

	Cabinet 16 October 2023
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools (Councillor Grahl)
School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	One: Appendix 1: Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Shirley Parks Director, Education, Partnerships and Strategy 020 8937 4259 Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk Michelle Gwyther, Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships 07388 859380 Michelle.Gwyther@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report seeks Cabinet approval of the new School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves the new School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028, as provided in Appendix 1.

- 2.2 Notes the focus on planning for the sufficiency of places and the sustainability of schools, based on varying demand patterns impacting on school planning areas in Brent.
- 2.3 Notes there continues to be increasing demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 and the planned strategies for addressing this need (including the SEN Capital Programme of £44m approved by Cabinet in January 2022 and the Post-16 Skills Resource Centre approved by Cabinet in May 2023).
- 2.4 Notes the change of government funding arrangements for Early Years provision and the planned approach to implementation of the new entitlements.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1.1 The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 supports the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life. By ensuring there are sufficient, suitable early years and school places for children and young people in Brent, the local authority is meeting its statutory obligations and supporting every child and young person to access high quality education locally to them in the borough.
- 3.1.2 In November 2018 Cabinet approved the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 which has come to the end of its lifespan. The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 presents the objectives and operating principles that will underpin the Council's approach to school organisation over the next five years. The focus of the new Strategy is both the sufficiency of places and the sustainability of schools in the context of falling demand in some areas of the borough.
- 3.1.3 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028 sets the following expectations:
- All Brent schools are good or outstanding (98.8% at the end of the 2022/23 academic year).
 - Children are able to access education close to home (under two miles for children under 8 and 3 miles for children up to Year 6; within 75 minutes travel time for secondary aged children).
 - Brent net exportation of secondary school pupils reduces over the duration of this strategy to 25% (baseline 25.8% for the 2023 Year 7 intake).
 - An increase in local SEND places in the borough will lead to a reduction in the use of out-of-borough placements and placements in independent non-maintained special schools.
 - The take up rate of free childcare entitlements in the borough increases over the course of the strategy to 70% for two-year-olds and 80% for 3 and 4-year-olds (baseline 65.4% for two-year entitlement and 79.3% for 3 and 4-year-olds in January 2023).

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 provides the latest assessment of school place demand across the borough based on pupil projections from the Greater London Authority (GLA). The GLA population projection models are updated and revised annually as new methods or data become available, for example the 2021 census, which ensures projections provide the best estimates of future population. The GLA projections are informed by centrally held demographic data, such as the Office of National Statistics (ONS) census data and fertility and birth rates, as well as locally held information such as migration patterns and planned housing growth provided by the Local Authority. The methodology also takes account of the percentage of children who historically move into the following academic year in an area and are therefore driven by the number of pupils on roll in the January 2023 school census. The GLA projections also take into account changes in housing growth, so the impact of new housing developments in the borough and those just outside borough borders are reflected in the strategy.

3.3 Early Years

3.3.1 Under the Childcare Act 2006 local authorities have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare for the needs of most working parents and carers in their area. Brent has a mixed economy of 0-5 childcare provision in the borough that includes private, voluntary, independent (PVI) and maintained settings. The Brent Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) 2021-2023 showed an overall increase in the number of PVI providers in the borough with new providers entering the market and other providers expanding their premises, alongside a reduction in places in maintained and childminder provision. The reduction in childminders is reflective of a national trend.

3.3.2 In March 2023, the government announced a significant expansion of early years childcare entitlements to take effect between April 2024 and September 2025. The proposals included an offer of 30 hours of funded childcare for every child of a working parent between nine months and five years to be in place by September 2025. However, both the funding rate for these new entitlements and the statutory guidance will not be available until autumn 2023 causing some anxiety for providers. A survey between March and July 2023 of all Brent providers showed despite this uncertainty, 46% of providers surveyed said they would offer under-twos places and 63% said they would offer two-year-old places for working families. This survey will be completed again once the funding rates and statutory guidance is available.

3.3.3 Between the end of 2023 and September 2025 there will be a co-ordinated programme to support providers with implementation of the expanded entitlements, which could include but not be limited to assistance to increase the numbers of children, expand premises, change hours of operation and / or take on age groups they are not currently caring for. Where there are identified gaps in the expanded entitlements provision in the borough, suitable actions will be progressed. This activity will be part of the on-going drive to increase the take up rate of free childcare entitlements in the borough.

3.4 Primary Place Need

- 3.4.1 Primary demand has been reducing since September 2017. The latest Greater London Authority (GLA) projections (based on the 2021 population census and the January 2023 school census) indicate demand at Reception age will continue to decrease over the next few years. At a borough level, Brent has sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand for mainstream primary places and maintain a level of 5% spare places to ensure there are sufficient places to respond to in-year movement, migration or any unforeseen increase in demand. However, some planning areas are showing sustained lower demand than available places, resulting in a significant number of spare places. While this means parents will have an increased choice of places, reduced intakes can present organisational and financial challenges for schools.
- 3.4.2 Over the past few years, the local authority has been working with schools to put in place strategies to manage changing demand and to support schools to ensure the sustainability of local provision. Measures to support reduced intakes include temporarily reducing admission numbers or placing an informal cap on admission numbers and repurposing spare capacity, for example, to provide Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- 3.4.3 The sustained reduction in primary demand and the resulting level of spare places that are impacting on some schools means individual measures are not an adequate response. The strategy sets out a new focus on the options available to address the increasing vulnerability of schools facing falling rolls and indicates in which of the six primary planning areas targeted reorganisation proposals to reduce capacity are considered to be necessary.

3.5 Secondary Place Need

- 3.5.1 The latest GLA secondary forecasts project a falling demand for Year 7 places as smaller cohorts transfer from primary schools. The projections confirm there will be sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand and provide the required 5% of spare places in Year 7 to manage any forecast in-year growth and any unforeseen increase in demand up to at least 2030/31. This includes capacity that will be provided by the North Brent School (180 places per year group), which will move to its permanent site in Neasden by September 2024.
- 3.5.2 A key challenge is in-year demand for secondary places which is expected to remain high in some planning areas and year groups. Brent will continue working with secondary schools to ensure in-year demand can be met, particularly in the higher year groups (Years 9 to 11).

3.6 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision Need

- 3.6.1 Demand for special provision in Brent has been growing and this is forecast to continue. There are currently 3368 children and young people aged 0-25 with

an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which at 4.2% of the school population is similar to national. The average annual growth in the number of EHCPs has been approximately 10% over the last three years, consistent with the national position. 10.8% of pupils are identified with additional needs that can be met at SEN support where a need is identified but does not meet threshold for an EHCP (compared to 13% nationally). 54% of children and young people with an EHCP are identified with communication and interaction needs (autistic spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication).

- 3.6.2 Direct work with schools and settings to better meet the needs of children with SEND has seen an increase in the number of children remaining within mainstream education. In 2022, 75.2% of children and young people issued with an EHC Plan for the first time were in mainstream settings, in line with the Children and Family Act 2014 position that all children should be educated in mainstream where possible. However, there remains a need for more local special places for children with the most complex needs. The capital investment programme of £44m agreed by Cabinet in January 2022 will provide over 400 additional special places, including a new Special School, expansions of existing special schools and new Additionally Resourced Provisions. Investment agreed by Cabinet in May 2023 in a Post-16 Skills Resource Centre at Welsh Harp and the Airco site will help to meet the needs of the 16-25 age group.
- 3.6.3 The continued increase in the number of children and young people with EHCPs means that, despite the investment agreed, further local places are required. The Strategy sets out the Council's intentions to consider using spare capacity in the primary estate to provide additional educational provision for children with SEND or Alternative Provision.
- 3.6.4 The Council has a statutory duty to provide an appropriate full-time education for pupils who have been permanently excluded from school or who are otherwise without a mainstream school. The Council provides support to Brent schools to reduce the number of exclusions, with a focus on early identification and prevention strategies working closely alongside pastoral teams in mainstream settings. Where pupils have been excluded or require provision that includes a vocational element to best meet their needs, Brent and local schools commission places for children and young people in Alternative Provision both in and out of the borough. Alongside Brent River College and Ashley College, the Roundwood School and Community Centre that opened in January 2021, also provides places for secondary aged children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs that cannot be met within mainstream schools.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 Ward members will be consulted on the impact of this strategy where mainstream planning area capacity is reviewed or where additional SEND places are being considered.

- 4.2 The Lead Member has been and will continue to be briefed about school place planning issues.
- 4.3 School representatives have been and will continue to be involved in discussions about school place planning through the School Place Planning Working Group.
- 4.4 Any proposed changes to provision would be subject to public consultation with parents and stakeholders in accordance with statutory guidance and legal frameworks.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Mainstream school places are funded from the annual Dedicated School Grant (DSG) based on pupil numbers as per the October school census in the preceding year. This means that, although there is a time lag, the revenue cost of mainstream pupil growth is recognised and funded by the DfE.
- 5.2 School budgets are devolved to respective school governing boards but are under pressure due to rising cost of inflation and falling rolls. As schools are funded on the basis of pupil numbers, it is likely small schools and those with falling numbers on roll will find it most difficult to balance their budgets. Larger schools are more likely to successfully manage the impact of these pressures.
- 5.3 Expanding funded High Needs provision will have revenue implications, as it is funded from the High Needs Block of the DSG. In order to help manage the financial pressure on the High Needs block, new in borough provision must replace current out-of-borough arrangements at a lower cost. Reducing out-of-borough provision will also help mitigate the financial pressure on the transport budgets held in the General Fund to transport children and young people to out-of-borough provisions.
- 5.4 The SEN Capital Programme is expected to deliver 427 SEND places and reduce the need to send children to schools out of borough, which will lead to cost avoidance of c£6m by 2026/27. All projects within the programme are expected to be completed by 2025.
- 5.5 Basic Need Capital Grant and the Special School Capital Grant are not time bound or ring-fenced and can be used for any capital purpose. However, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has stated it is expected to be used for investment in schools, joining up with other capital resources when it is beneficial for schools to do so.
- 5.6 The nature of SEND education means the development of additional places presents additional complexities, and thus higher costs than primary expansions. The nature of any construction work required to provide additional school places, combined with the site location and layout all affect the cost per place. As proposals to address the forecast demand set out in the School Place Planning Strategy are developed, further reports will be provided to Cabinet with relevant financial information as required.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 The Council has a general statutory duty under Education Legislation to ensure there are sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the population in its area. The Council must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty, the Council has to undertake a planning function to ensure the supply of school places balances the demand for them. (Section 13 and 14, Education Act 1996) and (Education and Inspections Act 2006).
- 6.2 In addition to securing school places for pupils aged five to 16, the local authority has related statutory responsibilities in relation to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) up to the age of 25, where the Council has to make suitable provision to meet their needs and early years provision pursuant to the Children and Families Act 2014. The Council has responsibility for childcare sufficiency for provision for disadvantaged two-year-olds and all three- and four-year-olds and ensuring it overlaps coherently with school provision.
- 6.3 The Council has additional statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide education for pupils needing alternative education.
- 6.4 As a contingency to support the admission to school of children as quickly as possible, the In Year Fair Access Protocol allows for the admission of children over schools' planned admission numbers in the event a school place is not available. Schools are not required to maintain classes over the planned admission number (PAN) but revert to the usual admission number when children leave.
- 6.5 Statutory processes should be followed for any proposed enlargement of the school premises that would increase the capacity of the school by both more than 30 pupils and 25 per cent or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser). However, it is not anticipated that there will be any requirement to enlarge any premises during the lifespan of the Strategy.
- 6.6 Statutory processes should be followed for the reduction or removal of capacity from any school. These processes are set out in the School Admissions Code 2021 for the reduction of a school's Published Admission Number and in the statutory guidance 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools January 2023'.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising its public functions to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not. This duty is

known as the public sector equality duty (PSED). The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. All providers commissioned to deliver public services on behalf of or in partnership with Brent Council are required to comply with the PSED and the Council's Equality and Diversity policies.

- 7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- 7.3 There is no prescribed manner in which the Council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.
- 7.4 The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 aims to ensure there are sufficient, sustainable and suitable school places for all Brent children, and their diverse and changing needs are met including those with special education needs. It also aims to raise the education standards for all and address inequality due to social disadvantage, disability (including multiple complex needs) and/or other protected characteristics and contributes to the delivery of the Council's equality duties.
- 7.5 The findings and the equality analysis screening of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 show a slowdown in demand for primary school places and a short-term increase for secondary school places before returning to current levels. Demand for places for children and young people with SEND in the borough is also increasing and the strategy identifies the need for additional local places to meet their needs.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 The Strategy sets an expectation that the school estate is used efficiently to provide for current and future educational needs. This approach reduces the use of construction materials and waste production and encourages efficiency in the use of existing resources.
- 8.2 The strategy sets out the need to create additional capacity for SEND provision in Brent reducing the need for children to travel outside of the borough to receive their education. Travelling shorter distances closer to home will reduce emissions and reduce air pollutants from private cars, minibuses and taxis.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 9.1 Through delivering the strategy there could be some changes to the current use of school capacity, through for example an increase in SEND provision through utilising existing spare capacity in the mainstream primary school estate.
- 9.2 School reorganisation proposals that reduce capacity across the school estate could impact on school staff. This could have the potential effect of the need to consider redundancies for staff.

10.0 Communication Considerations

- 10.1 Any proposed changes to provision would be subject to public consultation with parents and stakeholders in accordance with statutory guidance, legal frameworks and the Council community engagement process.

Report sign off:

Corporate Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People