

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOL PLACES STRATEGY (SPS) 2021 - 2026 AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Cabinet Date	24 March 2021
Cabinet Member	Cllr Patrick Molyneux, Cabinet Member for Economy, Education and Skills
Key Decision	Yes
Purpose of Report	To consider and approve the updated Gloucestershire School Places Strategy (SPS) 2021 - 2026 and its Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan will in turn inform future school capital programme priorities.
Recommendations	It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy (SPS) 2021 - 2026 and its Implementation Plan
Reasons for recommendations	To agree the strategy and policy framework for the assessment of sufficient school places in Gloucestershire to ensure the Council meets its statutory duties.
Resource Implications	Whilst this report and decision does not commit any capital resource funding directly, the proposed implementation plan will be used to inform future school capital programme basic need priorities. The school capital programme and individual schemes will be subject to separate individual decisions.
Background Documents	School Places Strategy 2018 – 2023 Cabinet Report 18 Dec 2018 on the School Places Strategy 2018-2023
Statutory Authority	Gloucestershire County Council's statutory duty under the Education Act 2011 Directors of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services statutory responsibility to promote a diverse supply of strong schools, including by encouraging good schools to expand, and where there is a need for a new school, seeking proposals for an Academy or Free School. Statutory guidance April 2013.
Divisional Councillor	All

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Timeline	On-going

Background

1. Gloucestershire County Council, like all local authorities, has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient local school places are provided for all children and young people of statutory school age in its area. It is a commissioner of places rather than being a direct provider – working in partnership with providers and stakeholders to meet current and future demand across the county.
2. A key objective of the Council Strategy for 2019 – 2022 is to work with schools to make sure children have access to a good quality education that prepares them for adulthood, all of which will be supported by developing and delivering a School Places Strategy.
3. Cabinet approved the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2018 – 2023 in December 2018 and this report provides an update of this strategy for the period 2021 – 2026.
4. The Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026 is a key framework document for the Council in considering any statutory proposals for changes to school organisation, including the commissioning of new schools, and will inform future capital investment priorities.

School Places Strategy

5. The Gloucestershire School Places Strategy (SPS) 2021 – 2026 sets out the latest context and background for the Council's strategic planning of school places and the issues that impact on places and demand across the Local Authority area.
6. The SPS provides the latest overview of demographic information for the county and includes a more detailed analysis of each school planning area, including historic trends and future projections. School planning areas align to the geographical locations of primary and secondary schools across the county and are agreed by the Department for Education (DfE). This information informs priorities for school place planning in the short (1-2 years), medium (3-5 years) and longer (5-10 years) term and will inform capital investment priorities moving forward.
7. The SPS and Implementation Plan can be found at Appendix A. A summary position statement and more detailed analysis are provided for each of the planning areas and can be found in Section D of the Strategy.
8. The SPS Implementation Plan at Section E provides a summary overview of the latest identified need across Gloucestershire and will inform future capital programme priorities for the commissioning of additional places and new school provision.

Main Considerations

9. The SPS contains proposals for, and focusses on, the continuing increase in supply of places across both the primary and now secondary phase of mainstream school provision. Moving forward, there may be the need to review and rationalise

provision or reduce places where there are significant surpluses or where organisational change is needed to maintain and improve outcomes for children. The local authority has a robust process for assessing need and commissioning sufficient places to ensure we meet our statutory obligations in providing the right number of places in the right locations. This is further evidenced by the high percentage of parents/carers getting their preferred choice of school at both primary and secondary level. The local authority continues to achieve value for money in the delivery of capital works to provide new places and effectively manages school place planning in a very complex operating landscape.

Primary Provision

10. Since 2008 the Council has provided over 5000 additional primary places of which over 700 (or 23 forms of entry) were for Reception age children alone, to meet the increase in population arising from demographic growth, birth rate, migration and new housing. The growth continues and this SPS highlights the anticipated demand for further additional places across both phases in the short, medium and longer term and also where demand is able to be met from existing provision. This SPS will be kept under review and updated biannually.
11. Alongside the provision of new primary schools in new housing development areas and the expansion of existing schools required to meet the demand for places in existing communities, there will be a need to keep under review the admission numbers in schools and, where appropriate, seek to increase admissions at schools where a temporary admission number breach may suffice. Any formal changes to admission numbers will be in consultation with schools/academy trusts and will be proposed as part of the annual round of consultation on admission arrangements. Own admission authority schools may, in consultation with the council, also consider a change to their admission numbers as part of their own review of admissions policy.
12. Commissioning of additional places includes new provision to meet basic need in existing communities and to accommodate additional pupils generated from housing developments identified in the Housing Audits and local Core Strategies - developed in partnership with the six District Councils in Gloucestershire.
13. Where there is a significant enlargement, relocation or new school provision, or where an extension to the age range of a school is proposed, statutory proposals and individual decisions will be required. The Council or individual schools and academies will undertake the statutory process of consultation with individuals, stakeholders and organisations that may be affected by the proposal, alongside the timescale for determining the admission arrangements.
14. It is anticipated that new primary schools will be required, to meet demand from strategic developments still to come forward and subject to house building in Bishops Cleeve, Winchcombe, Fiddington (Tewksbury), Chesterton (Cirencester), Stonehouse, Uckington and Hesters Way (NW Cheltenham). Looking to the future any new development sites brought forward as part of the Local Plan process will need to be assessed on the basis that a new primary school may be required.

Secondary Provision

15. For several years, secondary schools have been collectively managing surplus places as numbers were low. Numbers are now starting to climb as the growth in the number of pupils from the primary phase feeds through. The impact on secondary school places very much depends on the extent of local demographic growth and new housing proposed in a schools designated area. Some secondary schools will only feel a moderate impact in the short to medium term as numbers take up surplus places - whereas in areas where a significant amount of housing is planned or where there has been significant demographic growth through an increase in the birth rate or inward migration, the impact will be much greater and there will be a need for expansion and possibly new school provision. To date over 2000 additional secondary places, of which over 400 (or 13 forms of entry) have been for year 7 pupils, have been provided predominantly in the more urban areas of the county.
16. Looking forward, in addition to the new secondary school planned in Leckhampton, there will be a need for a further 6FE secondary school as part of the new Uckington development in NW Cheltenham and with the continuing expansion of housing in the Gloucester surrounds, a new 6FE secondary school ideally located in the south of the city.

Specialist Provision

17. Separately from this SPS, an analysis of specialist need has been undertaken by the Specialist Commissioning Team to determine the expected need and growth of specialist school provision through development of the independent sector and new maintained Special School facilities. That work is being managed separately from mainstream provision and aligned to the proposals coming out of the recent High Needs Strategy consultation and the level of funding in the High Needs Block. To date there has been very limited funding made available by government for SEN basic need. The Council has approved capital funding for the delivery of a new 75 place Special School for children and young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs, which is scheduled to open in September 2022. The Council has also approved capital funding for providing additional places at existing maintained and academy special schools to meet rising demand for places and reduce high needs spend on independent placements.

Options

18. (1) To approve the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026 and its Implementation Plan which will then inform future basic need capital allocation programme priorities.

(2) To approve the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026 and its Implementation Plan, with any amendments agreed by Cabinet.

(3) To not approve the strategy
This would mean that the Council would be unable to plan strategically and would have to consider the need for school places in isolation and on a reactive basis.

Risks and assumptions

19. This SPS provides a detailed analysis of the latest demographic trends impacting on the supply of school places across Gloucestershire. This information is based on birth data, current school population trends, an assessment of inward/outward migration, parental choice in applying for school places and the impact of new housing. All these factors can change over time and therefore need to be kept under constant review to ensure the most up to date position is known.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

20. The following are risks for the Council if the SPS is not approved and the proposed work cannot be progressed :-
- a) The Council will be failing in its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for the children and young people of Gloucestershire.
 - b) Failure to provide sufficient school places in the right locations and at the right time to meet the demand arising in local communities and in areas of new housing. This will have a direct impact on a parents' right to express a preference for and be allocated a local school place for their child. This would also be contrary to the council's policy of providing local provision for local children – with an on-going additional transport liability being created for the council each year as more children become entitled to support with home to school transport if places are provided away from where they are needed and over the statutory walking distance for children.
 - c) The SPS has identified the short, medium and longer term priorities for the provision of school places, which in turn will inform the Council's capital investment priorities and need to allocate resources to ensure the effective delivery of new provision in a strategically planned and timely way. Without an effective strategic framework the council is at risk of responding to changes in the school population by providing reactive, short term and ad-hoc provision at increased cost.
 - d) If new school places cannot be provided in key areas, then this will have a direct impact on the housing strategies proposed across the County and future economic growth of Gloucestershire.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

21. The following risks will need to be considered if the SPS is approved:
- a) Risk 1 - Changing patterns of need are not accurately reflected in pupil forecasts

Mitigation - the Local Authority will refresh the pupil forecasts annually, using information from NHS Digital birth data, early years data, admission trends and updated school capacity information.

b) Risk 2 - There is insufficient capital funding to deliver additional provision

Mitigation - the council will continue to review and update requirements for submission to the DfE as part of the annual Schools Capacity (SCAP) Return, which informs future annual capital allocations. The council will continue to negotiate Section 106 (S106) / Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) developer contributions and ensure contributions are based on latest Pupil Product Ratios, as assessed in 2018 and 2019.

Annual returns including school capacities, changes in demographics, housing build rates and migration inform the Department for Education Basic Need allocations and negotiated S106/CIL contributions required to adequately resource programme requirements. The Council has successfully secured Basic Need allocations to 2021 and will continue to negotiate S106/CIL contributions where required. However if S106/CIL contributions are not secured then there will be significant pressure on the Basic Need funding available and not all priorities will be able to be funded.

c) Risk 3 - The council does not own land on which to site new school provision

Mitigation - the council will carry out land searches, and continue negotiations with developers for land contributions. The council will consider the longer term needs of development proposals arising from the 2050 vision.

Land will be acquired either through negotiation or by use of statutory powers and in line with the County Council's Property Acquisition Policy.

Equality implications

22. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been completed. This proposal does not discriminate against any of the protected groups and actively seeks to ensure equality of opportunity to improve outcomes for all children and young people. Each separate proposal for change will also have its own assessment.

Data Protection Assessment (DPIA) implications

23. A DPIA is not required for this decision because it does not involve the collection, storage or use of personal data.

Social value implications

24. The Council will seek to use the SPS and its Implementation Plan to maximise the additional social, economic and environmental benefits to the local area by procuring goods and services above and beyond the benefits of merely the goods and services themselves.

Consultation feedback

25. Consultation has taken place with the Lead Cabinet Member, service areas and other organisations where appropriate in the development of this strategy.

Officer Recommendations

26. Officers recommend that Cabinet adopts Option 1 and approves the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026 and its Implementation Plan.
27. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places and in approving the School Places Strategy, this will enable the Council to plan effectively and in a timely way to ensure school places are provided where they are required and at the right time. The infrastructure needs arising from new strategic housing developments will be incorporated into the Implementation Plan and ensure sufficient school places are made available for new housing communities and enable advance planning for Vision 2050. This will ensure the Council's limited capital resources will be used in a proactive and cost effective way and will minimise the potential for additional transport costs.
28. If the Strategy is not approved then there is a risk that the planning of school places will be reactive rather than planned strategically in advance using the most up to date pupil forecasts. This would increase costs as more short term temporary arrangements may be needed in advance of planning permanent facilities; children may not be able to attend a school in their locality due to the places not being available at the right time, resulting in increased transport costs and adversely impacting on social cohesion and children not being able to attend schools with their neighbours and friends. Additionally if there is no effective or approved strategy for planning and commissioning school places, the council would be open to challenge as we would be unable to evidence need for places when required.
29. The Draft Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026, has been updated using the latest school capacity information, birth data and latest pupil projections arising from demographic trends and future house building proposals to provide the best possible position statement on the demand for school places across the County. If approved, the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy 2021 – 2026 and Implementation Plan will continue to inform future capital investment priorities for the Council in order that the Council can meet its statutory obligations to provide sufficient school places in a timely way, across Gloucestershire.

Performance Management/Follow-up

30. This Strategy and its associated Implementation Plan will be kept under review by the Head of Commissioning for Learning. The Implementation Plan will inform the future Schools Capital Investment Programme from 2021/2022 onwards.