

School Place Planning Review Group

Minutes

Thursday 22 March 2012

Conservatory, Civic Offices

Present:

Review Group Members: Cllr Robin Bradburn and Cllr Jan Lloyd

Officers: Michael Bracey, Assistant Director and Marie Denny, School Place Planning Manager

Apologies: Cllr John Hawthorn, Dr Sanhita Chakrabarti

Item		Action
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1	Members were welcomed and introductions made.	
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2	Future demand for primary school places	
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Marie Denny (MD) outlined the fact that until more recently in Milton Keynes the majority of additional places had needed to be secured to support growth in the population due to new housing. MD added that Milton Keynes is now experiencing a rise in the birth rate in previously maturing areas of the borough that is leading to a projected deficit in demand for places for children starting school in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The group considered the birth data presented as against the total number of places available across the borough and noted that even if every school was full, including those in more rural areas of the borough where this was unlikely to be the case, 85 additional places would be required to be found in 2012, 199 in 2013 and 40 in 2014. This would allow a surplus of 3% in the system, to enable a very small element of choice and to enable places to be available to those moving in to the area during the course of the academic year ("in year admissions").

Members noted that there are places in rural schools that are not currently taken up and that it was unlikely that this would help to alleviate the pressure unless children were transported out of the centre to small village schools. Cllr Lloyd pointed out that there was quite a difference between a very small village school and larger

secondary schools and this was likely to be quite a shock at transition for some children. Overall it was agreed that small schools and their place in the wider system should be explored separately.

3 **Strategies to secure places for the future**

Increasing Primary Places (IPP)

MB outlined the consultation that has taken place with all schools in the primary phase to assess all schools' willingness to admit more pupils over the few years in order to meet the increase in the local demographic. He confirmed that all 89 mainstream primary phase schools had been contacted and a total of 64 replies were received giving a response rate of 72%. 41 schools responded positively to the request. Many suggested ways of increasing the admission number within the existing building whilst others asked for additional accommodation, either temporary or permanent. Some schools took the opportunity to share their ambition to change their age range. 23 schools declined to raise their admission number, although many did say that they were happy to review the position in the future. Despite a number of reminders 25 schools did not reply, although in some cases this was linked to recent changes or current change proposals.

MB confirmed that as a direct result of this consultation the additional places required for 2012 had been secured, as had some of the places required for 2013. Officers were now looking at some of the less obvious schemes proposed, to see whether there were more high quality, value for money schemes that could be secured to enable the balance of the deficit to be met.

It was pointed out that at the change in the age of transfer many schools had gained space with Year 7 moving to secondary or Year 3 moving into junior provision, and this had meant that schools have had the opportunity to convert classroom space into alternative provision. This provision had been useful in terms of the curriculum offer in place for children or the wider community and now some schools were disinclined to turn it back into use for its original intended purpose. MB stated that this is a challenging area of negotiation.

Cllr Lloyd asked what 'carrots' were on offer to encourage schools to take additional pupils. MB stated that revenue funding via the local formula was generally adequate and there was therefore limited financial incentive involved in admitting more pupils. Cllr Bradburn stated that it was better to seek to persuade schools if at all possible.

Cllr Lloyd asked whether consideration has been given to sharing strategies between schools, for example how schools use less space but still achieve excellent outcomes, and how some schools take MB

increased numbers into some year groups and manage it to the school's benefit. MB agreed that this would be something important to consider.

MB talked about the size of schools and stated that the Cabinet Member preferred schools of two forms of entry. Members agreed that there is no evidence to support this view as the success of a school is dependent upon the quality of its leadership and management. Members asked that their view that a maximum size of the school should not be a consideration when determining expansions should be passed on to the Cabinet Member. MB

Presumption to expand

MB discussed the recent letter from the Department of Education with members and stated that this would now be used to progress the need for additional secondary school places.

MB asked members whether they were of the opinion that this process should now be used in the primary phase, too.

Cllr Lloyd was broadly in agreement but pointed out that although some communities that are near one another (and within the 2 miles criterion for primary) are quite different, such as West Bletchley and Bletchley and Fenny Stratford, and therefore caution should be exercised. Cllr Lloyd also had some concerns about using the process in new communities in case this was divisive and did not result in community cohesion. Cllr Bradburn believed the process agreed for secondary should be widened to include the primary phase and felt that the process that had been set up ensured that this risk would be managed.

MD gave the example of the schools in the Western Expansion Area as one which could progress using the new local process. Members agreed that this was a possible test bed for the new process at primary phase.

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Next Meeting:

It was agreed that feedback could now be given to the Cabinet Member through the regular briefing with a report back to the first meeting of the Children and Young People's Select Committee in the new civic year.