Executive Summary

West Sussex County Council has a legal duty to provide sufficient school places for all children. This is carried out by reviewing past trends in admissions, calculating likely pupil numbers from new housing developments agreed by district & borough councils and reviewing trends in data.

The Department for Education monitors school capacity across the country and provides capital grant funding to deliver additional school places. Extra school places can be delivered through either temporary classrooms, extending existing schools or by opening new schools.

The focus for scrutiny

- To be aware of the process undertaken in West Sussex to plan school places and be informed of the challenges.

Recommendations

1. The Committee is asked to support the approach undertaken in West Sussex to plan school places and the opportunities taken to secure external financing of new school places
2. The Committee to consider how the Council may be able to influence decisions

1. Context/Background

1.1 Local authorities are legally responsible for making sure there are enough places for all children to attend good schools. The Department for Education (DfE) allocates capital funding and oversees the national provision of school places. It is therefore the role of the County Council to plan, organise and commission places for all maintained schools in the county, in a way that raises standards, manages rising as well as declining pupil numbers and creates a diverse community of schools. The Council seeks to exercise this function in partnership with dioceses, academy sponsors, multi-academy trusts, governing bodies of schools, headteachers, local communities and other key stakeholders. To fulfil their responsibility, local authorities work with individual schools to expand existing provision. However, their plans to create new places are affected by, and in some cases dependent on, free schools and academies. Local authorities cannot compel academies to expand or contract and this can impact on the provision of additional school places.
1.2 The need for school places changes in response to population movements and birth rate variations. Increases in demand can lead to the creation of a new school or the expansion of existing schools by adding permanent or temporary accommodation. Surplus places can also mean the reduction of school provision in an area through reduced admission arrangements\(^1\) or the rationalisation of school provision, including changes to existing catchment areas. Any review of school provision undertaken by the County Council (e.g. the opening, closing, federating, amalgamating, expanding or contracting of schools) will, in the large part, be led by forecast pupil numbers.

1.3 Predicting school place demand is a complex task. Where children go to school involves a range of factors such as housing growth, inward and outward migration and parental preference. As a result, planning for school places is based on probabilities and not certainties and while pupil forecasts may be derived from sound methodology, they come without guarantees. Furthermore, the practice of school organisation must take into account a number of different, and at times conflicting, factors. This includes the need to:

- respond to local need, to raise standards, to promote diversity, to respond to government policy;
- to respond to external and internal findings on the quality of schools; and
- ensure that scarce resources are used efficiently.

1.4 Demand for school places has been continuing to grow as a national issue because of an increase in births from 2002 onwards. The number of five- to ten-year-old primary school pupils increased by 446,000 (13\%) between 2010 and 2016. The DfE forecasts that this number will rise by a further 220,000 by 2019. It then expects pupil growth to either plateau or slightly decline after that, although forecasts are uncertain because future birth and migration rates are unknown.

1.5 A number of schools across West Sussex have been expanded in recent years in response to rising demand for places. The established practice is to support sustainable expansion. Decisions on expansion take account of factors including the availability of resources for new buildings, the infrastructure of the school (halls, specialist facilities and services such as gas and electricity supply capacity), the size of the site and transport implications. The quality of education and its sustainability are key considerations. Other important strategic factors are the availability of places locally, set in the context of the likely pattern of future demand, modified where appropriate through plans for known housing developments and migration.

1.6 Not all unfilled places in a school are surplus places; some margin of capacity is necessary to allow parents to exercise a preference, given that there will be volatility in preferences from one year to the next, and to allow for differences in the size of individual cohorts. The County Council’s position is

\(^1\) Further information on admission arrangements can be found in appendix 1
that a school should be considered as full when it has less than 5% of its places unfilled. This is also a figure recognised by the D.

1.7 The County Council’s policies on the size of a school are aimed at meeting the needs of pupils and the local community, in an educationally effective way.

- Settings need to be cost effective and to provide the breadth of curriculum and teaching expertise to meet the standards set out in the education policy;
- Settings also need to be organised on a ‘human scale’ if they are to support ‘friendly working relationships between adults and children’;
- A local educational presence is an important contributor to the sustainability of rural communities; and
- We should ensure that sufficient places are available in schools to support parental preference whilst avoiding an excess of surplus capacity.

Our guiding principles for primary schools are that, wherever possible:

- All-through primary schools (ages 4-11 years) should be established;
- They should have a minimum of one form of entry (FE), 210 places and ideally a maximum of 3FE, 630 places, although recent guidance from the DfE suggests new primary schools should ideally be no smaller than 2FE, 420 places; and
- The pattern of schools should ensure that a primary school is readily accessible to its pupils and, in urban areas, within walking distance of the homes of the majority of its children, as detailed later under the transport paragraph on page 7.

Secondary schools in West Sussex are on average larger than in many other areas of the country. In order to achieve the benefits of smaller scale schools we will:

- Support the development of ‘schools within schools’ on existing sites; and
- Consult on, and agree research-based criteria and guidelines for planning ‘schools within schools’.

1.8 West Sussex County Council, like all local authorities, has to submit annually a report on School Capacity (SCAP) in the summer to the DfE. This information allows the DfE to review how each local authority’s forecasts relate to the existing capacity within its schools and is directly linked to the DfE capital allocations for Basic Need that local authorities receive.

1.9 The DfE has agreed funding for over 7,000 Basic Need places in West Sussex during the period 2017/18 to 2019/20 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Places</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>2,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>2,891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This has been funded by DfE capital grant as follows:

- **2017/18**: £14,077,263
- **2018/19**: £27,862,772
- **2019/20**: £43,776,182

**Total**: £85,716,217

It is this DfE capital grant that is used by the County Council to fund extensions or extra classrooms at schools through its Basic Need capital programme. However, the opportunity for the County Council to meet some of its future Basic Need demand through the delivery of Free Schools, awarded and delivered by the DfE, is financially beneficial to the County Council. In April 2017, the DfE announced seven new free schools would be established in addition to the existing free school approvals in Crawley, Chichester and Littlehampton and these will add some 4,000 additional school places across the county.

1.10 Where significant strategic developments are expected, the County Council negotiates S106 developer contributions towards new school places that are needed as a direct result of the new development. In a growing number of instances, the County Council has been able to secure the development of a new school being fully funded by the developer in lieu of S106 contributions. This has a positive impact for the developer in helping to sell new homes but also means the County Council does not need to find capital funding to deliver the provision. This has been the situation at Forge Wood Primary School in Crawley where a new primary school is being built fully funded by the developer.

2. **Proposals**

2.1 In order to carry out effective pupil place planning across West Sussex, and to reflect the DfE’s requirements for pupil forecasting and school capacity, the county is split into planning areas, or sometimes referred to as locality groups of schools. These are based on the geographical areas defined by the secondary school’s catchment area and the feeder schools aligned to them. There are currently 24 planning areas in West Sussex. Any decisions on changes to education provision, such as the expansion of one or more of these schools, are discussed on a regular basis with the headteachers and, where necessary, the relevant diocesan representatives within these planning areas.

2.2 Overall pupil numbers are rising and are likely to continue to do so. This will be significantly affected by population demography, together with the proposed timing, size, tenure and location of future housing developments. Whilst the increases are not consistent across the county, some planning areas have experienced a 1% or more year on year increase in pupil numbers. The growth of pupil numbers in the primary sector in the last seven years, is now beginning to affect the number of children seeking a place in secondary schools across the county.
2.3 Forecasting pupil numbers is reliant on accurate birth data. Birth data is collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by electoral ward. Data on pupil movement trends is collected from the School Census and examines pupil movement between schools, localities, in and out of the county, and between educational stages i.e. transferring from primary, including infant/junior, to secondary school. These trends are combined with birth and housing data in order to create pupil projections or forecasts. These pupil projections allow the County Council to commission adequate educational provision to ensure that every child who requires a school place is offered one.

2.4 Although school place demand is based on planning areas, or localities, there is no direct link between the number of children living in a particular area and the number of school places available there. This is because, when it comes to applying for a school place, parents/carers are under no obligation to apply for their nearest school and could instead express a preference for a school outside of their town, borough/district or county, or choose home schooling or independent provision for their child.

2.5 The County Council has recently acquired new statistical analysis software that will be used to further enhance the current projections model. This software is used by a number of other local authorities and supports the annual forecasting returns which have to be provided to the DfE. Where possible, the County Council strives to meet parental preferences. Analysing historic pupil movement trends enables the planning of school places to take preference patterns in an area into consideration. West Sussex County Council’s pupil planning is effective in this regard and for September 2016, the County Council was able to offer a place at a preferred school to 97% of reception applicants, 98.5% of junior applicants and 97.6% of secondary applicants. Pupil movement trends also allow the County Council to understand whether there is a significant movement of pupils in a particular area.

2.6 Concern is often expressed by parents that the planning of places does not provide sufficient places at their local school or even that too many places have been created. The County Council has to ensure that there is sufficient evidence to support an expansion of a school and that by creating extra places in a locality there will not be too many that could lead to several schools not filling to their published admission number and thereby creating organisational and financial challenges or that too few places are provided and children have to be offered places at alternative schools, perhaps further afield. Planning places for school entrants at reception age i.e. 4 years old is more problematic than the prediction of Year 7 (aged 11) pupils starting at secondary school as they are likely to already be in the system.

2.7 Current predictions for the next 15 years take account of the predictions in each of the district & borough councils’ Local Plans that suggest by 2032 there will be some 66,000 additional homes across West Sussex. The standard formula for assessing future demand, based on regional factors, is that up to 30 pupils per year group can be expected from every 1,000 homes. Based on that formula, this would be the equivalent of 33 new 2FE (420 places) primary schools being needed across West Sussex by 2032. However, whilst new homes are a key source of additional children at
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2.8 To ensure the County Council uses its funding to greatest effect in providing additional school places where and when required, it is proposed that the pupil projections system continues to review data at two key stages of the year. These are at April and November each year so that account can be taken of school admission data and school census. The results of those projections are shared with headteachers across each of the 24 localities of schools so that they can see trends and also help them understand future demands in an area that may require either additional school places to be created or a new school. As all new schools must be academies, these will be provided through either the Government’s Free Schools programme or by the County Council undertaking an Academy Presumption competition and seeking a sponsor before funding the construction of a new school at cost to the County Council.

3. Alternative Options Considered

3.1 School Place Planning used to predict school places over a much shorter period, often only up to 5 years, but in 2015 began a move to projecting ahead the demand across 15 years. Statistical algorithms can be used to predict pupil numbers based on trends but predictions beyond 5 years into the future have to make assumptions about children that are not yet born and therefore are fraught with challenges.

3.2 The introduction of a new statistical modelling software (para 2.5) is expected to give further reassurance that extra places will only be created where there is demand or that there are sufficient surplus places in an area that require a review of provision to be undertaken e.g. where there are too many school places and removal of surplus accommodation might be required.

3.3 Reviews of how school place planning in West Sussex is carried out have been undertaken by Internal Audit in 2014/15 and by the DfE in 2015 which together with the DfE School Capacity (SCAP) returns (see para 1.8) suggest that the system is compliant and has led to £85m of capital grant being granted for the County Council (see para 1.9).

4. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee

4.1 This report has been produced to outline for Members the process that is undertaken in West Sussex to plan school places and give reassurance that there are both local and national checks on our data projections. The impact of insufficient or too many school places in a locality can be significant for local families, schools and the best use of public monies and so careful planning is carried out to ensure new provision is identified early.

4.2 Consideration of how pupil projections are assessed against actual numbers on roll at schools might be an area that would illustrate how accurate the projections are. However, the introduction of a new software projection
system in 2017 and the announcement of seven new Free Schools all need to be factored into any assessment.

5. **Consultation**

5.1 Regular discussion of school place planning is undertaken through the Headteachers Resources & School Organisation Group of the Education Skills Forum and they see and comment on the draft Planning School Places report. The annual publication of the ‘Planning School Places’ report also provides for comments to be made by the general public and these are incorporated into the annual review of the document. Officers from the School Organisation & Development Team also attend each of the 24 locality Headteacher meetings throughout the year to discuss pupil place planning in each locality and comments are sought.

6. **Resource Implications and Value for Money**

6.1 Paragraph 1.9 refers to the central government grant that the Council receives to provide additional school places. The Council’s approach to capital funding of additional school places is to use central government grant, S106 developer contributions, developer funded projects and Government funded Free Schools in preference to using County Council funding. This ensures the highest level of value for money for residents of West Sussex.

6.2 The use of predominantly external funding to deliver additional school places meets the West Sussex County Council priority of Giving the Best Start in Life.

7. **Risk Management Implications**

7.1 The County Council has a legal duty to provide sufficient school places and without appropriate pupil projection data being calculated, analysed and used to influence projects to meet the demand there is a risk to the County Council of not meeting its legal duty as well as reputational risk. Meeting parental preference is a different factor to ensuring there are sufficient school places and can often be misinterpreted that where parents cannot get their school(s) of preference the County Council has not fulfilled its duties. However, the balance between sufficient school places to provide for all children and creating additional places to meet parental preference can lead to an overall surplus of places.

7.2 Across West Sussex (as of Autumn Term 2016 census) there were 111,603 pupils at educational establishments where there existed a potential of 125,483 places. The difference of 13,880 places provides for greater parental preference and to reduce or remove the additional places could lead to reduced levels of parental satisfaction, increased travel times, short notice and costly additional accommodation if required.

8. **Impact of the proposal**

8.1 This report is for information only.
9. **Equality Duty**

9.1 An Equality Impact Report is not required for this decision for the following reason: It is a report dealing with internal or procedural matters only.

10. **Crime and Disorder Act Implications**

10.1 Not Applicable.

11. **Human Rights**

11.1 Not Applicable

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**Appendices**

Appendix A – Admission arrangements

**Background Papers**

West Sussex County Council Planning School Places 2017