

Wokingham Borough School Places Strategy

2024/25 to 2029/30
(To be refreshed annually)

Next review date: April 2025

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Introduction

The Wokingham Borough School Place Strategy 2024/25 to 2029/30 (the strategy) assesses the sufficiency of education provision over this period and, where deficiencies are identified, proposes remedial measures and options. The strategy considers the needs of children and young people in the key education phases of Early Years (pre-statutory school age); mainstream statutory school age (age 4 to 16); and post-16 in the Borough. This breadth reflects the Council's core statutory duties for education. The Strategy also considers longer term needs, tied to developing Borough development plans for the period to 2037/38.

There are 10 secondary schools within the Borough. All are (or will shortly be) Academies or Free Schools. In addition, there are 55 primary schools, currently consisting of 26 Academies, 3 Free Schools, 4 Voluntary Aided Schools, 4 Voluntary Controlled Schools and 18 Community Schools.

The strategy sets out how and why the child population of the Borough is changing. It considers how factors behind current population trends may themselves change and what these changes could imply for school place planning. It sets this need in the context of inter-Borough movement of children and young people from other local authorities into borough schools and vice versa. The analysis is underpinned by the most recent 2023 roll projections, which extend to 2027/28 for the primary phase and 2030/31 for the secondary phase, backed by a range of relevant contextual housing, planning and demographic data. The longer period of the secondary projection reflects the greater reliability of projections for older children, as the forecast is entirely based on living children, rather than forecast births.

Key constraints and policy imperatives that the strategy and any plan for action must take account of are set out. In doing this, the strategy establishes how the different parties including the local authority, the Department for Education (DfE), Academy Trusts and other bodies interact to ensure that all children have a school place.

The strategy sets out the key challenges for the Early Years, primary (aged 5 to 11), secondary (11 to 16) and post-16 mainstream phases. It sets out options for meeting needs and makes recommendations concerning future action. In some cases, further work will be required before an action plan can be agreed.

The Strategy will be refreshed annually to reflect the regular update of pupil forecasts and consequent alterations to the approach to addressing sufficiency. It is also the aim to incorporate sections in relation to SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) sufficiency in future iterations of this document.

Local Authority Legal Duty for School Sufficiency

Early education and childcare sufficiency

Provision of early education and childcare is vital for the local economy and for developing stronger communities. One aim of childcare is to ensure parents are supported to be economically active, either in work, or in study or training for work. Early education focuses on the specific learning needs of very young children, and the benefits can extend far beyond the early years - children build confidence, develop their fine and gross motor skills, and expand their communication and social skills through play and exploration, preparing them for lifelong learning. Funded early education for 2-year-old children aims to reduce levels of inequality and narrow the pre-school educational gap for disadvantaged children.

Local Authorities are required to secure sufficient early years and childcare provision (Childcare Act 2016; Childcare Act 2006; Children and Families Act 2014; The Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) Regulations 2014; The Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Amendment) Regulations 2016; The Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Extended Entitlement) Regulations 2016). In practice this translates as follows:

- Sufficient childcare means securing the right type and volume of provision, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (up to 18 for a disabled child).
- Sufficient early years provision means families being able to access their free entitlement for qualifying 2, 3 and 4-year-old children:

The free entitlement is:

- from April 2024, all working parents of 2-year-olds can access 15 hours per week.
- from September 2024, all working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 15 hours per week.
- from September 2025, all working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 30 hours free childcare per week.

Alongside the free entitlement, some parents will wish to purchase additional childcare hours from their provider where, for example, they require more childcare to be able to undertake their choice of work.

School places duties

Local authorities with statutory education duties are required to:

- Ensure sufficient school places (Education Act 1996 Section 14).
- Increase opportunities for parental choice (Section 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which inserts sub-section 3A into S14 of the Education Act 1996).
- Comply with any preference expressed by parents provided compliance with the preference would not prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources (School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Section 86).
- Ensure fair access to educational opportunity (Section 1 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 inserts sub-section 1(b) into S13 of the Education Act 1996).

Turning to land use planning, paragraph 95 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. This includes local planning authorities giving substantial weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools when preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications.

Post-16 duties

Local authorities hold responsibilities for the sufficiency of post-16 education and training and promoting continuing education to young people.

These are:

- To secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are over compulsory school age but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is maintained (Education Act 1996 S15ZA). To fulfil

this, local authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.

- To make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those between 20 and 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training under Section 68 of the ESA 2008.

However, the Council's legal duty in relation to young people's post-16 participation and its statutory powers to enable it to fulfil this duty are not precisely aligned. It has no formal role in the planning of Further Education provision; it can propose sixth form provision, but decision-making lies with the DfE Regional Director. Therefore, to fulfil this legal duty, the Council is required to work in partnership with education, skills training providers, and local businesses.

A changing population

As at the latest census in 2021, there were 177,502 people living in Wokingham Borough. That is 15% more people than in the previous census 10 years prior in 2011, when the population was 145,380.

Looking further back, the population of Wokingham Borough has been increasing by approximately 12% every 10 years, based on population changes between 1981 and 2021.

The number of resident children is determined by the number of births to Borough residents, modified by net internal and international migration.

Births: The trend in both annual births and underlying fertility rates is downwards in the Borough and in neighbouring Local Authorities. Birth numbers peaked in 2012 with just under 2,000 births. By 2022 birth numbers had dropped to less than 1,700 (but with considerable annual variation, most recently in 2021 when over 1,800 children were born). The children now entering secondary schools were born when the birth numbers peaked. Annual births have been at least 100 less in subsequent years than the 2012 peak.

Migration: Wokingham Borough is characterised by strong rates of child migration into the Borough. Until 2021 the consistent picture from ONS data was that migration was strong for early years (>100 annually per year group), slightly less strong for primary (average c.60 per year per year group), and very low for secondary year groups (6 per year group). This has been facilitated by high rates of housebuilding and churn (families moving into older homes). While there is no ONS post-2021 data yet, it is clear from admissions and roll data that post-2021 there has been a significant increase in international migration of children into the Borough. Much of this is due to increased numbers of British Nationals (Overseas), from Hong Kong. Numbers of additional primary age children per year have more than doubled and secondary rolls have also increased, but from much lower annual base numbers.

Currently the high migrant numbers from 2021 onwards are at least balancing the impact of falling birth numbers on rolls.

Should international migrant numbers drop to pre-2021 levels, pupil intake will begin to fall. Housebuilding has also been a significant factor in migration to the Borough. While it is expected that housing growth will remain strong given national planning policy requirements, the housing market is volatile and subject to economic conditions. While there are a number of large schemes in development, if annual new home completions fall, there will likely be a corresponding fall in the number of children requiring school places.

Constraints

The council makes decisions within the constraints of the statutory framework that governs the provision of education, the priorities of the various parties within that framework and available resources.

Local Authorities have some powers and responsibilities for existing maintained schools (community, and voluntary (church) schools). However, education is increasingly provided by schools within Academy Trusts, rather than by local authority-maintained schools. All Wokingham Borough's secondary schools are (or will shortly be) Academies or Free Schools. The Borough's primary schools are also increasingly converting to academy status. Academies are responsible to their managing Trusts, and to the DfE Regional School Director (RSD), who approves all changes to Academies / Free Schools.

Therefore, while the school place sufficiency duty is solely held by the council, it must focus on partnership working with other parties to ensure there are sufficient places.

Wokingham Borough Council has wider responsibilities, though, and education planning takes place within this broader framework of objectives. In particular, the council has committed to making the fullest possible contribution to reducing the carbon footprint to meet carbon neutrality by 2030, which leads to an emphasis on local provision and energy efficient development.

The council's resources are limited, with pressures on both capital and revenue budgets. There is a strong imperative, therefore, to look to measures that reduce revenue costs (such as school transport costs) with a minimal capital cost. Revenue costs associated with new or enlarged schools come from the DSG Growth Fund, which is agreed annually with the Wokingham Schools Forum (a statutory body).

Early Years sufficiency

The 2022 childcare sufficiency report noted that both childcare provision and demand had remained constant over the period May 2020 to May 2022. The one area where place supply had changed materially was child minding, where the number of registered child minders had declined from 244 (December 2019) to 198 in 2022 (an 18% reduction). This is in line with national trends. Key aspects of Early Years sufficiency are the provision of free entitlement places and the provision of services to vulnerable learners (children entitled to free 2-year-old provision and children with SEND).

The profile of setting offering free entitlement places from May 2020 to May 2022 is as follows:

Pre School Play Groups	27
Day Nurseries	29
Independent Schools	5
Childminders	24
Specialist Provision	1
Maintained Primary School	10
Academy	7
Special	1

Note that provision (measured by number of providers) has remained largely static over this period. One area of positive change though, is the increase in the proportion of childminders offering free entitlement places (up from 40% in December 2019 to 71% in October 2022).

The numbers of children taking up Free Entitlement places has remained relatively constant over the May 2020 to May 2022 period. It should be noted that Early Years numbers follow an annual cycle, so it is important to compare May, October and January figures separately.

Three year olds peaked in May 2021 with a high of 1527 children, and lowest numbers were recorded in October 2020 with 1484 children.

Four year olds peaked in May 2020 with a high of 1058 children, and lowest numbers were recorded in October 2021 with 183 children.

The data above relates to the number of 3- and 4-years-olds using Free Entitlement places in private settings and at childminders over this period.

The data below show the same data, but for users of school settings.

Three year olds peaked in October 2021 with a high of 580 children, and lowest numbers were recorded in May 2020 with 371 children.

Four year olds peaked in May 2020 with a high of 362 children, and lowest numbers were recorded in October 2021 with 1 child.

One service area that has seen increased usage is provision for children with SEND and vulnerable 2-year-olds. Both numbers of children requiring SEND support and those with EHCPs increased over the May 2020 to May 2022 period, as shown in the data below.

The number of children requiring SEND support increased from 111 in May 2020 to 165 in May 2022.

The number of children holding Education Health and Care Plans increased from 20 in May 2020 to 40 in May 2022.

The number of vulnerable 2-year-olds benefitting from Free Entitlement places has also increased, from 97 in May 2020 to 124 in May 2022.

On the basis of the above, the report concluded that there are broadly enough places across the Borough for families to access the funded hours for which their child is eligible. This includes enough spaces for the new entitlement for working families of 2-year-olds which comes into effect in April 2024. Subsequent to this review, the DfE carried out a national local authority readiness assessment (published February 2024) in preparation for the expanded Early Years entitlements. In relation to Wokingham, the overall assessment states that the Borough would need an additional 26 places (a 1% increase) by September 2025. Given the recent level of activity to create additional Early Years capacity by Wokingham schools and other parties (with a number of projects currently in the pipeline), this is not considered to be a significant risk, but will require annual monitoring.

It is important to note that early years' sufficiency can change quickly, for example if a key provider closes or receives a poor Ofsted judgement. Therefore, local authority will continue to identify areas which may be vulnerable and where additional provision may be needed due to growth in demand, for example from new housing development.

Primary Phase sufficiency

As noted above, the key factors of Wokingham School Place Planning are:

- Declining birth rates over the past decade
- High migration rates in the recent past
- Balanced inter-Borough movement

Therefore, the primary roll projections point to low Reception admission numbers (generally declining in line with birth numbers), leading to significant surpluses in Key Stage 1 (290 to 360 per year). However, high net migration rates have led to rolls steadily rising year by year from initial admission, leading to deficits in Key Stage 2 (Year 6 in particular). There are variations though, between areas, with some areas having projected surplus capacity in all phases, some having Key Stage 2 deficits, and one having a projected deficit in both Key Stages.

Movement between the Borough and other local authorities sees a small net gain of Wokingham Borough rolls of 165 pupils and no future changes are currently forecast in respect of this pattern. The below table sets out these patterns in more detail.

LA	Wokingham Borough residents' destinations	Wokingham Borough school roll from out of Borough
Reading	380	512
Bracknell Forest	204	284
Hampshire	73	32
Windsor and Maidenhead	46	44
West Berkshire	38	28
Oxfordshire	11	13
Others	20	24
Total	772	937

Net gain to Wokingham Borough rolls	165
Total Roll Number	15,385
% of total	1.1%

Note that migration rates are likely to be susceptible to short term change (because they are directly related to government policy, variable home building rates and volatile preferences). Should migration rates decrease, much of the Key Stage 2 pressure set out below would be alleviated.

Borough-wide primary projections are that there will be sustained shortfalls in Year 6 (all years to 2027/28) of between 15 (in 2024/25) and 102 (in 2026/27) places. Three other year groups will see deficits, with a maximum of 38 places in 2025/26.

The Borough's seven primary school planning areas can be grouped as follows, according to the challenges they face.

Areas with a surplus in Key Stage 1 and a deficit in Key Stage 2: Earley, Wokingham Town East (of the town centre) and Woodley.

In Earley the peak deficit was 66 places in Year 6 in 2026/27. Surplus capacity across both Key Stages was projected to increase from 10 places to 264 places by 2027/28.

In Wokingham Town East the peak deficit was 69 places in Year 6 in 2027/28. Surplus capacity across both Key Stages was projected to peak at 90 places in 2025/26, declining to 47 places by 2027/28

In Woodley, the peak deficit was 44 places in Year 6 in 2026/27. Surplus capacity across both Key Stages was projected to increase from 65 places to 342 places by 2027/28.

Areas with a small current projected surplus for both Key Stages: the North (of the A329M), South East (Finchampstead and Wokingham Without), and Wokingham Town West (which includes Winnersh). In all these areas there were no more than 4 year groups with deficits, and none were greater than 5. Conversely, very significant surplus capacity was projected by the end of the period (2027/28), with 109 places in the North, 325 in the South East and 219 in Wokingham Town East.

An area with a projected deficit across all Key stages: the South West (Shinfield, Arborfield, Barkham, Swallowfield and part of Finchampstead within the Arborfield Garrison SDL area). It is worth noting that this area includes both the Shinfield and Arborfield SDL areas, and therefore has very high numbers of homes completed over the past decade, with further homes to follow. The Shinfield area is seeing the highest rate of growth and is the area with immediate capacity issues.

The maximum deficit in any one year group is 58 (Year 2 2027/28). The overall deficit is projected to increase to 152 places in 2027/28.

The South West area is effectively divided by the Loddon Valley, with Shinfield South Ward to the north-west, and Arborfield, Barkham, Swallowfield and parts of Finchampstead to the south-east. In Shinfield, major developments being sited around the Shinfield Village, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross communities (South of the M4 SDL). In the south-east the schools are in the Arborfield Green and Arborfield Cross communities. The Arborfield SDL is sited where the Arborfield, Barkham, Finchampstead South and Swallowfield wards meet. The Arborfield SDL is the major population centre in this area, with c.1,800 further homes planned for the period 2023 to 2030.

Currently, within the South West area, the Shinfield area is experiencing the highest rates of growth and school place pressures. The Shinfield SDL is now largely built out, although a further c.630 homes are planned for the period 2023 to 2030, completing the development of 3,000 new homes.

Disaggregating the projections and capacities of the Shinfield schools from other South West schools makes this clear. In essence, rolls are rising and there is a current local deficit of 30 Reception places (with children placed in other Borough schools), and a projected deficit against whole school capacity by 2025/26. Note that the surplus capacity seen below reflects the fact that the Alder Grove CoE Primary School is filling one year group at a time through Reception class admissions, with this surplus capacity expected to be filled for 2025/26 admission.

[Actions proposed for place planning](#)

In response to the above-described analysis of each admission area's trend of school place needs, the following actions are proposed for next five year's primary school place planning:

Areas where more Key Stage 2 places would be helpful: Earley, Wokingham Town East and Woodley.

The Council has been working with the Keys Trust to develop an option to add a bulge Year 6 class at St. Cecilia's C of E Primary School, should applications / in year admissions merit this. Such an option would only be deployed if required in order to meet the Borough's sufficiency obligations.

Areas where it might be possible to reduce Planned Admission Numbers (PANs), without significant risks to Key Stage 2 capacity: North, South East and Wokingham Town West.

Note that when PANs are decreased this increases the likelihood that additional Key Stage 2 capacity will need to be agreed and funded as children age through the primary phase. While it is clearly preferable for schools to maintain a 1 to 30 teacher to children ratio in Key Stage 1 and a 1 to 32 ratio

in Key Stage 2, the implication of making PAN reductions to maintain these ratios is that the Council may have to fund an increased number of places in older Key Stage 2 year groups, if the current rate of mid-phase growth is maintained. Without reduced PANs additional children could be absorbed into classes with significant numbers of unfilled places. It is therefore important that the Growth Fund is funded and resourced appropriately to meet this challenge.

If the rate of migration into the Borough slows to pre-2021 levels, the Council would need to look to make significant reductions in the number of primary phase places. This would likely require area school re-organisation, rather than reductions in PANs at a number of schools.

In recent years, the Council made a number of applications to the Schools Adjudicator to reduce primary school PANs, with mixed results. In future, it is intended to make adjustments to primary PANs through the annual admissions determination process.

Area where there is a case for additional Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 capacity: South West (Shinfield focus)

Shinfield rolls are rising and there is a likely local need for at least an additional 30 places per year, evidenced in the 2023 admissions round (but less clearly in the 2024 admissions round). As population growth in this area is housing led, it is anticipated that growth could be maintained, even if the rate of international migration into the Borough is maintained at lower, pre-2021 levels. Recent roll projections have shown demand increasing above the current level, as developments complete. At some point though, demand may drop back towards (or even below) current levels, as development slows and completed homes age and their resident children move into secondary phase education. Future Shinfield development is planned, but at a slower rate than seen in the recent past. Further analysis is required, using the latest, housing delivery sensitive 2024 roll projection model, and taking account of 2025 projections, January 2025 rolls and 2025 applications, to evaluate whether or not the tipping point has been reached, to give confidence that new capacity will be sustainable in future.

Shinfield options:

In view of the likely need for additional capacity, a range of options for action have been considered, including “do nothing”; expansion of an existing school; and the creation of a new school. “Do nothing” is not recommended for the long term, if current growth is sustained, because alternative provision is not within statutory walking distance, which could lead to an unsustainable increase in home to school transport spend by the Council. The expansion of an existing school would provide a sustainable, flexible option and good value for money. The Council must also explore the alternative option, building new school premises on a separate site. A site is available, in Spencers Wood but this is within AWE Burghfield’s Detailed Emergency Planning Zone and consequently may be subject to additional planning restrictions. Currently, the Council holds c.£4m in S106 contributions that are linked to this site, and it may be better value for money to build school premises here, to avoid losing this money. New school premises could be run as a new school or as a satellite of an existing school.

All identified options (except “do nothing”) require additional funding over currently allocated resources. Until it is clear that resources are available, it is not possible to include any new provision as component of this strategy.

It is proposed that, subject to further review, the Council takes steps to create 210 places. Options to add further capacity may be available in future. The Council will test options in this respect over the

course of the coming year, with a view to anticipated delivery of additional building capacity for September 2027 (taking advantage of exiting temporary surplus capacity in the interim, if necessary).

Secondary Phase Sufficiency

Background

The council's secondary schools are divided into two areas for place planning purposes.

- **North area schools:** Maiden Erlegh, Bulmershe, Waingels and the Piggott schools.
- **South area schools:** Oakbank, Forest, Emmbrook, Holt, St Crispins and Bohunt Wokingham Schools.

All these schools are, or will shortly be, Academies or Free Schools. Holt School is the sole single sex (girls) school in the area. The Forest School is converting from a boys to a co-educational school from September 2024.

The North area has seen markedly lower rates of housebuilding in the last decade than the south and, because of the limited building opportunities in the north (much of the area is either built up or designated green belt) this is likely to be true in future too. This is expected to have implications for the future balance of the Wokingham child population between these areas.

As noted above the key factors of school place need are:

- High numbers of children currently feeding through from the primary sector, reflecting high and growing birth numbers until 2012.
- High migration rates
- Inter-Borough movement

Year 7 numbers required for next three years are projected to remain high, well above current permanent Year 7 place capacity, reflecting the impact of both high continuing rates of migration of primary school age into the Borough and high numbers coming through from the primary sector, reflecting high and rising birth rates until 2012. Should the migration rates fall, the number of children who have arrived to date is expected to maintain Year 7 numbers above those established in 2021 and earlier projections. However, demand across the projection period will reduce and Year 7 numbers can be expected to fall too, in this event.

There are also challenges due to the increase in the number of mid-secondary-phase applicants. These are particularly acute for girls, as in most year groups there are places for boys at the Forest School. This school is converting to co-educational status through annual changes to the admissions to Year 7 arrangements. As a consequence, the challenges the council faces placing girls in older year groups are likely to persist throughout the five-year period it takes the school to become fully co-educational.

Movement between the Borough and adjoining local authorities is not balanced, with more Wokingham Borough children securing out of Borough places than vice versa. The number of children crossing the Borough boundary is much higher than is the case for the primary sector, and the net movement is a much more significant issue, with a net balance of 382 or 4% more of Wokingham Borough's resident secondary state school attendees on roll at an out of Borough school than there are out of Borough children on roll at a Wokingham school. While there is no obvious

reason to expect this to change in the immediate future, this is a potential place planning vulnerability.

A new secondary school, River Academy Reading (part of the Maiden Erlegh Trust family of schools) opened in September 2024. This school is planned to provide capacity for north Reading, but the actual impact will not be seen until 2024 admissions are fully analysed. It is possible that the new school may have an indirect impact and make more Year 7 places available at Wokingham Borough residents' preferred Reading Schools.

The most significant movements are Wokingham Borough children to Grammar schools in Reading and Slough and Wokingham Without (Crowthorne) children to Edgbarrow School in Bracknell Forest. Conversely significant numbers of Reading children attend Wokingham Borough schools, with the highest numbers being at schools in Earley and Woodley.

Local Authority	Wokingham residents' destinations	Wokingham school roll from out of Borough
Reading	781	1010
Bracknell Forest	575	118
Hampshire	63	54
Windsor and Maidenhead	15	33
West Berkshire	27	19
Oxfordshire	15	12
Buckinghamshire	17	5
Slough	139	0
Others	16	15
Total	1648	1266

Net loss from Wokingham Borough schools	-382
Total Roll Number	10,752
% of total	-4%

The projection of secondary place needs (made in 2023):

	7	8	9	10	11
2023/24	-164	-143	-59	37	50
2024/25	-177	-212	-202	-73	25
2025/26	-162	-222	-274	-227	-87
2026/27	-182	-215	-284	-315	-240
2027/28	-256	-221	-277	-325	-329
2028/29	-268	-331	-283	-318	-338
2029/30	-204	-374	-394	-324	-331
2030/31	-140	-250	-437	-438	-337

These figures take account of current school capacity (and therefore do not include planned additional places at a number of Wokingham schools).

There are also two local issues, one related to recent development and another long standing, which are significant enough to require specific focus of place planning for next five years:

Firstly, Shinfield is served by one secondary school, Oakbank, which admits c.120 pupils a year. Local primary schools admit 210 pupils (with further growth to follow). Alternative schools are not within walking distance, so the provision is unbalanced. There are no immediate local solutions, but one may become available in conjunction with the proposed Loddon Valley Garden Village (Hall Farm), which was a preferred allocation in consultative stages of the emerging local plan. Conversely, the schools that many Shinfield residents do rely on are in Winnersh and Wokingham Town. The option of a new school in Hall Farm could negatively impact on the current schools that supply the places for children in Shinfield. However, further residential development on the southern edge of Wokingham Town is expected and the number of children living in the communities around that area requiring secondary places will also increase. As a consequence, it is possible that rebalancing could be achieved, in time, without any detriment or need to make changes to existing Winnersh / Wokingham Town provision.

Secondly, much of Wokingham Without (part of Crowthorne) is served by Edgbarrow School in Bracknell Forest. Rising numbers of children in Crowthorne have meant that some local Wokingham Borough children have not been admitted to that school. While the school has advised that they would offer additional places, this would be dependent on financial support. Bracknell Forest Council have no grounds to give such support and the DfE have advised this local authority that it should not do so. However, if Bracknell Year 7 numbers do begin to decline, it is likely that the place availability issue for Wokingham resident families will become less acute in time.

Options for action

Year 7 place shortfall: The council has a number of options, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The “do nothing” option and reliance on provision in other boroughs could be eliminated quickly, because neither was likely to meet statutory need. A new school would be expensive and vulnerable should rolls begin to decline, as they are projected to do. Accordingly, the council has focused on expansion at existing schools. The expansion programme has focused on larger expansion schemes, on three school sites near areas of continuing residential growth (at St Crispins, the Emmbrook and the Bohunt schools), and a fourth (Piggott School) in the north of the Borough. Other schools have provided useful capacity too, but at a lower scale.

Current programmes of school place expansion

Plans were agreed in 2022 for expansion projects at a number of secondary schools, based on forecasts that year 7 rolls would peak in 2022-24 and decline towards a level that could be accommodated in the permanent Year 7 capacity, over much of the following decade.

More recent projections, taking account of the impact of increased international migration from 2021 onwards, point to a need for the enhanced capacity to be maintained for a longer period. Moreover, the proposals that had been developed before 2023 were found to be unaffordable within the council’s financial constraints and needed to be modified. New and modified plans have been developed. While some of these are still subject to final legal agreement with schools, they have been verified through value for money checks and considered to be deliverable within resource constraints.

In 2023, a significant effort has been made across the council departments led by the Education and SEND Service to pursue expansion programmes of existing schools while having a focus on outcomes

and value for money, as well as a revised place forecasting model to inform any need to modify the programmes.

The new approach with cross-cutting council-wide efforts and stronger partnership with schools have led to successfully securing sufficient secondary school places for next three years until 2027.

However, our forecast indicates that Wokingham will still need extra secondary school places for the remaining planning period from 2027-28 until at least 2030-31. The need for extra places in additional to what has already been secured is minimal and manageable.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30*	2030/31*
Year 7 shortfall	-177	-162	-182	-256	-268	-204	-140
St Crispins	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emmbrook	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Piggott	46	45	45	45	45	45	45
Bohunt	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Oakbank	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Waingels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Holt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Forest	90	60	60	60	60	60	60
Maiden Erlegh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bulmershe	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Total Extra Places	274	243	243	243	243	243	243
<i>Balance</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>-13</i>	<i>-25</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>103</i>

* Current school place expansion programmes cover next five years' planning period up to 2029/30. The continued delivery of the increased numbers for the future years beyond 2029 (highlighted in yellow below) will need to be confirmed with the relevant schools by November 2024, the time for an annual review of this strategy. Sufficiency for 2029-2031 will also be achieved once this has been confirmed.

As the Forest School will convert to co-educational status from September 2024 there is no requirement to make adjustments for unusable places for boys, as was the case in 2022 and 2023.

International migration will in time reduces back to pre-2021 levels. Should that occur in the near future in the near future, the number of places required will also reduce significantly, at least eliminating the 2027 to 2030 projected deficit against existing plans.

Proposal for action

The projected shortfalls of the later years of this planning period will be reviewed in the light of the 2024/25 updated projections, taking account future changes to the immigration rate and inter-borough movement. Any necessary actions will be developed in partnership with schools in the

Autumn 2024 to Spring 2025 period, in good time for the budget making process for the 2027 Financial Year. If additional temporary capacity is required, this is likely to be delivered in the form of bulge classes, so as to ensure that places are not oversupplied, in view of the falling rolls issue currently filtering through the age range.

Post-16

Local sufficiency for post-16 participation requires cross departmental collaboration between Skills, Growth and Economic Development and Education Services in Wokingham Borough and in neighbouring local authorities.

Most post-16 provision for the Borough is through sixth forms in eight of the Borough's secondary schools. These are academically selective; largely offering A Levels and other Level 3 courses. A minority of students go onto sixth forms, sixth form colleges and other provision outside the Borough for A-level study. Most Level 2 and vocational courses are offered out of Borough, with majority of them in Reading and Bracknell Forest at Further Education colleges. The Council has agreed to work with the Bohunt Education Trust to open a new sixth form at the Bohunt Wokingham School (currently planned for September 2025). Schools have considerable discretion around the size and nature of their sixth form offer.

Several Wokingham Borough school Sixth Forms have surplus capacity. In May 2025, three schools had sixth form rolls below the DfE's minimum size expectation for a new sixth form of 200 students. However, Sixth Form rolls are forecast to rise over the projection period of 2023/24 to 2030/31, as the rising numbers of students being admitted to secondary schools age into the post 16 sector. Moreover, some of the preferred out of Borough provision (Sixth Form Colleges in particular) may be unable to admit Wokingham Borough students, because of rising demand for their post-16 places from nearby communities. There is therefore a concern that the demand for sixth form places may in the foreseeable future exceed local sixth form capacity. Other providers, the FE Colleges in particular, are known to have more flexibility, and would reasonably be expected to respond positively to increased demand from Wokingham Borough students for Level 3 (A/T Level) courses. Although the council has a duty to ensure there are sufficient sixth form places, the DfE do not provide capital funding to enable local authorities to create this capacity.

The sixth form roll projection is the standard Wokingham Borough roll forecast. It is based on the average of the last three years Year 12 rolls at a school with a sixth form, as a proportion of the preceding year's Year 11 roll (e.g. Year 12 2023 ÷ Year 11 2022). Sixth form capacities are estimated through a number of methods, following DfE guidance.

The current sufficiency analysis (gap between projected need and current provision) points to there being a significant sixth form place deficit over the projection period, even taking account of the new sixth form for the Bohunt School scheme that is in active development. However, there is an example of a school operating successfully with an apparent deficit. In this case, its actual and projected rolls include significant numbers of young people from outside the Borough. Wokingham schools are not compelled to offer significant number of places to students from outside the Borough. Taking account of these facts, part of the deficit could be discounted, so that any operational deficits will occur much later in the projection period, if they occur at all. On this basis any deficit will be more limited and probably be manageable within existing Borough resources.

Year	Total places	Standard Roll Projection ¹	Surplus / Deficit	Restricted to ex WBC Year 11 ²	Surplus / Deficit	Alternative place calculation ³	Surplus / Deficit
2024	2,286	2,141	145	2,151	135	2,542	391
2025	2,286	2,319	- 33	2,318	- 32	2,602	284
2026	2,436	2,547	- 111	2,536	- 100	2,752	216
2027	2,586	2,814	- 228	2,775	- 189	2,902	127
2028	2,586	3,013	- 427	2,918	- 332	2,902	- 16
2029	2,586	3,141	- 555	3,009	- 423	2,902	- 107
2030	2,586	3,174	- 588	3,033	- 447	2,902	- 131
2031	2,586	3,176	- 590	3,035	- 449	2,902	- 133

Proposed actions

Given:

- that schools have discretion over the size of their sixth forms;
- the significant level of surplus sixth form capacity at a number of Wokingham Borough schools;
- the small size of some Wokingham Borough sixth forms;
- the uncertainty over future needs; and
- the planned 2025 opening of a new sixth form at the Bohunt School,

it is proposed that the Council continues to monitor current place needs and developments in sixth form provision in neighbouring local authorities. Apart from the review of post-16 place sufficiency, the Council will need to review, with local and strategic partners, the fit of the current post-16 offer with local educational demand and skills needs. It is important that post-16 education provides young people with the skills that will enable them to thrive, in line with the expectations raised in the “Skills for Jobs” White Paper from 2021. To this end, the Council will look to develop proposals for broadening the local post-16 offer, alongside any increase in capacity.

Future community needs

The council is required to plan for long term development needs, including the need for additional housing. Whilst work continues, consultative stages of the local plan have proposed two new major housing allocations. If confirmed, planning permission would need to be gained and so first housing completions likely be five years away with full realisation over a period extending into the 2040s. The major proposals will give rise to significant demand for school places. Education proposals are to a

¹ The standard roll projection uses the historic relationship between Year 11 and Year 12 rolls (and between Year 12 and Year 13) to derive projected future Year 12 and 13 rolls. This would mean that out of Borough admissions to WBC sixth forms would rise in line with WBC origin sixth form rolls.

² This projection is on the basis that out of Borough entry to WBC sixth forms will not rise in line with WBC origin rolls, where schools have discretion over external admissions to sixth forms. For the purposes of this exercise this is modelled by freezing one school’s sixth form at 500 on roll.

³ WBC core concern is whether all young people 16+ have suitable provision available to them. Some schools have apparent current shortfall in sixth form provision but are able to deliver high quality post-16 education despite this. This may simply reflect the inadequacy of the tools and information available for sixth form capacity evaluation. This measure removes sixth capacity shortfalls at schools that are known to have current calculated deficit, but which operate successfully. Inclusion of these deficits risks masking genuine capacity deficits that may result in young people being unable to secure desired sixth form places.

large extent, prudent planning for possible future need, rather than firm commitments to actions that may be a decade or more in the future.

Loddon Garden Village

The most important potential major development (c.3,750 homes) is the Loddon Garden Village proposal focused on land around the University of Reading's ownership at Hall Farm. It is proposed that this development should have two primary school sites and one secondary school site. The two primary schools could be sustained by the need arising from development alone. Secondary schools need to take a minimum intake (at least 180 children per year) to be viable, and this would not be generated by this development. The school would therefore need to serve a wider area, i.e. Shinfield and possibly parts of Lower Earley too (fringe areas normally outside Maiden Erlegh School's recruitment radius). This points to the need to plan any new provision in partnership with the Anthem Trust, who are responsible for the Oakbank School. It will be several years before works start on site, and the area requires extensive work before the school could be built. As agricultural land it has no utilities, roads, or other infrastructure to enable development. However, strategic local planning is being initiated to maximise the opportunity and sustainability of this future development for school improvement.

South Wokingham SDL Extension

This proposal would add up to a further c.1,150 homes to the existing South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL). Although the first part of the SDL, Montague Park, is now complete, the land south of the Wokingham to Bracknell rail line is yet to be delivered. The area south of the railway scheme has a planned primary school within it, to be brought forward if necessary. The new scheme is expected to have a further primary school site reserved. This gives the council assurance that it will be able to meet needs locally, if a further school is required. Although, as with the Loddon Garden Village proposal, there is much site work to be completed before the school could be built, the plans are more developed and so delivery of new homes is expected to commence at an earlier date.

Risks

Risk	RAG rating	Mitigation	Post mitigation RAG rating
Current projections are unreliable, because they are underpinned by high rates of international migration, which may return to or towards pre-2021 levels at any time	RED	By moving to annual all-phase plans, proposals can be developed, and commitments made on an annual basis (“just in time”) rather than some years in advance.	Amber
The Council’s financial position could deteriorate further, and the capital programme commitments may be undeliverable.	Amber	The purpose of the “Gold” review process was to ensure that schemes were reduced to their minimum costs so as to be deliverable within the council’s resources. The new School Place Planning Working Group galvanises the joint efforts of planning, education, property services of the Council to find the VfM solutions.	Green
Further changes to the Borough’s population, such as an increased rate of migration into the area, could make the current proposals too limited in scope to meet needs.	Amber	Changes such as this are outside the council’s control. However, the national view is that the level of net migration seen last year is exceptional and will reduce in future years.	Amber
School priorities (broadly, standards) may be out of alignment with the council’s need to work within budget constraints.	Red	The Gold process, of negotiation by senior officers, led by members of the council’s most senior leadership team is believed to have arrived at a set of proposals that provide additional capacity and meet essential school requirements. The assessment is left as “amber” because the underpinning formal agreements are still in preparation.	Amber
Further increases in construction costs, labour shortages and diversion of manufacturing capacity to help meet other identified national needs (such as providing temporary accommodation for RAAC affected schools) makes the construction programme undeliverable.	Red	As far as is practicable the growth programme emphasises use of existing premises to achieve growth aims. Minimising the need for investment provides better VFM and minimises risks to programme delivery from this source.	Amber333

Appendix 1: Shinfield area primary phase delivery plan

There are five primary phase schools in Shinfield Parish: Shinfield Infant and Nursery and Shinfield St Mary's Junior Schools, Lambs Lane Primary School, Alder Grove CoE Primary School and Grazeley Parochial VA COE Primary School. Shinfield Infant and Nursery Schools, Shinfield St Mary's CoE Junior School and Grazeley Parochial Schools were all expanded in the early 2010s, and none are thought to have significant future expansion capacity. Lambs Lane provided additional "bulge classes" at that time and is not thought to have further significant expansion potential. The site is small and car parking provided on leased land. Grazeley Parochial also has a limited site and is not within walking distance (by a safe route) of the new Shinfield communities.

There are two viable options for creating additional capacity in Shinfield:

- a) Expansion of the Alder Grove CoE Primary School
- b) A new school site in Spencers Wood.

There is an additional strip of land available through the S106 agreement for the Shinfield West development to enable the expansion of the Alder Grove CoE Primary School.

There is a primary school site in Spencers Wood available through the S106 agreement for the Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross housing development. Although the costs per place would be higher than at Alder Grove, the site has the potential to offer more places than would be possible through the Alder Grove expansion scheme.

In addition, the Council holds c£4m of S106 funding ringfenced to the Spencers Wood site. This would require a deed of variation to enable the funds to be used on the Alder Grove project. Although discussions are ongoing, to date, agreement has not been given to this.

However, the Spencers Wood site is within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone of the AWE Burghfield site and, as such, there is a risk of objection or restrictive planning conditions being applied to any development.

The Council is developing proposals for both sites whilst negotiations with the developers are ongoing, on the basis that forfeiture of the S106 funding would make expansion on either site difficult to achieve in view of the current financial context.

Initial indicative timetable

Task	Date
Planning application for a development brief for the Spencers Wood site	Spring / Summer 2024
Decision on Preferred Option	Spring 2025
Additional children admitted to an existing school	September 2025
Construction contract let	Spring / Summer 2025
Initial site occupation	September 2026

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