

Wards Affected:

Bradwell, Loughton and Shenley

ITEM 6**DELEGATED DECISION****24 JUNE 2014****PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE PROVISION OF FREE EARLY EDUCATION PLACES IN AND AROUND TWO MILE ASH AND GREAT HOLM**

Decision Taker: Councillor Miles (Cabinet member for Children and Lifelong Learning)

Author: Simon Sims, Programme Lead, Setting and School Sufficiency and Access, Children and Families - Education, Effectiveness and Participation. Tel: (01908) 253919

Executive Summary:

The council is required to secure additional free early education places in the vicinity of Two Mile Ash and Great Holm as a result of a demographic increase and an extension to its statutory duties.

Having explored the options available to address the projected shortfall in this area and carried out a consultation with local stakeholders, the council is proposing to change the age range at Holmwood School to include a nursery provision for children aged from 3 years old.

There are five stages for a proposal to make a change to a school:

1. Consultation
2. Publication of a statutory notice
3. Representation
4. Decision
5. Implementation

The council has completed the first stage in relation to the proposal. This report is intended to report the results of the consultation process and proposes that the council moves to the second stage by publishing a statutory proposal.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That a statutory proposal be published to lower the age range at Holmwood School to enable the school to offer nursery provision for children from the age of three.

2. IssuesBackground

- 2.1 Historically, the majority of population growth that has occurred in Milton Keynes has resulted from new housing. This has meant that additional pre-school and school places have been able to be planned in advance of new areas of development and new provision opened to serve the increased demand for places. The growth in new areas happened in the context of reducing demand for places in other areas of the borough. However, Milton

Keynes, like many other authorities across the country, is experiencing an increase in the birth rate across most areas of the borough.

- 2.2 In addition to the increasing demographic, from September 2013, the local authority's statutory duty to secure free early education provision has been extended to include two year olds who meet the prescribed eligibility criteria. The number of two year olds eligible under this duty will increase significantly in September 2014. This will increase pressure on provision across the borough.
- 2.3 To assist local authorities to plan sufficient places, the Department for Education published data on 18 December 2013 which estimated 1,459 two year old children living in Milton Keynes would be eligible to receive their free entitlement in September 2014; this compared to 800 in September 2013. Whilst this data does not provide estimates for each settlement within the borough, estimates are available for each postcode sector. Analysis shows these estimates are broadly comparable with our local projections.
- 2.4 Analysis of early years provision projects additional places are required in this area. Currently there are no maintained nursery classes within Great Holm or Two Mile Ash, which limits parental choice.

The Proposal

- 2.5 The Headteacher and Governing Body of both Ashbrook School and Holmwood School have expressed their desire to change the school's age range to incorporate nursery provision for children aged from three, in order to alleviate the pressure for places in the area, and free up some places at existing providers to cater for the increased demand from 2 year olds.
- 2.6 Ashbrook School is located in Two Mile Ash, and was judged to be providing an 'outstanding' standard of education during the school's inspection by Ofsted in June 2009. Holmwood School is located in Great Holm and was judged to be providing a 'good' standard of education during the school's inspection by Ofsted in May 2011.
- 2.7 Both schools currently cater for children from Year R to Year 2 and expressed a desire to provide a 30 place nursery provision, offering up to 60 additional free early education places at each site (morning and afternoon sessions).
- 2.8 The proposals to alter the age ranges at Ashbrook School and Holmwood School required a consultation before the change could proceed further giving parents, carers and the community an opportunity to share their thoughts on the proposed changes.
- 2.9 The consultation documents proposed that the change of age range would apply with effect from September 2015. We have since been advised that, due to the time required to support the approvals and procurement processes, the change to age range would need to be effective from September 2016. This does not affect the proposal in principle.

Consultation

- 2.10 Consultations on the proposed expansion of both Ashbrook School and Holmwood School took place between 3 February and 21 March 2014, a period of six working weeks in term time.
- 2.11 A total of 549 consultation documents were sent out to a range of stakeholders and the consultations were available on line, alongside an electronic response form. Drop in sessions were also held at the schools to give stakeholders the opportunity to submit views and discuss the proposed expansion plans. A full record of the consultation processes, the views received, and officers' response to these views area attached for each school at Annex A and B.
- 2.12 The consultation responses for Ashbrook School are summarised in Annex A. This shows that there were 15 responses to the consultation. 1 of those who responded was in favour of the proposal to change the age range at the school, whilst 12 of those who responded were against the proposal. The main concerns cited by those against the proposal were that it would increase traffic and parking issues in the area, reduce the outdoor play area, cause disruption during the building phase, and adversely impact upon existing pre-school provisions.
- 2.13 The consultation responses for Holmwood School are summarised in Annex B. This shows that there were 12 responses to the consultation. In contrast to the consultation for Ashbrook School, a small majority of respondents (7) were in favour of the proposal. The main benefit cited was that it would increase the provision of nursery places in the area.

3. Options

3.1 There are four options:

(a) Do nothing

Milton Keynes Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient free early education places for all children aged three and four in the borough. The projected shortfall for residents in and around the Two Mile Ash and Great Holm estates exists in the broader context of projected shortfall of places elsewhere in the borough due to the rise in the birth rate and other new housing development. In addition, the extended requirement for local authorities to provide free early education places for 20% of two year old children in 2013, rising to 40% in 2014, has resulted in greater pressure across the early education sector. If nothing is done then initially parents would need to transport children to schools and providers elsewhere across the borough and ultimately there would be some children for whom no free early education place would be available at all.

(b) Change the age range at both Ashbrook School and Holmwood School

The council could proceed with the statutory process to change the age range at both Ashbrook and Holmwood schools by publishing a statutory notice for each proposal. Whilst a small majority of respondents were in favour of the proposal to change the age range at Holmwood School, a significant majority of respondents were against the proposal to change the age range at Ashbrook School. Whilst officers consider that appropriate actions could be taken to mitigate many of the concerns raised, there is a risk that proceeding with both proposals at the same time, thereby creating up to 120 additional places, could detriment existing early education providers in this area. Particular concerns were raised by providers responding to the Ashbrook School consultation.

(c) Publish a statutory notice to change the age range at Ashbrook School

The council could proceed with the proposal to change the age range at Ashbrook School by publishing a statutory notice, and delay proposals to change the age range at Holmwood School. Whilst this would achieve an increase in the number of free early education places available in the area by up to 60 places, the consultation responses show existing providers in this area have concerns that this could adversely affect them, as there are already two other pre-schools on this estate. If one proposal is to proceed, it makes sense that this is not the one with the least community support.

(d) Publish a statutory notice to change the age range at Holmwood School (**preferred option**)

The council could proceed with the proposal to change the age range at Holmwood School by publishing a statutory notice and delay proposals to change the age range at Ashbrook School. This would achieve an increase in the number of free early education places available in the area by up to 60 places, whilst taking account of the views of the local stakeholders. Proposals regarding Ashbrook School could be re-reviewed once the impact of the extended duty in this area is clearer.

4. Implications

4.1 Policy

Ensuring sufficient early education and school places is fundamental to delivering the council's vision that our residents have access to all the services they need and have the support to access opportunities and enjoy a healthy and good quality of life.

4.2 Resources and Risk

Capital

An initial estimate of the costs associated with providing the additional accommodation required at either school as a result of the change of age range is £650k per school. An initial estimate of the Resources can be

accommodated within the school build programme and all building work will be taking place at the existing school site. Authority to seek both spend and resource approval will be considered by the Capital Programme Review Panel and come forward for approval by Cabinet.

Revenue

Early years and schools revenue funding is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and therefore these proposals do not directly impact on the council's General Fund.

Y	Capital	N	Revenue	Y	Accommodation
N	IT	N	Medium Term Plan	Y	Asset Management

4.3 Carbon and Energy Management

The capital works linked to this proposal would be delivered in line with the council's Carbon and Energy Management Policy and support the principles of maximising energy efficiency and carbon reduction in buildings, equipment and vehicles and would use the most sustainable or renewable energy sources.

4.4 Legal

This proposal is subject to statutory procedures as established by The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.

If approved, the next step will be for the council to publish a statutory proposal under Schedule 3 of The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. This will appear on our website, as a notice in the press and outside the school. Following publication there is a further period of four weeks within which representations can be made to the council. Once that representation period expires, the council has two months to decide whether the change should proceed.

4.5 Other Implications

N	Equalities/Diversity	N	Sustainability	N	Human Rights
N	E-Government	Y	Stakeholders	N	Crime and Disorder

Background Papers:

1. Setting and School Place Planning Frameworks September 2013 (<http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-families>)
2. Early learning for 2-year-olds: estimates of the number of eligible children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-allocations-for-early-learning-for-2-year-olds-2014-to-2015>)