

SCHOOL PLACES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.00 pm on 27 April 2021

Present:

Councillor Kieran Terry (Chairman)
Councillors Nicky Dykes, Judi Ellis and Neil Reddin FCCA

Also Present:

Councillor Kate Lymer
Robert Bollen, Head of Strategic Place Planning
Philippa Gibbs, Democratic Services Officer
Ben Johnson, Head of Planning Policy and Strategy
Jared Nehra, Director of Education
Georgina Sanger, Head of Strategy and Performance (Children & Education)
Gill Slater, Planner (Planning Strategy)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

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

RESOLVED: That Councillor Kieran Terry be appointed Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Ben Johnson, Head of Planning Policy and Strategy, submitted apologies.

3 PLANNING UPDATE

The Working Group noted that the Local Plan had been adopted and the review process would begin later in the year. The Local Development Scheme – which indicated the direction of travel - was approved by the Development Control Committee in late 2020.

The London Plan had recently been adopted. Planning applications in Bromley were determined in accordance with the Development Plan which included both the Local Plan and the London Plan. In the event of a conflict arising locally, it was resolved in favour of the more recently adopted plan (currently the London Plan). When the Local Plan was reviewed there would be a requirement to be in general conformity with the London Plan.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would apply to new applications from 15

June 2021. The income would only be received by the Council once a development had started. As such there was quite a significant lag period and it was therefore unlikely that any funds would be received for the first 12 to 18 months. In the meantime, some Section 106 funding was still running through the system. The Section 106 funding relating to Education that was currently held by the Council had been allocated to schemes and there was still some outstanding funding, but this would only be received once developments had started. This money would be allocated as and when it was received.

The majority of the CIL money that was received would go into the Capital Investment Programme and this would be the route through which Education CIL funding could be accessed. There was also a requirement that 15% of any amount of CIL was spent locally. The processes for how this money would be allocated were still in the development stage but it was very likely that ward members would have a significant input into this.

In response to a question, the Working Group noted that whilst CIL was replacing Section 106 funding it was likely that in rare cases there would be some funding so intrinsically linked to a development that it was fall under Section 106. Members further noted that under the CIL, Health and Education funding would not be tied by the same strict criteria as it had been with Section 106.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

4 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT AND ANALYSIS BY PLANNING AREA

The Head of Strategic Place Planning provided a comprehensive overview of the report highlighting that the Reception rolls this January (at 4050 borough-wide) were the highest they had been in recent years and that was following two years of growth. The position in Bromley was different to the rest of London where many areas had seen reductions in primary rolls. However, across London there had been a significant drop in the number of applications for primary places this year and at the moment the reason for the drop was not entirely clear.

The Working Group noted that the numbers on roll captured in the Schools Census in January 2021 were higher than GLA projections and this was something to keep mind when considering the rest of the data. It was also noted that in terms of demand for school places there were different local dynamics in different parts of the borough and there were a number of places that were below the 5% target for surplus places: Penge and Anerley; Hayes and West Wickham, Central Bromley; and Bromley Common, Farnborough and Keston.

In terms of Secondary Places, applications for this year had not been affected by Covid. The January School Census appeared to suggest that Year 7 places had fallen slightly however, most of the schools in Central, North and West Bromley were over capacity with surplus capacity in the East of the Borough and this would need to be monitored going forward.

In relation to the secondary school need in Penge and Anerley, the Working Group noted that in terms of managing the impact of any delay in the opening of the new school Officers were holding regular meetings with both the DfE and Harris Multi Academy Trust to explore interim measures that could be put in place. There was good commitment and engagement from the DfE in relation to this complex project and there were alternatives should places be required on a temporary basis. Members noted that a report would be presented to the Executive later in the Summer term and the report could provide greater assurance of the scheme going forward.

Members noted that a review of SEN provision remained ongoing. There had been a significant growth in the number of EHCPs processed which presented ongoing challenges. With reference to Table 4.8: Projection of Future EHCPs by Needs, Members noted that there was a difference in the way support was provided for each primary area of need which in turn impacted on financial implications. The greatest growth area was speech, language and communication needs and was an area that was under close review. The report of the independent review of speech and language provision in Bromley had just been published. It was likely that as a result of the actions that would be taken arising from the Independent Review, particularly the focus on increasing universal and targeted provision, the need for specialist provision would be reduced. It was hoped that the local changes that would be made as a result of the Independent Review would reduce future demand for EHCPs. Key areas of growth included: autistic spectrum conditions which were quite often linked to speech and language; and areas of social, emotional, and mental health.

Members noted that the issue of introducing SEN Units in schools with surplus capacity was one option that could be considered. However, a key consideration had to be the planning target of a surplus of 5%. If capacity was reduced through the introduction of specialist units it may prove to be difficult to expand provision in the future if required. It was also acknowledged that there was volatility in the projections. Where some schools had short-term surplus capacity the Falling Rolls Fund had been approved by the Schools' Forum and this provided some interim financial support to schools. The Working Group noted that a recommendation would be made to the Schools' Forum to retain the Falling Rolls Fund for a further year.

The Working Group discussed the number of Tribunal cases in which the Local Authority was involved. Members noted that Bromley's data was in line with both the London and national averages. It was agreed that performance data concerning tribunals would be shared with Members of the Working Group following the meeting.

In response to a question concerning whether the Outer London Boundary Charge proposed by the current London Mayor would affect Bromley's status as a net importer of pupils the Head of Strategic Place Planning explained that the key movement in terms of Kent was Bromley residents accessing the North and West Kent Grammar Schools, the greater movement into the Borough came from Croydon and Lewisham and to a lesser extent Greenwich and Bexley. As such it was unlikely that the data would be affected by the proposed Outer London

Boundary Charge however this scenario would be modelled for the next year.

The Working Group discussed the pressure that could be placed on admissions when some Academies and Multi Academy Trusts proposed changes to their admissions criteria (recent examples being Langley MAT and Harris MAT). The Director of Education highlighted that the Local Authority was not the admissions authority for any schools within the Borough. Members noted that where the Local Authority was consulted on admissions arrangements it would firstly express a view concerning whether the proposed arrangements were in line with the admissions code and secondly express a view about the proposed admissions arrangements and if necessary make recommendations to ensure that they provided local choice. Where there were concerns (and evidence) of a significant detrimental impact on either the availability of places or local choice these concerns would be expressed and where necessary the Local Authority would formally write to the Schools' Adjudicator.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That pupil roll projections and other trend data set out in the report be noted;
2. That 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. That 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. That there is specific pressures for placements for pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) 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. That 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;
3. That the potential delay to Harris Kent House free school opening is noted and that it is recommended that the Council engages in conversation with Harris Federation and other academy trusts operating in the borough to ensure that there are sufficient school places until the school open;
7. Where expansion is agreed, to implement through the education capital programme (subject to the availability of funds);
3. That the direction of travel for the increase in local SEND provision be endorsed.

The Meeting ended at 7.19 pm

Chairman