

SCHOOL PLACES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 27 April 2020

Present:

Councillor Kieran Terry (Chairman)
Councillors Emmanuel Arbenser, Nicky Dykes and
Neil Reddin FCCA

Also Present:

Robert Bollen, Head of Strategic Place Planning
Philippa Gibbs, Democratic Services Officer
Ben Johnson, Housing, Planning and Regeneration
Jared Nehra, Children's Services
Gill Slater, Planner (Planning Strategy)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Dykes proposed that Councillor Kieran Terry be appointed Chairman. This was seconded by Councillor Reddin and agreed by the voting Members present at the meeting.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Kieran Terry be appointed Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3 UPDATE ON THE LOCAL PLAN

The Head of Planning Policy and Strategy and the Planner (Strategy) provided an update in respect of the position of both the Bromley Local Plan and the London Local Plan. The Head of Planning Policy and Strategy reported that the Bromley Local Plan had been adopted whilst the London Local Plan had not yet been adopted. In relation to the London Local Plan there was some movement around targets for housing which would impact on Bromley.

In response to a question concerning whether it would be possible to remove the education land designation of 1 Westmoreland Road, the Head of Planning Policy and Strategy explained that whilst in theory it was possible in reality the process would likely take around 18 months to complete as it would need to be done as part of a review. However a review was likely as a result of the changes to housing targets.

A query was raised by a Member in relation to the planning designation of the land adjacent to Edgebury Primary School, Chislehurst, which was proposed as a new site for the Marjorie McClure School. The Planner (Strategy) confirmed the land had been designated for educational use, however at the time of drafting the local plan this was originally intended as a site for a secondary school.

In relation to the impact of changes in housing targets on pupil projections, the Head of Strategic Place Planning explained that in recent years population growth across the Borough had primarily been led by migration however there remained a strong live birth rate which would continue for the next 10 years. The Working Group also noted that the 5 year pupil projections were based on the known position and consequently any changes to housing targets were unlikely to have a significant impact.

4 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT AND ANALYSIS BY PLANNING AREA

In considering the School Place Planning Report 2020, the School Places Working Group made the following observations and recommendations:

Section 1 – Executive Summary

Introducing the report, the Head of Strategic Place Planning explained that the report presented a similar position to that reported in 2019/2020. The Working Group noted that the growth in demand for primary places started in 2010 and as such demand for school places was now shifting into the secondary sector. Members noted that there would be added pressure in the North West of the Borough if the Harris Federation were not able to open a new school. In response to a question, the Director of Education confirmed that there had been positive conversations in respect of the Harris Federation's proposal for a new school. Both the Council and the Regional Schools' Commissioner were clear that there was sufficient demand to justify opening a new school. The Working Group noted that there were some complications in terms of the site and these were being addressed however, Members were advised that the DfE appeared to be shifting its policy in relation to schools being opened in temporary accommodation and this would require a joint approach between the Council and Harris Federation.

Section 3 – Borough Data

In respect of table 3.5 the Working Group noted that the 2019 comparative GLA projections of Year 7 school rolls were relatively low when compared to previous years. Members were reminded that there were a number of factors that influenced school place planning and additional spaces in school could cause other issues.

Section 4 – SEND

Members of the Working Group noted the pressures in relation to children from Bromley attending both independent specialist provision and out-of-borough

provision. In response, the Director of Education acknowledged that LB Bromley did have comparatively more children in independent and out-of-borough provision and this position was historical, resulting from a lack of suitable local provision. Within the last couple of years there had been a focus on addressing this deficit resulting in approval for a new Special Free School in the Borough. However, one of the key issues was increases in demand for specialist provision coupled with the increasing complexity of need in the children that were presenting for SEN support. This meant that despite the positive work that was being delivered progress was slow. The new Free School would play an important role in providing more attractive and cost-effective local provision. Members noted that there were a number of benefits of delivering local specialist provision, it was not just about addressing financial pressures. However, Members noted that the needs of the young people accessing services were continually evolving and this meant that changes would be required in the provision offered from time to time.

The Head of Strategic Place Planning also highlighted that there were a number of factors which influenced and impacted on the market for SEND provision and there was a need for schools which were continually able to meet the evolving needs of children. Consequently the Local Authority had commissioned an ongoing piece of work around future need in relation to SEND and the ongoing budgetary pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant in relation to High Needs provision. It was recognised that the Local Authority needed to get better at projecting the changing needs of children in order to support them to remain in more suitable and cost effective mainstream education were possible.

It was agreed that the outcome of the ongoing work around SEND provision would be reported to either the School Place Planning Working Group or the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee when it was available.

In response to a question, the Director of Education explained that there was growing demand for provision in respect of three key areas – autism spectrum disorder; speech, language & communication; high level anxiety and social, emotional and mental health needs leading to school refusal. There was a need to provide support to children at an earlier stage before these issues became a significant problem.

Members of the Working Group noted that whilst additional capacity had been added in special schools within the Borough demand would continue to grow. Consequently Members agreed to recommend that more local SEND places should be delivered in order to reduce the reliance on independent provision.

Section 5 – Local Data

Members of the Working Group noted the particular need for places in the North West of the Borough, in particular the demand for secondary school places. The Director of Education emphasised the need for a new secondary Free School stressing that there would be a demand for places before a permanent build could be delivered in 2023. If it was found not to be possible to deliver the required Free School within the timescales consideration would need to be given to alternative options.

The Working Group considered the impact of the proposals recently put forward by multi academy trusts in respect of admission criteria. The Director of Education emphasised that the Local Authority had adopted a strong position in objecting to the proposed changes. The Director of Education highlighted that in respect of the new Harris school it was important to make clear the expectation of the Local Authority that, were the new school to be delivered, places would be offered on a locality basis. However, Members of the Working Group were reminded that the Local Authority was not the admissions authority and therefore did not take the decision.

In response to a question, the Head of Strategic Place Planning confirmed that his understanding was that the planning application for Bullers' Wood had been validated earlier in the day.

The Working Group also requested that Members were provided with updates regarding Dorset Road.

Turning to the issue of building public trust in the process for allocating school places, the Working Group noted that past School Place Planning stakeholder events that had been held in libraries had been well received. These events had enabled residents to meet with Members and Officers to discuss the process for applying for a school place and had provided an opportunity for the Local Authority to dispel some of the common myths that existed around applying for a school place. The Working Group noted that in relation to the offer of preferred school places Bromley was consistently better than both the London average and its nearest neighbours.

A Member highlighted that whilst outcomes in terms of places offered were good the process could sometimes be difficult for parents to engage in. As such the Member felt that there was more that could be done to make the process more user friendly. The Director of Education acknowledged the feedback that had been provided and confirmed that this was something that was being addressed within the Department. The Head of Strategic Place Planning agreed that it was often difficult to explain how the system worked to ensure equity and transparency. The position could change on a yearly basis due to a number of external factors and this contributed to residents' concerns around the process. The Working Group agreed that better communication and community engagement around the process for applying for school places would play a part in mitigating some of these concerns and it was recommended that more School Place Planning stakeholder events be delivered across the Borough in the future.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

RESOLVED: That

- 1. Pupil roll projections and other trend data set out in the report be noted;**

- 2. A planning margin of 5% above the GLA school roll projections is continued to be sought to provide for local variations in need and to meet parental preferences;**
- 3. Whilst there are, at the moment, sufficient places available or planned to meet current and projected demand for school places, the Council will work with schools to safeguard the existing supply of school places as required;**
- 4. There are specific pressures for placements for pupils with an Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and that the Council works with local schools, trusts and the DfE to bring proposals forward to increase capacity and improve provision where necessary;**
- 5. Discussions be undertaken with schools, multi academy trusts and the DfE, as outlined in this report, to ensure a sufficient supply of mainstream school places in the Borough, including through expansions and opening new schools;**
- 6. There is a potential delay to Harris Kent House opening and that it is recommended that the Council engages in conversation with Harris and other academy trusts operating in the borough to ensure that there are sufficient school places until the school opens;**
- 7. Where expansion is agreed, to implement through the education capital programme (subject to the availability of funds);**
- 8. The outcome of the ongoing work around SEND provision be reported to either the School Place Planning Working Group or the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee when it is available;**
- 9. Local provision of SEND places be increased in order to reduce reliance on independent provision; and**
- 10. More School Place Planning stakeholder events be delivered across the Borough in the future.**

The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chairman