

MINUTES OF AN EXTRA MEETING OF STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GREENACRE CENTRE, ON WEDNESDAY 17TH MARCH 2022, AT 7.00PM

Members present:

Councillors Mrs L Anderson, T, Bhasin, S Buck, B Collier, A Cooper (Chairman), Mrs M Cooper, S Dhaliwal, S Hayes, Mrs J Hyde, D Matthews, G Russell, J Talbot

Also present:

Mrs K Elliott-Turner – Town Clerk, one member of the public and Councillor S Dixon (CBC)

44/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor B Saunders.

45/22 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests and no requests for dispensations. Members were reminded that if at any time during the meeting they feel they have an interest in an item being discussed, they should declare it at that point.

The Chairman proposed moving item 4 – School Place Planning to this point, so that the public section follows. **PASSED** by members.

46/22 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Victor Wan, Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning gave the following presentation on school place planning for Stotfold.

Victor is responsible for securing school places for the authority, school admissions and school transport.

Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to ensure that every child in Central Bedfordshire who wants a school place, gets a school place.

There are a number of ways of doing that:

Understand the need and demand for school places in the area – forecasting tool. This forecast looks at cases needed in terms of primary, secondary in two-tier, or lower, middle and secondary in three-tier, and is broken down into specific areas within Central Bedfordshire area, known as cluster areas – ours is Shefford & Stotfold cluster. Within that cluster there are pyramids of schools. These are schools which have a relationship with one another, e.g. upper school where middle schools feed into it, and lower schools which feeds into the middle schools.

If the forecast identifies that there aren't enough places, Central Bedfordshire Council commissions places.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on Central Bedfordshire Council to act as commissioners, rather than providers of school places. When commissioning places they have to secure money from the Department for Education, through a return submitted annually - 'Basic Need Grant'.

In addition, there is S106 from local development. As a statutory consultee they work with their planning colleagues to secure school places through S106 Agreements – financial or land contributions.

They then engage with schools and planners. Schools can be faith-based, maintained or academy.

In terms of admissions, Central Bedfordshire Council has responsibility for setting the admissions for maintained (council) schools, but academies set admission numbers themselves.

The Council uses a company called 'EDGE, who produce data for school places on an annual basis, published just after the summer. The forecast is a snapshot, a point in time of what the picture looks like in the area.

School places are not set just on incoming housing development, there are many other criteria:

- The pre-school data based on pre-school population and birth.
- The proportion expected to enter school based on past experience.
- The “survival” of that cohort as it moves through school taking account of net migration which occurs in relation to schools’ popularity.
- The effects of housing development in their area.
- Those who may need education in other establishments such as special schools.
- The likely transfer to each secondary school.
- And, for each secondary school, a similar “survival” method, particularly taking account of transfer rates to the sixth form if there is one.

Forecast for Shefford & Stotfold Cluster, and the four lower schools in the pyramid for Stotfold:

School	Admission number – pupils into reception every year
Fairfield Park Lower School	90
Roecroft Lower School	90
Gothic Mead Academy	60
St Mary’s Academy	60

Going through the forecast for each year, combined number of places in our lower school pyramid, the school census shows surplus places for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. But for 2024/25 and 2025/26 there is a deficit of places. This forecast will be continually monitored and if it can be shown that the situation is sustained, they will need to commission more places.

The point of transition for our schools is year 5, with Etonbury Academy and Pix Brook Academy having admission numbers of 180 each. The number of school places remains as a surplus up to 2025/26, following completion of Pix Brook Academy and commissioning of new school places.

Roecroft Lower School, St Mary’s Academy, Etonbury Academy and Fairfield Park Lower School has expanded, and Pix Brook Academy was created to reflect the need for school data in the area.

Admissions for September 2022 – Central Bedfordshire Council offered 98% first preference for Central Bedfordshire upper schools in the area. 99.5% of applicants received their first preference for secondary schools.

Everyone who has applied for Samuel Whitbread as a first preference, has been offered a place.

The data for lower and middle schools won't be available until national offer day – 19th April. Once this data is available, it will be shared with the town council.

Last year across the whole of Central Bedfordshire, on time applications for reception schools 94% received their first preference, and with middle schools 95% received their first middle schools.

The audit commission recognise that in the area, there is a need for some surplus spaces.

When it is apparent that there is a need for school places in a particular area, they will do their best to provide those places, however it is not always possible, because of school site constraints, for example. They will then look at schools in the proximity to see if any others can be expanded and if not, they will commission new school places. They will always try to accommodate to the nearest school and to the preference submitted.

In the Shefford & Stotfold cluster, there is a lot of forthcoming growth, particularly in the Arlesey area, and they are working to secure school places to accommodate.

Schools for the Future

This is about moving our current education system of lower, middle and upper into a two-tier system. The national curriculum is based on a two-tier system.

Within our cluster, phase 1 was implemented with schools becoming primary. Last September they kept their year 5s, rather than moving on to a middle school. This is the transition into a primary school.

Phase 2 – schools were consulted and asked what they think the school organisation landscape should look like. The responses are being assessed and the community will be consulted on the results of that engagement at the end of this month.

Responses to questions from members

With the change to the tier system, this could have an effect on the current deficit numbers. Central Bedfordshire Council is also forecasting for a two-tier model but cannot publish this until the change to the education system in our area is completed.

6th forms are not funded through Central Bedfordshire Council, and they do not have a duty to commission 6th form places. The Department for Education provides funding for individual schools, and it is up to them what subjects they provide, the location for a 6th form, etc.

The biggest challenge they have is in-year growth, with the admissions that might require. That is why the audit commission recognise the need for surplus places.

There is a set formula for securing a school site, with Department for Education guidance on what you should normally see on a school site and its size. There is also

negotiation with developers to secure parcels of land for schools. The challenge is future proofing when you don't know what the future will hold.

The Chairman proposed that for the public section, relevant Standing Orders are suspended regarding the time limit of 3 minutes, in order that the public may speak for up to 15 minutes maximum if required. **PASSED** by members.

47/22 PUBLIC SECTION

A member of the public outlined concerns about problems with school places for Stotfold over the years, and in particular when children were sent to other schools, such as Henlow and the problems that caused for families.

Schools for the Future is due to be completed very soon, and he expressed concern that the new tier-system will be in place without ensuring that sufficient school places are provided in time.

Victor confirmed that terms of the health data they use to forecast places, they use address data rather than place of birth, i.e. often at Lister Hospital.

With regard to Etonbury and Henlow, Central Bedfordshire Council is the commissioner of places and so needs to engage with the schools to take those places, but they have no power to force them to.

Victor Wan was thanked for his presentation and for answering questions.

48/22 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

Nothing to report.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.08pm

MINUTES APPROVED (date):

SIGNED BY CHAIRMAN: