

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 6 March 2015

Staffordshire's Learning Infrastructure Forecast

Recommendations

- a. That the Select Committee endorses the proposal that a priority is placed on the strategic development of Staffordshire's Learning Infrastructure Forecast in the 2015/16 business planning year
- b. That Select Committee explore within their work programme the necessary alignment of wider planning, prioritisation and capital programme decisions where significant interdependencies exist in order to support delivery of the Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast
- c. That the Select Committee provides comment and recommendations in regard to the development of Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast document.

Report of Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills

Summary

1. Staffordshire has a clear and ambitious vision set out in the strategy "Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills". Securing access to the right provision, at the right time, in the right place is a key commissioning challenge within this strategy.
2. The County Council - working with the extensive network of Early Years settings, schools, specialist settings, FE colleges and training providers and the related funding agencies and stakeholder groups - is fully committed to securing the best outcomes for learners by investing wisely and well to create a flexible learning infrastructure that delivers our strategic outcomes.
3. The County Council has a range of statutory duties to fulfil and operates within a fast-moving and very dynamic environment. Changes to legislative frameworks, new freedoms and flexibilities for providers, rapid demographic and planning shifts, along with new resourcing and funding parameters all contribute to the complexity of the situation.
4. To best manage this, the County Council wishes to produce a Learning Infrastructure Forecast for the county. The Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast (SLIF) is a key document to be developed to outline the strategic principles, approach and headline programme. Select Committee members will be able to comment and inform the development of this document at an early stage.
5. The document will be named an "Infrastructure Forecast" rather than an "Infrastructure Plan" to reflect the uncertainty and complexity of school place planning in terms of, for example, the housing market in each area of the county, receipt of capital funding from

government and developers, changes in parental preference and individual school performance, births and inward and outward migration, new government legislation and policy, building costs, the increasing number of autonomous academies, introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy. All of these factors combine to create a volatile environment.

6. By 2030 Staffordshire is expected to see significant growth with a minimum of 59,457 new homes planned to be built. There are significant challenges to be addressed through the Infrastructure Forecast: with an accelerating demand compared to the established pattern of supply and the significant pressures this will place on capital programmes, resources and investment. There is also a need to align the related infrastructure that is interdependent with school place planning, which includes roads, transport and travel, ICT, strategic property, local housing growth plans, inward investment plans and aligned maintenance programmes of work.
7. In contrast, there are areas of the county where population growth is not expected and where schools rolls are low and/or falling. This presents challenges to the maintenance of valued educational provision in often rural and isolated communities, and where viability and sustainability can become salient issues.
8. Select Committee members are invited to comment on these interdependencies and promote links, including through their on-going work programme of scrutiny activity.

Report

Background – Strategic Context

9. Staffordshire’s strategy “Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills” sets out the County Council’s vision and ambition for education in Staffordshire. It confirms the pivotal role that learning and skills play in underpinning the delivery of the council’s vision of “Connected Staffordshire, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy”.
10. Each of the council’s three priority outcomes relies upon the provision of high quality and effective education to Staffordshire residents so that they will be better able to access good jobs by having the right skills and qualifications; make good choices to live a healthy and independent life by being informed, intelligent and responsible for the choices they have; and be fully able to achieve their full potential both as individuals and as citizens, overcoming obstacles and tackling disadvantages.
11. There are seven pillars to the Learning and Skills strategy each of which is a critical factor in the success of the overall approach. This includes “**Flexible Learning Infrastructure**”. All pillars of the strategy interrelate and link to the key commissioning questions that the county council asks in order to fulfil the array of education and wellbeing functions and statutory duties that it holds. Commissioners ask:
 - a. Have we got the right supply provision in the right place to meet local needs and statutory obligations? (Led by the Access to Learning sub-team)

- b. Is the provision the best that it can be - including quality, impact and outcomes for learners? (Led by the Education Excellence sub-team)
 - c. Does each individual get their fair chance to achieve and thrive? (Led by the Inclusion and Wellbeing sub-team)
 - d. Does this lead into jobs, growth, prosperity and independent adult life? (Led by the Skills and Employability sub-team)
12. A simple schematic has been developed and shared with partners setting out the commissioning roles and functions and is attached as **Appendix A** as background information.

A Flexible Learning Infrastructure – What are we trying to achieve?

13. This pillar of the strategy recognises that Staffordshire is a large county and very diverse in its characteristics. In our more rural settings being well connected with appropriate access to good local learning and skills provision is a focus, when access, size and sustainability can be issues. In our more urban settings ensuring that clusters of provision work to strengthen and enrich the local offer is a focus when competition, specialisation or inequalities can be issues. Furthermore, schools and other settings represent a major public investment in each local community and these assets need to work hard for us both in and outside of a formal learning context.
14. Changes in population, through demographic shifts and other circumstances demand that our infrastructure is sufficient, suitable and flexible enough to respond to need. Combining good access with a viable, safe and well-maintained infrastructure is an on-going priority and challenge, and therefore a key component of our overall system for learning and skills.
15. Our strategy sets out that a flexible learning infrastructure would need to ensure that each school and setting:
- a. Contributes positively as a valued public asset within its community
 - b. Adapts and is appropriate to meeting needs
 - c. Organises to meet demand
 - d. Is accessible, inclusive, sustainable and efficient

What would success look like?

16. A flexible learning infrastructure will be:
- a. Open and available – we want all of our community to benefit from the public purse investment in school buildings and facilities, both through formal learning for children, young people and adults and through wider access evening and weekends to meet local need and demand

- b. Organised to meet demand – changing populations will be well accommodated in a flexible and responsive system that educates in good quality safe environment, utilising space well and responding to demand and choice
- c. Efficient and Sustainable – we want to see energy efficient and environmentally sustainable learning and skills infrastructure. Ensuring that the estate in terms of buildings are appropriately maintained, sustainable and attractive will keep our learners both safe and inspired to responsible beneficiaries of public investment
- d. Inclusive and Accessible – all parts of our community should be able to access appropriate learning opportunities and we will continue to strengthen the ability of the local infrastructure to meet specific needs so that people do not have to move out of county to access opportunities to learn

A New Challenge – A New Priority

17. Staffordshire County Council has a strong track record in terms of school place planning and admissions. Whilst primary school intakes have been increasing in recent years, In 2014/15, for example, 92% of parents were successful in gaining admission to their first choice of primary school for their child and for secondary schools the figure was 95%.

2014/15 School Year	Parents offered a place at their <u>first choice secondary school</u>	Parents offered a place at one of their <u>top three choices</u>
Staffordshire	94.9%	98.9%
West Midlands	81.9%	93.7%
England	85.2%	95.5%
2014/15 School Year	Parents offered a place at their <u>first choice primary school</u>	Parents offered a place at one of their <u>top three primary choices</u>
Staffordshire	92.4%	97.9%
West Midlands	89.5%	96.3%
England	87.7%	95.7%

Figure 1: Admissions offers made on respective Offer Days. Source: DfE statistics

18. Over the last five years in Staffordshire around 2,200 new primary places and over 200 secondary places have been created through schools maximising use of their accommodation and through capital investment of £33M.

19. However, the situation is changing and there is an escalating demand and new pressures emerging. Demographic changes resulting from increasing births, inward and outward migration and district and borough councils' plans for a minimum of 59,457 new homes by 2030 indicate a need for around £350M of capital investment to provide an additional 12,500 primary and 8,000 secondary school places over the next 15 years. Demand for new places will be greatest in areas with most new housing

planned, for example:

- a. East Staffordshire: over 3,000 primary and over 3,000 secondary school places.
- b. Lichfield District: around 1,700 primary and 1,500 secondary school places.
- c. Stafford Borough: around 2,300 primary and 1,700 secondary school places.

20. In addition, population growth will affect the need for places in special schools, specialist and alternative provision and early years and childcare.
21. The nature of the childcare market in Staffordshire is changing due to the government's 8-6 schools agenda, the increase of free places required (40% of two year olds now eligible), population increases and migration into the county. Gathering sophisticated intelligence with regard to supply and demand in the sector allows us to ensure sufficient places are available, in line with our statutory responsibilities. A further demand for free Early Years and Childcare places can be anticipated post general election 2015 due to manifesto pledges of all major parties. Staffordshire has one of the highest take ups (at around 73% of those entitled) in the country of funded 2 year old places.
22. Historically, the planning linked to different phases and types of learning provision have operated in different and distinct parts of the council's structures, with a mixed track record of collaborative and integrated working. Opportunity now exists to better integrate provision planning under a single strategic approach, drawing expertise together, and this should be grasped as a means to drive both efficiency and effectiveness.
23. Links with local planning authorities has evolved and the significance of developer contributions within the resourcing of growth and sufficiency is vital, although there is a large degree of uncertainty about future levels of contributions with legislative changes to the way district and borough councils collect those contributions. Changes to funding and the new demands for investment that can be projected arising from the planning also need to be managed as a key risk to the delivery of the programme. As with most local authorities, limitations on the county council's resources to invest in infrastructure means that sufficient central government funding for additional places (called "Basic Need") will remain essential, especially as recent growth in primary school pupils begins to increase demand for secondary school places.
24. A separate Capital Funding Annex is attached as **Appendix B** and provides a useful information on the funding of school places. Based on a number of assumptions, detailed within the annex, a capital funding gap of between £32m and £72.5m has been estimated against a £350m mainstream school programme spanning the next 15 years.

Statutory Duties of the County Council

25. There are a range of legal duties placed on Local Authorities pertinent to this aspect of the strategy and these include:
- a. Ensure the sufficiency of Early Years provision and places
 - b. Ensure sufficient school places in a locality
 - c. Ensure sufficient and suitable post 16 provision to meet reasonable need
 - d. Provide appropriate provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
 - e. Ensure fair access to educational opportunities
 - f. Promote high educational standards
 - g. Promote parental choice and influence within the system
 - h. Promote diversity in provision
 - i. Promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential
 - j. Support the most vulnerable including those in care, at risk of exclusion, missing/missing out from education
 - k. Promote sustainability and suitable travel to learn arrangements
26. Therefore, the scope of the Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast needs to encompass sufficiency, place planning, market development and capital programmes spanning from Early Years to school years and post 16, including specialist, alternative, as well as mainstream provision options.
27. The way in which these duties are delivered is shaped through an array of statutory guidance, policy frameworks, accountability regimes as well as local decision-making. Fundamentally, as a commissioning council, Staffordshire utilises a commissioning cycle to analyse-plan-do-review. The development of an infrastructure forecast is the articulation of this work to make it transparent, coherent and accessible to partners and stakeholders.

Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast

28. The Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast (SLIF) is a key document to be developed in order to outline the strategic principles, approach and headline programme. It will focus on articulating the ways in which Staffordshire intends to:
- a. Fulfil the core duties and functions associated with school place planning
 - b. Deliver the strategic ambitions and outcomes of the council

- c. Manage the prioritisation and progress of the programme of work associated with schools capital and skills capital
- d. Secure effective alignment of the SLIF programme with other core council functions

29. The intention is to deliver a forecast document during the summer term.

A Dynamic Programme Underpinning the Forecast

30. It is clearly recognised that the programme of work outlined within SLIF will be dynamic and fast-evolving, as the many factors that influence and inform it change on an almost daily basis. There are decisions well outside the remit of the council that will influence the forecast (such as when developers bring forward their plans for new housing, or planning authority decisions and processes, or the autonomous decisions that schools are free to make under devolved powers). Therefore, ongoing work will take place and we will work in strong alliance and partnerships to deliver for Staffordshire people and adhere to our values:

- a. Put the people of Staffordshire first: Responding appropriately to their needs to make a difference now and in the future by being open and listening respectfully.
- b. Value each other: Working collaboratively, and in partnership, to support each other, embracing constructive challenge and valuing our differences.
- c. Embrace doing things differently: Open to learning new things, being bold and taking risks to enable a sustainable future.
- d. Do the right thing: Working efficiently and effectively, committed to innovative and leading edge thinking to find the right answers, constantly seeking to achieve the highest standards.

Key Interdependencies and Aligned Investment

31. In order to deliver both the ambitions of the Learning and Skills Strategy and the developments of the Learning Infrastructure Forecast there are number of key interdependencies and alignments that would be necessary. An initial identification of these is illustrated in the table below:

Area/Programme of Work	Driver for Alignment to SLIF
District and Borough Council Local Plans	Effective local planning policies and spatial distribution of new housing sites will support provision growth in the most appropriate locations, new infrastructure, sustainable travel opportunities, and impact on associated costs of provision. Housing growth creates new demand and section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions from developers are a necessary source of funding/resources to manage growth
Locality Planning	It is essential that the county council works in partnership with district and borough councils and developers so that we can plan the infrastructure required. Therefore school organisation is a priority within the 8 Locality Plans

	developed by the county council alongside our partners, with the county council's District Commissioning Leads talking local responsibility
Roads and transport infrastructure	Road networks and traffic flows impact significantly on accessibility, development costs, local planning approvals, safety and community impact
Strategic Property portfolio	Efficient and effective use of and relationship with the wider strategic property portfolio will impact on cost and quality.
Travel policy and Transport networks	Effective local planning and promoting local choice will support accessibility, sustainable travel, and impact on associated costs of provision
ICT Networks and Infrastructure	Essential to 21 st C learning environment, systems management and more flexible platforms
Inward Investment Portfolio	Skill demand and supply linked to economic growth, enterprise and competitiveness will place demand on quality and alignment of the learning infrastructure
SEND assessment and care planning, including specialist and alternative provision	Planning to assess and meet specialist needs through the local offer will strengthen progression pathways and manage down costly out of area placement

32. It is essential that the right mechanisms are found for commissioners of these respective programmes to work together to realise the benefits of aligned and integrated programme design and delivery, and for the scrutiny and accountability frameworks of the council to promote and recognise the fundamental risks and opportunities associated with this.

Conclusion

33. The scale and significance of this issue has been set out in the report and work on the draft Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast has commenced. It is therefore recommended that:
- a. That the Select Committee endorses the proposal that a priority is placed on the strategic development of Staffordshire's Learning Infrastructure Forecast in the 2015/16 business planning year
 - b. That Select Committee explore within their work programme the necessary alignment of wider planning, prioritisation and capital programme decisions where significant interdependencies exist in order to support delivery of the Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast
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Link to Strategic Plan – Ready for Life

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity – given the increasing child population across most areas of the county a report on school organisation plans and pressures and the capital programme was proposed at a Select Committee preview meeting.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Learning and Skills function and organisational design schematic

Appendix B – Capital Funding Annex

Contact Officer

Name and Job Title: Anna Halliday

Telephone No.: 01785 278774

E-mail: anna.halliday@staffordshire.gov.uk