

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 October 2019

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2019

SUMMARY

Although the statutory requirement to publish an annual School Organisation Plan was abolished in 2004, the Council has continued to publish an updated plan to inform schools, parents and the general public. The Plan gives information about the number, types and sizes of schools maintained by the Council, Academies and Free Schools. It records the number of places available in those schools and it includes forecasts of pupil numbers over the next five years. This information is an important resource to support the Council in carrying out its statutory duty to ensure a sufficient supply of school places to meet the needs of children and young people in the borough.

When taken together with documents relating to the condition of school buildings and their suitability for purpose, the information in this plan may help to inform decisions about capital investment in existing or new school buildings.

The 'School Organisation Plan 2019' describes three specific issues to be confronted over the next five years:

- Rising numbers of four-year-olds starting school;
- The beginning of the end of falling numbers in our secondary schools;
- Uncertainty over the impact of Academies and possible Free Schools.

The draft plan is attached as the **Appendix** to this report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council as Local Education Authority is under a statutory duty to ensure a sufficient supply of primary and secondary school places to meet the needs of children and young people resident in the borough. The School Organisation Plan brings together relevant information about the number, types and sizes of schools in the borough, the number of pupils on roll and projections of future pupil numbers. The projections can point out trends that may lead to a need to increase or reduce the pupil capacity of schools in particular areas of the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Note the information in the attached draft plan.
2. Note pressure in demand for secondary school places.
3. Agree that the 'School Organisation Plan 2019' be published on the Council website and made available to partner organisations.

DETAIL

1. Although the statutory requirement to publish an annual School Organisation Plan (SOP) was abolished in 2004, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Council) has continued to publish an updated plan to inform schools, parents and the general public. The SOP gives information about the number, types and sizes of schools maintained by the Council, Academies and Free Schools.
2. The Council does however have a statutory duty to ensure that there are enough school places in the borough to meet demand. The Council must therefore plan, organise and commission places for all state-funded schools in Stockton so that high standards are maintained, diverse school communities created and fluctuating pupil numbers are managed efficiently.
3. The demand for school places changes over time - this document is considered to be 'live' and, as such, is updated every two years. It sets out where the Council currently thinks there will be a need to provide more school places and if there may be a need to provide fewer places over the coming years. Increases in demand can lead to the creation of a new school or the expansion of schools, whereas decreases in demand can lead to a reduction in school provision.
4. Predicting school demand is a complex task because where children go to school involves a range of different and often conflicting factors, and as a result planning for school places is based on probabilities, not certainties. This means that while projections may be made from robust calculations, they do not offer any guarantees.
5. It is important for us to be as open and transparent as possible when considering school organisation decisions. We strive to communicate effectively with schools and school communities about the school place pressures in their area. However, the Council must also endeavour to manage expectations regarding school organisation proposals that are less certain.
6. This updated SOP aims to provide an overview of current and future pupil numbers which supports planning the provision of school places across the borough. This document will be produced every two years and be made available to our schools and partners.
7. School Place Planning is a critical aspect of the Council's statutory duty to assess the local need for school places to ensure that every child can be provided with a place in a state-funded school in Stockton-on-Tees. The Council needs to demonstrate that they have robust procedures and systems for forecasting pupil numbers taking account of changes in local circumstances to ensure there will be the right number of schools in the right places for the number of pupils expected in the future.

8. To enable the Council to gain a clearer understanding of where there are current and anticipated pressures in both primary and secondary school (including Academies) places in the borough, the Council have grouped all schools into specific local planning areas. This will allow more detailed analysis of need and inform decisions regarding the use of funding to meet demand. In Stockton we have broken the borough into the following separate planning areas namely Billingham & Wolviston, North Stockton, Central Stockton, Thornaby, Ingleby Barwick and Eaglescliffe & Yarm.
9. This plan also sets out the Council's policies and key aims on school organisation and the procedures required by law for making changes such as opening, closing or enlarging schools.
10. The Council has in place a strategic group that meets regularly and uses the SOP and the data supporting it, in making school place planning decisions. These include increasing school level Published Admission Numbers (PAN's) in response to predicted demand for places and the allocation of Basic Need Capital monies to those schools deemed the most appropriate following feasibility options work.
11. The headlines captured within the SOP are also used to inform the commentary, School Capacity and Pupil Forecast data the Council submits in support of the 'School Capacity Collection' (SCAP) return to the Department for Education (DfE) annually. The SCAP provides the DfE with information on all schools which are maintained by the Council as well as the data for Academies and Free Schools.
12. The SCAP is used to inform Key Decisions regarding School Place Planning pressures across the borough and Capital allocation priorities across primary and secondary schools in terms of refurbishment and maintenance. This SOP should be read in conjunction with any Capital Papers to Cabinet on future Capital Plans for support and the allocation of appropriate funding.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

13. None

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

14. This report does not contain corporate parenting implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15. None

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

16. The Council as a local authority with education functions has a duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure a sufficient supply of school places to meet the needs of the children and young people resident in the borough.

RISK ASSESSMENT

17. This School Organisation Plan 2019 is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

18. Not ward specific. This report does not require any consultation.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

19. This report is for information only and although it has no financial or legal implications it helps underpin elements of the Policy Principles in the Council Plan.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

20. None.

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