

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 18 November 2015 at 7.00 pm in Conference Room B, Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Will Purvis (in the Chair)
Hannah Hockaday
Ryan Brent
Ken Ferrett
Suzy Horton

30. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

31. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

32. Minutes of Previous Meeting - 21 October 2015 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 21 October 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

33. Review into home to school transport and access to primary school places (AI 4)

Chris Williams, Pupil Place Planning & Capital Strategy Officer

Chris Williams introduced his paper. He explained that table 1 showed that the total number of pupil numbers on roll peaked in 1999-2000 and following this they steadily decreased until 2009/10. From 2009/10 to date numbers have started to increase. Table 2 shows the infant phase number on roll has had a dramatic increase since 2009, however this increase is now showing signs of slowing down. One of the methods the pupil place planning team use to base their forecast on is the birth rate data for the city. This shows that the birth rate has declined slightly over the last two years. Internal boards hold regular meetings to monitor the situation and have access to all data which can affect pupil place planning including health data, cross border movements and officers work closely with the planning officers with regard to where new housing developments are coming forward. Officers also have a regular dialogue with head teachers who are often able to provide local knowledge of issues that may affect movements of families.

The number of children yielding from a new housing development is changing. For example where one bedroom flats used to be unlikely to have children we are now seeing couples with two or three children. Officers also know from local knowledge that certain developments, such as waterfront developments

are unlikely to yield children. It is therefore important that the LA have as much detail as possible about any proposed developments and also obtain as much local knowledge from schools and closely monitor this to establish the likely effect on future pupil numbers.

The transition years are at year groups 2/3 (infant to junior school) and 6/7 (junior to secondary school). Over the last few years there have been 92-95% of children who move up to the next level, however the LA does lose some children at these transitions either through children moving to schools across the border or moving to private schools.

The LA aims to keep ahead of the curve and the changing economy. Over the last few years the unstable economy has affected many of the historical patterns of pupil movements .

The popularity of schools can be influenced by parental perception. For example, new build schools are usually popular choices for parents also if the parent went to a particular school a number of years ago and had a good experience they will often want their child to go to that school.

The Council has needed to put in a great number of places at primary level. As a starting point the LA looked at schools that had reduced their published admission number (PAN) and had spare accommodation. For these schools the LA have increased their PAN. The LA has built in contingency planning including temporary classrooms at Langstone infant and junior schools, for the bulge years which are very useful to have especially when down to the 1-2% surplus.

The top half of the table in appendix 1 of the report shows a list of developments that officers are aware will come forward to be developed for housing, but where a planning application has yet to be submitted. The bottom half of the table are developments that are included in the forecasting. The final column details the total yield broken down into each year group from year R to secondary.

In response to questions the following points were clarified:

- It is impossible to predict which schools will be popular choices for parents to send their children to each year.
- Three years ago the intention was for a permanent expansion of the Langstone schools. The Langstone site is large enough to expand so it was a logical solution. In reality the following year numbers plummeted however in other areas of the city the numbers increased. The bulge year has started at the junior school this academic year and demand for the infant school has dropped off therefore the feasibility plans are on standby.
- The team have also started feasibility work on Moorings Way Infant School, which is currently a very small school who is struggling to get numbers. There is space for this school to expand and a project is being considered with a view to expansion to meet some of the demand for school places from the St James development site.

- The Pupil Place Planning team have looked at options for expanding Craneswater Junior School as they know there is a demand for school places in the area. Arundel Court infant and junior schools have amalgamated and changed their admission numbers. There have been lots of these types of opportunities to reorganise schools or look for additional numbers, however a lot of the obvious projects have been completed so it becomes more problematic to expand schools in the future due to lack of development space.
- Many schools in the city were built in the Victorian period and are on constrained sites so cannot be expanded which is an issue.
- For bigger developments e.g. the Tipner development, there is both long and short term planning in place. At the secondary level, part of the logic to move the former City Boys to a co-educational school was due to the low numbers of pupils at the former boys' school and due to the close proximity to the Tipner development it was logical to change this to a co-educational school.
- A feasibility study looking at secondary provision in the city is taking place, as if the Council does nothing; there will not be enough places for year 7 pupils by 2018. The Council is also looking at Stamshaw Infant and Junior School to see if there are opportunities that they can take more primary numbers. The Stamshaw Junior site is probably the biggest in the city so has potential for expansion.
- In addition officers are considering whether there is potential for a new primary school as part of the new Tipner development. They are considering whether this is achievable and value for money.
- Officers look at every possible option for increasing primary school places in the city, which includes whether a new purpose built school should be built.
- With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the developments at Tipner and the St James site will have the most impact in terms of increased pupil numbers. Very little money has been obtained from the CIL towards the school sufficiency programme to date. The CIL money goes into the capital programme and like basic needs funding it is not ring-fenced.
- School places (both primary and secondary) is one of the infrastructure projects on the regulation 123 list that should be funded by the CIL. The panel felt it would be useful if the Tipner development was included on this list though so that people would be able to see if CIL money goes towards a new school.
- With regard to housing stock shifts, this is something that every local authority has been grappling with over the last 2-3 years. The chair mentioned the situation in Southsea as due to the new student housing being built in the city this is freeing up many former student houses in Southsea. The Council is seeing an increasing number of planning applications for former HMO's to change to family homes. Chris said it was vital to get intelligence from head teachers and also estate agents to identify patterns in an area.
- Pupil place planning is a very difficult area to get precise. Can end up with an oversubscribed school or alternatively the team put provisions in place to increase numbers and the school is not filled which can result in increased staff costs for a school with a lack of pupil number

funding to support this increase. Ofsted have commented in the past though that we are very precise with our pupil place planning. In addition an external review of the pupil place planning methodology noted that "the range of data analysed to inform the Reception projection is impressive" and that the Council should have confidence in its projections.

- Secondary provision currently is a 'ticking time bomb'. The decrease in the birth rate has stabilised the position in the primary sector however the team know that there will not be enough provision at year 7 as the numbers move through the year groups, by 2018. Expanding primary schools is just a case of building more classrooms; however expanding secondary schools is more difficult as it means adding in complex laboratories, technology suites etc. in addition to classrooms. The team are looking at schools that can expand within the existing stock. There are some secondary schools where there is a 'quick win' solution and a report is likely to come forward to the Cabinet Member in January. A capital bid has recently been submitted in response to these early solutions. It was likely that these can be funded from the current sufficiency programme. If agreed this will then involve discussions with the head teachers about logistics of undertaking building works whilst schools are operational, which can be challenging. The process does take a number of years to rollout.
- Pupil place funding known as basic need, is based on an annual return of pupil numbers which the government looks at. Up to 2018 there are no problems with pupil numbers at secondary level but it is expected that the next basic needs allocation will be based on secondary pupil numbers which are looking high.
- There are now no 'quick wins' in terms of increasing school places so it will be more of a challenge.

With regard to the catchment areas of secondary schools and whether these should be re-visited, Chris Williams advised that from a pupil place planning perspective it was important to deal with place planning issues first as this will change the education landscape. Recent examples being the change of City Boy's School to Trafalgar co-educational school, Mayfield moving to an all through school, Portsmouth Academy for Girls consulting on a proposal to move to co-educational and the new University Technical College which have all had an impact on catchment areas in the city. Therefore it is more important to get the planning right before looking at a review into catchment areas.

Neil Stevenson added that there are both advantages and disadvantages of schools having catchment areas. There are also pros and cons of putting the sibling criteria above catchment which Southampton have recently implemented. Neil advised he had spoken to his colleagues at Southampton and he was not sure they had enough of an impact for Portsmouth to consider this. In addition he advised that the Government are currently undertaking a consultation on the Admissions Code and whether to put sibling at the top of the list. This would mean that as long as you live within the catchment area and one of your children is at the school already, there should be a right for your next child to go to that

school. He therefore felt it was not appropriate to consider this until the outcome of the Government consultation has been reached. A catchment area review would take approximately 18months/two years to complete and officers felt that it was not the right time to review catchment areas.

Home to School Transport written evidence from Richard Harvey.

The Chair noted from the paper that for stage one appeals, the number of appeals had decreased slightly from 2014/15 to 2015/16 as has the number of successful transport appeals. It was also noted that the number of children receiving statutory transport has remained stable over the last three years. Neil Stevenson advised that the new policy has reduced the number of children receiving non-statutory support (exceptional circumstances).

In response to a question regarding whether it would be cheaper for the Council to use a third sector company for its home to school transport, Neil Stevenson said he was not convinced it would be as the costs are comparable to commercial provision. He advised he would check and get back to the panel on this matter.

Neil added that there is currently a SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) review taking place across the city to look at the changing needs and to establish whether the Council are commissioning the right buildings which will effect on the non-statutory home to school transport.

34. Date of next meeting (AI 5)

The panel agreed that it would be useful to hold an informal meeting to consider all of the evidence received so far. It was agreed that the panel will meet on informally on 16 December at 7pm, venue to be confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 8.10 pm.

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Councillor Will Purvis
Chair