Committee and Date

Cabinet

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SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

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1. Summary

1.1. Some areas of Shropshire are facing a forecast growth in pupil numbers in the next few years, primarily due to the increased number of housing developments, which are leading to additional children requiring school places. This is not a countywide issue and so in some areas, generally in rural communities, a number of schools are managing provision with a large number of unfilled places in classrooms.

1.2 There is a contrasting position in other parts of the county, generally in urban settings, where schools require increases in their current provision for pupil places. On 7 November 2018, Cabinet agreed indicative spend allocations for a number of school place planning projects included in the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulation 123 List for 2018/19, which will result in increased classroom provision on 7 primary school sites across the county in 2018/19 and 2019/20. These indicative allocations will be transferred to the Council's capital programme against the individual projects. It should be noted that a further 3 primary school sites are also having additional classroom provision, funded through Section 106 developer contributions.

1.3 This paper provides Cabinet with an overview of the next phase of school place planning, which is focussed on the requirement to increase the provision of primary school places in north Shrewsbury and a new school in the west of the town. The paper will outline the Government process for commissioning a new school and seek approval to launch the first stage of the process, by initiating an informal consultation process with key stakeholders.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet agree to the launching of the first (informal consultation) phase for a new school in the west of Shrewsbury, under the Government's 'free school presumption process', on land secured from developers for this purpose.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure sufficient schools are available in their area to provide primary and secondary education, whether in maintained schools or academies. This requires the provision of a school place for every child living in its area of responsibility who is of school age and whose parents choose for their child to be educated in the state funded sector.

3.2 Where this statutory duty for additional school places extends to establishing a new school, local authorities are required to follow the Government's presumption process. The latest Department for Education advice *'The free school presumption'* was published in May 2018 and is available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/706171/Academy_and_free_school_presumption_departmental_advice.pdf .

3.3 Local authorities are responsible for determining the specification for the new school and to lead and implement the project to establish the school, and to fund the build. All new schools established through this process are classified as 'free schools', which is the Department for Education's term for any new academy provision, which means they are independent of local authority control and receive their funding directly from the Government.

3.4 A key risk to any school place planning projects is not securing the appropriate funding to meet the costs of additional school places resulting in the Council not meeting its statutory duties under section 14 of the Education Act 1996. Every effort will be taken to minimise the requirement to prudentially borrow to fund any aspects of the projects, thus reducing any ongoing and long-term revenue costs.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Where additional school places are required, whether on an existing school site or through a new school, there are a range of funding streams to meet the costs of any necessary capital works. These include: Government allocated basic need capital grant, contributions from housing developments through CIL and Section 106, and any potential receipts from the sale of surplus school sites within Council ownership (dependent on Cabinet approval to allocate such receipts to education provision).

4.2 The monitoring and tracking of predicted growth in forecast pupil numbers has evidenced a number of Shropshire schools where pressures on school places are such that additional provision is required to meet local demand for school places. Since the autumn of 2016,

extensive work with school leaders in each of these schools has resulted in plans to reconfigure up to 9 existing class bases and to construct 14 new class bases, across 10 primary schools, with a view to the majority being delivered for September 2019.

4.3 The estimated cost of this programme is £4.525m. On 7 November 2018, Cabinet approved the allocation of £2.670m in CIL to support the programme, with the balance of funding coming from Section 106 (£1.085m) and basic need capital grant (£0.770m).

4.4 The next phase of school place planning relates to the requirement for additional primary phase provision in Shrewsbury, in particular in the north and west of the town. While there is sufficient capacity for secondary school places in Shrewsbury for the next few years, to meet demand from pupils living in the town, there will be a requirement for increasing this capacity early in the next decade and this will be taken into account as part of the consultation for a new school.

4.5 These projects will draw on the available capital resources from each of the sources listed in paragraph 4.1 above, while seeking to minimise the requirement for borrowing. Further reports will be presented to Cabinet in the new year to secure the necessary financial approvals.

5. School Place Planning – North Shrewsbury

5.1 Sundorne Infant and Harlescott Junior schools form the Haughmond Federation. The current pupil capacities of the schools are 270 and 360 respectively. There are currently three forms of entry in the federation (i.e. 90 pupils), at Reception and Year 3.

5.2 The forecast numbers of known children in the primary catchment areas for Sundorne and Harlescott, through to 2022, indicate that are consistently over 120 in-area children at these points of entry to the schools. There is therefore a requirement to move to four forms on entry i.e. 120 pupils per year group, to meet the future in-area demand for school places. This will require the expansion of existing provision by an additional seven class bases – three in the Infant school and four in the Junior school.

5.3 There are significant restrictions on the Sundorne Infant site on Corndon Crescent, which severely limits the scope for expanding existing provision by three class bases. The site is shared with Shrewsbury Academy's secondary provision (currently split between Corndon Crescent and a separate site on Worcester Road). There are significant revenue budget inefficiencies for both the federation and the academy from operating on split sites.

5.4 Senior leaders in both the federation and academy have indicated a preference to operate on single sites. The large site at Harlescott Junior has capacity to accommodate the co-location of the Sundorne Infant

onto one site. This opens up the opportunity of transferring the Infant school site at Corndon Crescent to the academy so they can move their secondary provision onto a single site.

5.5 In exchange the Council would look to the academy to relinquish their 125-year lease on the Worcester Road site, back to the Council. This in turn opens up the opportunity to look at what to do with this site, one option being disposal and realisation of a capital receipt. If this is not possible, the Council is in a position to consider the disposal of the Infant school site with a view to any capital receipt supporting the cost of the re-location to the Junior site

5.6 Further discussions with the federation, academy and the Regional Schools Commissioner will be progressed in respect of any land swap option. In the event that this presents the most effective way forward, both in educational and financial terms, a further report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration and approval.

6. School Place Planning – West Shrewsbury

6.1 The school place planning programme for 2018/19 includes the reconfiguration of existing provision and addition of new class bases at both Mereside CE Primary and Meole Brace CE Primary. This requirement is a direct consequence of the housing developments on various sites in the south of Shrewsbury. Section 106 education contributions have been secured to fund the capital works at these two schools.

6.2 In the west of Shrewsbury there are significant barriers to expanding provision at Oxon CE Primary, Radbrook Primary, Oakmeadow CE Primary, Woodfield Infant and St George's CE Junior schools. These are primarily in respect of the size of the existing sites and capacity to accommodate additional provision.

6.3 Additional school places are required as a direct consequence of housing developments in this part of Shrewsbury. The primary pupil yield from all of these developments, together with the expectation of further development beyond the current plan period to 2026, indicate the requirement for new provision in this part of Shrewsbury in the form of a new school.

6.4 A Section 106 agreement for land in Bowbrook includes a contribution of land measuring 7 hectares 'which may be used for the Council for future recreation, community and/or education purposes'.

6.5 The land requirement for a new school, to provide the required additional school places, will be dependent on the proposed size of the school being commissioned. For example, a two-form entry primary school – i.e. 60 pupils per year group, 7 year groups, 420 pupils in total – would

require a minimum site of 1.58 hectares, though 2.00 hectares may be more appropriate.

6.6 A more ambitious option, looking to the longer term and with an eye on the further housing developments in the area beyond 2026, could provide for an all through school. This could have provision for 420 primary pupils and 450 secondary pupils. In this case, the minimum land requirement would be 4.68 hectares, so up to 5.00 hectares would need to be set aside.

6.7 The new school could provide for the shared use of playing fields for the wider community and recreation use, while ensuring the necessary safeguarding of pupils.

6.8 An expression on interest was submitted to the Department in October 2018 for a special educational needs and disability (SEND) free school under the Government's Wave 13 free schools programme, with the Bowbrook site identified as a preferred location, given the availability of land. This provides the option for an inclusive school for both mainstream and SEND pupils. If successful, the SEND part of the school would draw down Government funding.

6.9 Local authorities seeking to establish a free school have to go through the free school presumption route. The Department for Education issued updated guidance in May 2018, which details the process to be followed. The process requires local authorities to seek proposals to establish and operate a free school where the need for a new school has been identified.

6.10 Under the presumption process, the local authority is responsible for providing the site for the new school, which in the case of west Shrewsbury has been secured at Bowbrook. The local authority is also responsible for meeting the associated capital and pre/post-opening revenue costs (through the Dedicated Schools Grant). Close liaison with the Department throughout the process is strongly advised, as is engagement with the local office of the Regional Schools Commissioner.

6.11 Before launching a presumption competition, the local authority must carry out a consultation on the proposed new school, as well as undertaking an assessment of the impact of the proposal. A detailed specification is required ahead of the presumption competition being widely marketed. The Department guidance details the prescriptive process for assessing proposals. The process concludes with a recommendation to the Secretary of State from the local authority, who delegates the final decision to the local area Regional Schools Commissioner.

6.12 Subject to the agreement of Cabinet, it is proposed that the first stage of the presumption process for a new school in west Shrewsbury is initiated by launching an informal consultation with key stakeholders on the new

school. This will inform the drawing up of a detailed specification for the school, to bring back to Cabinet in the Spring term for approval ahead of progressing to a presumption competition. Engagement will be made with the Department for Education to secure a designated 'lead contact' to support the presumption process.

7. School Place Planning – Secondary Provision in Shrewsbury

7.1 The current focus and prioritisation for school place planning is on additional provision in primary schools. In the next few years these numbers will move through the education system into the secondary phase, mirroring the national trend. The main pressures in Shropshire will be felt in Shrewsbury early in the next decade, with the capacity in a number of the town's four secondary schools requiring expansion. Secondary school places in Shrewsbury are forecast to meet in-area demand for the next few years.

7.2 Discussions have been taking place with senior secondary school leaders in the town over the last year. In partnership with these key stakeholders, it is proposed to develop plans for meeting the future demand for secondary school places in Shrewsbury, with a view to bringing these plans back to Cabinet in the new year, including the option to consider an all-through school as noted in 6.6.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Nick Bardsley
Local Member All Council members for Shrewsbury town wards and those wards bordering the town
Appendices