

## **SCHOOL PLACES WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of the meeting held at 5.00 pm on 25 November 2013

### **Present:**

Councillor Sarah Phillips (Chairman)  
Councillors Neil Reddin FCCA

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P., Chairman, Education PDS Committee  
Councillor Stephen Wells, Portfolio Holder for Education  
Jane Bailey, Interim Assistant Director: Education  
Robert Bollen, Education Strategic Capital Manager  
Iain Johncock, Interim Head of Strategic Pupil Place Planning  
Kerry Nicholls, Democratic Services Officer  
Gill Slater, Planner (Planning Strategy)  
Max Winters, Principal Research and Statistics Officer (ECHS)

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 2ND SEPTEMBER 2013**

Members considered the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013 be agreed.**

### **3 PLANNING FOR GROWTH: REVIEW OF SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Members considered projected demand for secondary school places across the Borough. Over recent years there had been a significant increase in the number of primary school places required to ensure that every on-time applicant received a valid offer. As these pupils moved into the secondary phase, there was a need to consider how the increase in demand for places would be met, as well as how a range of other changes would impact demand for secondary places, including raising the participation age to 17 and 18 years, and new education options such as University Technical Colleges and Career Colleges.

A comprehensive range of secondary provision was currently delivered across the Borough which offered single sex, faith and selective options in addition to mainstream academies. Whilst some schools still had capacity, initial projections indicated a need for up to 30 additional forms of entry in the years to 2025 and beyond. Although there was scope for existing secondary providers to expand, there was a need for the Local Authority to consider where enlargement would

best meet increasing demand for places as well as assess whether there was a need for one or more new schools. The Catholic Archdiocese had also proposed that a new Catholic secondary provision be established in the Borough, as Bromley was the only borough in south London without a Catholic secondary school.

With regard to the potential for secondary schools to expand, Members were advised that the Government space standards in secondary schools had recently been reduced by 15%, and all applications to build and extend schools would be funded on this basis. Some Local Authorities were working to reassess space standards of secondary schools in their Boroughs, as this reduction in space standards would create additional capacity in existing school buildings and impact the size of any extension or new school building. The reduction in space standards applied only to school buildings and not to outside space, such as playing fields.

In considering the review, the Portfolio Holder for Education noted that the increase in demand for secondary places was expected to become more significant from 2016-17. A number of Secondary Head Teachers had expressed an interest in expanding by 1 or 2 forms of entry which would help accommodate additional pupils, but there was also a need to consider where new free school provision would be required, whilst ensuring that existing schools were not affected by a high number of surplus places.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP highlighted the importance of ensuring that parental choice continued to be supported in secondary education, and suggested that a margin of 5% be considered above projection to provide for parental choice and improve the rate of first choice allocations, as well as to accommodate any additional surge in demand such as through increased migration to the Borough. Following discussion, this was generally agreed by Members.

The Local Authority continued to liaise with the Archdiocese around the potential development of a Catholic secondary school in the Borough. The Archdiocese appeared reluctant to establish a new school on the former All Saints secondary school site and was seeking to utilise this site for residential development. Such a proposal, involving the loss of a school site whilst there was a recognised future need, would currently be unacceptable under National and regional planning guidance. In addition to planning issues, there remained a number of covenants and consents which would restrict the future use of the site. In the event of disposal of the All Saints site, any funds realised should be reinvested in Catholic secondary education in the Borough. The Head of Strategic Pupil Place Planning also advised Member that there remained an outstanding debt owed to the Local Authority by the Archdiocese for the closure of All Saints Secondary School.

The development of the proposed Catholic secondary provision as a free school would limit the school's ability to select pupils on religious grounds to 50%, and the current national position of the Catholic church was to oppose free schools on these grounds. The alternate route for funding any agreed new provision would be through targeted capital or basic need funding, and there was no certainty of additional resources being made available before March 2015. Three alternate

sites had been identified for the potential Catholic secondary provision, although there were a significant number of planning issues around the use of these sites including restrictions on new development on sites designated as Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Space. The Planner (Planning Strategy and Heritage Team) highlighted the advice in the Mayor's 'Call for Sites' which emphasised the use of redundant office buildings, and would provide a letter to Members that had recently been received from the Greater London Authority expressing concern regarding proposals for free schools on open space.

In discussion, Members generally supported the establishment of a new Catholic secondary provision in the Borough. Pupils leaving Bromley Catholic primary schools in 2012/13 went on to attend more than 40 different secondary schools, both in Bromley and across London. The Portfolio Holder for Education noted the potential for an outstanding Catholic secondary school, such as Coloma Convent Girls School, to sponsor any new provision, which could support the rebranding of the All Saints site if the Archdiocese chose to retain it. Alternately the All Saints site might be used by another free school or in the expansion of an out of Borough selective school should the Archdiocese choose to sell the site.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Strategic Pupil Place Planning confirmed that the Borough was currently a net importer of pupils at secondary level. It was expected that there would be some variation of demand over time, particularly for pupils that lived close to the Borough boundary, but this was not expected to have a significant impact on the levels of predicted demand for secondary places in Bromley.

The Chairman queried the impact of raising the participation age. The Head of Strategic Pupil Place Planning advised Members that it was difficult to model the impact of this demand as young people would not necessarily remain in a school environment post-16. There were a number of training and education options available, including apprenticeships and alternate provision through colleges, and planning should be undertaken to ensure that sufficient capacity was available to support young people at 17 and 18 years in a range of different settings. It was underlined that raising the participation age was likely to affect young people who would previously have left education at 16 years, so it was important to ensure that the available provision met a range of needs, abilities and interests.

In considering free schools, the Portfolio Holder noted the potential to approach free school sponsors around educational opportunities within the Borough. Potential sites had been identified for a new secondary provision within the Borough, however there were issues that would need to be resolved before these sites could be utilised. There was also potential to establish new free schools that linked to significant developments in the Borough, such as the proposed Crystal Palace Park development.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP confirmed that Bromley College of Further and Higher Education would shortly launch a Career College specialising in food and enterprise. This provision would be based at the College's Orpington Campus from September 2014, and would prepare students for employment in the catering and hospitality industry. Pupils would also be able to start at the College aged 14

years, where they would learn the practical skills needed for work whilst continuing to study for GCSEs in core subjects.

#### **4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following consideration of the review of secondary education, Members considered the Working Party's initial recommendations.

**RESOLVED that it be recommended that:**

- 1) The review be accepted as the basis for secondary place planning;**
- 2) The higher Greater London Authority (GLA) alternate roll projection methodology be adopted as the basis of forecasting for 2014/15 and beyond;**
- 3) A margin of 5% be considered above projection to provide for parental choice in order to improve the rate of first choice allocations;**
- 4) A new Catholic secondary school provision in the Borough be supported in principle;**
- 5) Further reviews of existing secondary capacity be carried out using the Department for Education's revised space standards to validate options for growth at existing schools as the basis for capital bid applications.**

#### **5 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE**

Members were provided with an update on the development of the Local Plan for Bromley. The Local Development Framework Advisory Panel was overseeing the production of the Bromley Local Plan, which would involve bringing forward planning policies, land designations and site allocations to steer development and support infrastructure in the Borough up to 2030. At the meeting of the Advisory Panel on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013, Members had considered the increased demand for primary and secondary school places over the next few years and had agreed to define all sites with permitted use for education purposes (including the sites of schools, colleges and purpose built day nurseries, and any future free school and education sites where new education provision was provided on a permanent basis) as 'Education Land' and to protect these sites for education purposes for the period of the plan, as well as to address the need for additional provision by looking at the possible expansion of existing school sites.

At the meeting of the Advisory Panel on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013, Members had considered a further exploration of the current pressures on educational land, including future school expansions and the establishment of free schools, as well as the draft Local Plan education policies and an amendment of the Urban Open Space Policy to facilitate educational development. Following consideration, Members of the Advisory Panel had approved the direction of the education policies and agreed an amendment to the Urban Open Space Policy to meet the

projected educational needs to the end of the plan period. The Members of the Advisory Panel had noted the potential for a review of Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Space boundaries in respect of school site development in Bromley, where schools could demonstrate a surplus of school playing fields. Where practicable, Members of the Advisory Panel had expressed a preference for schools to build upwards rather than outwards, although this would have cost implications.

The Planner (Planning Strategy and Heritage Team) outlined the draft education policy that had been recommended to the Local Development Advisory Panel on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013. This underlined the Local Authority's commitment to choice in education for parents and young people, and to work in partnership with agencies and providers to ensure the provision of an appropriate range of educational facilities for lifelong learning. This would be supported by an assessment of need and allocation of sites for educational infrastructure during the plan period, definition of land with permitted use for education purposes, and permitting of extensions to existing schools where local need had been identified, subject to Local Plan open space and conservation policies, unless there were demonstrably negative local impacts which outweighed the need for additional education provision. Within this, it was recommended that proposals for school extensions on land adjacent to Education Land be considered favourably where appropriate.

The Planner (Planning Strategy and Heritage Team) advised Members that the majority of schools in the Borough had some form of open space designation. This included Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt land, but also the local definition of Urban Open Space, which limited the development that could be undertaken on existing school sites. Recent changes which came into force on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013 meant that free schools did not need planning permission to use premises which were currently in use for business, hotels, residential institutions and assembly and leisure. Additionally, a temporary permitted development right allowed a building of any class to be utilised as a state funded school for a limited period of one academic year. These changes limited the amount of influence the Local Authority had in the location and design of new schools.

In considering the update, the Portfolio Holder for Education underlined that school site boundaries should be clearly defined in commercial transfer agreements as Local Authority maintained schools moved to academy status. It was important to ensure that large tracts of land were not automatically transferred to academies and could be utilised for other education purposes in future, such as for free schools where appropriate.

**RESOLVED that the update be noted.**

## **6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

No future meeting date was set.

The Meeting ended at 6.59 pm

Chairman

This page is left intentionally blank