

SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 26 April 2023

Present:

Councillor Felicity Bainbridge (Chairman)
Councillor Thomas Turrell (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Graeme Casey, Robert Evans and Ryan Thomson

Also Present:

Robert Bollen, Head of Strategic Place Planning
Jared Nehra, Director of Education
Gill Slater, Planner (Planning Strategy)
Kerry Nicholls, Democratic Services Officer

4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jonathan Andrews and Councillor Robert Evans attended as his substitute.

5 PLANNING UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Working Group heard a verbal update on planning matters from the Planner (Planning Strategy).

The Local Authority was in the process of reviewing its Local Plan 2019-2030 which set out planning policies and proposals for new development in the Borough, including identifying and allocating potential sites for education provision as well ensuring that existing education sites were not lost to alternative uses. Bromley's Local Plan was required to be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework and the London Plan and would be subject to a robust public consultation process as it was developed. Public consultation would shortly commence for an Issues and Options document, and it was anticipated that the detailed draft Local Plan would be available for public consultation by Spring 2024 in advance of the finalised draft being submitted to the Secretary of State in June 2025.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

6 BROMLEY SCHOOL PLACES EDUCATION SCHOOL PLACE PLAN 2023-27

The Working Group considered the draft Education School Places Plan 2023-27 which aimed to ensure there were enough high-quality accessible school places in the Borough to meet projected demand in the short to medium term.

In introducing the report, the Head of Strategic Place Planning advised that two key challenges had been identified around school places. These comprised a

projected reduction in demand for mainstream school places, particularly at primary level, and further growth in demand for specialist education as a result of the high number of Bromley children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans. There were two new free schools in the pre-opening phase including Harris Kent House, a secondary provision that would provide much needed school places in the Penge area, and Redwood Academy, a special school that would enable more young people to attend an in-borough provision. The Local Authority would continue to work closely with the Department for Education to progress both projects and would seek earlier opening of these schools using temporary accommodation where feasible.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Strategic Place Planning explained that school place planning at primary level was undertaken on the basis of ward groupings, but that this did not preclude pupils attending schools in other planning areas or indeed neighbouring boroughs. Secondary place planning was undertaken via a single borough-wide planning area with the most acute need in the North West of the Borough. Whilst there was some surplus secondary capacity in the Cray Valley area, this was not a reasonable school offer for children living in Penge, Anerley or Crystal Palace due to travel times and distances, based on the Department for Education's statutory home to school travel and transport guidance. The Member queried whether the highly selective Newstead Wood and St Olave's Schools were included in the secondary planning area and was advised that they were as there were only two grammar schools in the Borough and the small number of pupils involved did not warrant the creation of a separate planning area.

A Member asked about the support provided to Harris Academy Orpington and Kemnal Technology College which were both rated by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement'. The Director of Education advised that the Local Authority offered a wide range of support to Bromley schools including a fortnightly schools' circular; regular governor briefings; events, groups and forums; and the Bromley Education Matters website. Whilst Harris Academy Orpington and Kemnal Technology College often preferred to rely on their own resources and partnerships, the Local Authority had recently undertaken some collaborative work with Harris Academy Orpington on supporting students with a Gypsy Roma and Traveller background. The Regional Director was ultimately accountable for the performance of academy schools, although the Local Authority did retain responsibility for safeguarding for which there were currently no concerns. The Head of Strategic Place Planning added that whilst academies had freedoms to pick and choose some matters on which they collaborated with the Local Authority, relationships between schools, academies and the Local Authority were strong and had enabled the delivery of many initiatives, including the provision of sufficient school places. On a related note, a Member asked what triggered an Ofsted inspection. The Director of Education advised that following a change in practice, all schools should expect to be inspected at least once every four years. A Member flagged that St Paul's Cray CE Primary School which was rated 'Requires Improvement' had not been inspected since 2016 and the Director of Education would take this forward with the Regional Director following the meeting. Another Member observed that developers had contributed £8.7M to the delivery of school places over the past 10 years and that it would be important to ensure that the educational impact of new

development continued to be mitigated under the Community Infrastructure Levy which had recently replaced Section 106 agreements.

In considering Planning Area 4: Bickley, Bromley Town and Plaistow and Sundridge, a Member asked for an update on Bromley Trust Alternative Provision Academy (Hayes Lane site). The Director of Education advised that primary and secondary outreach services supported schools to manage pupils with challenging behaviour with a view to avoiding the breakdown of their school placement. On occasions where it was not possible to avoid temporary or permanent exclusion, vocational placements were made available to excluded pupils at Bromley Trust Alternative Provision Academy. The Member requested that further details regarding the work of the Bromley Trust Alternative Provision Academy be included in the Education Commission Plan for future years. With regard to Planning Area 6: Chislehurst, Mottingham and Chislehurst North, a Member observed that Chislehurst School for Girls was a single academy trust and queried whether this was common across the Borough. The Head of Strategic Place Planning advised that whilst there were a number of single academy trusts across the Borough, an increasing number of these academies were seeking to join multi-academy trusts which had a number of benefits including closer working with other schools as well as economies of scale in some cost areas.

In reviewing the recommendations within the draft Education Commission Plan 2023, the Chairman suggested a further recommendation be included to highlight the need for sufficient education provision to be prioritised within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan in light of the transition from Section 106 arrangements to the Community Infrastructure Levy. The Working Group endorsed the draft Education Commission Plan 2023 for approval by the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee, subject to this further recommendation being incorporated.

RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee be recommended to agree:

- 1) That pupil roll projections and other trend data set out in the report be noted;**
- 2) That the continued increase in the number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), above demographic trends be noted;**
- 3) That a planning margin of 5% above the GLA School Roll Projections continues to be implemented to provide for local variations in need and to meet parental preferences;**
- 4) That the GLA School Roll Projections indicate a potential future reduction in the need for primary places and this position needs to be kept under review;**
- 5) Whilst there are, currently, 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;

- 6) That the Council will prioritise the needs of education within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan;**
- 7) That 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. The High Needs Funding and Estates Review will be a key route for identifying opportunities to bring forward additional capacity;**
- 8) 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;**
- 9) That whilst there has been progress in the delivery of both Harris Kent House and Redwood Academy free schools that there remains a potential delay to both projects and that it is recommended that the Council engages in conversation with both trusts to ensure that there are sufficient school places available until each school opens;**
- 10) That the Council should actively seek to increase the capacity of in-Borough specialist provision;**
- 11) Where expansion is agreed, to implement through the education capital programme (subject to the availability of funds); and,**
- 12) That officers continue dialogue with the Department for Education on amending the primary and secondary planning areas.**

The Meeting ended at 8.36 pm

Chairman