

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)
to
Cabinet

on
14th March 2017

Report prepared by:
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Agenda
Item No.

9

The Future Provision of Secondary Places in Southend
People Scrutiny Committee
Executive Councillor: Councillor James Courtenay
A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet members with a progress report on the strategy for the provision of secondary places as overseen by the School Places Working Party.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet is asked to firstly note and secondly agree to the recommendations made at the School Places Working Party (SPWP), held on 6th February 2017.

- 2.2 The following recommendations are taken from the draft minutes. The SPWP endorsed the report, and made the following recommendations:

(To meet immediate needs by September 2018)

- To agree the continuation of expansion discussions with Good and Outstanding Schools

(To meet the additional need for September 2019)

- To agree an initial exploration with a small number of Academy Trusts regarding a secondary free school
 - To agree exploring expansion opportunities with schools that currently require improvement
- In addition
- That officers should continue dialogue with faith schools regarding future expansion, where there is excess demand but places should be for Southend children only

3. Background

- 3.1 On 23 June 2015, Cabinet resolved that officers undertake consultations with existing secondary schools regarding expansions to meet increases in pupil population demand.
- 3.2 Long-term forecasts for secondary schools are reasonably accurate, as the numbers of primary pupils transferring to secondary schools are already known. The increased birth level indicates the continuation of high pupil numbers in primary and subsequently in secondary schools is currently stable with no current indication that numbers will reduce. By comparison, there has been a permanent increase of around 9 forms of entry (FE) and nearly 3FE in bulge years within the primary sector. The total cost for the primary expansion was nearly £25 million.
- 3.3 Over the last four years we have seen an average net loss at secondary transfer (year 7) primarily to Essex schools of 300 pupils for mainstream places and a net gain from Essex, the London Boroughs and other sources of 567 pupils for selective places (those reaching the pass mark for the eleven plus examination and/or entering Southend Catholic faith schools).

Previous attempts to secure Essex County Council's (ECC) accurate and reliable school planning data have not always proven successful or helpful. However, more recent communication indicates that their own pupil forecasts identify that due to their own pupil population increase and housing developments surrounding the Essex/Southend boarder, from 2018 they will only be able to offer limited secondary places to Southend children and from 2019 they will have no capacity to offer any secondary places to Southend resident pupils. Whilst this very recent information from ECC is helpful, officers will continue to work using this intelligence as a factor when determining accurate Southend predictions. This factor has increased the number of deficit places to beyond the primary expansions taking the need to 12 FE plus 2 further FE in bulge years. A summary of the latest forecasts is included in Appendix 1.

- 3.4 The first shortfall of places appears in 2018 where 4-5 forms of entry are needed followed by a further 6 FE in 2019.
- 3.5 Secondary school place offer day was the 1st March 2017. Overall there was a 1.7% increase in the number of pupils applying for a school place (32 more pupils, which is just over one form of entry). Southend Borough Council was successful in ensuring that every child who had applied for a school place was allocated a place for September 2017. However the underlying pressures alluded to in this report have started to manifest themselves, reflected in a slightly lower percentage of places offered to pupils for their first school preference (76% compared to 79% in 2016). In addition there was a 2% increase in parents not receiving any of their preferences (7% for 2017 compared to 5% in 2016). Officers are currently working with school leaders where schools are oversubscribed and not meeting catchment.

4. Other Options

Way forward to meet need

4.1 Southend School Expansions – Good and Outstanding Schools:

- 4.1.1 To meet the initial need in 2018 discussions have progressed with 3 secondary academies graded good or better by Ofsted to expand by 2FE per site. One of these has progressed to planning and one is at feasibility stage. Expansions with 'good' secondary schools are intended to meet the 2018 need. We are currently working with Eastwood Academy, Shoeburyness High School and Belfairs to secure firm commitments to ensure the required forms of entry for 2018 meet our predicted needs
- 4.1.2 In-depth discussions were also undertaken with secondary faith schools regarding the potential for expansion; however there was insufficient evidence that increasing places at these schools would secure places for Southend children due to their oversubscription criteria for admissions prioritising out of area Catholics, over Southend resident non-practising Catholics. There is little evidence to suggest that the Catholic population has increased for the immediate need (2018/19), however expanding these schools remains an option for 2021 onwards where pupils attending the expanded Catholic primary school will reach secondary age.

4.2 Free School

- 4.2.1 Any new school now must be a free school. The LA is investigating the feasibility of a free school and is in communication with existing and proven academy trusts regarding submitting a bid to the Department for Education (DfE). This would be through a centrally funded route, whereby a trust puts a bid in directly to the DfE. The department, using this route, would fund all capital costs associated but would reduce the basic need grant paid to the Council.
- 4.2.2 Benefits:
There would be no cost to the Council, and given a smooth transition we would have sufficient places within the time allocated. Trusts require a 'strong track record' and achievement should be above local and national averages. Free Schools (with the exception of Free Special schools) must be 'all-ability' schools, so cannot use academic selection processes.
- 4.2.3 Risks:
The drawbacks would be that we have no control over which academy trust is selected, although remain accountable for the outcomes. The decision on a successful bid rests entirely with the department, and we will continue to work very closely with their teams to try and ensure Southend views are addressed.

In addition the process starts by a scrutiny of assets owned by the Council, and would in effect utilise those without recompense to the Council, resulting in potentially a loss of a significant asset to the Council. This could be land or buildings. If no suitable Council land is found, then public land or compulsory purchase may be followed.

Lastly, there is a danger that a new school could draw capacity further from some of our underperforming schools, compounding the situation further.

Applications for free schools are submitted in September or March and a process of assessment by DfE takes place that can take up to 6 months. As a result of consultation, the minister has delayed the next round of application to the “summer term”, expected in June. Whilst this allows us time to work with the Trust and department to construct the bid, the slight delay in submitting the initial expression of interest would now put pressure on our ability to complete the project in order to meet a September 2019 opening. If the basic need case is proven to be strong enough a free school could open in temporary accommodation, although the DfE avoid this where possible.

4.3 Southend School Expansions – Underperforming Schools:

4.3.1 The DfE expects that schools should not generally expand if they are eligible for intervention by the local Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). This is to safeguard underperforming schools becoming compromised by expansion. It is accepted that there will be exceptional cases where there is no viable alternative to ensuring sufficient school places locally.

4.3.2 One currently underperforming academy has raised an interest in expanding. Southend LA is in communication with the RSC regarding schools that fall under this criteria and their readiness to expand.

5. Reason for Recommendation

Conclusion

5.1 Need from September 2018 is intended to be met by expansion of ‘good or better’ secondary schools.

5.2 Additional need from September 2019 is expected to be met through a successful free school application to the DfE

5.3 Additional need from 2020 onwards is aimed to be met from expansions at currently underperforming schools (and faith schools if data evidences an increased cohort of Catholic pupil’s resident within Southend).

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council’s Vision & Corporate Priorities

Ensure residents have access to high quality education to enable them to be lifelong learners and have fulfilling employment.

6.2 Financial Implications

Budget was agreed at February Cabinet meeting

6.3 Legal Implications

If sufficient places are not supplied the council will not meet its statutory duties in supplying sufficient school places

6.4 People Implications

Risk of a % of children not having a secondary school place in September 2018

6.5 Property Implications

DfE may commandeer local authority asset to build a free school (only those of sufficient size to meet a 6FE school would be at risk)

6.6 Consultation

None

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

None

6.8 Risk Assessment

None

6.9 Value for Money

None

6.10 Community Safety Implications

N/A at this present time

6.11 Environmental Impact

N/A until site identified for free school

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Forecast Numbers with Illustrated Forms of Entry Expansions

Appendix 1 – Forecast Numbers including impact of Essex places and Illustrated Forms of Entry Expansions

	Year 7 Forecast	Essex Places pushed back to SBC	Year 7 Forecast + Pushback	Anticipated	Surplus/Deficit	Number of FE Required	Number of Places	Total Places	Surplus/Deficit
				PAN*	(B-A)		(D*28)	(B+E)	(F-A)
	A	Ai	Aii	B	C	D	E	F**	G
2017/18	2265	0	2265	2300	35	0	0	2300	35
2018/19	2361	60	2421	2300	-121	5	140	2440	19
2019/20	2525	75	2600	2320	-280	10	280	2600	0
2020/21	2540	90	2630	2320	-310	12	336	2656	26
2021/22	2583	105	2688	2320	-368	14	392	2712	24
2022/23	2585	105	2690	2320	-370	14	392	2712	22
2023/24	2547	105	2652	2320	-332	12	336	2656	4
2024/25	2476	105	2581	2320	-261	10	280	2600	19
2025/26	2508	105	2613	2320	-293	11	308	2628	15

*PAN is combined PAN as known for 2017/18. From 2019/20 including additional places at Cecil Jones.

**Column F indicates the anticipated increased combined PANs.