



Children and Education Select Committee  
26 January 2015

**SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING AND EXPANSION PROGRAMME**

**Purpose of the report:** Scrutiny of services

To report improvements to the process of school expansion

**Background /Context**

1. The number of school places being created in Surrey schools has risen significantly in the last 5 years. This is in response to an increase in birth rates, over 22% in the decade 2002 – 2012, and increasing pressure from housing development. Surrey County Council is also a *net importer* of pupils, admitting students from most of our neighbouring local authorities. Table 1 shows the scale of this increase with demand for additional school places being 8 times more in 2014 than in 2009. The degree of complexity and difficulty in delivering these numbers has also increased greatly; therefore the numbers alone do not show the true impact of delivering these places.

Table 1. Increase in number of school places provided 2009-2014

Year	Number of school places provided	Increase on previous year (percentage increase)
2009	480	
2010	600	120 (25.0%)
2011	840	240 (40.0%)
2012	1664	824 (98.09%)
2013	2794	1218 (73.19%)
2014	4138	1344 (48.10%)

2. A new pupil forecasting system from Edge Analytics, a national software provider, is now fully implemented and the Council has more accurate data sets to inform school place planning requirements. Forecasts are combined with local knowledge obtained through meetings with school commissioning officers, area education officers, head teachers and officers from district and borough councils.
3. Surrey County Council has been identified by the Department for Education (DfE) as a Local Authority (LA) that has been consistently accurate with forecasting in the last 5 years. In the last academic year

the authority experienced a 98% accuracy rate. The LA continues to push for GP registration data from health partners and is in discussion with other LAs about if and how they collect this data.

4. Schools continue to convert to academy status either as an individual academy or joining a Multi Academy Trust. The most recent list of academy conversions and free schools is attached as Annex A to this report.
5. Surrey currently has one primary free school, one all through (5 – 18 yrs) free school and one secondary free school approved. This new free school is currently planning to be operational in Woking from September 2015. There were further bids submitted to the DfE in October 2014 for the next round of the free school programme, and the outcomes of the round are due to be announced in March 2015.

### **Challenges and constraints**

6. A programme on this scale presents huge challenges. Constraints such as available space and infrastructure at existing sites, lack of availability of new sites, congested local transport networks, and a car dominant culture all impact on programme delivery. As more schools are brought into the programme, issues relating to funding, planning and highways need to be managed carefully to ensure that we remains on track to achieve critical deadlines each September for the start of the school year. The multi disciplinary team delivering the school expansion are working towards solutions to mitigate against the impact of all of these issues as far as possible.
7. There are significant financial constraints to a programme of this size and the LA is doing everything possible to limit its borrowing requirement. Capital allocations to meet demand (referred to by the DfE as basic need funding) are as yet unknown beyond 2016/17 but an announcement regarding allocations for 2017/18 is expected by the end of January 2015.

### **Programme Delivery Improvements**

8. The formation in 2013 of a Schools Delivery Team has helped establish a strong and effective delivery team. The team consists of officers from Schools and Learning, Property, Planning and Highways, Procurement and Finance to manage and deliver the Schools Basic Need 5 Year Programme,
9. Throughout 2013 and 2014 this team has been working together to deliver a revised and improved delivery model to ensure the huge demand for new school places is met on time, within budget and is of good quality.
10. An external report commissioned by Cabinet to examine the existing process was used as the basis for developing an improved process for the school expansion programme.

11. A new project management board has been created with senior officers from the five departments above, with the Chief Property Officer appointed as the programme sponsor. The programme board develops delivery strategy, monitors the effectiveness of the delivery and performance, and acts as the forum for queries and issues to be resolved.
12. A Programme Office was formed in September 2013, to monitor and report progress to the Property Delivery Board of the 5 year schools programme, together with the status of individual projects. A project tracker with key information of the schools to be expanded and milestone dates was developed to facilitate this.
13. Meetings with Cabinet and Members highlighted the need for better communication of the planned programme. In response to this, the programme tracker detailing the current stage of individual schemes (i.e. viability, construction and completion) has been circulated to Members by the Leader. From 1 April 2015, it is proposed to issue the tracker at the start of each quarter. It will be noted at the point of issue that the programme tracker is a live document and as such subject to change. A new protocol to inform and update local Members is currently under review.
14. Additional property project managers have been recruited to meet the increasing demands of the programme, and their roles and responsibilities refined for themselves and the teams they are working with. A key role of the project manager is to provide monthly updates to the programme office on the projects status and to agree construction works that will provide minimum disruption to the school.
15. In addition to this, Planning and Highways have also secured additional resource such as Planning Officers and the School Planning Monitoring Officer.
16. A process of evaluating the optimum scheme to deliver in any area indicating demand has been created using a scoring matrix for each potential school with inputs from four teams, education; property; planning and highways and finance. This new gateways process will assess schemes at each stage from viability through to completion and provide evidence based decision making about school expansions schemes.
17. The LA designs and builds to the DfE's baseline standards and current cost targets, however this creates a challenge in managing the individual school expectations, which usually exceed what the LA are required to provide.

18. In response to the significant funding pressures on the LA for Schools Basic Need, together with substantial increases in materials and labour costs in the construction market, the delivery team have reviewed and introduced improvements in the way the Council builds and procures projects. These include:
- Developing alternative procurement options to address shortages in the market for labour and building materials, where sharp rises in costs have occurred.
  - Introducing new building solutions to resolve exceptionally difficult site conditions such as high flood risk.
  - A range of new low tech modular buildings have been developed for short term requirements to address temporary bulge classes as well as those with high degrees of sophistication and technical specification.
19. These new modular buildings provide long life expectancy, improved environmental performance and lower cost in use, in addition to a speedier and more efficient build programme, which reduces the impact of disruption on the school and local residents.
20. It is essential that there is minimal disruption to schools during construction and that the Council continue to support school leaders through the construction period. Working with procurement the LA ensures that all contractors are mindful of the need to work considerately with the school and its local community so that there is no adverse impact on education.

### **Planning, Highways and Transport**

21. The majority of the schools asset base was built prior to 1970, at a time when there were considerably fewer vehicles on the road and lower household car ownership. Since then, residential development has grown around schools with schools remaining at the heart of the local community. This has resulted in increased demand for school places and space constraints in those areas. When taken together with greater car ownership and use, this has created significant challenges. This means the County Council has now reached a position where highways issues and mitigation measures required to offset expansion pressures are two of the biggest challenges that it faces.
22. The ability to provide additional on-site parking and local drop off facilities is severely constrained on sites which do not have sufficient space and congested residential areas. In addition, both measures are in direct conflict with the LA's highways policies to deter car journeys for environmental reasons.
23. As part of any planning application to expand a school, a detailed transport assessment is carried out which assesses the impact of the expansion against the existing situation. As part of this process we consider the individual nature of each application to develop solutions to mitigate the additional impacts the expansion generates, as far as is reasonably practical given the constraints within the local area. An

example of this is providing school travel plans for all expansion sites which are now developed by our in house team who are familiar with Surrey schools, as opposed to previously being developed by external consultants.

24. These mitigation measures are reflected in the School expansion transport strategy which aims to address concerns about transport impacts and aims to reduce some of the significant challenges of delivering the expansions programme to the timescales required. This strategy has been out to consultation and closed 11 January 2015.
25. Where physically possible and as part of the planning process, the authority always seeks highway improvements in and around schools such as crossing points, better footways, cycleways and signage to facilitate children and parents getting safely to and from schools.

### **Way forward 2015**

26. Following the delivery of the September 2014 places we have reviewed our delivery performance with the relevant teams. This includes feedback from the individual schools to refine and challenge this process for continuous improvement. These ongoing improvements have been put together into an action plan, which is being reviewed between January and June 2015 as part of a continuous improvement plan overseen by the project management board.
27. The County Council is trialling a new process for the delivery of bulge classes, non-permanent places which are identified from each year's school admissions rounds. Historically work on the delivery of these schemes has commenced viability once the admissions data has been analysed, leaving a very short window of opportunity to deliver - typically April - September.
28. For the 2015 delivery the authority has analysed forecast data from the new Edge Analytics database to anticipate where additional pressures may materialise, and developed schemes for these school sites to planning stage ahead of knowing if they will be required. This new approach has been introduced with the purpose of providing additional time in assessing and consulting on Planning and Highways issues, as well as smoothing out the overall end to end delivery process for all parties associated with the school project.
29. This new approach is considered as the only viable way of guaranteeing delivery for the bulge classes for the start of each school year. As the planned programme is delivered the requirement for temporary facilities is expected to diminish.
30. Regular meetings between District and Borough planning teams and the school commissioning officers take place to transfer core strategic data. This enables early identification of planned housing developments and opportunities to enter into discussions with developers regarding potential financial contributions to school expansions or in some cases the provision of new schools.

31. The County Council has also commissioned a market research study to determine “pupil yields” from new housing. This research has been jointly commissioned in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Central Bedfordshire. This will help officers to negotiate fair and informed contributions from developers to offset school infrastructure costs. It is generally understood that new housing results in an increase in the local population of school age children.

## Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the challenges that face the Council in meeting its statutory responsibilities to provide school places, and the processes that have been implemented as part of the school expansion programme. It is suggested that the Committee consider how it wishes to review and monitor the progress of the programme as part of its Forward Work Plan.

## Next steps

Further steps are taken by education, property, planning and procurement teams to realise continuous improvements to the school expansion programme. A periodic report is submitted to Select Committee with updates on progress

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