

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 25 JUNE 2024****REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****SUBJECT: SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2024****ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: NO ONE LEFT BEHIND / EMPOWERED AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES****Purpose of the Report:**

The Cabinet is asked to consider the Surrey School Organisation Plan covering the academic years from September 2024-2034 and recommend it to Council for publication.

Sufficiency of high-quality school places is a key statutory duty and underpins a great education for all, supporting Surrey County Council's guiding mission that no one is left behind. It is important that there is equity in inclusive accessible school places for all, across Surrey and so the School Organisation Plan sets out the policies and principles underpinning both mainstream and specialist school organisation in Surrey. This supports Surrey County Council to achieve ambitions set out in Surrey's Community Vision for 2030; that children and young people are safe and feel safe and confident and that everyone benefits from education, skills and employment opportunities that help them succeed in life. It also supports Surrey's Inclusion and Additional Needs partnership strategy which seeks to ensure that Surrey children and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities can usually have those needs met in Surrey and can lead the best possible life.

The School Organisation Plan highlights the likely demand for school places projected over a 10-year period and provides context as to how the educational landscape has changed and is likely to change in the future. The council has created over 10,000 additional places over the last five years in mainstream and specialist provision, and still needs to provide more while current levels of government funding continue to fall short of the amount needed to create those places.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Endorses the School Organisation Plan 2024 which will meet our statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality places for pupils in Surrey and refer it to Council to approve its publication.

Reason for Recommendations:

The School Organisation Plan is a key document used by schools and education stakeholders in considering medium- and long-term plans. Sufficiency of high-quality school places is a key statutory duty and underpins a great education for all and therefore, it is necessary to review the plan to ensure that the best and most up to date information is published for use in this process. This will encourage collaborative and collegiate planning and will provide greater transparency and understanding to local communities.

Executive Summary:

The current position in Surrey

1. The county council has a statutory responsibility to ensure that there is a sufficient number of school places for all pupils who require one. The council must monitor future projected demand and discuss and decide the appropriate changes to school organisation, where necessary, in order to meet this statutory responsibility.
2. The current context across Surrey is that the school age population has now started to stabilise after a period of significant increase over the last decade. Both nationally and locally we have seen falling birth rates since 2013 but these are variable across districts and boroughs, with some reductions as large as 27% and even the smallest reduction being 8%.
3. It must also be recognised that the period which this plan covers is one recovering from unique uncertainty and probable volatility. The Covid-19 pandemic inevitably changed the underlying demographic patterns of our communities, and there is a strong likelihood that the current trends will alter again, and so school organisational decisions will need to be made to react to the changes in those demand patterns.

Sufficiency in Mainstream Schools

4. This context means that there is a surplus of infant, junior and primary school places across Surrey. These surpluses are not uniform but are creating sustainability issues for some schools. In contrast, there are a few pockets of exceptional demand remaining, which are generated largely by additional housing.
5. The School Organisation Plan is a key document for schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to inform their strategic discussions and help them to formulate a plan. Council officers are engaged in facilitating conversations with primary school leaders, academy trusts and other stakeholders about school organisational changes that could help to support those primary phase schools when they have vacancies to secure medium term sustainability whilst preserving any latent capacity to future-proof for potential demographic changes.
6. Meanwhile, the sharp increase previously experienced in primary cohorts is now also impacting on the secondary sector, as these larger cohorts are now transitioning into secondary schools. The secondary school population is expected to continue to increase up to 2025 in some areas, and so the county council's capital programme to expand mainstream school places is now focussing on managing demand pressures in secondary schools.
7. In the phase of further education, larger cohorts from secondary schools are now moving into further education settings such as sixth forms and colleges. With the

requirement for young people to continue in education or training until the age of 18, challenge to capacity is already being experienced within some institution types. Where specialist facilities are required, such as for the delivery of vocational and technical qualifications, this is directly restricting delivery of provision within priority skills areas. Recognising that the local authority plays no direct role in the provision of capital funding to address demands exceeding or projected to exceed capacity, we continue to support applications to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for capital funding as individual institutions submit them.

Places for those pupils with additional needs and/or disability

8. The School Organisation Plan also sets out our position regarding specialist school places and forecasting.
9. The capital programme for pupils with additional needs and /or disability is aligned with Surrey's Community Vision 2030, which seeks to realise the local area's ambition that everyone benefits from education, skills and employment opportunities that help them to succeed in life and Surrey's Inclusion and Additional Needs partnership strategy which seeks to ensure that Surrey children and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities can generally have those needs met in Surrey and can lead the best possible life. It also supports delivery of the Safety Valve agreement in relation to the sustainability of the High Needs Block.
10. The majority of Surrey's existing specialist school provision is graded by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding. This provision enables better long-term outcomes for pupils educated closer to home by local providers, who successfully support local children and young people to live, learn and grow up locally to achieve their potential. Improved investment in Surrey's specialist education estate will support local schools to continue to deliver high quality inclusive education to some of the county's most vulnerable children and young people.
11. The Council has therefore agreed to an ambitious programme of providing additional places for those pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) within Surrey.
12. As of the end of the 2023/24 academic year, completed projects across 24 different schools have provided an additional 847 specialist school places. In addition, there are a further 19 projects in contract or with a contractor appointed that will ultimately provide a further 616 places on completion. Some of those projects are already delivering extra capacity where sufficient works have been completed or where it has been possible to repurpose existing space on a temporary basis. This allowed 145 new places to be opened in 2023/24 at those schools and will allow a further 166 to be opened in 2024/25. Some projects are still in development, but it is anticipated that the number of additional specialist school places in Surrey will exceed 2,000 by 2029. This is enabling more pupils with additional needs to be educated within Surrey and closer to home.

Changes to the School Organisation Plan format

13. The plan has previously consisted of two sections – the first describing the regulations and principles which underpin the planning of future provision in Surrey, including the methodology by which school age population projections are produced and an

overview of the current demographic and school place context both nationally and at a Surrey level. The second section provided school level data at borough and district level alongside graphs detailing the projected demand for school places in that area.

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14. Due to the frequency of change within this data (for example, the number of schools of each type in Surrey can change monthly, and pupil level data changes each school term) the second section of the School Organisation Plan became out of date before it was even published. Officers have reviewed the plan and have concluded that it would be more appropriate to provide this information on the Surrey County Council website. It is anticipated that it would be available as an extension to the current [provision of school place webpage](#), where the current School Organisation Plan (and this updated version if approved) is published. In this way, the data can be updated when it becomes available - for example, once a term for the school census, each month for academy conversions and as and when any other organisational changes take place. This increased frequency will ensure greater accuracy and accessibility and provides an even greater level of transparency and openness in school organisational decision making for stakeholders.
 15. The School Organisation Plan in its entirety now sets out the government regulations, policies and guidance, describing the legislative framework through which changes in school organisation are achieved, detailing the process of school commissioning in Surrey and setting out the methodology by which school age population forecasts are produced. An overview of the current situation in Surrey in terms of demographics and school population is also provided, including details on the county's state funded schools and identifying county-wide trends in births and housing.

Consultation:

16. The School Organisation Plan is not subject to statutory consultation. However, the phase leads for Surrey's school councils have been consulted, alongside Surrey County Council colleagues. Once authorised for publication, the plan will be widely distributed to education stakeholder groups and organisations, including schools, Local Planning Authorities and Dioceses. It is a helpful tool to aid future planning at a school level.
17. The plan will also be published on the Surrey County Council website for public viewing, alongside the web pages with school organisational data for both mainstream and specialist provision at borough and district level.

Risk Management and Implications:

18. The statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for all applicants within Surrey is held by the county council. An understanding of the school estate and how school organisation changes relate to demographic changes is vital to performing this duty.

Financial and Value for Money Implications:

19. The School Organisation Plan underpins the school basic need planned capital programme and determines the level of additional school places required across the county. The plan is the business driver for the required capital investment which forms part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

20. This latest iteration of the School Organisation Plan is aligned to the current budgets within the Council's MTFs. There is therefore no additional request for capital funding currently.
21. Any proposal for future Capital requirements would be through a separate report to Cabinet.
22. The Revenue Costs related to either reductions or increases in pupil numbers will be managed through allocations of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block which is allocated from the DfE based on an annual pupil census.
23. The plan can also be used for early identification of potential surplus places and the impact that may have on funding allocations for individual schools and identify where Schools may need support in their future budget planning.
24. There would be no expected impacts to the Council's General Fund of this report.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

25. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending to achieve a balanced budget position each year.
26. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for most of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.
27. As such, the Section 151 Officer concurs with the contents of this report and the related financial implications.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

28. The School Organisation Plan is a key document in ensuring that Surrey County Council is able to comply with its duty to ensure that sufficient school places are available in the area. Section 13 of the Education Act 1996 places a general duty on the Council to secure that efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the population in its area. In doing so, the Council is required to contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on the Council to secure that sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education are available in its

area. There is a legal duty on the Council therefore to secure the availability of efficient education in its area and sufficient schools to enable this.

Equalities and Diversity:

29. There are no direct equalities implications arising from the School Organisation Plan. The Equality Impact Assessment screening tool has confirmed that there are no impacts, direct or indirect, identified on people with protected characteristics or other groups. However, the provision of a sufficient number of school places which are open to anyone who applies for them will support the council's commitment to equality and diversity.

Other Implications:

30. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	Set out below
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	Set out below
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report
Compliance against net-zero emissions target and future climate compatibility/resilience	No significant implications arising from this report
Public Health	No significant implications arising from this report

CORPORATE PARENTING/LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IMPLICATIONS

31. This is a key document to ensuring that the appropriate numbers of school places are provided to meet the demand of our residents. All places provided have the highest priority given to children in the care of the local authority.

SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS IMPLICATIONS

32. The council has a duty to promote and improve educational outcomes for all children, particularly those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged. The School Organisation Plan is an important piece of evidence used to plan the appropriate number of school places, thereby aiding the council in fulfilling this duty.

What Happens Next:

33. If endorsed by Cabinet, the School Organisation Plan will be heard at Full Council. If approved at Full Council, the School Organisation Plan will be published on the Surrey County Council website and distributed widely to all stakeholders including Surrey schools, district and borough councils and local Diocesan boards.

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Consulted:

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Annexes:

Annex 1: School Organisation Plan 2024-2025

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