

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

27 July 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 – Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Heena Makwana (Chairman), Becky Haggart (Vice-Chairman), Philip Corthorne, Kamal Kaur, Tony Gill, Peter Smallwood, and Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Dan Kennedy, Corporate Director of Central Services Abi Preston, Director of Education and SEND Nav Minhas, School Places Planning and Policy Manager, and Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
13.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Kishan Bhatt with Councillor Philip Corthorne substituting. Apologies were also received from Councillor Rita Judge with Councillor Kamal Kaur substituting.</p>
14.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
15.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed</p>
16.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p>
17.	<p>TWICE YEARLY SCHOOL PLACES PLANNING (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Officers noted that the School Places Planning report was one that was presented to the Select Committee twice per year.</p>

It was noted that the forecasted need for school places had been in line with recent years, and there had been no big swings. Therefore, the need for school places was as predicted.

There had been a gradual reduction in need for Primary School places, while there was a high and rising demand for Secondary School places. There was a challenge of meeting the demand for children with additional needs, but officers were working with parents, carers and schools to meet this need. It was a statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of school places.

In Primary Schools, there had been a gradual decline in the termly census returns since January 2019, however there had been an increase in the recent January 2023 census. Officers were working closely with schools over Published Admission Numbers (PAN).

For Secondary Schools, a correction was made to the report, whereby Secondary Schools were expected to see an increase in demand for the next four years at least (the correction was that this did not apply to year 7 only). There had been a peak for September 2023 for year 7 projections. There were bulge classes of 101 extra places in a small number of Secondary Schools.

Specialist provision was at capacity. Officers were also working with the Department for Education (DfE) and specialist providers to increase the provision to accommodate the growth.

Members referenced previous suggestions around a new Secondary School. Officers noted that there was a question of finding a suitable site for any new school. Officers were confident of being able to meet the need, whilst also providing value for money. It was noted that a new secondary school would cost tens of millions of pounds to build. However, the forecast was always under review. Members further noted consideration for pupils who move into the Borough and also increases in primary school numbers.

Members congratulated officers on managing the service, and asked how officers were working with schools. Officers noted that they liaised regularly with schools and considered the school census, finances and Published Admission Numbers. The schools estate was constantly being reviewed.

Members also asked about the big picture and noted that there were falling school rolls in inner London. Officers noted that forecasting needed to be kept under regular review. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit had affected 'where to live' choices. However, there was a strong Hillingdon economy, and Hillingdon was a Borough that people wanted to come to. It was noted that the birth rate was slowing slightly.

Members noted that Hillingdon was a net exporter of year 7 pupils due to parental preference, and asked how officers were supporting schools to be competitive and to be parents' first preference. Officers noted that Hillingdon school had good Ofsted outcomes. Officers also noted the partnership model

of working with schools. There were also education advisors to look at data outcomes and trends. There was strong quality in Hillingdon schools.

Officers noted that there was forecasting for a number of 'what if' scenarios. There was capacity of 4% in the system. Through the Fair Access Panel, schools could be requested to take in more pupils if required, however, unexpected swings were not likely.

Members asked about emergency procedures and flexible learning models. Officers noted that there was some capacity in the system. The role of supply teachers was noted, and there was some mobile/ temporary accommodation for temporary classroom space available. Good partnership working was noted.

Members asked why there were lower numbers for nursery and primary places. It was noted that private nurseries provided a level of free childcare, and that it was down to family choice/ family patterns. Officers were working with public health and noting levels of, for example, GP registrations.

Members asked whether numbers of high-needs children were continuing to grow at a faster rate than the overall numbers. Members further asked how much additional capacity was required for specialist schools and specialised units in non-specialist schools. Officers noted that the level of need had been increasing nationally. Hillingdon had previously been above national levels of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and high-needs but was now in line with national levels. Officers were doing lots of work for high-needs children. It was important to ensure that mainstream schools were as inclusive as they can be and can meet as many needs as possible. It was also important to have the appropriate level of provision for specialist placements. Hillingdon had been growing this offer via a graduated approach which included mainstream schools, specialist resource provision (SRP), designated units, and special school provision. In terms of meeting demand, officers were looking at projections around numbers and at how to change practices and culture to ensure that needs were met in every possible way. There was planned growth in the system – new SRPs and designated units were opening. There were a number of new special schools too. Therefore, demand should match provision. By around 2025-26, there would be a significant increase (roughly 30%) in the number of special school places available.

Members asked how projections were made prior to Reception. It was noted that further information on this could be provided outside of the Committee. Members also noted that there may be a slow-down in numbers in seven to eight years' time, and asked whether this would be a cause for concern. Officers noted that they were responsible for the use of funds and had to make the best use of the education estate. Members further asked about how much capacity had been taken up. It was noted that further information on this could be provided outside of the Committee.

Members asked about pupils who move into the Borough but were still having to go to school outside of the Borough. Officers noted the Fair Access Panel, which was chaired by a headteacher. If a year group was full, schools would work together to find a place. It was further noted that sometimes school places were declined by parents who may be waiting for a place at their preferred school. (In some cases, parents would be offered places that were not at their preferred schools.) It was noted that while the preference may not be met, need was being met.

Members asked about wriggle room, noting that there was a large year 6 cohort moving into year 7. Members asked if the number of unfilled places at year 7 was still below 5%. On PAN for September 2023, consideration was given to the expansion at Harlington School (*to ensure demand is met in future years, Harlington School is being expanded by 1.5 forms of entry – 45 additional places in each year group from 2023. This is part of the complete rebuilding of the school and library. The school will benefit from having new SRP units for secondary aged pupils with ASD who will be integrating into mainstream for part of their timetable and also have specialist teaching and support*). Officers also noted the four schools containing the 101 bulge places. Officers noted that the total PAN was 3,823. A school place had been offered to 3,626 pupils (of which 537 were out-of-Borough places). Hillingdon had imported 401 pupils from out-of-Borough. This gave a surplus of 333 school places or 8.7% as at National Offer Day, which would allow for any late applications. It was noted that of those who had been offered a place, some would not have received a place at their preferred school.

Members asked about the effect of bulge classes. Officers noted that bulge classes were always agreed with the relevant schools; that their timetables would be adjusted to accommodate the bulge classes; and that no concerns had been raised.

Members asked for a list of the schools that were offering bulge classes. Officers noted that more details on this could be provided outside of the meeting.

Members asked about high-needs children and the level of spending on this, and also asked if officers were confident in the current building programme meeting expected demand. Officers noted that providing additional capacity in state-funded schools was one part of the strategy, along with developing capability within mainstream schools, and early intervention. By changing this practice, it would be possible to downward forecast for special schools/ high-cost placements. There was a plan to step down high-needs places into mainstream schools with dedicated units.

Members asked about working with independent schools around spare places. Officers noted that they worked with schools to improve perceptions and understanding of options. It was noted that parents' perceptions of a certain school may not have evidence and officers would highlight benefits. There was lots of partnership working.

	<p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee:</p> <p>1) Noted the update and actions underway to support parents and schools; and</p> <p>2) Questioned officers about the update.</p>
18.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Members asked about the SEND Strategy. Officers clarified that the Forward Plan within the agenda was the July Forward Plan, which listed the SEND Strategy as a Cabinet Member decision expected in July. The August and September Forward Plan had been shared with Members and listed the SEND Strategy as expected in August. Members asked if this item would come to Select Committee and officers noted that it already had come to Select Committee in November 2022, where comments were submitted to Cabinet.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
19.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Members asked about starting the next review. It was noted that this process could begin as the current review was coming to its conclusion. Members also suggested an item at a future Committee on how school places/ projections are used, and also an item from the School Improvement Team.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Work Programme</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 7:40 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information of any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell at democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.

The public part of this meeting was filmed live on the Council's YouTube Channel to increase transparency in decision-making, however these minutes remain the official and definitive record of proceedings.