years. The strategy sets out how this may impact in BCP. Mitigation could include finding alternative uses for surplus accommodation, and managing school admission numbers. It is important that the council and schools work together to avoid scenarios where individual schools struggle to recruit sufficient pupils to remain financially viable and to thrive educationally.

Background papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1: School Place Planning Strategy 2021-2024