

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> 17 November 2025
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People &amp; Community Development</b>
	<b>Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People &amp; Schools (Councillor Gwen Grahl)</b>
<b>School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028 Second Refresh</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	One Appendix 1: Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028 2 <sup>nd</sup> Refresh November 2025
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Shirley Parks, Director, Education, Partnerships and Strategy 020 8937 4259 <a href="mailto:Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk">Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk</a>  Michelle Gwyther, Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships 020 8937 2499 <a href="mailto:Michelle.Gwyther@brent.gov.uk">Michelle.Gwyther@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides Cabinet with a second refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028, approved by Cabinet in October 2023 following a refresh received by Cabinet in November 2024.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

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

- 2.2 Notes the continued 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 the very early signs of a reversal of declining pupil numbers in the borough and that a requirement to accommodate higher demand in some planning areas may be required in the future.
- 2.4 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 intention to further develop the SEND estate capital investment programme as Brent's strategy to address this need, as set out in Section 3.7.
- 2.5 Notes the school place planning actions completed in the first year of the strategy and the actions planned for the coming academic year as set out in section 4 of this report.
- 2.6 Notes the update on the success measures set out in the original strategy in section 3.1.3 of this report.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### **3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword**

- 3.1.1 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024–2028 directly supports Strategic Priority 4 of the Borough Plan: The Best Start in Life. Through proactive planning and delivery of sufficient and appropriate early years and school places, the Council fulfils its statutory responsibilities and enables all children and young people in Brent to access high-quality education within their local communities.
- 3.1.2 Approved by Cabinet in October 2023, the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024- 2028 Strategy sets out a clear framework of objectives and guiding principles to shape the Council's approach to school organisation over the next four years. It reflects a strategic response to demographic trends, including declining demand in some areas and projected growth in others. The Strategy prioritises both the sufficiency of school places and the long-term sustainability of Brent's education infrastructure, ensuring that provision remains responsive, equitable, and financially viable across the borough.
- 3.1.3 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 sets the following success measures and the updated position is also provided:
  - All Brent schools are good or outstanding (*as per applicable Ofsted gradings at the time*).

This was 98.8% at the end of the 2022/23 academic year, 95.3% at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year and 96.5% of Brent schools at the end of the 2024/2025 academic year (based on where current Ofsted single word

judgements still apply). This success measure will be updated as and when appropriate to take into account the new framework for Ofsted inspections replacing the 'single word' judgements.

- 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).

This position was established in November 2023 and remains unchanged in both November 2024 and November 2025

- Brent net exportation of secondary school pupils reduces over the duration of this strategy to 25% with a stretch target of below 25%.

The baseline was 25.8% for the 2023 Year 7 intake and 25.1% for the 2024 Year 7 intake. The figure for the 2025 intake is 23.8%, showing an improving position. The initial target has been achieved, and the ongoing objective is to maintain this level of performance throughout the duration of the strategy. This sustained success reflects strong parental confidence in Brent's education offer, with families actively choosing Brent schools as their preferred setting for their children's education.

- 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 percentage of placement spend on the independent, non-maintained special school (INMSS) (Lower is better) was 18.8% at the end of the 2024/2025 financial year which is consistent with 18.5% at the end of the 2023/2024 financial year.

- 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.

The latest figures indicate take-up in Brent as of January 2025 for the two-year entitlement for low/no income families lowered to 53.4%. This reflects a decrease of 6.2% on the take up in 2024 and is below the London average of 61.1% which has also reduced by almost 6%. The take up for 3 – 4 year olds was 80.4%. This is a decrease of 4.4% on the previous year (84.8%) and is approximately 5% lower than the London average. Brent remains ambitious in increasing the uptake of early years entitlements and the strategy outlines steps to achieve this.

## **3.2 Background**

- 3.2.1 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 refresh 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.

- 3.2.2. 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 2025 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.
- 3.2.3 A report in 2025 published by London Councils called 'Managing school places and admissions in London' <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news-and-press-releases/2025/managing-school-places-and-admissions-london-report> analysed the four year school places forecasts of all 33 London local authorities (from 2024) and revealed that a collective predicted drop of 3.6 per cent in demand for reception places and 2.9 per cent in Year 7 places. There are some boroughs predicting growth, but the large majority are forecasting cumulative drops in demand. The latest projections for Brent mainstream school demand indicate that the birth rate is starting to rise again, and this will lead to increasing numbers on roll over the medium to long term.
- 3.2.4. The principles of sufficiency and sustainability continue to underpin the refreshed School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028. Primary schools with falling rolls are being supported through a number of measures as outlined in the strategy. Where there is unused school built capacity or vacant school sites, these will continue to be retained and repurposed for educational use, with a stronger focus on increasing the number of specialist school places for Brent children and young people. A school closure will only be pursued when all other viable options have been exhausted and is deemed necessary to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of educational provision.

### **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/carers in their area. Brent continues to meet this duty through a diverse childcare market for children aged 0–5, comprising private, voluntary, independent (PVI), and maintained sector providers.
- 3.3.2 While there has been a gradual decline in the number of childminders since 2015 mirroring national trends, Brent's childcare market remains dynamic. Some closures have occurred, often linked to rising operational costs or shifts in local demand. However, this has been offset by new market entrants and existing providers expanding or relocating to larger premises, signalling continued demand and confidence in Brent's early years sector and ensuring sufficient local capacity to meet demand.

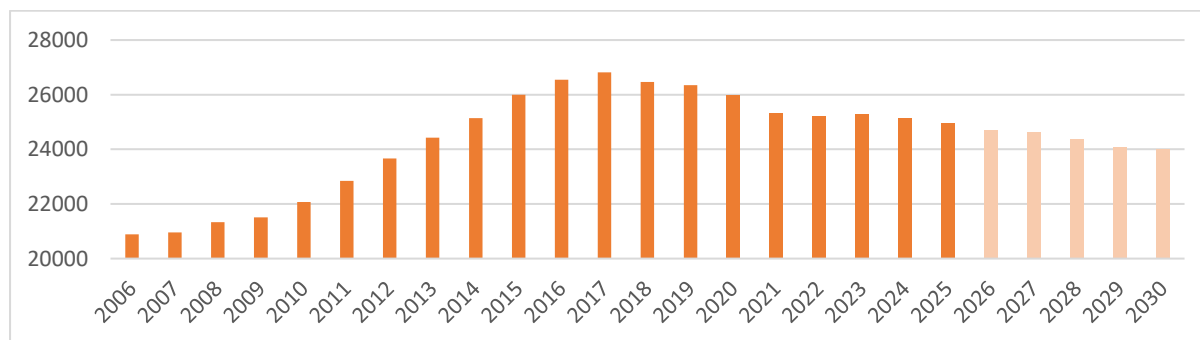
3.3.3 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee received a detailed report on 18 September 2024 titled '[Early years provision and progress towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements](#)'. This report outlined Brent's progress in delivering expanded entitlements and deploying capital investment to support growth and sustainability across the sector.

3.3.4 As of August 2025, Brent had a strong network of 284 registered providers including private, voluntary and independent nurseries (PVI), childminders, nursery classes in schools and maintained nursery schools. The borough retains sufficient capacity within the system, particularly in the PVI and childminding sectors, which are the primary providers of places for children aged two and under.

### 3.4 Primary Place Need

3.4.1 Primary school demand has been reducing since September 2017. The latest GLA projections (based on the 2021 population census and the January 2025 school census) and which run to 2029/2030 (because for later years children have yet to be born), indicate demand at primary age will continue to decrease over the next few years (Chart 1). This reduction in demand reflects a falling birth rate across London. The number of births across Greater London fell from 134,037 in 2011/12 to 115,735 in 2019/20.

*Chart 1: Brent Primary numbers on roll and projections as of January each year up to 2030*



3.4.2. At a borough level, Brent has sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand for mainstream primary places and maintain a level of 5% spare places. This ensures the borough has the flexibility to respond effectively to in-year movement, migration, or any unforeseen increases in demand.

3.4.3. However, there are differences across the primary planning areas. One area (Planning Area 3) is expected to experience a significant increase in demand. In contrast, three areas (Planning Areas 2, 4 and 6) are showing sustained lower demand than the number of available places, resulting in a substantial surplus of capacity. Schools in these areas with spare places will help to support those in Planning Area 3 to meet the rising demand.

- 3.4.4 While lower demand means parents have an increased choice of places in some parts of the borough, reduced pupil numbers present organisational and financial challenges for schools. Falling primary demand means that some schools in Brent are operating as one form of entry when they have the built capacity for two, as is the case in many other London authorities, and this trend is likely to continue in the context of reducing demand for places. School funding is received via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and is driven by pupil numbers. Therefore, the impact of vacant school places causes financial pressures for school as some overheads remain the same despite reduced income. This can impact on the quality of the teaching and learning offer.
- 3.4.5 Over the past few years, the local authority has been working with individual schools to manage changing demand and to support schools to ensure the sustainability of local provision. Measures include temporarily reducing admission numbers or placing an informal cap on admission numbers in specific year groups in schools. A more recent strategy has been to repurpose some spare built capacity to provide a small number of Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- 3.4.6. The sustained reduction in primary demand and the resulting level of spare places in three planning areas alongside limited spare capacity in another, means individual measures are no longer an adequate response. The second refresh of the strategy outlines a range of proactive and coordinated options, also recognising that schools through their active participation in the School Place Planning Working Group have a key role in identifying emerging challenges and co-developing sustainable solutions.
- 3.4.7 Longer term forecasting, which is less reliable, indicates that reception demand will rise after 2029/2030 (led by a rise in birth rate from 2023/2024) and that this increased birth rate will also lead to a higher level of demand for school places in Brent from 2030/31. This demand will not be evenly distributed. Some planning areas are likely to retain high numbers of surplus places, which means that action may still need to be undertaken to address this, while ensuring the sufficiency of places to meet any sustained future demand.

### **3.5 Secondary Place Need**

- 3.5.1 The latest GLA secondary forecasts project a stable demand for Year 7 places after the falling demand of recent years, and there will be sufficient capacity to meet this forecast demand. However, the latest projections indicate the level of surplus capacity across the borough may fall below the target of 5% in some higher year groups from 2028/29. (Secondary forecasts are for a longer timescale than primary, as they are more reliable because children are already attending nursery or primary school).
- 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, especially Year 11. This increased demand is caused by inward migration to the borough and population mobility levels. Brent will continue to work with secondary schools to ensure in-

year demand can be met, but secondary schools cannot swiftly increase teaching capacity even if they have the building capacity to do so and to increase pupil numbers takes time. Where necessary, Fair Access Protocols are being and will continue to be employed to place children who are out of school and who have not been offered a school within 4 weeks of their application.

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

- 3.6.1 Brent is a borough that has high aspirations for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This was recognised by Ofsted during Brent's SEND Area Inspection in January 2025 who wrote *"Leaders across the partnership understand very well the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. They have high ambitions and a relentless focus to continue to improve services for children and young people who have SEND"*.
- 3.6.2 Brent and its schools acknowledge that Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are not necessarily fixed or lifelong characteristics. At different points in time, a child may experience additional learning needs that require tailored or enhanced support to enable full participation in school life. For some children, this may involve access to specialist provision throughout their education.
- 3.6.3 There is a range of high-quality provision for children with SEND in Brent encompassing 3 enhanced pre-school providers, 1 primary special maintained school, 1 primary special academy school, 2 special all through academy schools and 2 secondary special school academies, and a number of Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARP) in both primary and secondary mainstream schools. An ARP is designed to provide specialist and targeted support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who can function well in a mainstream school. ARPs provide specialist environments which support the learning needs of each pupil, and many young people with additional learning needs can make better and more sustained progress when they attend mainstream schools.
- 3.6.4 Brent currently provides 977 places in special schools and 246 places in Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs), reflecting year-on-year increases of 1.5% and 2.8% respectively. This growth demonstrates the positive impact of phase one of the SEND Capital Programme, which has successfully expanded specialist provision to meet rising demand. The increase in capacity not only supports Brent's commitment to inclusive education but also ensures that children and young people with complex needs can access high-quality, tailored support closer to home.
- 3.6.5. As with other London boroughs, Brent schools may educate children and young people with SEND from outside the borough, just as some Brent-resident pupils attend special schools elsewhere. Consequently, the proportion of out-of-borough pupils placed in Brent's special schools and Additionally Resourced

Provisions (ARPs) fluctuates annually. Currently, 12% of Brent's total specialist provision is occupied by pupils from other boroughs, an increase of 1% compared to the previous academic year. As a result, Brent currently accesses 860 of the 977 special school places and 216 of the 246 ARP places available within the borough

### **3.7 Demand for specialist provision**

- 3.7.1 As of August 2025, there are 4025 children and young people living in Brent aged 0-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Of these, 2414 are statutory school age, or 5.5% of the school population (similar to national levels, which currently sit at 5.3%). 12% 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 14.2% nationally).
- 3.7.2 In the last year, the number of EHCPs has increased across all age groups, but not consistently. The age groups with the highest increases in EHCP numbers were the 5-10 and 16-19 age groups, which saw increases of 8.2% and 7.4% respectively.
- 3.7.3 Targeted and ongoing support for schools and early years settings has contributed to a modest but meaningful increase in the proportion of children with an EHCP attending mainstream provision in Brent, rising by 1% to 48%. This reflects growing confidence and capability within the mainstream sector to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND. Alongside this, Brent has made significant capital investment to expand specialist provision within special schools and ARPs. However, demand continues to outpace supply. Based on current projections within the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, Brent requires an additional 212 primary and 150 secondary special school places beyond those already planned through the current capital expansion programme. This shortfall is expected to grow year-on-year, underscoring the need for sustained investment and strategic planning to ensure all children and young people with SEND can access appropriate, high-quality education within the borough.

### **4.0 School place planning strategy actions undertaken and planned**

- 4.1. A number of school place planning actions have been completed that support Brent's school place planning strategy to provide both sufficiency and sustainability of mainstream school places.
- Carlton Vale Infant School and Kilburn Park Junior School joined together in a hard federation in April 2024 and are now in the planning stages to become a single school on one site as part of the South Kilburn Regeneration Programme. This is in response to demand increasing in the longer term beyond the 5-year forecasts in the strategy.
  - Following Cabinet's decision in May 2024 to proceed with the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School, the LA is providing



support for the school to plan for the phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site in July 2027.

- The Malorees Infant School and Malorees Junior School Governing Board have consulted on amalgamating the schools, which are currently federated, as a single community school. Formal amalgamation of the schools was agreed by Cabinet in Spring 2025, and amalgamation will take place in April 2026 to form Malorees Primary School.
- Islamia Primary School is scheduled to relocate to the Gwenneth Rickus building in September 2027 following the school's eviction from its current site. This secures the long-term future of the school and will provide improved facilities for its pupils.

4.2. In January 2022 Cabinet approved £44m of capital investment for additional specialist places in a new secondary special school, Wembley Manor School that opened in Brent in September 2024 and moved to its new buildings in September 2025, expansions of existing special schools and new ARPs in mainstream schools. As many of these projects have either been delivered, are close to delivery or have been reconsidered, a new 'phase two' SEND Capital strategy is currently under development. The key projects within this strategy and the timescale for delivery are detailed in the table below. Academy expansions will be subject to school consultation with the DfE Regional Director. Development of the Strathcona site will be subject to local consultation.

School	Places	Phase	Delivery timescale
Strathcona site	50	Primary	September 2026
The Manor School	88	Primary	September 2026
Woodfield School*	40	Secondary	January 2027
The Avenue	34	All-through	September 2027
The Village School	80 (but net gain of 40)	All-through (but places are for secondary)	TBC (modelled for delivery 2028)
<b>Total</b>	<b>212 (138 primary, 74 secondary)</b>		

*\*Woodfield places are being delivered during the Phase 2 Capital works programme but were agreed as part of Phase 1. Therefore, these 40 places do not count towards the Phase 2 total.*

## 5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 5.1 Ward members will be kept informed of the outcome of actions taken under this strategy particularly where mainstream planning area capacity is reviewed and where additional specialist provision is under consideration.
- 5.2 The Lead Member has been and will continue to be regularly briefed on school place planning issues and associated actions.
- 5.3 School representatives have been and will continue to be actively involved school place planning discussions through the School Place Planning Working Group

- 5.4 Any proposed changes to provision will be subject to public consultation with parents and key stakeholders in line with statutory guidance and legal frameworks.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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) expects this funding to be used for investment in schools, joining up with other capital resources when it is beneficial to do so.
- 6.5 The development of additional places for children and young people with SEND presents greater complexity and higher associated costs than mainstream primary school expansions. These increased costs are influenced by the nature of the construction required, the specific needs of the cohort of children and the constraints of site location and layout. As and when proposals to meet the forecast SEND demand need to be brought forward, further reports will be submitted to Cabinet, accompanied by financial information to support informed decision-making.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

- 7.1 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).

- 7.2 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 children aged 9 months to 5 years from September 2025 and ensuring it overlaps coherently with school provision.
- 7.3 The Council has additional statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide education for pupils needing alternative education.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 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).
- 7.6 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 October 2024'.

## **8.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.

- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 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 stable outlook for secondary school places. 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.

## **9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 9.1 The strategy sets an expectation for the school estate to be used efficiently to provide for current and future educational needs. The approach of sustainability and utilising the school estate for other educational provision reduces the use of construction materials and waste production and encourages efficiency in the use of existing resources.
- 9.2 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.

## **10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations**

- 10.1 Through delivering the strategy there could be some changes to the current use of school capacity, for example an increase in SEND provision through utilising existing spare capacity in the mainstream primary school estate.
- 10.2 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.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**

- 11.1 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, Young People &  
Community Development