



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 March 2021

REPORT TITLE:	WIRRAL PUPIL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY 2021-2026
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

Wirral Council is committed to ensuring that all Wirral children can attend schools that are efficient, viable and provide the best possible education which meets their needs.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure there are sufficient school places available for children and young people in the right locations and at the right time to meet demand. This includes both maintained and Academy schools. The Council also has a duty to identify how it will remedy any excess or insufficiency in the provision of school places for children.

The Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-26 (attached at appendix 1) sets out a transparent and equitable approach for pupil place planning over the next five years. Fundamental to the Strategy is a set of key principles which will underpin the review process to provide consistency and result in positive outcomes for future provision. The principles include a commitment to:

- Using detailed and meaningful insight and data to allow accurate and robust forecasting
- Taking a collaborative approach and a commitment to work with all schools and stakeholders in ensuring they are consulted and involved
- Maintaining a focus on inclusion so that children with different needs are offered high quality education which meets their need
- Ensuring that children's educational outcomes and attainment are at the forefront of decision-making

In addition to the principles, the Strategy sets out a detailed appraisal and governance framework to guide the review planning and ensure legitimacy for decisions. It sets out the methodology for forecasting pupil places in line with national guidance as well as the wider influences which impact on demand predictions. It also proposes a phased approach for reviews over the next five years to enable appropriate planning, consultation and legal compliance to be carried out.

The Strategy supports the Council's wider vision to secure 'Brighter Futures' for children and young people.

This is a key decision as it impacts on all wards.

RECOMMENDATION

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is requested to review and endorse the Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The recommendation supports the Council in fulfilling its statutory duty to secure sufficient places for school pupils in Wirral.
- 1.2 The recommendation enables the Council to set out a transparent and robust process for reviewing pupil places across the borough to address any excess or insufficiency.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing: It is important the Council meets its statutory duty to secure sufficient school places for children in Wirral. Failing to set out a robust process for reviewing pupil provision creates a risk that the Council will not fulfil this statutory duty.
- 2.2 One option to bring only specific planning recommendations prior to agreeing a holistic approach, was considered and discounted. There is a pertinent need to ensure a transparent and legitimate approach to pupil planning is agreed in the first instance to reduce risk of challenge and to secure wider organisational support.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Education Act 1996 set out a requirement for all local authorities to ensure there are sufficient school places for children in their area. This includes setting out how they will remedy any excess or insufficiency in provision.
- 3.2 The former School Organisation Plan set out how the Council would meet its responsibility to secure sufficient education provision. The requirement to publish a formal School Organisation Plan was removed in 2014, however the Plan information has been updated on an ongoing basis to continue to monitor requirements, identify emerging need and inform sufficiency planning.
- 3.3 The purpose of the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 – 2026 is to refresh the previous strategy to take account of legislative changes whilst also setting out a robust framework for pupil place planning alongside a suggested schedule of reviews to take place over the next five years.
- 3.4 The Strategy is structured around four main strategic headings:
 - a) **Context:** This provides national context around pupil numbers, local population statistics and provides a profile of schools in Wirral, which includes type and status of schools.
 - b) **Vision and principles:** This section outlines the purpose of the Strategy and what provision will be scope of reviews. It sets the strategic vision to *“to ensure that*

Wirral's children attend local schools that are efficient, viable and provide the best possible educational standards to meet their needs". This section also sets out eight key principles which will underpin pupil place planning reviews.

- c) **Influences:** This section identifies the key considerations which will influence pupil place planning and must be considered as part of reviews. This includes, although not exclusive to, current and future housing developments, priorities within the School Capital Programme for major school infrastructure projects, education standards and school size and viability.
- d) **Approach:** The Strategy outlines the pupil place planning areas, of which there are 21 in primary and one in secondary. It identifies the methodology used to predict pupil numbers and demand for places and what other factors are included within the projections, for example, faith preferences. The review process and approach are also detailed within this section and include:
 - An appraisal framework which will guide the review process, ensuring that relevant and meaningful information is considered
 - Potential outcomes which may result from reviews
 - Legal framework and requirements which will be adhered to as part of any proposal for significant change
 - Consultation and approval processes

3.5 In the final section, the Strategy sets out a schedule of reviews for all areas over the next five years. Given the nature of the planning areas and the schools within it, the timetable is intended to present a logical model by proposing to review neighbouring planning areas in the same phase.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no specific financial implications arising out of this report. However, there are several financial considerations which will be considered as part of the pupil place reviews. These include:
 - a) *Schools Capital Programme:* The Council's allocation for the school's capital programme is based on the submission from the Local Authority via the Schools Capacity Survey (SCAP). The allocation allows for the maintenance and development of the school estate. The Capital allocation, however, may not be sufficient to support major infrastructure developments which may be recommended from the reviews. It is therefore important that these considerations are factored into pupil place planning review and appropriate measures are put in place to secure relevant investment if this is required.
 - b) *School viability:* The review process will consider school financial viability and the long-term impact on viability in relation to increasing or falling pupil numbers. Reviews are intended to ensure schools are financially sustainable and can support improved outcomes for children.

- 4.2 It is not intended that review will result in any significant financial detrimental impact for the local authority. However, robust financial support and monitoring will continue to be required to mitigate any potential risk.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Education Act 1996 set out a requirement for all local authorities to ensure there are sufficient school places for children in their area. Whilst the proposal to review school provision does not have any specific legal implications, due regard will need to be given to the legal requirements which may result from recommendations for significant change to school organisation. Sound legal oversight will therefore be essential as part of the review process to ensure that the relevant legislative processes are in place.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Strategy sets out an ambitious schedule to review all pupil areas over five years. Whilst it is anticipated that much of the work to deliver the strategy can be carried out using existing resources, there will be significant input and commitment required from Council officers and directorates. Robust data and intelligence will also be required, utilising resource from the Council insight and data teams.
- 6.2 There are no significant asset implications arising out of the report. However, it will be essential for the Strategy to be aligned with the Council's strategic vision for assets and complement any major infrastructure developments or planning ambitions. The insight from relevant strategic asset and planning officers will be essential in the review process to ensure that any potential recommendations are aligned.
- 6.3 There are no significant ICT implications arising out of the report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The Strategy intends to provide a transparent framework for the undertaking of pupil place planning reviews and ensure that potential outcomes are supported. There will always be a risk, however, that the Strategy is unable to deliver on the proposals set out due to unforeseen issues/circumstance. Arrangements to consult early, frequently and in line with legal responsibilities are intended to mitigate this risk.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation on the draft Strategy has been carried out with:
- elected members
 - schools (primary, secondary and special)
 - Council officers including children's SLT
- 8.2 Any relevant feedback will be incorporated within the Strategy.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help Council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

a) Yes, and impact review is attached –

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to:

- Reduce emissions of CO2

REPORT AUTHOR: **Hannah Myers**
(Hannah Myers, Performance and Improvement Manager)
Telephone: 07786114735
email: hannahmyers@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021- 2026

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[DfE School Organisation guidance](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date