



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 25 September 2023

REPORT TITLE:	PUPIL PLACE PLANNING PHASE 2
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to outline the recommendations arising out of phase 2 of the pupil place planning review.

In March 2021, this 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 2 of the primary phase of the review commenced in October 2022 looking at small planning areas in and around South Wirral, specifically: Bebington, Bromborough, Eastham, Spital and Thornton Hough. A detailed review framework and process has been undertaken and has included information gathering, stakeholder discussion. This has culminated in the recommendations presented within the report.

Recommendations relating to schools controlled under the auspices of both the Diocese of Chester – Church of England, and the Diocese of Shrewsbury – Roman Catholic, have been presented, discussed, and approved 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 the parties progress 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 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 – Bromborough, Clatterbridge, Eastham and Rock Ferry.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to note and support the recommendations made regarding the proposals for each small planning areas of Spital, Thornton Hough, Bebington and Bromborough & Eastham.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 It is important that the Council demonstrates its support for the work and proposals considered and agreed by the Diocese of Chester and the Diocese of Shrewsbury which are important partners in supporting education outcomes for Wirral children.
- 1.2 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. It is also important that it ensures 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.
- 1.3 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 and to have influence/views on the proposals. The principles have been adhered to and remain fundamental to 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 In relation to the specific proposals:

Bromborough and Eastham: Several schools within the small planning area do currently have capacity within their school, one school currently operates with a temporary, Published Admission Number, PAN, of 30 instead of 45. An option could have been to review the number of schools within the local area, this was discounted due to no one school having significant capacity to absorb the pupils of another school. In addition, and more importantly, extensive house building is expected to take place over the next 10 years alongside the Mersey Bank in Bromborough indicating additional school places will be required. It would be feasible that a school could be closed but then within a very short time frame an additional school would be required to meet the needs of the house building within the local area.
- 2.3 Given this context, schools that would have a smaller pupil cohort in the medium term will be supported with appropriate financial forecasting and management until housing developments come to fruition.

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 2 of the review cycle has considered schools in and around the area of South Wirral. For primary schools, the review is organised around several small planning areas. These are: Bromborough & Eastham; Bebington; Spital and Thornton Hough.

3.4 Review programme overview – activity so far

3.5 Between September and October 2022 extensive evidence and information was gathered about the small planning areas and schools within those areas. A school profile presentation was compiled, allowing for the information to be shared with schools, leaders/governors, and Diocesan representatives after the autumn half term break.

3.6 Between November 2022 and February 2023 a series of meetings were held with schools within the review area, sharing current information for accuracy checking and the future predicted numbers for pupils at each school. Proposals relating to Diocesan schools were shared with them regarding schools within the planning area. No recommendations regarding a change in PAN were required and therefore no consultation recommendations were required for committee in January 2023.

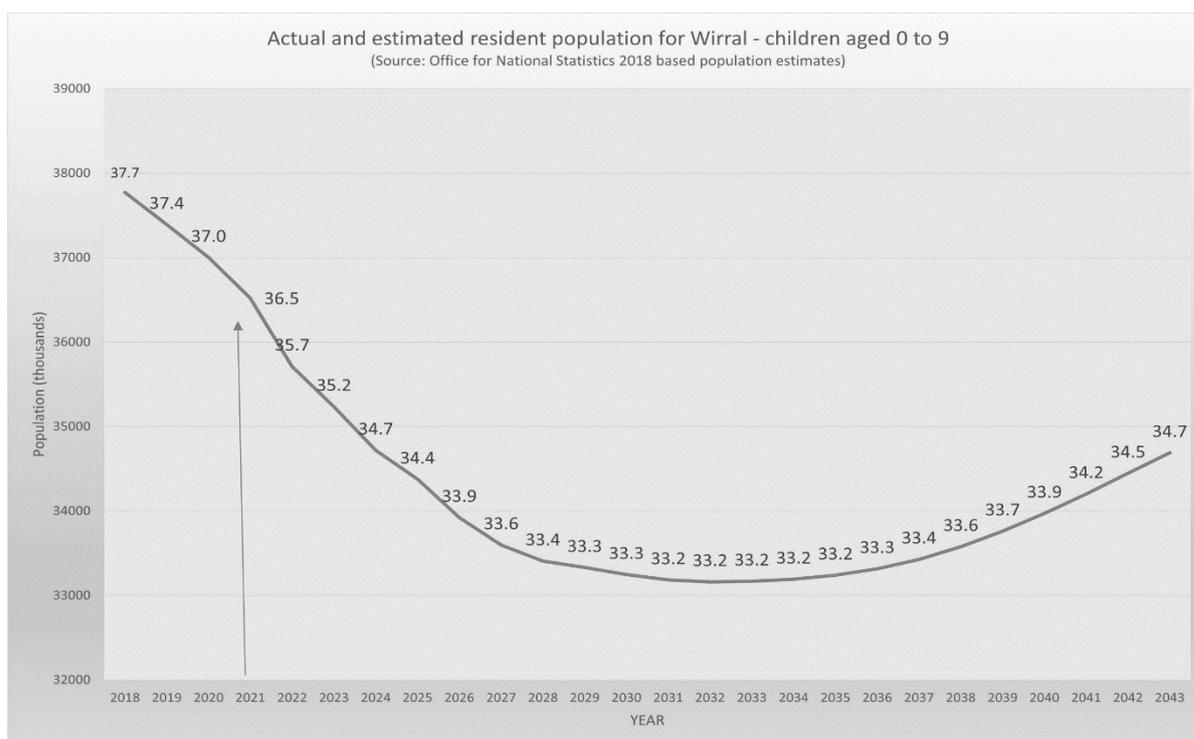
3.7 Between March 2023 and May 2023 future pupil numbers for Bromborough & Eastham were considered given the planning consent for 466 houses on the former Riverside Business Park near Old Hall Road. This is in addition to the 1200 houses proposed for the Bromborough Wharf Development.

3.8 Context – statutory framework

3.9 The Council 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.

3.10 Context - population change

3.11 The population of children aged 0-9 is expected to decline in Wirral over the next five years. The graph below demonstrates the actual and expected resident population for Wirral for children aged 0-9. It shows that 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.



3.12 Calculating pupil projections.

3.13 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.

3.14 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.

3.15 Phase 2 Small planning area: Thornton Hough

3.16 Thornton Hough small planning area consists of one maintained primary school: Thornton Hough Primary. The pupil forecasts for the planning area are the same as for the school.

	May-22			Projections 24 - 27						
	May 2023 actual	Oct 2022 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26	Jan-27	Jan 2027 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy 2027	0-5 years Local Plan yield
Total	183	+8	103.40%	179	179	177	176	+1	100.50%	101.50%
Primary aged pupils in Thornton Hough Planning area. 2024 to 2027 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.										

Table 1

3.17 As Table 1 indicates the number of surplus places in this planning area will not be significant and remain at 100.50%.

There are no recommendations for this area arising out of the review.

3.18 Phase 2 Small planning area: Spital

3.19 Spital small planning area consists of one Academy Primary School: Poulton and Lancelyn Primary School. The pupil forecasts for the planning area are the same as for the school.

	May-22			Projections 24 - 27						
	January 2023 actual	January 2023 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26	Jan-27	Jan 2027 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy 2027	0-5 years Local Plan yield
Total	429	+9	102.14%	411	406	402	398	22	94.70%	95.00%
Primary aged pupils in Spital Planning area. 2024 to 2027 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.										

Table 2

3.20 As Table 2 indicates the number of surplus places in this planning area will not be significant and remain at 94.7%

There are no recommendations for this area arising out of the review.

3.21 **Small planning area: Bebington**

3.22 Bebington small planning area consists of 4 primary schools, 3 infant schools and 3 junior schools. In May 23, the percentage occupancy for the area was 91.41%. It is anticipated that there will be some housing developments within over the next 5 to 15 years, as identified within the Local Plan.

3.23 Projections over five years indicate that occupancy will reduce to 83% with a surplus of 17%. Projections over the next 15 years, aligned to expected housing, indicate that there will be an increase in reduction in surplus places to a percentage occupancy of 85%.

	May-22			Projections 24 - 27					0-5 years Local Plan yield	
	May 2023 actual	May 2023 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy	Jan- 24	Jan- 25	Jan- 26	Jan- 27	Jan 2027 unfilled places		Percentage occupancy 2027
Total	2521	202	92.60%	2453	2399	2357	2316	407	85.00%	87.00%
Primary aged pupils in Spital Planning area. 2024 to 2027 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.										

3.24 A close analysis of the schools within this area indicates that while the area has some surplus places this is spread across a number of schools in Bebington and a change in the number of schools would not be appropriate. In relation to schools within the small planning area where numbers are expected to fall over the 5 year period, support will be put in place to make sure they can manage as the budget changes. In addition, the small planning area will be analysed regularly moving forward and where necessary a change in PAN could be explored for 2 form and 1.5 form entry schools.

There are no recommendations arising from this area out of the review.

3.25 **Small planning area: Bromborough and Eastham**

3.26 Bromborough and Eastham small planning area consists of 7 primary schools. In May 23, the percentage occupancy for the area was 84.3%. That said, one school the has a PAN of 45 is currently has a temporary arrangement with admissions and operates with PAN of 30. This currently increases the percentage occupancy to 88.5% with 242 unfilled places.

3.27 It is anticipated that there will be significant housing developments within over the next 5 to 15 years. as identified within the Local Plan. These housing developments across the Mersey Bank stretching from Eastham Country Park to Bromborough Pool. The development at the

- 3.28 Projections over five years indicate that occupancy would reduce to 75.7% with a surplus of 24%, if the temporary PAN changed for one school remained in place, the percentage occupancy would increase to 79.4%
- 3.29 It is anticipated that there will be significant housing developments within over the next 5 to 15 years. as identified within the Local Plan. These housing developments across the Mersey Bank stretching from Eastham Country Park to Bromborough Pool. The development at the Riverside Business Park will yield 466 new houses, it is anticipated the vast majority of pupils from this new housing development will attend schools within the Bromborough and Eastham small planning area. In addition, the Bromborough Wharf development is expected to yield 1200 new homes, it is also anticipated the vast majority of pupils would be access school provision at schools within the Bromborough and Eastham small planning area in the first instance.

	May-23			Projections 24 - 27						
	May 2023 actual	May 2023 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26	Jan-27	Jan 2027 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy 2027	0-5 years Local Plan yield
Total	1870	347	84.30%	1791	1748	1714	1678	439	75.70%	80.70%
Primary aged pupils in Bromborough and Eastham area. 2024 to 2027 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.										

- 3.30 The local plan yield for Bromborough and Eastham over the next 5 years estimates the percentage occupancy to increase to 80.7%, again if the temporary PAN remained in place at one school, the percentage occupancy would be 84.8%.
- 3.31 When considering the local plan yield, the expected reduction in pupil number is 80 pupils within the small planning area. Some of the schools within the small planning area will see a reduction in pupil numbers until the new housing development come on stream, they will be supported with financial management to transition through lower school number cohorts in the medium term.
- 3.32 Given the local plan and housing developments planned within this planning area are significant over the next 15 years, it will be prudent in long term to check the pupil place planning within this area in making sure the number the number of school places continues to match the need of the local area.

There are no recommendations arising for this area out of the review, if the local plan or housing developments significantly change over the 5 – 15-year time frame this small planning area will need to be re-assessed.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 At this time there are no financial implications, if the housing development on the Mersey Bank comes to fruition, capital funding maybe required if additional pupil places are required. This will be assessed in the long term with funding secured through section 106 contributions from the housing developer.

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. Given the recommendations outlined, no resource implications are expected.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There is a risk that the proposals in relation to housing developments in the Bromborough and Eastham area will not come to fruition in the time period expected. With this in mind, if any of the developments expected to occur within the Bromborough and Eastham small planning area are delayed, a re-assessment of school sufficiency will be implemented if appropriate.

7.2 There is a risk that the projections may not be accurate and that pupil numbers could increase/decrease in schools. 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.
- Summary of small planning areas shared with education JCC members.
- 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

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026. The EIA can be found via the following link:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/equality-impact-assessment-pupil-place-planning-january-2021.pdf/download?inline>

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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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with section a of its Terms of Reference:

(a) exercising management, oversight, and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education, or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children's, Education and Family committee	12 th October 2022
	10 th March 2022
	11 th March 2021