

Schools Forum

May 15th 2014

School Organisation

This report relates to maintained schools and academies

Recommendation

Schools Forum is recommended to:

- 1.0 Note the information in the report;
- 2.0 Agree to receive consultation on the draft sufficiency strategy at the June 2014 meeting

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Schools Forum requested information on the County's criteria for expanding schools, ways of expanding schools and the planning strategy.

2.0 WCC criteria for expanding schools (basic need)

2.1 The County Council has a number of criteria for expanding schools, set out below:

1. Demand within the area, as evidenced by,
 - pupil forecasts for the area;
 - housing development in the area;
 - parental preference, catchment loyalty
2. School performance, as evidenced by
 - OSFTED judgements,
 - rates of progress, etc
3. Sufficiency and suitability to expand, as evidenced by:
 - site area;
 - gross area
 - teaching area
 - site access

4. Preserving and enhancing choice and diversity in terms of size of school, religious character etc.

2.2 Evidence based proposals

- 2.3 There is no “one size” fits all model. We have recently produced a matrix of evidence to be shared with all schools in an area to be reviewed. We will apply this to groups of schools in areas of high demand, to agree the accuracy of the information (as schools are in the prime position to know about demand, suitability, access etc.).

- 2.4 We hope that by sharing the information with schools in an area, and talking through options in an open and transparent way, colleagues will understand the rationale and reasons for options being put forward, even if they may not agree with them.

2.5 Timescale for bringing expansion proposals forward

- 2.6 We have developed an annual timetable from 2014 onwards for considering demand, bringing forward options and securing capital funding. It is recognised that unforeseen events may necessitate projects being considered outside this timeline.

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| February / March 2014 | Observatory release data |
| August 2014 | Submit SCAP return to DfE |
| March to November 2014 | Collation / analysis of pupil data Development and agreement for a School Access and Organisation Strategy – priority list – full options appraisal |
| End November 2014 | Final priority list produced |
| December 2014 | Priority list reported to Asset Strategy Board |
| December 2014 | Capital funding announced |
| January 2015 | Draft programme agreed by CAOB, cabinet report drafted |
| January 2015 | Programme reported to GLT |
| February 2015 | Draft cabinet report ‘signed off’ by Asset Strategy Board |

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| February 2015 | Budget Resolution through Council |
| March 2015 | Agreed Schools capital programme approved taken to members. |
| April 2015 | Parallel building design and consultation re PAN |

2.7 It is recognised that there will always be a small number of unanticipated needs to be funded and criteria are being drawn up for allocating resources to these. The recently established Capital, Access & Organisation Working Group will assess each application against the criteria and all unallocated Council capital and s106 resources are reported regularly to the Capital, Access and Organisation Working Group and Board to meet these needs. Once the criteria have been agreed and the process confirmed, these will be communicated to schools.

3.0 Targeted basic need proposals

3.1 The government announced a round of funding to meet basic need and local authorities were invited to bid for funds. The DfE/EFA set very strict criteria for including schools in bids:

- Demand within a planning area (this is an area agreed by LAs and EFA)
- A school which is good or outstanding
- Places which can be delivered within a short timescale

3.2 In some cases, we identified a need at KS1, in some at KS2. In some the schools which met the criteria were separate infant and junior schools and we were successful in bids at one key stage, but not the other. Twenty bids were submitted, of which 10 were successful. The list of successful bids was published with no explanation as to why others were unsuccessful.

3.3 This has left us with a shortfall at KS2. We submitted a bid for additional funding to EFA on 26 February for funds which we understand are unallocated but have had no feedback to date.

4.0 Ways of expanding

4.1 Where we expect demand to be very short term we may request a school in the demand area with space to open a “bulge” class, which will gradually work its way through the school.

- 4.2 In cases of longer term demand, we would generally work with a school/schools to expand by a whole or half a form of entry (depending on demand) a year at a time, with consequent building work, as necessary.
- 4.3 Another alternative is to extend the age range of an existing school by for example, extending the age range upwards at an infant school or downwards at a junior school. We have a current proposal for Ayelsford School to extend its age range to take reception from 2015, adding new year groups incrementally until it becomes an all through school.
- 4.4 Any proposal for a new school would have to be an academy, for which the LA & DfE would have to find a sponsor. Separate community or foundation infant and junior schools can be replaced with a primary school of the same status, but decisions on these cases are made by the Schools Adjudicator using the DfE criteria of good or outstanding schools. Otherwise a primary would have to be created by the closure of both infant and junior schools and the opening of a new academy.

5.0 Sufficiency strategy

- 5.1 As well as producing a robust transparent evidence base for reviewing schools in an area, we are also producing a long term sufficiency strategy. This will confirm the principles underpinning school reorganisation and the process for carrying out reviews and securing the required funding and other approvals.
- 5.2 The strategy will set out, area by area, the demand for places for the foreseeable future, from birth rate data, the housing developments expected and from migration in, out and across each area. It will also set out the current supply of places and their designation. The gap analysis will determine the priority areas for review and opportunities to rationalise provision. The strategy will link to the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and its Action Plan and the Council's Asset Strategy to ensure a transparent, joined up approach.

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