

4 December 2018

ITEM: 10

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Update on the Free School Programme

Wards and communities affected:

All

Key Decision:

Key

Report of: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Place and Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services

Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Interim Assistant Director Learning, Inclusion and Skills and Detlev Munster, Assistant Director of Property

Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Place and Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services

This report is Public

Executive Summary

Thurrock is becoming a place of choice to live, and demand for school places continues to increase. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are enough school places to meet demand and therefore needs to be proactive in ensuring we have high quality school accommodation that provides choice for parents and supports the educational outcomes for our children.

A Council priority is to increase choice of pupil school places by supporting the development of new schools within the borough. This is done by way of supporting Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in their bids to the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA). The Council cannot build new schools itself.

This report seeks to provide an update on the status of the free school programme including temporary accommodation prior to the opening of the free schools where required.

1. Recommendations;

- 1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and provides comment on the Free Schools Programme progress to date and the partnership working with the ESFA;**
- 1.2 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the update in relation to the Thames Park Free School**

1.3 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the Councils plans for temporary accommodation at Orsett Heath Academy and Thames Park prior to the opening of the Free Schools

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure that suitable and sufficient school places are available in Thurrock for every child of school age whose parents wish them to have one. However, local authorities are limited by statute and cannot build new schools.
- 2.2 The successful Free Schools include:
- 2.3 Orsett Heath Academy - mainstream, 8FE, 1,200 place secondary with a sports specialism. The new school would be part of the South West Essex Community Education Trust.
- 2.4 Thames Park - 6FE, 900 place secondary. The new school would be part of the Osborne Trust. A site is yet to be identified for this school and will be the subject of a separate Cabinet Report.
- 2.5 Treetops Special Free School; special, all-through school with 140 places for pupils between the ages of 4-16 catering for Moderate Learning Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Condition.
- 2.6 The council continues to work with the ESFA to support the delivery of the free schools within the borough.
- 2.7 The secondary school application round closed on 31st October 2018, Thurrock School Admissions team received 2,385 applications for a secondary school place. Across all Thurrock secondary schools we have a total Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 2,142 available places. We will therefore have a shortfall of 240 places come September 2019.
- 2.8 It is important to note that the delivery of the new schools is extremely important if we are to ensure we meet our statutory responsibility to provide all Thurrock children a secondary school place.
- 2.9 The new Pupil Place Plan 2018-22 has now been released. Indicative forecasts based on the autumn school census data show there is a significant demand for pupil places from September 2019 onwards.
- 2.10 The Council is keen to build more new 'good' schools in deprived areas and ensure new schools are located geographically where they are required.
- 2.11 The new Pupil Place Plan 2018-22 indicates that the schools planning area under the most pressure is in the 'central area' of the borough, therefore by building the new schools in Grays this will help resolve this forthcoming pressure.

3. Free School Sites

Two Thurrock owned sites have been formerly agreed for disposal to the ESFA and Heads of Terms have been agreed and been signed off.

- 3.1 Orsett Heath Academy (Secondary) - Land lying to the North West of Stanford Road, Grays
- 3.2 Treetops Special School - Former site of Torrells County Secondary School For Girls, Buxton Road, Grays
- 3.3 Thames Park – land in private ownership has been secured by the ESFA in order to deliver the new free school. Heads of Terms have recently been agreed and signed off.

4. Temporary accommodation prior to free schools opening

- 4.1 The ESFA have advised that the new free schools will not be fully opened for three years, although the schools may be in a position to open in phases from year two of the build programme.
- 4.2 Orsett Heath Academy – ESFA have agreed that the school can open in temporary accommodation. The Council is working in partnership with both the ESFA and the SWECT academy trust (South West Essex Community Education Trust) to identify a suitable location close to where the new school will be constructed. An estimated budget of £3M is required, options for location of classrooms and associated facilities options are being investigated. A separate cabinet report is to be presented to cabinet this month to seek approval for the funding from basic need. It is envisaged that this will provide a permanent structure instead of temporary demountable classrooms, and will strengthen the relationship with the Rugby Club and the link between academic and sporting achievement. A total of 120 (4FE) year 7 places will be provided to meet the demand in September 2019. Once the new school is built, the pupils will move to the new school.
- 4.3 Thames Park – the Council is working with the ESFA to seek agreement for the school to open in temporary accommodation to provide (4 FE) year 7 schools places for September 2019. Options for temporary accommodation are being investigated. If the ESFA are in agreement to the new school opening, the pupils will move to the new school once the school is in a position to open.

5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 5.1 If the Cabinet do not approve the budget of £3M to develop the classrooms and associated facilities for Orsett Heath Free School, the Council will need to identify other options to provide bulge classrooms for the additional places required for September 2019. In addition, if the ESFA do not approve the new Thames Park Free school opening in temporary accommodation, the

Council will need to look to expand alternative secondary schools within the borough, although there are very limited options to do so.

- 5.2 In relation to Lower Thames Crossing, there is uncertainty at this stage of the overall impact on the Orsett Heath site. Further consideration will need to be undertaken whilst the proposal for the new crossing is being further developed. Initial discussions with Highways England (HE) suggest a willingness to amend the Lower Thames Crossing red line boundary to accommodate the school. This would be a matter for the ESFA and HE to progress.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 To provide an update on the progress of the Free School Programme to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. And to note the demand for 240 schools places for September 2019.

7. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 7.1 This report is to be reviewed by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to provide a progress update.

8. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 8.1 This will enable the Council to continue to meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient pupil places under the Education Act 2006.

9. Implications

9.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Management Accountant

Additional accommodation required for increased pupil numbers will be funded from the future capital basic need budget. Once in-depth feasibility studies have been undertaken, funding requirements will be quantified and confirmed. This will include any funds applied for and successfully obtained from the Education Funding Agency, under the Targeted Basic Need Programme.

9.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal – Social Care

The Education Act 1996 s 14 imposes a duty on the Council to ensure the provision of sufficient schools for the provision of primary and secondary education in their area. S26 of the Children and Family Act imposes a duty to make arrangements, jointly with the NHS Commissioning Boards for the provision of education (as well as health and social care) for children and young people with SEN or disability. There is an additional duty to keep the latter under review (s27). (Lucinda Bell, Education Lawyer)

9.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

Whilst there are no direct diversity and equality implications, the provision of these services will help to tackle inequality and social exclusion. The procurement process will follow responsibilities as set out within The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty, with due regard to advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The procurement approach set out in this report will enable the Council to continue to meet its statutory duty under the Education Act 2006, to ensure that suitable and sufficient places are available in Thurrock for every child of school age whose parents wish them to have one, whilst ensuring value for money.

9.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)**

None.

10. **Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- Pupil Place Planning Document 2018-2022

11. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Authors:

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