



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 10 March 2022

REPORT TITLE:	OUTCOME OF PHASE 1 PUPIL PLACE PLANNING - SMALL PLANNING AREAS: BEECHWOOD; CENTRAL BIRKENHEAD; NORTH BIRKENHEAD; SOUTH BIRKENHEAD; NOCTORUM; PRENTON.
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to outline the recommendations arising out of phase 1 of the pupil place planning review.

In March 2021, the Children Young People and Education Committee endorsed the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 -2026. This Strategy set out a planned framework for the review of school places in both primary and secondary mainstream schools over the next 5 years.

Phase 1 of the primary phase of the review commenced in March 2021 looking at small planning areas in and around Birkenhead, specifically: Beechwood; Central Birkenhead; North Birkenhead; South Birkenhead; Noctorum; Prenton. A detailed review framework and process has been undertaken and has included information gathering, stakeholder discussion and parent/carers engagement. This has culminated in a series of findings and recommendations as set out in Findings Report at Appendix 1.

Recommendations relating to both the Diocese of Shrewsbury (Catholic) and the Diocese of Chester (Church of England) have been presented, discussed and supported as well as proposals relating to Academy Trusts. This has demonstrated the strength in partnership working and collaboration across the education sector which will be harnessed as we move forward as a local education partnership.

Fundamental to the work has been adherence to the principles outlined. These are the drivers for change and are intrinsically aligned to the 'Brighter Futures' priority in the Wirral Plan 2021-2026. The work has already been captured as a strategic driver within the Plan and this report and recommendations form part of its delivery.

This is a key decision as it affects residents from two or more wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the outcome of phase 1 of the Pupil Place Planning review regarding small planning areas: Beechwood, Central Birkenhead, North Birkenhead, South Birkenhead, Noctorum and Prenton as outlined in the Findings report attached at appendix 1:
2. Approve recommendation 1 that the Diocese of Shrewsbury decommission existing teaching space in St Anne's Primary School and repurpose for alternative use to reduce the overall capacity of the school.
3. Approve recommendation 2 that in principle agreement is given for the establishment of a new school in the small planning area of North Birkenhead to meet the demand for new school places over the next 15 years. This will be subject of future reports for members consideration as more details are developed.
4. Approve recommendation 3 to reduce Pupil Admission Numbers at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School as agreed by the Diocese of Shrewsbury and Holy Family Multi-Academy Trust (MAT):
5. Approve recommendation 4 to reduce Pupil Admission Numbers at Christchurch Church of England (CE) Birkenhead as agreed by the Diocese of Chester.
6. Note recommendation 5 relating to Woodchurch Road Primary as outlined in the report 'Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated admission schemes for 2023-24' as considered and approved by the Children, Young People and Education Committee at its meeting 31 January 2022.
7. Agree to undertake a formal consultation on recommendation 6 regarding the amalgamation of St Peter's Catholic Primary School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school.
8. Agree to undertake a formal consultation on recommendation 7 regarding the amalgamation of Manor Primary and Hillside Primary commencing 9th May 2022. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school. In line with statutory guidance, this recommendation requires a formal consultation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 As the responsible authority for maintained schools, it is important that the Council is managing both surplus and demand for pupil places in line with its statutory responsibilities and to ensure that schools can provide high quality education, are efficiency and viable and provide the best possible education support to meet children and young people's needs.
- 1.2 It is important that the Council demonstrates its support for the work and proposals considered and agreed by the Dioceses who are important partners in supporting education outcomes for Wirral children.
- 1.3 The recommendations outlined have been identified following a rigorous, transparent and equitable review programme which has sought to engage stakeholders throughout. Schools have had opportunity to consider and comment on the information gathered. The principles have been adhered to and remain fundamental in guiding the development of the proposals.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 **Do nothing:** There is a strong case for change. Population changes and local projections are evidencing that surplus is growing in schools. This can have a detrimental impact on school viability as well as how pupils are supported in their education. Failure to understand the implications of this and set out a planned and managed programme of change may result in more significant, unanticipated financial and reputational consequences for Wirral.
- 2.2 **Alternative review framework:** The current review framework for pupil place planning in primary schools is structured around small planning areas. They have been established for many years and have formed the basis of previous reviews of this nature. They are also used by the Department for Education for monitoring and reporting purposes. The review framework is based on looking at pupil projections for the small area which enables a more strategic view of places across the area (rather than primarily looking at specific schools). An alternative framework, such as reviewing pupil places for the whole borough at the same time would be unfeasible given the scale and number of primary schools in Wirral.
- 2.3 In relation to the specific proposals:

North Birkenhead small planning area – one other potential option which was explored and discounted was to increase capacity in the existing schools in the small planning area. However, given the projected level of demand within the area, due to the major housing developments outlined in the Local Plan, this would not be feasible.

Central Birkenhead small planning area – one option for this area was to look at more significant changes such as amalgamation/school closure to address the surplus. However, given that the area has several larger schools with capacity over 210 and Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) over 30, it was considered that a reduction

of PAN at the three schools identified would help to reduce surplus without the need for more significant action.

Noctorum and Beechwood small planning areas – Unlike Central Birkenhead, the schools in these small planning areas are already at minimum capacity and Pupil Admission Numbers of 30 or below. One option suggested was to reduce capacity and PAN further in these schools. However, considering statutory guidance and Department for Education good practice, it is suggested this would not be an effective course of action to take given that it would have the potential to significantly impact on the viability of the schools.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 was approved in March 2021 by the Children, Young People and Education Committee. This Strategy set out the vision and principles “to ensure that Wirral’s children attend local schools that provide high quality education, are efficient, viable and provide the best possible educational standards to meet their needs”.

3.2 The principles outlined are intended to guide much of the work and approach to a series of pupil place planning reviews as outlined in the Strategy. These are:

1. We will be fair, thorough, and respectful in our approach to Pupil Place planning reviews
2. We will follow and adhere to all legal requirements, seeking relevant advice and guidance where this is applicable
3. We will work with partners, and involve key stakeholders in pupil place planning where this is relevant and necessary
4. We will consult with schools, parents, and local communities as part of the pupil place planning process
5. We will utilise robust insight, intelligence, and data to underpin a robust methodology and analysis
6. We will always consider how our efforts will improve educational outcomes for children and young people
7. We will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of education provisions as part of pupil place planning
8. We will prioritise and focus on inclusion, ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities are at the forefront of considerations throughout

3.3 Phase 1 of the review cycle has considered schools in and around the area of Birkenhead. For primary schools, the review is organised around several small planning areas. These are: Beechwood; Central Birkenhead; North Birkenhead; South Birkenhead; Noctorum; Prenton.

3.4 Review programme overview

3.5 **March 2021 – August 2021:** Between March 2021 and August 2021 extensive evidence and information was gathered about the small planning areas and schools within those areas. A school profile presentation was compiled, and meetings arranged with school headteachers, governors and the Dioceses to discuss the

information and listen to the views of stakeholder. A summary of the information gathered is attached within the Findings Report at appendix 1.

3.6 September 2021 – December 2021: Between September 2021 and December 2021 a series of options were shaped to manage demand and address surplus where priority areas had been identified. Proposals relating to Diocese schools were shared with them in the first instance followed by meetings with the schools themselves. A report was presented to the Diocese of Shrewsbury outlining options for review. During this time, some schools acted on the recommendations outlined and submitted consultation for reduction in PAN.

3.7 January 2022 – March 2022: The Children Young People and Education Committee considered proposals regarding the reduction in PAN aligned to the review and approved the reduction in PAN for Woodchurch Road as the maintained school. Further engagement has taken place with schools and stakeholders. The Findings report and recommendations will be presented to the Children Young People and Education Committee.

3.8 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.9 Context – statutory framework

3.10 The local authority has a duty to secure sufficiency of school places for children and young people. This includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. Each year, the Council submits annual school capacity survey to DfE which provide pupil forecasts, and these inform capital programmes and funding.

3.11 Context - population change

3.12 The population of children aged 0-9 is expected to decline over the next five years. Based on the actual and expected resident population for Wirral for children aged 0-9, between 2021 and 2026 (the time frame of the Strategy) there will be a decline in the number of children living on Wirral from approximately 36.5 thousand children aged 0-9 in 2021 to 33.6 thousand.

3.13 Calculating pupil projections

3.14 The pupil projections outlined are based on a robust forecast methodology which considers a range of factors including:

- Population change
- Planned/actual housing developments
- Historical changes and pupil patterns
- Movement of families/children in/out of areas

3.15 Pupil projections are completed each year as mandatory and provided to the Department for Education to inform local authority funding. Historical projections have been accurate to date, giving confidence in the projections outlined as part of this review.

3.16 Phase 1 Small planning area: Prenton

3.17 Prenton small planning area consists of a maintained primary school: Prenton Primary. The pupil forecasts for the planning area are the same as for the school. There are no recommendations for this area arising out of the review.

3.18 Phase 1 Small planning area: South Birkenhead

3.19 There are five schools within the South Birkenhead Planning area: Bedford Drive Primary; Mersey Park Primary; Rock Ferry Primary; St. Anne's Catholic Primary; and Well Lane Primary. Overall, the small planning area currently (May 21) has an occupancy of 91% and 9% surplus places. It is projected that the surplus will increase to 13% over the next few years. There is one school, St. Anne's Catholic Primary which is projected to have over 25% surplus places in five years. Local plan developments are not expected to have a significant impact on school place planning.

3.20 Small planning area: North Birkenhead

3.21 North Birkenhead small planning area consists of seven primary schools: Bidston Avenue Primary; Birkenhead High School Academy; Cathcart Street Primary; Co-op Academy Portland; Holy Cross Catholic Primary; Our Lady and St. Edwards Catholic Primary; The Priory Parish CE Primary. In May 21, the percentage occupancy for the area was 89%. It is anticipated that there will be significant housing developments within North Birkenhead over the next 5 to 15 years, as identified within the Local Plan.

3.22 Small planning area: Central Birkenhead

3.23 There are six schools in the Central Birkenhead small planning area: Christchurch CE Birkenhead; Devonshire Park Primary; St Joseph's Catholic Primary; St Werburgh's Catholic Primary; Woodchurch Road Primary; Woodlands Primary. The occupancy for the area (May 21) is 80%. Projections indicate that occupancy will be 66% in five years with 34% surplus. Local Plan developments are not expected to impact on pupil place planning projections in this area. There are currently two schools with over 25% surplus places. It is expected that there will be three schools with over 25% surplus in the next five years.

3.24 Small Planning area: Noctorum

3.25 Noctorum has four schools within the small planning area: Hillside Primary; Oxton St Saviours CE Primary; St Peter's Catholic Primary; Townfield Primary. Overall projections for the area indicate a change in occupancy over the next five years from 84% to 77%, meaning there will be a 23% surplus overall. Local plan developments are not expected to have any significant impact on the projected demand for pupil places in five years. There are two schools within the area with over 25% surplus places who are expected to remain with high levels of surplus over five years.

3.26 Small planning area: Beechwood

3.27 There are three schools in the small planning area: Bidston Village CE Primary; Manor Primary; St Paul's Catholic Primary. As of May 21, the area had an overall occupancy of 82%. This is expected to decrease to 70% over the next five years, in

line with population change resulting in a 30% surplus for the area. Local Plan developments are not expected to result in increased demand for places. Two schools currently have a surplus of over 25% and this is expected to remain for the next five (and 15 years) unless action is taken.

3.28 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Diocese of Shrewsbury decommission existing teaching space in St Anne's and repurpose for alternative use to reduce the overall capacity of the school. It should be noted that this recommendation has been supported by the Diocese.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that, in principle, agreement is given for the establishment of a new school in the small planning area of North Birkenhead to meet the demand for new school places over the next 15 years. This will be subject of future reports for members consideration as more details are developed.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that Diocese of Shrewsbury and the Holy Family Multi-Academy Trust reduce the PAN of St Joseph's Catholic Primary school to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity. This recommendation has been supported and actioned by the Diocese and Holy Family MAT.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the Diocese of Chester agree to reduce the PAN of Christchurch CE Birkenhead to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity. This recommendation has been supported by the Diocese of Chester.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that Woodchurch Road Primary reduce their PAN to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity.

This recommendation has been acted upon by the school. Consultation has been undertaken and the proposal was agreed by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 31st January 2022 in the report 'Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated admission schemes for 2023-24'.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended that St Peter's Catholic Primary School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School amalgamate. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school.

This recommendation has been agreed by the Diocese of Shrewsbury to proceed to a formal consultation in line with the statutory guidance on the amalgamation/closure of schools. The view of the Diocese is that the two schools should amalgamate onto the site currently occupied by St Peter's Catholic Primary School. Formal consultation with the local authority and the Diocese would commence in line with the statutory guidance on the 9th of May.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to amalgamate Hillside Primary and Manor Primary schools. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new

combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school. In line with statutory guidance, this recommendation requires a formal consultation.

- 3.29 In relation to both recommendation 6 and recommendation 7, consultation is open to all stakeholders and other options that may emerge will be carefully considered. Any alternative solution arising from consultation would need to achieve a sustainable educational outcome within the local area.
- 3.30 If approved, a formal consultation on recommendations 6 and 7 would commence 9th May 2022. Between 10th March 2022 and 9th May 2022, a detailed consultation scheme will be designed in partnership with the schools, diocese (where relevant) and the local authority. The findings of this consultation will be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Any revenue costs because of these changes would have a positive impact on the overall school budget and individual school budgets, not on the council's revenue budget.
- 4.2 There may be other associated financial implications, for example, building reconfigurations.
- 4.3 National requirements entail that any monies acquired because of capital receipts should be re-invested into the school's capital programme. This is intended to support the implementation of pupil place planning projects or wider school infrastructure developments and as such are ring-fenced for school projects.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The local authority has a legal duty to ensure sufficiency of school places for children. Statutory guidance sets out formal process for consultation and approval of significant decisions such as to make prescribed changes to maintained schools or to close/open schools. These will guide the activity and approval of the proposals.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Recommendations relating to Diocesan or Academy Trusts will be implemented within their own resources. However, the local authority will continue to offer support and guidance in relation to delivery of agreed recommendations.
- 6.2 The implementation of recommendation 5 relating to the reduction of teaching space at Woodchurch Road Primary will require Strategic Assets support to ensure that the building can be reconfigured appropriately to reduce capacity and allow space to be repurposed for alternative use if possible.
- 6.3 The implementation of recommendation 7 relating to the amalgamation of Hillside Primary and Manor Primary will require additional resource from the Council's

Human Resources Schools Team, Finance and Legal as well as Programme Management Office support.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 There is a risk that the proposals will concern local parents and carers who will be impacted by the changes. This may result in public challenge to school staff, Members, Council officers and Diocesan Bodies. Robust and relevant engagement and information with parents/carers will seek to reassure them that a detailed consultation framework will be developed, and findings reported back to the Committee before any decision is made.
- 7.2 There is a risk that the projections may not be accurate and that pupil numbers could increase in schools where proposals have been made. This could risk impacting on the implementation of the proposals (should they be agreed) and the validation of the forecasts. As outlined in section 3.15 of this report, this risk is mitigated because the forecasts are generated each year and tested giving confidence in the forecasts outlined.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 As outlined in the Strategy, stakeholder engagement has been intrinsic at every stage of the review process. In summary, the following activity has been carried out
- early consultation with Headteachers, officers and elected members on the scope and purpose of the overarching Pupil Place Planning Strategy
 - clear scope and terms of reference for the School Sufficiency working group and agreement
 - School profile presentations shared with individual school Headteachers and Governors, approximately 40 carried out in total
 - Summary school profile information shared with Unison
 - Summary school profile information shared with members of the Children, Young People and Families Committee
 - Summary school profile information shared with Diocese of Chester and Diocese of Shrewsbury
 - Options development shared with
 - officers and senior managers
 - wider corporate colleagues e.g. HR
 - individual schools and governors
 - Diocesan
 - Unions
- 8.2 Engagement with parents and carers at schools has been important and is currently being undertaken. It is imperative that they feel supported and reassured as the changes are discussed and implemented. The Council has worked with schools to devise information which seeks to inform and reassure parents/carers.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no significant environment and climate implications arising out of the report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no significant community wealth implications arising out of this report.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Pupil Place Planning Findings Report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children, Young People and Education Committee	31st January 2022
Children, Young People and Education Committee	11th March 2021