

Children and Young People

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 09/23

Date: 26/10/2023

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

Purpose: To provide an update on the position regarding Anchorage House with regard to School Places.

# Anchorage House inward migration – Potential impact on pupil place planning.

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**Background**

Education officers became aware of the situation from the Kent Online Report on Friday 13 October. This led to a number of urgent emails to colleagues in housing and planning around the factual accuracy of the report as well as a request for any information.

The potential for 81 families being placed in Medway causes much challenge and uncertainty around the number of pupils that may result in, and how many would require a school place, as well as understandably serious concerns around levels of SEND, EAL, safeguarding and adult and children’s social care.

**School Places**

School places for primary pupils in the area local to Anchorage House are limited with some spaces available, but with initial numbers projected at approaching 160 based upon 81 families, these may be swallowed up quickly. This coupled with the surge in inward migration in the Gillingham area due to the NHS recruitment drive, as well as the natural inward movement of families, means that unplanned for additional primary places are going to be required quickly.

When planning school places, we are generally looking 3 to 5 years ahead, based upon robust forecasting which includes an element of inward migration and housing growth. This growth far exceeds the planned for numbers the Anchorage House forecasts are realised.

A bulge class is where a school accommodates an extra form of entry (class) in one year group. This isn’t a permanent expansion in Published Admission Number (PAN) rather a bulge that works through the school.

To meet the demand in Gillingham, primarily caused by the NHS recruitment, further funding has been secured through the Schools Forum for five primary and two secondary bulge classes. They have also approved funding for two bulge classes in Hoo to meet a further surge in demand from housing in that area, which includes from military families where the army has bought up a number of larger houses for their families moving in.

Whilst this may assist in meeting demand in Gillingham and Hoo, Anchorage House has caused the potential for significant numbers in Chatham/Rochester.

We do have some primary school spaces available in Chatham and Rochester and so short-term demand should be met, although this will mean that we will need to re assess the forecasts for the next few years to determine if any additional places will now be needed. The challenge of the current situation is that at this stage we simply do not know the numbers, ages and gender of the children moving in and so planning additional provision is difficult.

Mark Breathwick – Assistant Director Culture and Community and Cllr Khan met with Newham on the 20th October, the feedback was that number may be less than we were expecting as the building is evenly split between smaller one- and two-bedroom properties, although there is still expected to be significant numbers of children.

At the same meeting a clear commitment was given by Newham that they wouldn’t be placing anyone with an active engagement with children’s or adult’s social care.

Mark is also writing to Newham Council to ask that they consider families with younger children ideally under school age, certainly initially. We also hope that lines of communication will be maintained so that we are pre advised of the families moving in, together with the numbers and ages of children, to assist in planning school places.

**Conclusion**

Whilst in the short term we hope that numbers of children are smaller than initially thought, and that they are younger children where more nursery and school places are available, at this stage we cannot be certain and must plan for all scenarios. To that end we are asking secondary schools to consider a funded bulge class as well as monitoring closely the fluid situation in the primary sector and exploring which schools in the local area could accommodate additional classes as and when necessary.

**Next Stage**

Whilst we are planning for additional pupils and demand for school places, we are unsighted presently on the precise level and nature of demand and so we continue to monitor the situation, chase for detail on families arriving to be as proactive as is possible under these circumstances, and explore what options will be available to us to react as necessary to the demand.

As more detail becomes known to us, we can update further.

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