

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 02/20

Date: September 2020

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To provide an update for Members on the Bulge classes in readiness for September 2020

Bulge Class Update

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Background

In 2016, central government announced wave 12 of the Free School Programme, an initiative to provide new school places funded and delivered by the DFE.

Of the four successful bids, two were for non-selective secondary schools. The Maritime Academy in Strood which is targeted to open in September 2022 and the Leigh Academy Rainham, which was targeted at 2020 initially but is now delayed until 2021 which is the subject of the remainder of this report.

When it became apparent that the Leigh Academy Rainham would not meet the 2020 deadline on the new site, temporary accommodation was sought. This however failed to materialise despite a number of potential options being considered, meaning that the responsibility to meet the significant demand for 2020 reverts to the Council.

On 9 October 2019 the DFE wrote to the council advising that the school would not open as targeted in 2020 but would be delayed until 2021. That left very little time for the council to make arrangements for, and deliver, the places to meet demand.

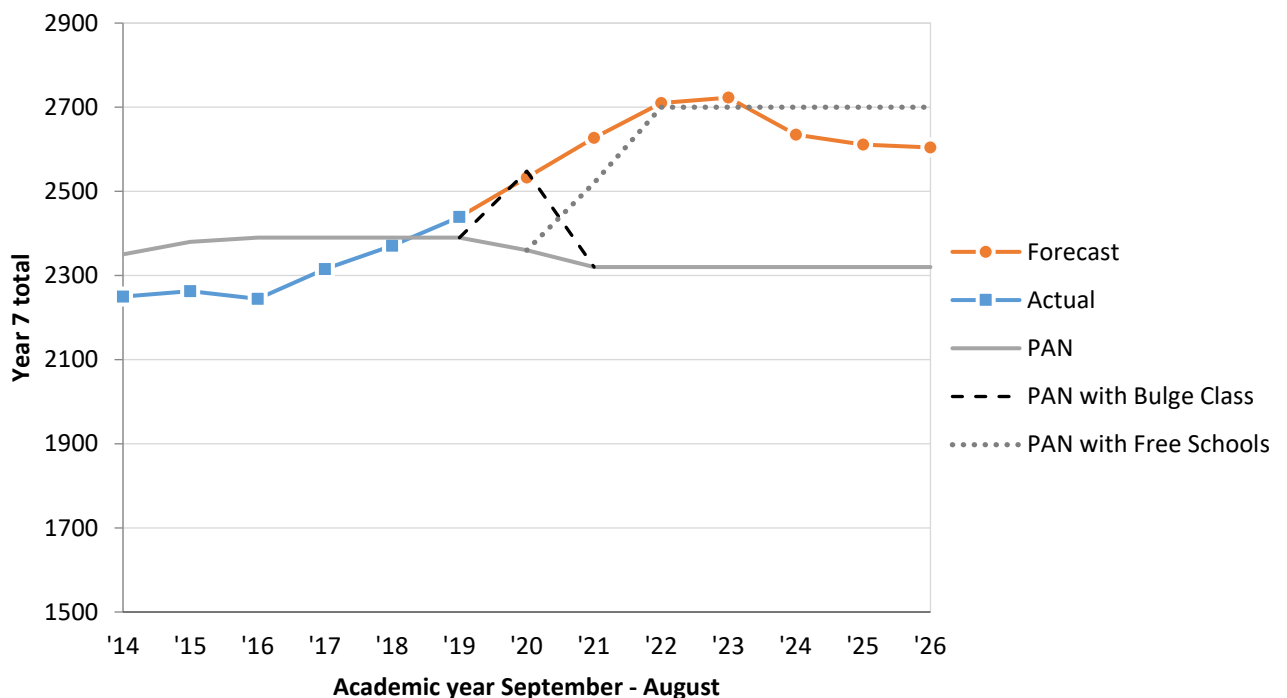
Officers set about speaking with secondary schools to look at where bulge classes could be implemented. All secondary school agreed to help to varying degrees, but some required additional capacity to be able to cope with the extra demand, and some more than others.

A report to Cabinet in November 2019 outlined the issue and the solutions as well as the estimated costs.

Analysis and Advice

The graph below shows how the demand for year 7 non-selective places has been rising steeply from 2016 and is forecasted to continue until at least 2023. Beyond 2023 we expect the forecasts to increase above those shown as more housing applications are approved; the forecasts can only be based upon approved housing applications. Medway's forecasts have been proven to be accurate against the government's benchmarking criteria and so Members can be confident in the analysis and the expected demand.

Whilst in 2019, despite there being additional demand above the PAN, that demand could be met utilising available capacity within schools. However that has now been exhausted with some schools in danger of overcrowding. Therefore, to ensure sufficient places are available for September 2020, additional capacity will now be necessary to avoid a widespread shortage of places. For example, in 2020 there could be a shortfall of up to 250 places which equates to the need for more than 8 forms of entry and by 2022 the need for 9 forms of entry.



This forecast shortfall was planned to be met through the provision of the two new Free Schools (Leigh Academy Rainham and the Maritime Academy in Strood), as set out in paragraph 2.2, awarded to Medway. As the Rainham school will no longer open in 2020 it is now anticipated that these schools will be operational from 2021 and 2022.

This does mean that for September 2020, there is now expected to be a significant shortfall in available places, and this will need to be met through the creation of bulge classes at current secondary schools.

The latest cost estimated of providing sufficient places in the bulge classes has increased from the original estimate of £3m to approximately £3.9m. The initial estimates were based upon the situation as we understood it at the time, but since then costs have increased due to a number of factors.

These are;

- Increased site costs due to more detailed work being undertaken after the initial estimates
- Increased costs due to covid and the construction industry as well as needing to accelerate works
- Revised forecast based upon the latest data which showed that there will continue to be a shortfall in 2021 even with the new school opening

This would create around 250 additional year 7 places at nine of the eleven non selective secondary schools for 2020. This will not only ensure that initial demand is met but will also provide some flexibility to meet in year demand from pupils moving into the area. The proposed work will also provide capacity for September 2021 when further places will be required.

As the graph shows there will be a shortfall of around 120 places in 2021 with the Rainham school opening.

This will be met through the new school admitting additional pupils and this has been discussed with the DfE and the Leigh Academy Trust, as well as at Thomas Aveling and Robert Napier, the two schools where costs have increased since the initial estimates. The additional costs incurred at these schools will mean that no additional work is required for 2021 and therefore provides value as there will not be the need for further projects at these schools to meet future demand. The places created by these school will be 120 which provides the majority of the 2021 need.

Inevitably, due to inward migration further places will be required for 2021's cohort as it progresses through the year groups, but it is expected that these could be absorbed into the capacity at other schools.

The pupils in the bulge classes will remain at the school for the entirety of their secondary education, and therefore the additional physical capacity has to be sufficient to support this for at least the next five to seven years.

Progress has been made in the delivery of the additional places for 2020 and 2021 and it is expected that the necessary places will be available when required.

How the funding is sourced and allocated is shown in the next section.

Financial implications

The initial estimates of £3m was reported to Cabinet in November and it was agreed that £3m would be vired from the SEND school fund.

Subsequently officers made a business case to the DfE as the situation the council found itself in was a result of the delay of the DfE free school. The outcome was that the DfE agreed to advance £1.9m in grant funding. That meant that £1.9m could be returned to the SEND school fund.

However, after the detailed design work was undertaken and the issue of 2021 demand was addressed the costs increased to £3.94m as shown in the table below.

The additional funding requirement (£940k) can now be met through the current Basic Need Programme as a result of some underspends on recently completed projects and the delay to the changes at St Nicholas Infant School. This funding will be vired from the Basic Need Programme code which holds funding until formally allocated. The underspends will be returned to the holding code and re allocated to the bulge classes, and the funding badged to St Nicholas but not yet formally allocated will be vired to the Bulge projects. The St Nicholas project will be progressed when future funding becomes available.

Project	Estimated cost	Revised cost
Strood Acad	0	0
Walderslade Girls	0	0
Rainham Girls	50,000	40,000
Brompton Acad	120,000	120,000
Robert Napier	150,000	250,000
Victory Acad	180,000	180,000
Hundred of Hoo	300,000	0
Greenacre Boys	700,000	500,000
Thomas Aveling	1,500,000	2,850,000
	3,000,000	3,940,000

The significant additional cost at Thomas Aveling is a result of the initial costs being under estimated as well as adding in additional capacity to enable the increased demand for 2021 to be met. The school is highly popular with parents and has become overcrowded in recent years and so this project will solve three issues (current overcrowding, 2020 and 2021). It will also provide the school with some flexibility in future years should further bulge classes be required in the future as new housing comes forward.

There is £10.9m in agreed section 106 contributions for education outstanding from approved developments either underway or yet to start. However, the receipt of these funds is reliant upon housing schemes completing, and with the funding received in instalments at agreed trigger points over time. It is uncertain when this funding will be available.

Wherever possible the most cost-effective solution will be utilised in each bulge class project to minimise the cost.