



Agenda Item Introduction

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date	23 JULY 2024
Topic	SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Background

1. At the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills on 1 September 2022, representatives from headteachers and school governors made a submission that highlighted the issue of school place planning, its impact upon the education of children and over-sufficiency of primary school places.
2. It was resolved that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills be requested to submit a report on school place planning, together with the statements from Isle of Wight Primary Headteachers and Primary Chairs of Governors, to Cabinet for consideration and identification of options regarding the future provision of primary education on the Island.
3. A report is due to go to Cabinet on 18 July 2024 to approve publication of the draft school place planning strategy and agree to proceed with reviewing the level of surplus places, and increases to special educational needs provision, to support improved education standards within the context of the emerging Education Strategy.
4. The committee will review the same report going to Cabinet and make any comment or recommendations on the decision-making process.

Focus for Scrutiny

- What preparations took place in recommending this decision?
- What engagement has taken place so far with school staff, parents, and children?
- What are the next steps?
- What are the things to be mindful of over the coming months?
- How can the committee support the process moving forward?

Document(s) Attached

5. Appendix 1 – Draft Island School Place Planning Strategy
6. Appendix 2 - IOW Primary School Place Planning Areas
7. Appendix 3 - Headteachers and Chair of Governor representations

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Scrutiny Report

Purpose: For Information

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date	23 JULY 2024
Title	SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND CORPORATE FUNCTIONS

Executive Summary

1. The Council is in the process of developing a new education strategy for the Island to transform educational outcomes for all children. A vital element of this emerging strategy, a draft version of which was published on 8 July 2024, is aligning the number of primary school places with the changing population size. The reason that this realignment is such an essential ingredient of improving the learning of all children is explained within this report, for example in paragraph 20.
2. Within the Isle of Wight Corporate Plan, it states that the Council will work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision. The plan states that the Council should ensure that a strategic school places plan is in place and maintained. Once agreed, this report will discharge that priority.
3. The Isle of Wight Council has a statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of school places for Isle of Wight children, this includes to:
 - Ensure sufficient childcare is available to meet the Early Years free entitlement as far as reasonably practical.
 - Ensure sufficient maintained school provision is available to meet the needs of all children aged up to 16.
 - Ensure sufficient post-16 provision is available for all Isle of Wight children.
 - Give priority at all ages to meet the needs of children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to 19 (in some cases 25).
 - Support all maintained nurseries, schools and Post-16 provision to function as high-quality, viable and financially efficient services.
 - Ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote diversity and parental choice.

4. This report is focused on ensuring suitable and sufficient school provision is available to meet the needs of all children aged up to 16 and is a key strand to our draft Education Strategy.
5. Utilising the NHS Data at present, there is growth in Year 7 intake pupil numbers in the secondary phase, which is forecast to continue until 2026-27. The actions identified in this report therefore necessarily focus on the primary phase where a significant decline in pupil numbers is forecast. In 2027-28, the decline in pupil numbers will reach the secondary phase, and therefore further place planning decisions will need to be made to manage surplus capacity in due course.
6. The Island has physical capacity for 10,724 primary aged children. In October 2023, we had 1,898 unfilled school places. By September 2027, it is forecast the number of unfilled primary school places will increase to 3,056.
7. Falling rolls also make planning and staffing decisions difficult, with schools potentially having to make year on year redundancies. There is a particular problem for schools affected by infant class size legislation: they may have limited ability to make savings by changing staffing structures or changing the use of physical space. For example, a school with an intake of 60 that only admits 32 pupils must still employ two teachers and heat, light and equip two classrooms, even though the budget for that year group may have nearly halved. For the financial year 2024/25 the average per pupil funding for primary schools on the Island, funded through the DfE Dedicated Schools Grant is £4,520 per child.
8. At times, the effective management of school places will include the need to remove surplus places and/or expand provision to ensure overall provision aligns with forecast need. Due to a significant reduction in birth rates on the Island, action is recommended in the primary phase in order to ensure demand and capacity are aligned and we continue to provide the best outcomes for the children, which is the focus of this report.
9. Contrary to the declining birth rate, the Island has seen a growth in the demand for additional special educational needs provision with 6.5% of our school population (4- to 16-year-olds) requiring an education health care plan (EHCP).

Recommendation

That cabinet approves publication of the draft school place planning strategy and agrees to proceed with reviewing the level of surplus places, and increases to special educational needs provision, to support improved education standards within the context of the emerging Education Strategy.

Background

10. Following an OFSTED Annual Performance Assessment in 2005, the Department for Education placed a requirement on the Council to address the level of underperformance and low aspirations, the effectiveness of support and challenge to schools, the strengthening of school leadership and teaching quality, efficiency of the system of school organisation and the unfilled places. This resulted in the

Council entering into a major school reorganisation to move from a three-tier school system to a two-tier system in 2011.

11. The Isle of Wight now has a diverse system of schools such as maintained/voluntary aided/voluntary controlled/foundation schools and academies, early years' settings and Post-16 provision. The Council is committed to ensuring that families living on the Isle of Wight have access to a good local school which offers a rich and varied learning experience, has the highest expectations for their children's success and where parents can be confident that their children will be safe. All children have the right to an enjoyable, inclusive, and broad education and it is the role of the local authority to intervene on behalf of children, especially those experiencing vulnerabilities, when this is not the case.
12. Whilst the reorganisation of schools on the Island had a positive impact on the performance of schools, birth rates nationally have now reduced to their lowest since 1941. The drop in the number of births is significant on the Isle of Wight due to its Island geography as migration to the Isle of Wight is greater in older age groups with 34% of population being over the age of 65.
13. Utilising NHS Data longer term pupil trends show the decline in birth rates having a direct impact upon the number of children arriving into the primary phase. In 2027 only 920 children will be starting reception, 484 fewer than in September 2018. The overall number of primary pupils are forecast to decrease from 9300 in 2017, to 7,640 in 2027. Secondary forecasts indicate pupil numbers are starting to grow from c.6,200 in 2017 to 7,360 in 2027. However, this growth will not be maintained longer-term, and consideration will need to be given to how future surplus capacity is managed in the secondary sector.
14. The planning and provision of school places is a complex task that must take account of changing populations, parental preference, migration and new housing. Individual schools, subject to status, now have greater autonomy regarding admission numbers and decisions surrounding school expansion/reduction, adding further complexity to the statutory role the Council has in relation to ensuring a sufficiency of school places. The geography and rural nature of the Isle of Wight creates challenges in relation to small schools. The main principle of current and future provision is that we will seek to provide local schools for local children, which are both educationally and financially sustainable in the longer term.
15. Having a level of surplus across our schools provides flexibility; allows for movement onto, and around the Island, and helps meet parental preference. The consequences of having too many surplus places can be severe. The main impact on schools of surplus places due to falling rolls is the resulting reduction in individual school finances.
16. In July 2023, 3.8% of our children living on the Island were registered as Electively Home Educated, which is understood to be high in comparison to the national average. The Isle of Wight Local Authority recognises that there are many approaches to providing education and respects a parent's right to Electively Home Educate. The Local Authority has a duty to identify children that are not receiving a suitable education. What is suitable for one child may not be for another, but all children should be involved in a learning process. The Local

Authority also recognises the importance of building positive relationships to support parents in their aim of providing their children with an effective education.

17. Schools are funded through the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) using a local funding formula. On the Island this mirrors the Department for Education's (DfE) national funding formula. The revenue funding passed through the LA for maintained schools is strictly controlled by operational guidance supplied by the DfE, and changes in schools generally have a per pupil impact on the overall funding allocation. When the overall pupil numbers in an area reduce, the local funding allocation is reduced on a per pupil basis.
18. Therefore, if a class which has capacity for 30 pupils only has 20 pupils within it this results in a potential loss of £45,200 per year.
19. It is also important to understand that not all schools are affected equally by falling pupil numbers. For example, when there is a 10% drop in numbers, not all schools will see a 10% reduction. Popular schools remain full or close to full and this may mean that a large drop in numbers could significantly affect a small number of less popular schools. When schools are disproportionately affected by falling rolls, those schools are at risk of spiralling decline. This means that we need to consider removing places.
20. Headteachers and Governors report that when a primary school is not full to capacity the funding is insufficient to maintain a sufficient structure of qualified teachers and support staff to meet the needs of all children and provide a high-quality educational experience. This requires compromises to be made which can have will have an adverse impact on the quality of education. Such compromises include:
 - Sharing learning support assistants between classes
 - Reducing small-group intervention and tuition
 - Reducing pastoral and SEND care
 - Combining administrative functions with part-time teachers
 - Requiring school leaders to have timetabled classroom responsibilities
 - Mixed year-group (age) classes
 - Reducing wrap-around care (after school club and breakfast club)
 - Moth-balling parts of the school site that are no longer needed
 - Subject leads having to oversee more than one subject, facing more pressure and additional workload
 - Teachers having to plan for a wider range of need due to mixed age classes.
21. A report was presented to Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills on the 1 September 2022 that identified the level of surplus capacity within the Primary Schools on the Island, and the measures that had been implemented to reduce some school's published admission number (PAN). This was in line with Cabinet's clear directive that school closures should be avoided where possible.
22. Two representations have been made on behalf of Headteachers and Governing Bodies on the Island, which requested support to formulate an Island wide approach to School Place Planning and not for the Council to work in isolation or, only consider reducing planned admission numbers (Appendix 3).

23. In June 2023 a Cabinet Paper was developed which sought to reduce surplus places in three planning areas across the Island but was withdrawn prior to being considered as it was felt that a more strategic overview of all our Island education provision was required to adequately address concerns.
24. Since the end of the Children's Services partnership arrangement with Hampshire County Council and establishment of a new department, a briefing has been provided to Members outlining the continued concerns and to propose a wider review that includes expansion of our SEND provision.
25. Given the level of surplus places that exist there is an expectation that DfE will be proactive partner to the Council in ensuring a suitable and sufficient pattern of schooling going forward and recognise that the strategy must be 'school type' neutral so if academies need to reduce or are proposed for closure, they will engage with the Council to achieve this.
26. Public engagement meetings have been held across the Island to provide an understanding on the reasons as to why change is required to improve overall outcomes for our children and young people on the Island. This included an online survey which sought views on what factors should be prioritised when planning the provision of schools. This will enable the local authority to be clear on the criteria which it will use to assess and identify proposals. Overall, there was in excess of 750 responses and detailed within Table 1 is the outcome of the survey which ranks the priority order for these criteria:

Table 1

Ranked order	Criteria
1	The quality of education
2	How close the school is to your home address (i.e., within walking distance)
3	A small school (up to 210 students, smaller classes)
4	Results and data in relation to public examinations or national tests, and the level of value the school can evidence adding to the educational attainment of its pupils
5	Ability to make a full educational offer within the financial budget available
6	The popularity of the school within its local community or user group
7	A larger school (up to 420 students, more resources)
8	The denomination of the school (i.e., Catholic, Church of England)

27. In addition to this many other factors are considered when reviewing options for the removal of surplus places. Some examples are:

- Leadership and management of schools
- Financial viability
- Transport implications
- Environment implications
- Number of pupils choosing to attend the school
- Sufficiency, suitability and condition of the site and buildings
- DfE guidance about rural schools
- Migration
- Local housing developments
- Factors that arise from the consultation process
- Any other relevant considerations

Forecasting School Places – Methodology

28. The Council collects data on the historical and current uptake of places in all schools. This data along with other linked information, primarily birth and housing data, is used to forecast school places across the Isle of Wight.

29. Immunisation and Vaccination data from Local Health Authorities are collected by age and postcode, providing information on numbers of children and these are allocated to pupil place planning areas. Local authorities have the discretion to determine their pupil planning areas for the purposes of school place planning, but this should be in line with the DfE's non-statutory guidance. This includes guidance around importance of the size of the planning areas. Too large and it does not provide full visibility of place pressures/surplus, or too small and this can over-represent pressure and give an inaccurate picture of place pressure. The primary planning areas are defined within Appendix 2.

30. The methodology used is based upon a cohort survival model. The basic premise is that pupils will roll forward from one-year group to the next at the end of each academic year. If there are known housing developments within a school's planning area, the expected pupil yield is added to the projections where appropriate. This information is provided by the Isle of Wight Local Planning Authority (LPA). Expected changes due to pupil mobility and migration are also taken into account. For each year group, the number of pupils on roll in January is compared with the same cohort a year later. A weighted moving average of the observed changes over the last three years (3:2:1) is calculated and applied in the same way as the participation rate.

Intake into Reception Year – the number of four-year olds living in a school planning area is determined as above. This is compared with the number of pupils that are enrolled by the school and a participation rate is calculated. Again, a three-year weighted moving average is applied to calculate a participation rate for use in forecasting future YR enrolment at schools.

Intake to Year 7 – At secondary transfer, the participation rate is applied to the Year 6 numbers available in the primary schools across the Isle of Wight.

Assumptions - The model assumes that the school population tends to be stable rather than influenced by a trend in the long term; by using this methodology we can mitigate against an exceptional trend. Weighting the average accounts for the assumption that recent events are far more likely to be replicated but using a moving average smooths out high fluctuations in year groups in a particular year.

Understanding the forecasts for school places in each area

31. For the purposes of school place planning, the Isle of Wight is broken down into more localised education planning areas (see Appendix 1). The tables set out within the strategy document identifies current and forecast future aggregated pupil numbers and schools' capacities within each planning area and, indicate both actions being taken, and actions proposed to ensure a sufficiency of school provision within these areas.
32. When looking at forecasts in each of the following sections it is important to remember that the figures presented are not statements of fact – they are forecasts based on a tried and tested methodology. It should also be noted that whilst the council will seek to support parental preference, it forecasts focus on the number of school places available within a school place planning area. It can be the case that some schools in an area are regularly oversubscribed in relation to parental preference. This could suggest a shortage of school places in the area. However, parental preferences only show where parents would like their children to attend school, not if there is a shortage of school places in an area.
33. School place planning decisions cannot be explicitly based around meeting parental preference. Schools' popularity does change over time and, creating a school place planning system that overly follows such trends would ultimately lead to a lack of choice for parents and a longer-term insufficiency of school places.

Admissions

34. For Community and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, the Local Authority (LA) is the admission authority and therefore manages any amendments to a school's Published Admission Number (PAN). However, Community and VC schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the LA set a PAN for them that is lower than they would wish. There is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to the PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection (para 1.3 of the School Admissions Code). Therefore, it is considered unlikely that the Schools Adjudicator would support an application to reduce the PAN if the Governing Body are not in support.
35. For Voluntary Aided, foundation and academy schools, the Governing Body is the admission authority so the LA cannot enforce an amendment to PAN.
36. On an annual basis the LA are required to determine local admissions arrangements. Where changes are to be made this must include a public consultation, this includes contacting all Community and VC schools to establish if they wish to propose an amendment to their PAN in future years. As a result of this year's consultation, the proposed amendments for September 2025 intake are set out in Table 2 below. The next round of consultations will be Autumn 2024 to be implemented in September 2026.

37. Table 2:

PAN Reductions for September 2025 intake	
Arreton CE Primary School	Reduce from 30 to 20

School Transport

38. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 created new duties on LAs to provide free transport for pupils in receipt of free school meals or whose families receive the maximum level of Working Tax Credit. Statutory Guidance has been issued by Central Government, particularly Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance (July 2014) and 2010 Post-16 Transport Guidance (February 2014) and is used by all LAs to inform policy and provision of the transport service. The July 2014 Guidance requires the LA to review its School Transport arrangements regularly to ensure that they provide the most cost-effective service.
39. There are no priority/catchment areas for primary and secondary schools. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to apply for the school nearest to their home address. A pupil's nearest school is calculated by direct distance. This is a straight line from the centre of the home address to the centre of the school. This is calculated using the local authority's geographical information system (GIS). School Transport is assessed on whether they are attending their nearest school (direct distance or walking route) and whether the shortest walking route is over the qualifying distance. The legislation specifies the statutory distances (2 and 3 miles) that apply to the provision of home to school transport, when distances are calculated from a pupil's home address to school, the measure of the shortest available walking route from the centre of the home address to the centre of the school building is used to ascertain whether the pupil lives more than the minimum number of miles to be entitled to free transport provision.

Corporate Priorities and Strategic Context

40. The recommendation in this report directly links to the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 priority which is to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through the ongoing business of the council it will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the Council.

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

- By reducing the number of school sites, it could result in additional children needing to be transported to school, however overall, by maintaining fewer school buildings for the total number of pupils on the Island it will have overall benefits for the environment as it will reduce the impact of building emissions. Schools do regularly promote active travel to school which will continue to support the reduction of emissions created from transporting children to school by car.

- Subject to the availability of funding heat decarbonisation plans will be commissioned in the future for all Local Authority owned school buildings. The recommendation in this report will assist in the submission of applications for future funding and ultimately support the IWCs target for schools to be carbon neutral by 2035.
- A climate and sustainable development impact assessment has been undertaken and is detailed below. This demonstrates the impacts of the proposed decision to the environmental and socio-economic conditions of the Island. The wheel is made up of two different distinct sections. The outer wheel focuses on socio-economic factors, which could impact communities across the Island. The inner wheel focuses on the delivery of net zero emissions to meet the councils 2030 target. There are 17 outer socio-economic segments and 6 inner environmental segments, and these are scored from 1 (long-lasting or severe negative impact) to 5 (long-lasting or extensive positive impact). Overall, the assessment demonstrates no long-lasting or severe negative impacts if the proposed option is approved.



Economic Recovery and Reducing Poverty

- As set out within the corporate plan this report demonstrates the council's commitment to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision, providing the best possible outcomes for our children on the Island. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through the ongoing business of the council it will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the council.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

- The decisions the Council makes now not only affect current residents, but may have long term impacts, both positive and negative, on young people and future generations. These impacts may not immediately be apparent or may not emerge for a number of years or decades. Impacts will be interrelated across the various domains of young people's lives from housing, employment or training, health and the environment.
- The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, in particular article 12, places a duty for children and young people to have an active voice in decision making on matters that affect them. We value the views of our young people. Incorporating coproduction and consultation with young people into our decision-making process is a robust way of ensuring young people's views are taken into consideration. Work has already commenced to ensure the views of young people are captured with various sessions being held in our primary and secondary schools. Should approval be provided by Cabinet to commence the consultations on the future of schools, further work will be undertaken to ensure young people are engaged in the process, and the views of the Youth Council and our Youth MP will be actively sought.

Corporate Aims

- The recommendation in this report directly links to the Corporate Plan 2021-25 priority which is to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through ongoing business of the council we will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the council.

Financial / Budget Implications

41. Schools are funded through the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) using a local funding formula. On the Island this mirrors the Department for Education's (DfE) national funding formula. The revenue funding passed through the LA for maintained schools is strictly controlled by operational guidance supplied by the DfE, and changes in schools generally have a per pupil impact on the overall funding allocation. When the overall pupil numbers in an area reduce, the local funding allocation is reduced on a per pupil basis.
42. All schools have devolved funding, accounting systems and bank accounts and it is their responsibility to remain individually financially viable. Uncertainty around places creates budget risks at an individual school level, as they work to maintaining efficient right sized establishments that ensure in-year income matches in-year expenditure. The School Standards & Framework Act 1998 requires local authorities to have a Scheme for Financing Schools. The scheme drives the requirements of schools in managing their deficits and the LA role relates to adherence to the scheme only as it has no power to write off or contribute towards individual school deficits. When a school closes, any deficit

balances fall to the local authority and therefore surplus capacity increases the risk of inefficient schools and potential increased deficits, impacting upon local authority budgets. In the event of an underperforming school converting to an academy (Sponsored academy conversion) this results in deficits falling to the local authority. Only 'good' or 'outstanding' Schools which convert to academies (convertor academies) have deficits funded by the incoming trust or DfE.

43. Most schools on the Island continue to raise concerns about the ability to set balanced budgets in coming years, and by March 2027 the forecast deficit for 22 out of 33 maintained primary schools amounts to £7.4million. This poses a significant risk to the IWC as it remains a potential liability of the Council. In a consultation with mainstream schools on 2024/25 school funding, most respondents emphasised concerns around the overall quantum of funding not being sufficient to meet current costs, in particular pressures around support staff pay and cost of supporting children with education and healthcare plans. The local authority continues to highlight pressures through the Association of Directors of Children's Services and regional network groups.
44. For the financial year 2024/25 the average per pupil funding for primary schools on the Island, funded through the DfE Dedicated Schools Grant is £4,520 per child. Therefore, if a class which has capacity for 30 pupils only has 20 pupils within it this results in reduced income of £45,200.
45. The local authority through a statutory function charge in relation to education agreed with schools, currently provides financial support in relation to redundancy costs should schools reorganise or close. Any potential eventual closing schools may lead to higher-than-average expenditure in this area and a one-off budget pressure on the authority. This can only be quantified following the outcome of the process.
46. In order to undertake the school organisation work needed by the recommendations in this report additional revenue funding would be required to support a temporary increase in staffing within the Strategic Development Team. This is estimated to cost approximately £40,000 and will be funded from the Corporate Contingency as agreed with the Director of Finance.

School Place Planning Strategy

47. School Place Planning forms part of a wider approach to improving the overall education outcomes and opportunities for our children and young people living on the Island. This includes securing good quality education, leadership and management, and financial sustainability.
48. This report is seeking a decision from Cabinet regarding further engagement on the development of the draft School Place Planning Strategy. This draft strategy can be found in Appendix 1. Adopting a School Place Planning Strategy for the Island will enable the Council to adequately plan our school provision and ultimately improve outcomes for our children and young people living on the Isle of Wight.
49. The draft version of the strategy provides a guide to decision making on the provision of school places for mainstream and SEND pupils. The current strategy

covers 2024/25 to 2027/28 and would be reviewed on an annual basis.

50. Within the strategy document it outlines the pupil place planning area forecast data, along with major housing data. The next stage in this would will be a cabinet paper in September outlining the Council's proposals for the reduction of mainstream school places and increase in SEND provision.
51. The strategy currently identifies the following proposed reduction of places within our primary planning areas, assessments will also consider cross border movement:

Primary Planning Area	Proposed review
Cowes (West)	Reduction of 60 places (2 forms of entry)
Cowes (East)	To be considered alongside other planning area reviews.
Newport	Reduction of 60 places (2 forms of entry)
Ryde Town	Reduction of 60 places (2 forms of entry). Review of additional SEND provision in area.
Ryde Rural	A review to be undertaken to establish the future viability of the schools in area given the level of children opting to travel into the planning area.
Sandown and Shanklin	Reduction of 90 places (3 forms of entry)
West Wight	A proposed review of the forecast data alongside the building capacity of schools in the area.
Ventnor	Reduction of 60 places (2 forms of entry)

Consultation and Engagement

52. In February 2024 all Councillors were invited to a briefing on School Place Planning, this was attended by 19 Councillors. It was widely acknowledged at this meeting that action was required, and the planned review must be an considered as an island-wide approach.
53. In March 2024 a presentation was provided to the Chair of Governors network meeting to which the trade unions were also invited.
54. Engagement sessions have taken place across the Island to share an awareness of the challenges our Islands education system is currently facing with both the high level of surplus maintained school provision and a shortfall of SEND provision. These sessions also enabled the authority to provide an overview of the proposed timeframe for reviewing proposals and the implementation of these. Overall, these were very positive with over 250 attendees of which a summary of those is provided in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Headteacher	17 representing 34 of our schools (due to Executive Headteachers being across multiple schools)
School Staff	141
Governors	18
Parents	45
Press	1
Town/Parish Council	7
Councillor	3
Labour Party	1
Residents	19

Legal Implications

55. The council has the power to make a proposal under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, in conjunction with the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 to close the following types of schools: community, community special, maintained nursery, foundation, foundation special or voluntary (VC or VA). The council is required to have regard to statutory guidance issued by the DfE when deciding whether a maintained school should close. The relevant statutory guidance is the “Opening and Closing of Maintained Schools” dated January 2023 and “The making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools” dated January 2023.
56. In deciding to discontinue a maintained school, the council must be satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils and the likely supply and future demand for places in the medium and long term. The council should take into account the overall quality of alternative places in the local area and the popularity of other local schools.
57. The council as Local Education Authority (LEA) is empowered to propose the closure of all categories of maintained school. Where it makes such a proposal it is also the decision maker. A right of appeal to the Schools Adjudicator is in place, this enables the relevant diocese, school governing body or trustees to contest the decision taken by the local authority. There is no right of appeal on determinations made by the Schools Adjudicator.
58. The “Opening and Closing of Maintained Schools” guidance sets out that there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. The Department for Education defines if a school is classified as a rural school and not the Local Authority. This presumption does not mean that rural schools can never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.
59. In formulating any closure proposals in relation to rural primary schools, proposers must have regards to the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community, the availability and likely cost of transport to other schools, any

increase in motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance and the effect of that increase and any alternatives to the discontinuance.

60. Proposers must also be able to provide evidence that they have carefully considered a number of additional factors set out in the statutory guidance before proposing to close a rural primary school.
61. There is a statutory process to follow when closing maintained schools. It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer thinks appropriate before publishing proposals under section 15 Education and Inspections Act 2006 to close a maintained school. It is for the proposer to determine the nature and length of the pre-publication consultation, but the statutory guidance makes it clear that it is best practice for consultation to take place in term-time.
62. In the case of rural primary schools, the Education and Inspections Act 2006 sets out some particular groups who must be consulted in addition to the groups specified by the Secretary of state to be consulted for all closures, as follows:
 - a. The registered parents of registered pupils at the school
 - b. any parish council for the area in which the school is situated
 - c. any other interested organisation or person that the proposer thinks appropriate

Equality and Diversity

63. Consideration must be given as to whether there are any sex, race, or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed. The proposal being put forward by the council in this report; School Place Planning will have no negative impact on equality and diversity.
64. The policies of the Council in relation to equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination will continue to apply should a change be approved.
65. Council staff will work closely with the headteachers and governing bodies to assess any support that might be required by staff, students and their families / carers should any proposed consultations be approved.
66. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and will continue to be reviewed as the process develops.

Property Implications

67. If the reduction of school places results in school closures further consideration will need to be given to the potential disposal of the site/s, should this be required. This will be subject to future decision making if necessary.

Options

68. The options that have been considered and consulted upon prior to deciding on its preferred option are:

Option 1: That cabinet approves publication of the draft school place planning strategy and agrees to proceed with reviewing the level of surplus places, and increases to special educational needs provision, to support improved education standards within the context of the emerging Education Strategy.

Option 2: Not to publish the draft school place planning strategy, and not proceed with reviewing the level of surplus places and increases to special educational needs provision and improve education standards within the context of the emerging Education Strategy.

Risk Management

69. Financial risks have been reviewed and considered by the Senior Finance Business Partner and further information can be reviewed in the Finance section of this report.
70. The council is required to pro-actively and effectively manage surplus capacity and performance across all the schools it is responsible for. Failure to do so in this instance (option 2 above) would lead to lost opportunities and continuing uncertainties for all involved:
- As surplus numbers increase over the coming years schools will be faced with ever greater financial challenges, potentially leading to job losses and a reduced ability to offer a wide, quality, and varied curriculum.
 - Parents, carers, staff, and pupils would continue to be faced with uncertainties around the availability and quality of the educational offer on the Island.
 - The capital and revenue resources available to the council would not be sufficient to support all schools and could lead to a number of budget deficits.
71. The risks set out above are mitigated by the recommendations in this report, to publish the draft school place planning strategy, and to proceed with reviewing the level of surplus places and increases to special educational needs provision and improve education standards within the context of the emerging Education Strategy.

Evaluation

72. The current number of primary school places in the areas identified for review is unsustainable leading to the inefficient use of resources in the area. If used more effectively these resources could be better targeted to improving the educational outcomes of the local children rather than maintaining the schools' estate which provides for and maintains the oversupply of places. The council must look to the needs of the children, not only now, but also long into the future in coming to its final decision about how to address the oversupply of places.
73. The recommendation set out in this report is felt to provide the best opportunity to secure long term educational improvement and financial stability for families and schools.

Appendices Attached

- 74. Appendix 1 – Draft Island School Place Planning Strategy
- 75. Appendix 2 – IOW Primary School place planning areas - Primary
- 76. Appendix 3 - Headteachers and Chair of Governor representations

Background Papers

- 77. A report was presented to Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills on 1 September 2022. The detail of this report and the presentation can be found in the link shared below.

[Policy and Scrutiny Committee - School Place Planning](#)

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