

Report to Cllr N Jupp, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills

November 2022

Review of primary age provision across the Worthing and Durrington area

Report by Mr P Wagstaff, Assistant Director (Education and Skills)

Electoral divisions: Broadwater; Cissbury; Durrington & Salvington; Goring; Northbrook; Tarring; Worthing East; Worthing Pier; Worthing West

Summary

The County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient primary and secondary school places for all children who need a place. The number of pupil places needed is reviewed annually and pupil projections for the Worthing and Durrington locality of schools show there is a significant surplus provision of places at primary schools in the borough. It is incumbent on the County Council to ensure efficient use of public funds and to ensure that there is sufficient surplus provision to allow an element of parental choice but not to the extent that this leads to inefficient use of public funds or a level of surplus that compromises the schools' financial sustainability.

An excess of vacant places in schools creates a number of financial challenges, particularly as the school funding model is based on the number of pupils actually on roll. It has been acknowledged that the Worthing and Durrington planning areas have a significant surplus in primary school places and, as such, is increasing financial and organisational challenges in some schools. Primary schools in Worthing and Durrington have approached the County Council to discuss opportunities to reduce this surplus across the community.

Following extensive engagement with all schools in the locality a mutually agreeable set of proposals has been developed which plans a phased reduction of the current surplus places by 953 between 2024 and 2027. This includes a reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN) in some primary schools, potential removal of some temporary accommodation and consolidation of provision in one area through the creation of an all through primary school from separate Infant and Junior schools. The proposals also aim to use some of the surplus provision to create additional specialist provision. This still leaves sufficient surplus to manage any planned building developments within the district

Additional proposals for three schools Lyndhurst Infant, Chesswood Junior and Springfield Infant are included as part of the options for future management of places and continuity of education and will be set out in the consultation exercise.

It is now proposed to launch a public consultation to seek views on the proposed solutions to help remove surplus primary school places across the Worthing and Durrington area.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills is asked to approve: -

- (1) That the County Council launches a public consultation on proposed solutions to reduce the number of primary school places across the Worthing and Durrington area, with effect from September 2024 entry, as set out in section 2 of the report.
- (2) That authority is delegated to the Assistant Director (Education and Skills), in consultation with the cabinet member, to determine, following an analysis of the outcomes of the public consultation, whether the reduction in the Published Admission Numbers of the schools listed in paragraph 2.2 should proceed and to confirm the revised numbers to meet the deadline of 31st January 2023 for implementation in September 2024.
- (3) That where the proposed solution means a significant change with respect of the re-organisation of provision between existing infant and junior schools, the authority in 2) above includes action to seek cabinet member approval for consulting on formalising such changes and making representation to the Department for Education.

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 The County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient primary and secondary school places for all children who need a place. The number of pupil places needed is reviewed annually and the requirements across the county are set out in the annual update of the [Planning School Places document](#). Since 2019-2020 pupil projections for the Worthing and Durrington locality of schools suggest there is a significant surplus provision of places at primary schools in the borough, due in part to a declining birth rate, which is leading to fewer children of starting school age requiring a school place.
- 1.2 In October 2021, Worthing and Durrington primary schools had 1,510 surplus primary school places across 22 primary, infant or junior schools and academies. This showed that the Worthing area had a 15.5% or 28 form entry (FE) excess of available places and the Durrington area a 17.5% (17FE) excess compared to pupils in the area at the time. Since that time, primary admissions for those starting school in September 2022 suggest a further decline in pupil numbers which will lead to a small number of schools facing increased financial risks. This is because school budgets are based on actual pupil numbers, through an annual census of school numbers. Where schools have fewer pupils than the capacity allows this results in them receiving less funding. Due to infant class size constraints this can lead to schools still having to incur expenditure for staffing and general operational costs which may not be fully covered through the budget based on pupil numbers.

- 1.3 In addition to the current surplus, the Department for Education (DfE) currently has plans to open a new 420 place primary Free School at Titnore Lane, West Durrington (called Bluebell Primary) and this will further exacerbate this surplus and the challenge facing schools and the local authority. The DfE have indicated that the new school is unlikely to open before September 2024.
- 1.4 The challenges that surplus provision of this magnitude creates includes:
- Instability in pupil numbers in schools and often with admissions exceeding the capacity of one class of 30 pupils but well below that which would fill two classes (60 pupils). This leads to financial challenges due to infant class sizes and the need to employ an additional teacher when numbers rise above 30, but without the finance to fully fund two teachers
 - Regular internal re-organisation of school teaching and class structures affecting continuity of organisation and stability of provision and unsettling parent confidence
 - Changes in staffing and staff reductions, particularly with regard to the numbers and changes in support staff, thereby reducing schools' flexibility to provide the support required for those children in need
 - Reduced management structures through the financial need to combine roles such as Deputy Headteacher and Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) due to limited funding
 - The cumulative impact of these pressures, including changes in structures, staffing, reduced flexibility to recruit and retain specialist staffing, along with frequent changes in the school's organisation, impacts on the school's standards and quality, but with more limited access to the resources they require to support improvement.
- 1.5 Schools have approached the local authority for help in resolving the surplus provision across the area as it was recognised that unilateral action taken by individual schools in reducing their Published Admission Numbers (PAN) would only create further challenges for other schools in the area. Therefore, engagement has been taking place since December 2021 between officers of the County Council, headteachers and the school governing bodies across the Worthing and Durrington area to discuss and propose options for reducing the surplus. As an outcome of this ongoing engagement a number of planned changes in admission numbers and school organisation are proposed, with effect from September 2024 entry. These proposals would reduce the surplus by 953 places from 2024-2027 (63%) leaving 557 surplus places (10%) across the locality. This is in line with best practice, as research by the National Audit Office in 2013 indicated that local authorities are encouraged to have no less than a 5% of surplus provision available. This allows greater opportunities for parental preference to be met and allows for some in-year movement of pupils and late arrivals.
- 1.6 These potential changes will be the subject of public consultation, in accordance with Department for Education guidance, seeking views and comments from interested parties and assist in further shaping the proposals.
- 1.7 Reviewing pupil place provision across the Worthing and Durrington area also creates the opportunity to provide some additional capacity for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the form of further Special Support Centres (SSCs) to provide continuity from Key Stage 1 to 2 and additional locally provided alternative provision for primary pupils. The creation of additional SEND capacity is something most schools have commented that

they would welcome as an area of development as part of the wider proposals for Worthing and Durrington if opportunities allow. The proposals will allow for SSC provision to continue through both infant and junior phases of schools whereas at present continuity for children in SSCs is not always available locally.

- 1.8 As part of the process for managing pupil numbers in schools across the County, each year, where necessary, the County Council’s Admissions Team undertake a consultation with schools across a locality on any required changes in the Published Admission Number. This could be to either increase or decrease the pupil numbers (via changing the PAN) at a particular school or schools to ensure places available more closely match demand. This consultation in accordance with DfE guidelines, needs to take place for some six weeks during the 1st November to 31st January period and, following any comments received from schools and interested parties, any changes to the PAN are then confirmed by the Assistant Director (Education and Skills) by the 31st January deadline date. This means any agreed revisions to schools PAN are made known to parents applying for places in the following autumn term for the next academic year. As part of the proposals to reduce the surplus places in the Worthing and Durrington area changes to PAN in some schools are proposed and are set out in paragraph 2.2.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills is asked to agree the launch of a public consultation to seek views on the proposals for reducing the surplus places across the Worthing and Durrington area. The solutions proposed include reducing the PAN of some schools in the area and reorganisation through amalgamation.

The proposals to be consulted on are as follows: -

2.2 **Schools where it is proposed to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) in accordance with the process described in paragraph 1.8**

It is proposed to reduce the PAN at a number of schools, meaning that these schools would have fewer available places to accept new starters from September 2024 entry. This will reduce the pupil numbers at the schools over time as the reduced PAN works through each year group.

Name of School	Current PAN	Proposed PAN	Number of reduced places
Thomas A Becket Infant	180	150	90
Thomas A Becket Junior	192	160	128*
			* PAN would begin to reduce from 2027 as the reduced PAN in the Infant school worked through to the Junior School
Field Place Infant School	120	90	90
			Sparkle Academy Trust (based at Orchard Junior School) have also expressed an interest in academising the school with the reduced PAN
Durrington Infant School	90	60	90

Durrington Junior School	90	60	120* *PAN would begin to reduce from 2027 as the reduced PAN in the infant school worked through to the Junior School
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As a result of reducing the PAN at Durrington Infant and Junior schools it would mean the temporary units currently required to accommodate pupils would be redundant over time so could be removed over a phased period. This would create greater external space and a reduction in maintenance costs to the school and local authority.

2.3 **Reorganisation of three schools – Lyndhurst, Chesswood and Springfield**

This proposal would involve Lyndhurst Infant School amalgamating with Chesswood Junior School as a new all-through primary school on the current Chesswood Junior School site. The newly amalgamated school would have a PAN of 120 which would also include an overall a reduction of 330 places compared to the existing two schools.

This would reduce surplus provision and bring about better utilisation of the current Chesswood Junior School site through the closure of Lyndhurst and the transfer of the pupils to the Chesswood site. This would require some capital investment into the Junior School site to provide appropriate key stage 1 and early years facilities and also to create an SSC. Reconfiguration to an all-through primary will allow for SSC provision for children across the primary age range at one school. The proposals would be to create a new 21 place Primary Special Support Centre for Social Communication Need on the Chesswood Junior School site, this will incorporate the 9 places currently available at Lyndhurst Infant school and allow for continuity through into Key Stage 2.

Springfield Infant school is also currently a feeder school for Chesswood Junior. Should the amalgamation of Lyndhurst and Chesswood schools proceed it is proposed that the Springfield site would remain but will be a part of this all-through provision but across the two sites of Chesswood and Springfield. This would provide greater choice for parents in being able to access Key Stage 1 provision at either a Key Stage 1 and early years annex, or a place at a site with both key stages. It would enable the whole school to ensure consistency of high-quality provision across the early years and Key Stage 1 and therefore minimise issues associated with transition from Key Stage 1 to 2. It would also ensure that children from the Springfield site had automatic access to places in Key Stage 2 at the all-through primary school without having to go through a separate admissions process.

The consultation will also seek views on a proposal from the governing body of Springfield Infant School for it to remain as a separate infant school. This option is not preferred by the Education Service as it would not benefit from the opportunities to secure consistency across the early years and Key Stage 1 as part of a single school with single governance, overall leadership, and common policies and approaches to supporting teaching, learning and children’s experiences. It also risks fragmentation as all schools move towards the government’s ambition for all schools to be a part of a strong Multi Academy

Trust (MAT) partnership by 2030 and risks the potential of the two schools moving into different MATs.

2.4 **Creation of additional provision for children with SEND**

The review of place provision across the Worthing and Durrington area also provides the opportunity to contribute to addressing the growing need for provision for children with SEND.

Both Downsbrook and Whytemead Primary School's buildings are under capacity. The Multi-Academy Trust which operates both schools has suggested reducing the PAN at Whytemead and is willing to explore the creation of an SSC for children with additional needs at either the Downsbrook or Whytemead sites. Further discussion with the Multi-Academy Trust will be needed to determine which is the appropriate site and the number of pupil places that would be created. It is proposed that this would be a primary SSC offering Alternative Provision (AP) for primary aged pupils with SEND who are permanently excluded, thereby creating provision embedded in mainstream education. This is in line with the County Council's developing Alternative Provision Strategy which forms part of the Council's [Education and Learning Strategy 2022-25](#), which is due for implementation in January 2023, and in line with the Government's [SEND Green Paper](#). Some capital work would be required in order to create the SSC.

Should this proposal proceed there would be no change to the PAN at Downsbrook Primary but the PAN at Whytemead Primary school would reduce from 45 to 30 leading to a reduction in 105 places.

2.5 **Schools where no changes are proposed**

There are a number of schools where it was felt that no changes are required or are being sought by the relevant responsible body. These schools would continue as now with no change in admission numbers or in the character of the schools. The reasons for this include the fact that some schools have accommodation which is fully utilised, so there is no spare capacity and future projections do not suggest any change in this. Some are Church schools or Academies and the Diocese or Multi-Academy Trust have not requested any change. The schools where no change is proposed are: -

School	PAN
Bramber Primary School	30
Broadwater CE Primary School	60
Elm Grove Primary	30
English Martyrs RC Primary School	30
Goring CE Primary School	60
Hawthorns Primary	30
Heene CE Primary School	60
Laurels Primary School (academy)	30
St Mary's RC Primary School	30
Vale Primary School	90
West Park Primary School	120

2.6 Following the closure of the public consultation period, any comments on the proposed reductions in PAN will be considered by the Assistant Director

(Education and Skills). Following this consideration, if it is determined that the reductions in PAN should proceed this will be confirmed, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, by 31 January 2023 for implementation in September 2024.

- 2.7 Responses and comments received on the proposed reorganisation of Chesswood Junior, Lyndhurst Infant and Springfield Infant Schools will be considered and reported to the Cabinet Member to determine next steps. If it is proposed that changes or the amalgamation of any of the schools should proceed this will require a Cabinet Member decision to agree the publication of statutory proposals in accordance with DfE Guidance on [Making Significant Changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to Maintained Schools](#).
- 2.8 Any consultation arising from the publication of statutory proposals would last for a minimum of four weeks and the Local Authority would be the decision maker on the proposals. This would be timetabled for the Spring Term 2023 with an expected decision in April 2023 to enable implementation of the changes in September 2024.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

3.1 Closure of several schools

Removing 953 surplus places equates to the closure of at least the equivalent of two 420 place primary schools, The closure of schools is a highly sensitive issue and whilst in some cases this could be an appropriate alternative, such action in this case would likely generate strong feelings. Since the reduction in surplus places can be achieved without the need for multiple school closures it has been discounted as an option.

3.2 Reorganisation of additional schools through amalgamation

Consideration was given to the option of amalgamating each of the separate infant and junior schools (Durrington Infant and Durrington Junior; Thomas A Becket Infant and Thomas A Becket Junior and Field Place Infant and Orchards Junior to create 3 new primary schools. This would require significant capital investment and, in some cases, the resulting schools would be extremely large as a primary school and there was no support from the governing bodies concerned to explore that particular option at the current time.

3.3 Alternative reorganisation of Lyndhurst, Chesswood and Springfield schools – Combine all the schools on one site

The option to relocate both Lyndhurst and Springfield Infant Schools on to the Chesswood Junior School site was considered. However, an initial site assessment advised the Chesswood site area would not meet the DfE guidance on school site areas required to have all three schools relocated and so this option has been discounted.

3.4 Do nothing

This option has been discounted as the schools have approached the County Council to explore how the surplus can be removed. This would have an adverse financial impact on the schools concerned.

- 3.5 The options covered above as alternatives not currently being proposed will remain under consideration whilst the outcome of the consultation is awaited and the analysis undertaken.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The public consultation will take place online via the West Sussex County Council '[Your Voice Engagement Hub](#)' website, for 6 weeks, in accordance with DfE guidance. This will enable comments to be received from school staff, governing bodies, parents, pupils, local community groups and individuals, Members, MPs, local councils, Church Dioceses, leaders of early years facilities, community groups, unions and professional associations, and other interested parties. Whilst online responses are encouraged, as that reduces the need for data entry of responses, the option of written responses will be available. All responses are collated via the software available to ensure data analysis can be automated. The opportunity for representations to be made by using public access PCs e.g. through local libraries will also ensure the widest opportunity to gain comments on the proposals. Schools will also be encouraged to offer support to families who they feel may require additional help in making representations.
- 4.2 A briefing session was organised for the Local Members for Broadwater; Cissbury; Durrington and Salvington; Goring; Northbrook; Tarring; Worthing East; Worthing Pier; Worthing West during October to ensure they were fully briefed on the proposals and had opportunities to ask questions.
- 4.3 Ongoing engagement has been taking place with the Headteachers and Chairs of governing bodies of all the schools in the Worthing and Durrington area since December 2021 to discuss options for reducing the surplus. In addition, all Headteachers and Chairs of Governors were invited to attend two briefing sessions in both December 2021 and July 2022.

5 Finance

Revenue consequences

- 5.1 The proposed removal of surplus provision through reduced pupil numbers will require a phased approach by schools to manage any staff reduction or changes. With natural wastage and staff turnover, it is expected that schools will ensure staff retention, wherever possible, is achieved.
- 5.2 Furthermore, the opportunity to secure agreement with governing bodies agreements from across Worthing and Durrington to implement a 'Staffing Protocol', as has been the case in previous reorganisations, should help to reduce the need and costs of potential redundancies and enable any surplus staff arising through phased reduction in pupil numbers in some schools to be considered for redeployment within the area.
- 5.3 The particular proposals for reorganisation across Lyndhurst Infant, Springfield Infant and Chesswood Junior are expected to require consideration of staff redeployment. Only one headteacher would be required if the school operates as one school across two sites but staffing structures and senior leadership structures will need to be agreed with the new Governing Body. Revenue costs will therefore need to be calculated when decisions are made about the organisation of those schools.
- 5.4 Durrington Infant and Junior Schools – removal of hutted classrooms estimated at £900,000 over a phased period. This is revenue spend and will need to be funded from the revenue budget.

5.5 Capital consequences

5.6 To determine a more accurate assessment of capital costs of any proposals approved for implementation feasibility studies will be required and will involve a thorough analysis of cost, phasing and impact against each of the projects both through feasibility and then detailed design.

5.7 The current estimated costs for fulfilling the work required to implement the plan, should it be approved following consultation, and to reduce surplus provision by 953 places whilst still retaining sufficient surplus to cope with planned increases in demand and offer parental choice, is set out below:

- Downsbrook Academy/Whytemead Academy - Internal remodelling to create a SSC (Alternative Provision) facility in existing accommodation estimated at £680,000 using SEND Capital funds
- Lyndhurst Infants – No capital works expected and a potential capital receipt
- Chesswood Junior - Refurbishment of surplus junior accommodation to provide infant (KS1) accommodation estimated at £1.5m funded from the County Council's Capital Development Fund
- Springfield Infants – No capital works expected.

5.8 These costs will need to be developed further with input from Property Services and will be funded through the existing Capital Programme.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Insufficient Capital to implement changes under consideration	Most of the capital works can be phased over time e.g. hut removals. Some capital receipts may be achieved. All capital proposals will require separate business case submission and consideration against priorities and value for money
The DfE will open Bluebell Primary and create 420 extra places across the area	This is expected to happen, although not before September 2024, and therefore requires action taken to remove other surplus places.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

7.1 There are positive implications of the proposed changes with respect of supporting more local SEND and Alternative Provision to meet the needs of some pupils within their community which currently are not being met. The contribution of some changes including the removal of some temporary accommodation will support the Council's policy on carbon reduction. There are no direct implications arising from the proposals on climate change, crime and disorder or public health. The consultation will allow officers to explore further where any implications may arise and these will be detailed in any future proposals.

- 7.2 The arrangements for consultation are in compliance with DfE guidance. The consideration of the equality duty will be applied both to the process of undertaking the consultation and the analysis of feedback to ensure that due consideration is given to the needs of persons with protected characteristics and the requirements of the public sector equality duty. The social value of the changes and their impact on local communities will form part of the consideration of proposals in light of the outcome of the consultation.

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Background Papers - None