

CABINET

19 OCTOBER 2021

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY 2018-22

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
(Lead Member)

Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools

Report from: Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People - Children and Adults Services

Author: Paul Clarke, Head of School Services

Summary

This annual summary report provides an update on the progress made against the School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22. It highlights areas of demand for school places and makes recommendations to ensure that appropriate levels of good quality school places are available.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1. Medway Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places. The School Place Planning Strategy describes the principles, methods, and challenges of this duty.
- 1.2. Annual reviews of the School Place Planning Strategy provide up to date information and proposals to make sure there continue to be sufficient good school places for the expected numbers of pupils.
- 1.3. The proposals in this annual review of the School Place Planning Strategy follow the School Place Planning Strategy Principles. They also support the Council Plan Priority of 'Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential', and the outcome of 'All children achieving their potential in schools'. The proposals, if approved, would be delivered through available funding from the Education Capital Programme. Therefore, this is a matter for Cabinet. Some additional funding is required to complete some projects, as detailed in sections 8.11 to 8.13 of the report, and Cabinet is requested to recommend full Council to add the additional funding to the Capital Programme.

2. School Place Planning Strategy

- 2.1. In July 2018, as part of the School Place Planning Strategy, Cabinet approved the School Place Planning Strategy Principles. These guidelines ensure that any changes are based upon improving schools and raising standards, so that the Council meets its statutory duty to provide sufficient good school places.
- 2.2. Several factors must be considered when deciding which schools to expand. These include forecasted pupil numbers, the OFSTED rating of the school, its current performance, and its popularity with parents. Medway's forecasts have proven to be accurate in the past, meeting the Department for Education (DfE)'s benchmarks. Therefore, Members can be confident that the recommendations made in the School Place Planning Strategy reviews are based upon accurate and robust evidence and analysis.
- 2.3. Manageable levels of surplus school places are necessary to ensure that enough places are available for pupils who arrive during the school year, such as pupils moving into new housing schemes. The nationally accepted level of surplus places is 5%, to ensure places are available without the risk of making schools unviable. However, given the high number of families with children of varying ages moving to Medway, a 5% surplus has not been sufficient in some areas. It was recommended that at planning area level, as necessary, an 8% surplus be used for the reception year group. This will naturally reduce as in year admissions occur and increasing cohorts move through the school. This may be a little higher than the average surplus levels but will ensure sufficient places in areas of demand and regular inward migration. It will also avoid the need and costs for emergency bulge classes and schools admitting over number which can prove difficult for schools to organise at short notice. Working to 8% surplus should not affect the financial viability of schools. However, in certain circumstances, where all or most of the surplus is at one school in an area, the local authority will work in partnership with the Schools Forum to help mitigate any potential financial impact.
- 2.4. Officers are reviewing the surplus levels, as with birth numbers falling it may be prudent to revert back to the 5% surplus figure and keep under review. This will be presented in more detail, when the review has been undertaken, within the new School Place Planning Strategy to commence in 2022.
- 2.5. Officers will commence drafting the new School Place Planning Strategy in the autumn 2021, which is expected to be presented to Members in the Spring of 2022. This report will therefore be the final annual review from the current School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22.

3. Annual review

- 3.1. Annual updates to the School Place Planning Strategy will make proposals for maintaining the appropriate level of school places in Medway. These proposals will be based on the most up-to-date information, as well as an analysis of local and national policy and strategy.

- 3.2. This annual review report, and the recommendations in it, are based upon the annual round of forecasting undertaken in April 2021, using the latest available data.
- 3.3. The forecasts in this report include housing developments with planning permission. Schemes under consideration or at appeal will only be included in the forecasts when approved. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that as more housing schemes gain approval future forecasts will reflect this and demand for places will rise.

4. Medway overview

- 4.1. Medway's Local Plan, which is due to be published in 2023, highlights the need for an additional 27,000 homes across Medway by 2037. A number of these are already under construction, and the publication of the Local Plan is expected to increase the rate of housebuilding. It is expected that the total population will increase from 279,000 to 330,000 in that time.
- 4.2. The number of approved and proposed housing schemes means that demand for school places is expected to rise in the future.
- 4.3. School place planning officers are working with planning and development colleagues on the Local Plan infrastructure delivery plan, looking at where and when new schools and expansions would be required across Medway. This will continue during the development of the Plan.
- 4.4. The number of pupils expected from housing developments is based upon research by MORI. On average, for every 775 new houses with 2 or more bedrooms, 210 primary pupils will be produced. This is enough to fill a one form entry primary school.

5. Early Years Sufficiency

- 5.1. Local authorities are required by legislation to secure sufficient childcare, so far as reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). This means that parents are able to work because childcare places are available, accessible and affordable and are delivered flexibly at a range of high-quality settings.
- 5.2. Medway is committed to supporting as many families as possible to take up the offer of free or funded places for an eligible two-year-old. There are sufficient registered places to accept all the potentially eligible two-year-olds in Medway.
- 5.3. The developments in 30 hours provision have not had a detrimental impact on the number of 15-hour places offered across Medway. The number of 30 hours places has increased significantly with the addition of 30 new providers.
- 5.4. The overall trend in Medway has seen a gradual decrease in the number of births. Births in individual areas tend to fluctuate, and there are some areas which have shown some small increases. This indicates that for the foreseeable future, sufficient places are available to meet demand. Whilst

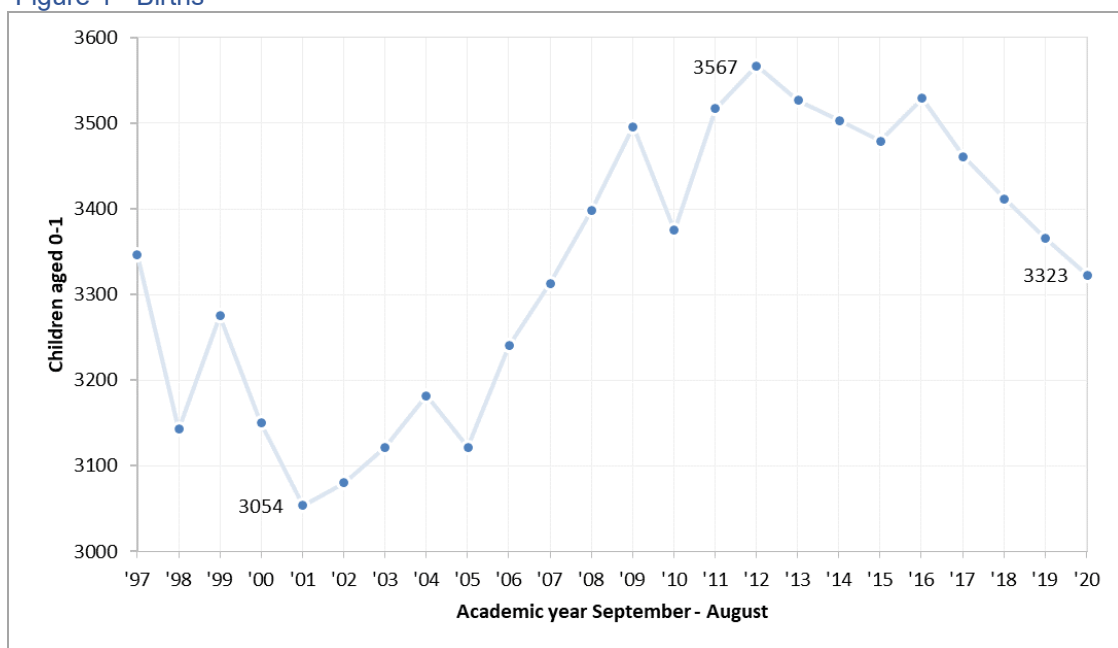
the position changes rapidly, there are over 800 full time childcare vacancies across Medway.

- 5.5. There are more than 250 Early Years providers within Medway, offering approximately 6500 childcare places.

6. Primary Schools

- 6.1. Births reached a peak in 2012 (Figure1), and the children born that year created a surge in Reception class applications in 2016. Another smaller peak in births in 2016 is the reason behind the Reception class peak in 2020. The falling Reception forecast reflects the current falling birth rate.
- 6.2. However, uncertainty caused by the Coronavirus pandemic is likely to cause an additional reduction in birth rates. People are less likely to have children when the future is uncertain. There appears to have been a negative impact on birth rates from December 2020 (9 months after the first lockdown started in March 2020). Lower births in 2020-2021 would impact the Reception numbers in 2025-2026.
- 6.3. However, as life moves back to normal and confidence returns, this reduction in rates is expected to slow, or even reverse. As new housing is completed, it is likely that new families and people planning to start families will move in, increasing immediate demand as well as the birth rate in the future.

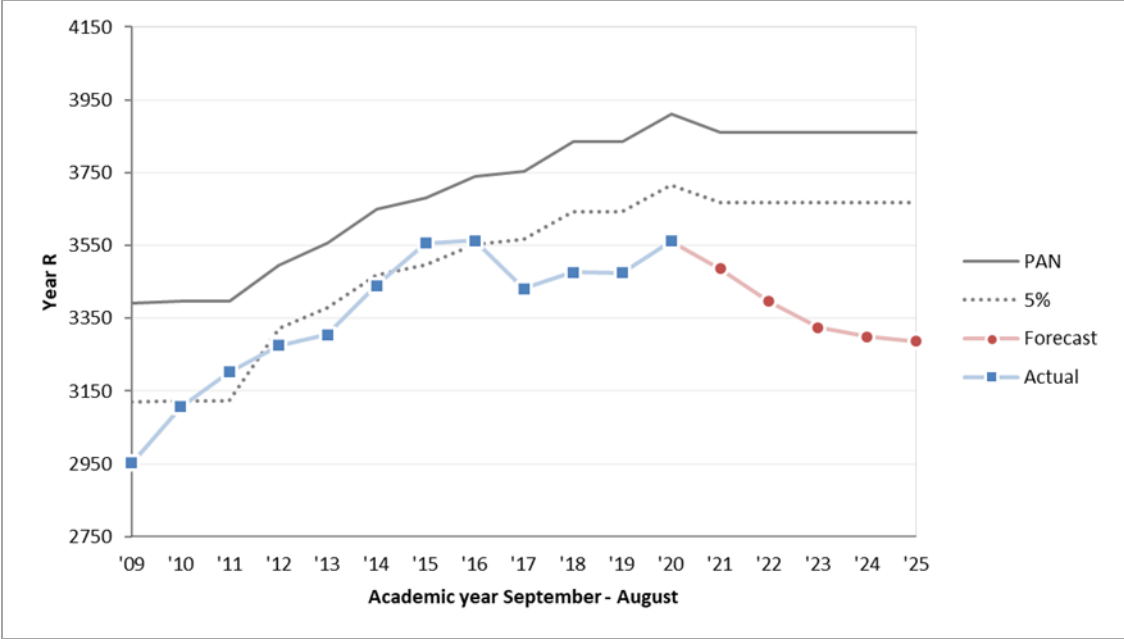
Figure 1 - Births



- 6.4. Reception figures have been rising over the last decade, but 2020 is expected to be the peak (Figure 2) for the time being. This is based on current birth rates and inward migration. The graph shows that the currently forecasted numbers are below the total Published Admission Number (PAN) of all reception places in Medway. As more housing schemes are approved it is likely that reception forecasts will increase. However, it may be necessary in the short term to look at reducing PANs in some areas to match demand.

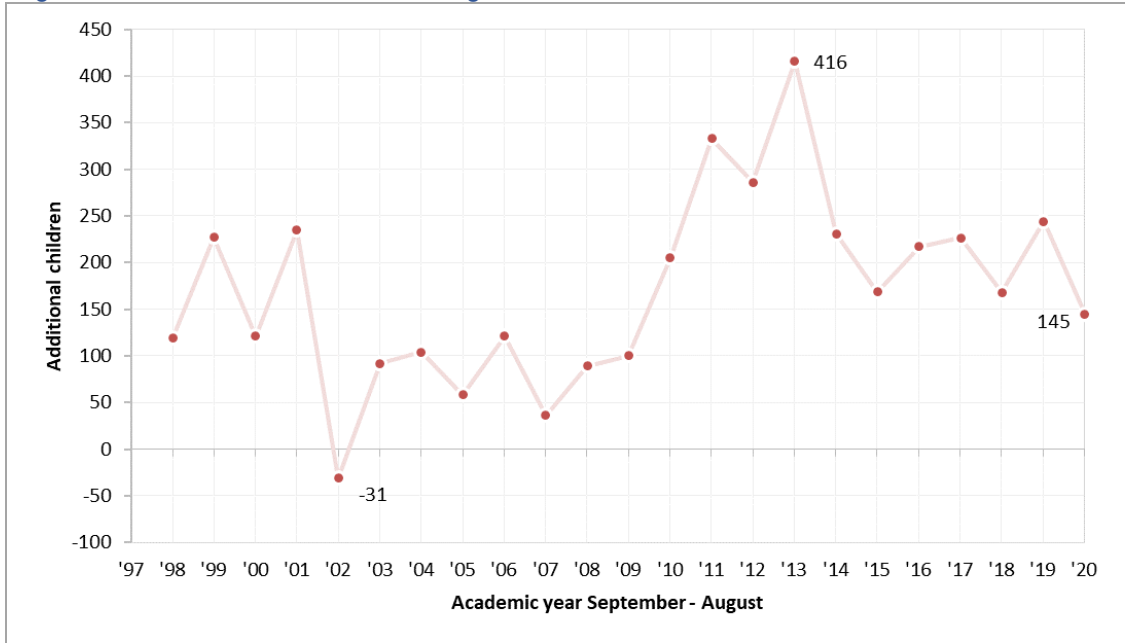
- 6.5. It is recommended that a review of PANs across Medway, as part of an overall assessment of school organisation arrangements, is undertaken to ensure that sufficient capacity is available in areas of demand and likely inward migration. In areas where there is a danger of over provision, PANs are considered for reduction, which in some cases may be short term arrangements to ensure the viability of schools until expected demand increases again, whilst in other cases the reductions may be permanent.
- 6.6. The outcome of this will be the protection of schools' financial and educational viability, whilst retaining capacity within the system to enable a speedy and cost-effective solution to future rising numbers.

Figure 2 - Medway Reception Year, actual and forecast



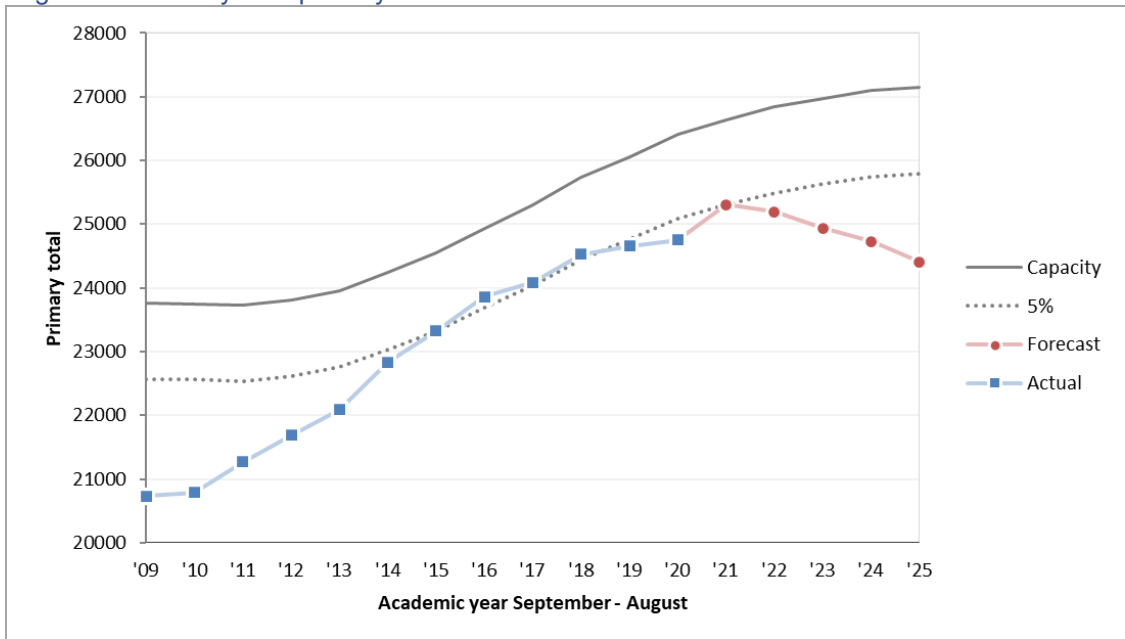
- 6.7. The number of pupils is affected by families with children moving into the area. Families can move in with children of any age, so the impact on Reception numbers can be anything between immediate, or in 4 years' time. From 2010, despite fluctuation, the number of pre-school age children moving into Medway has been higher compared to before 2010 (Figure 1). As the Local Plan progresses, an increasing number of housing schemes will come forward. Inward movement of pre-school age children can be reasonably expected to increase again in the future.

Figure 1 – Net movement of children aged 0-5



6.8. Total pupil numbers in primary schools have increased as the larger Reception cohorts pass through the school system. They are forecast to peak in 2021 (Figure 2). The expansion and new build work carried out as part of the capital programme up to September 2018 has provided sufficient school places to meet demand, however, whilst demand is falling in the short term some further primary capacity in some areas is likely to be required as housing development increases. There may be some areas with more surplus capacity than others, but this is because parental preference can change year on year. This makes it challenging to determine in advance which schools will be popular, and which will be less so.

Figure 2 - Medway total primary roll



Primary pupil place planning areas

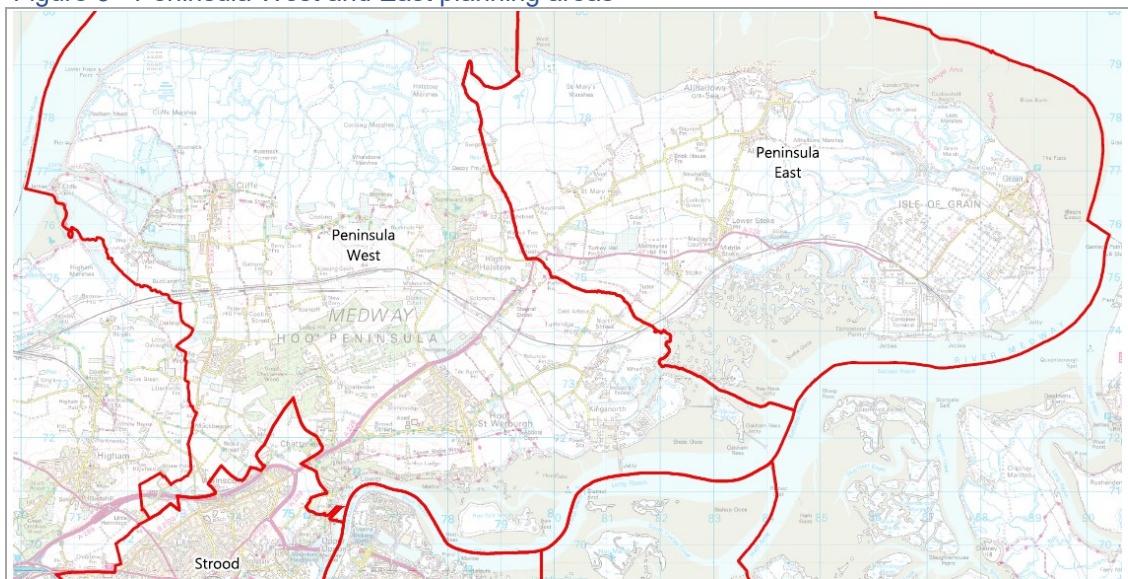
6.9. Medway has ten primary pupil place planning areas based on local geography. Generally, pupils who live in a planning area go to school in the

same area, although in some areas there is significant cross-boundary movement. When planning school places, it is necessary to consider movement between neighbouring areas. The following sections outline the forecasts for each planning area, some individually and others grouped due to movement between them.

Peninsula East and West

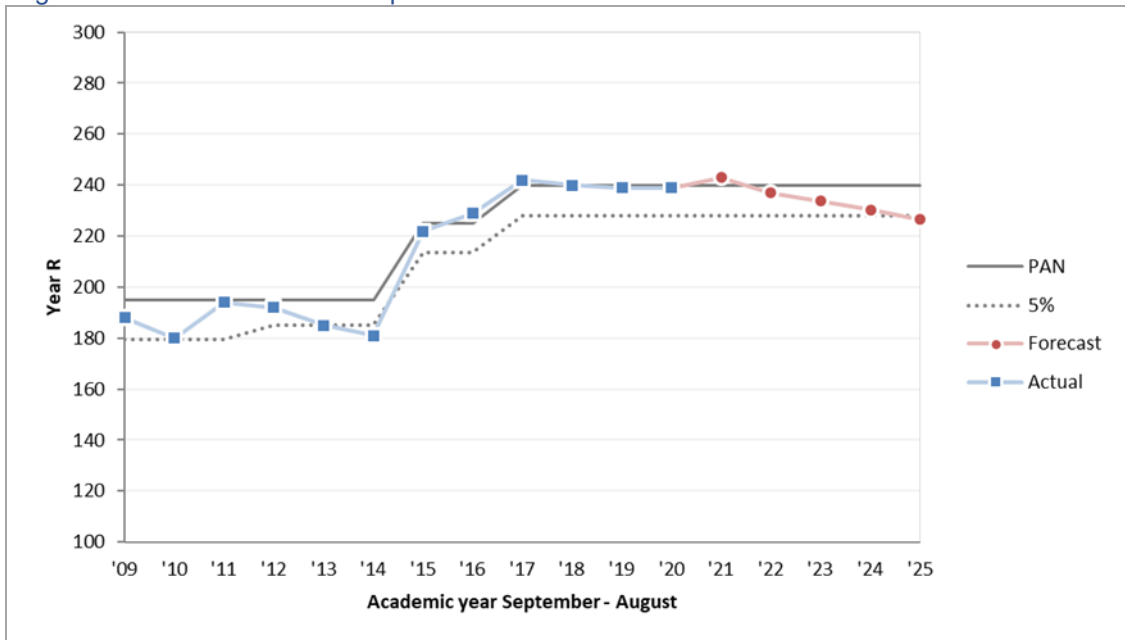
- 6.10. Peninsula West covers the area from Four Elms Hill to High Halstow, including Hoo St Werburgh, Cliffe, and Cliffe Woods. Peninsula East covers the remaining area to the east of High Halstow, including the villages of Grain, Stoke, and Allhallows.

Figure 3 - Peninsula West and East planning areas



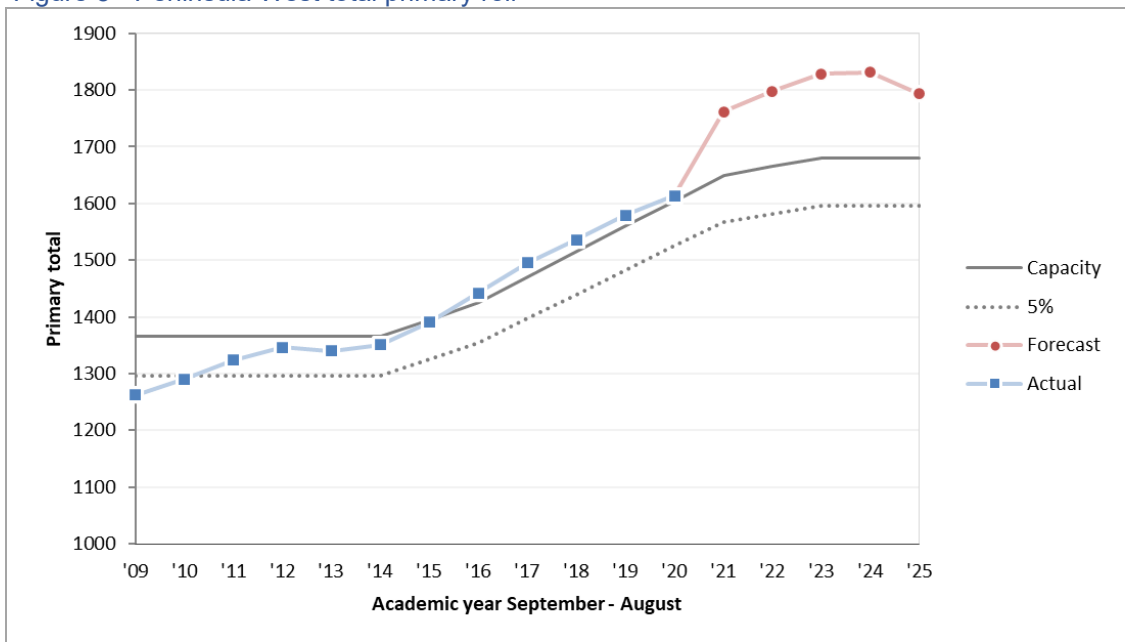
- 6.11. Peninsula West covers six primary schools. Projects at Hundred of Hoo and Cliffe Woods have recently added 315 primary school places into the area. The graph below shows the forecast for reception in the Peninsula West (Figure 4). Schools have generally filled to their PAN in the area, as soon as more places were added these were also filled. This is forecast to continue until at least 2022, and housing developments in the area may increase the forecast numbers in future.

Figure 4 - Peninsula West Reception Year



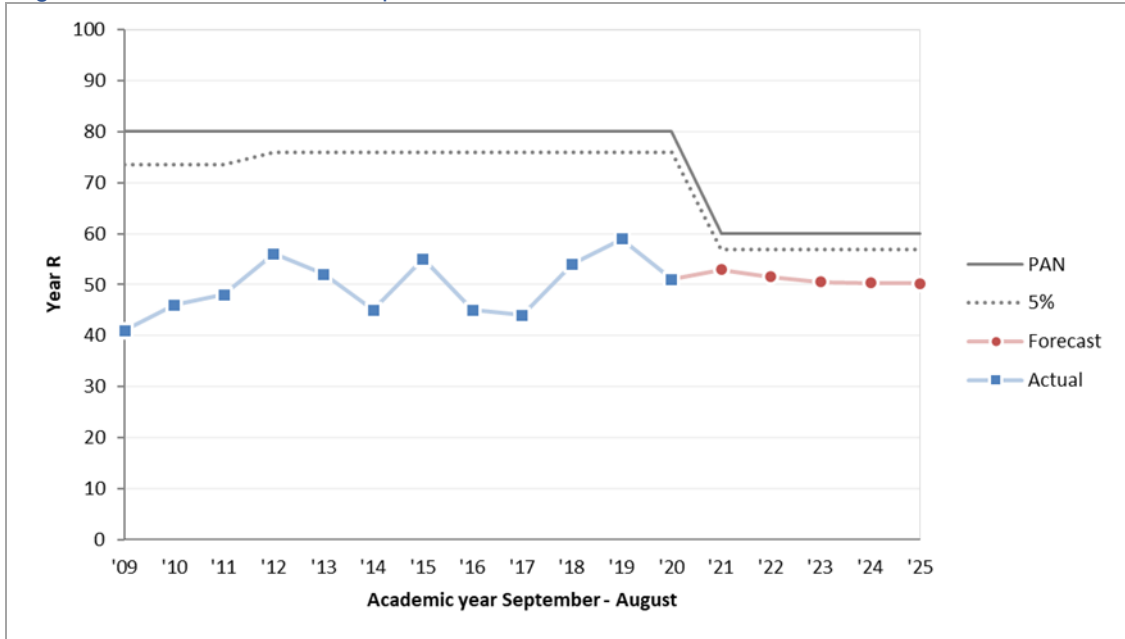
6.12. The continued large reception numbers in Peninsula West mean the schools have filled to capacity and are forecasted to remain so (Figure 5). Hoo is due to be the main area for housing growth in the local plan, and so demand for school places will increase. The number of additional places required, and how they are provided will depend on the rate of house building.

Figure 5 - Peninsula West total primary roll



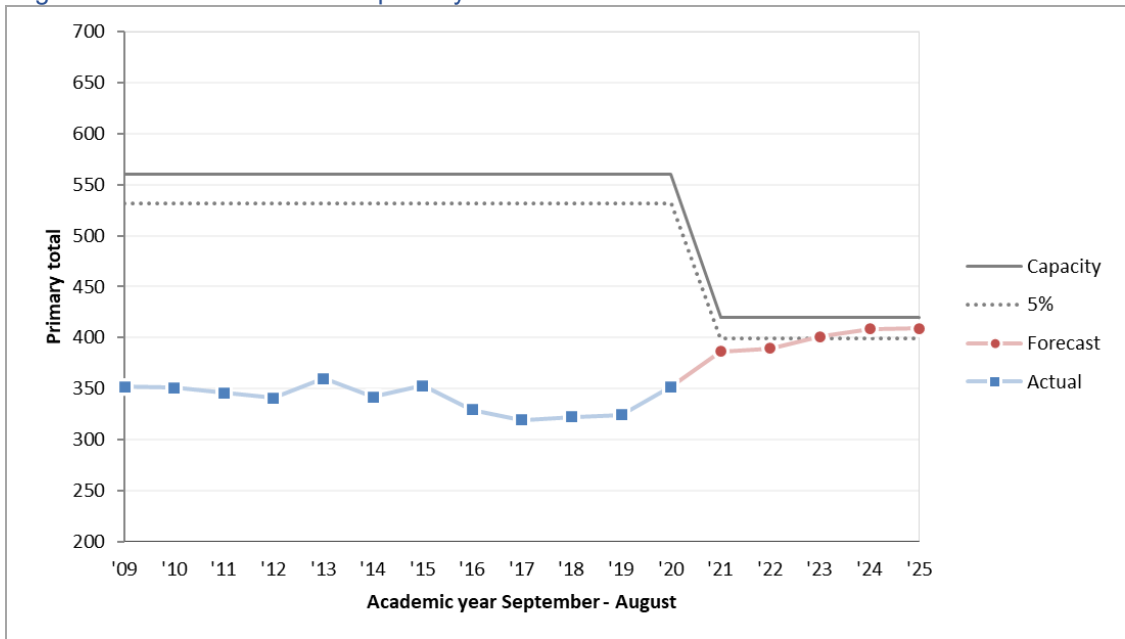
6.13. Peninsula East has two primary schools, both are small rural schools. The graph below shows the forecast for the Peninsula East area (Figure 6), with high numbers of surplus places. These schools are too far and too remote from Peninsula West for the surplus places to be used to meet current or future demand from that area. Schools in central Strood are closer to Hoo than the schools in Peninsula East. Two schools, Stoke and Allhallows, were merged on 31st August 2021. This will form the Peninsula East Primary Academy with a PAN of 30 on the Allhallows site. This will reduce the number of surplus places from September 2021.

Figure 6 - Peninsula East Reception Year



6.14. In Peninsula East, the schools have large amounts of surplus capacity (Figure 7). The merger of Stoke and Allhallows will reduce this unused excess capacity. The number of surplus places will continue to be monitored.

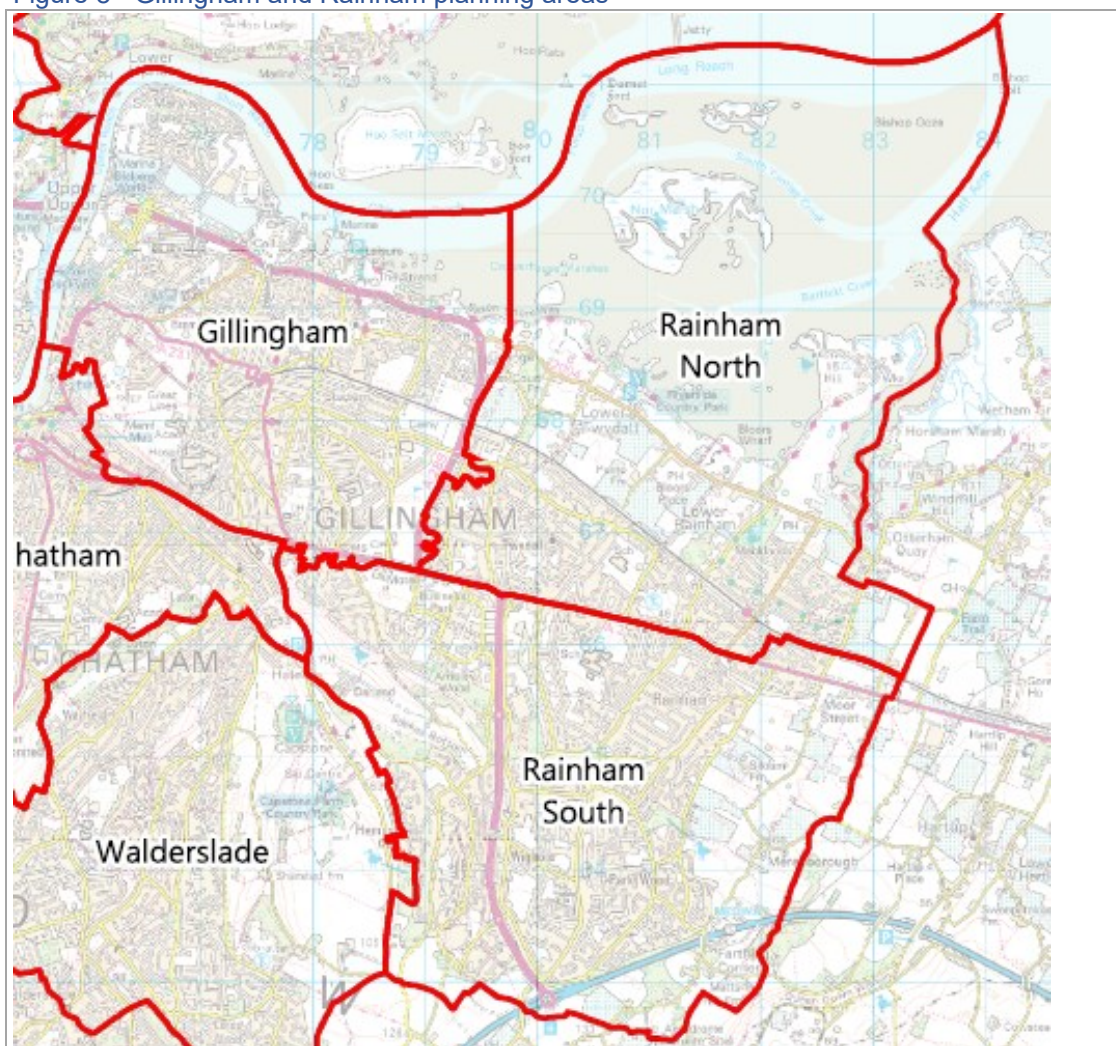
Figure 7 - Peninsula East total primary roll



Gillingham, Rainham North and Rainham South

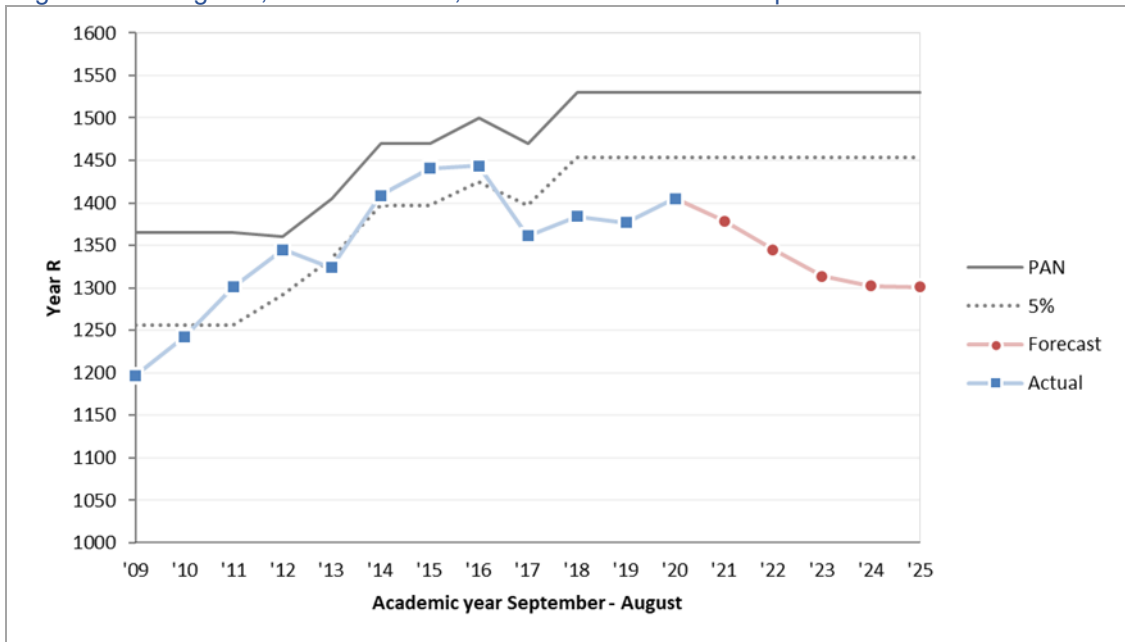
6.15. The levels of pupil movement between these three place planning areas (Figure 8) makes it sensible to review the Gillingham and Rainham areas together.

Figure 8 - Gillingham and Rainham planning areas



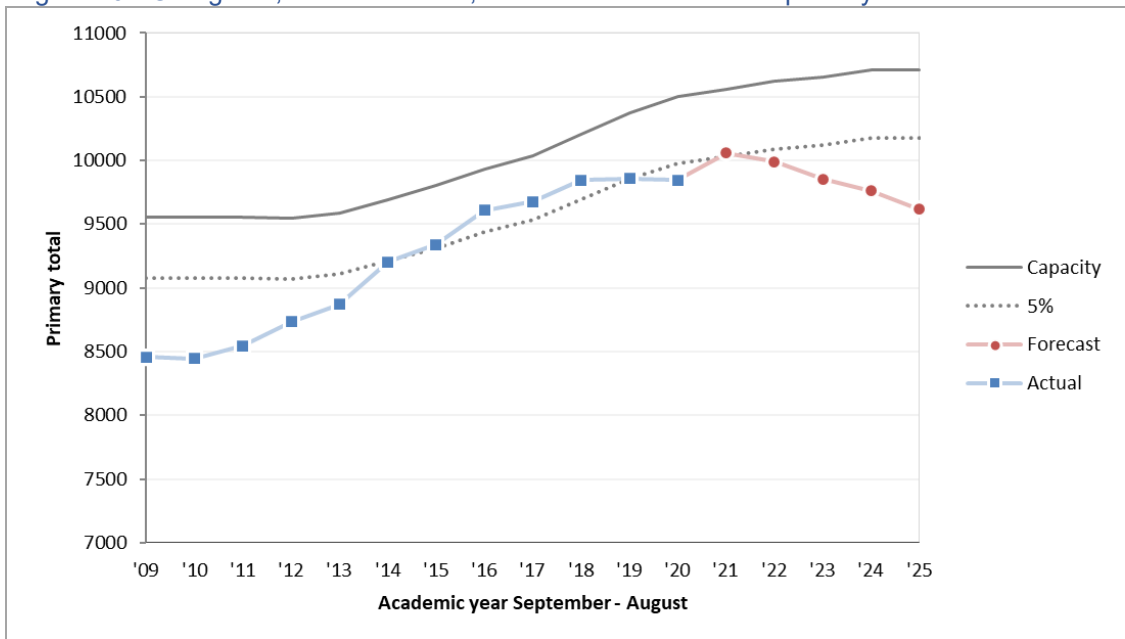
- 6.16. Reception numbers increased up to 2016 (Figure 9), and expansions at Brompton Westbrook, Woodlands Academy, Napier Primary, Saxon Way, and a bulge class at St Thomas of Canterbury ensured that sufficient places were available. Reception numbers fell in 2017 and then rose slightly up to 2020. There is forecasted to be a gradual decrease. However, there are housing developments underway around St Mary's Island and the docks area, and some underway in Rainham with more planned.

Figure 9 - Gillingham, Rainham North, and Rainham South Reception Year



6.17. Total primary rolls are forecast to reach a maximum in 2021 (Figure 10). However, housing from the local plan on the edges of Rainham will impact upon pupil numbers in the longer term.

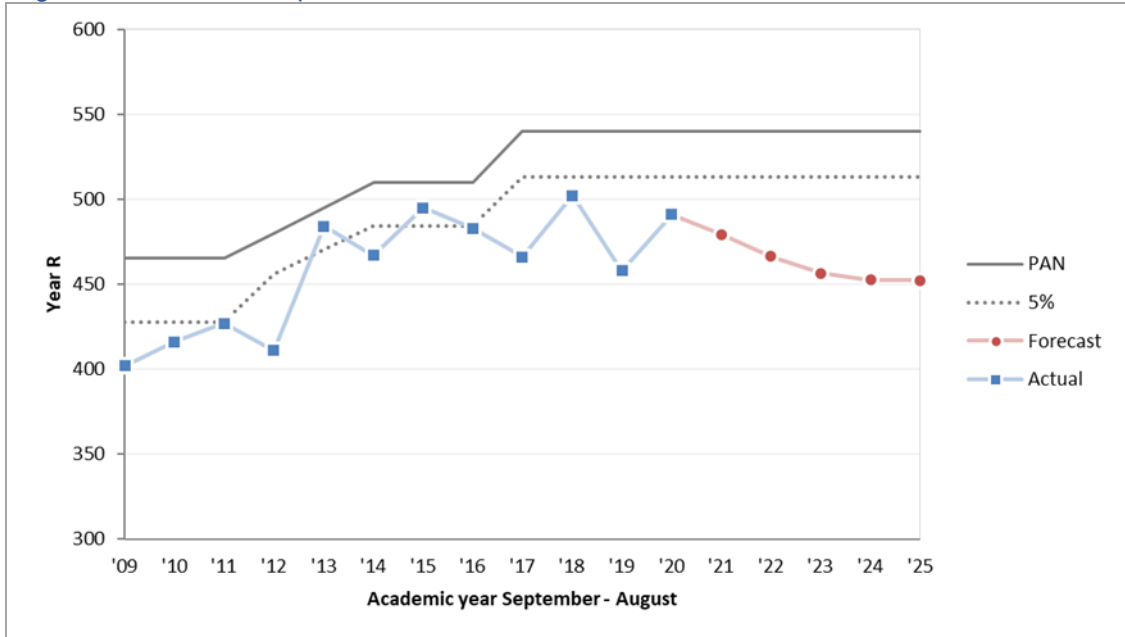
Figure 10 - Gillingham, Rainham North, and Rainham South total primary roll



Strood

6.18. In Strood there are several large housing developments at various stages of construction and over 1500 proposed. Reception class forecasts suggest that sufficient capacity is now in place to accommodate intakes over the next few years (Figure 11). However, this will depend on how quickly the new housing is built.

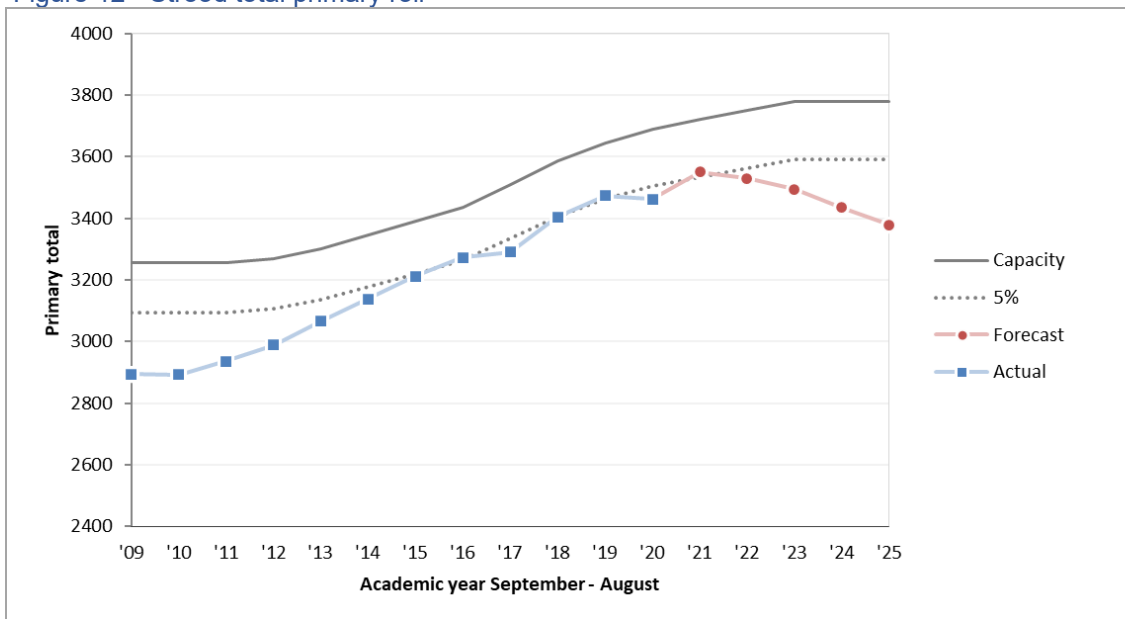
Figure 11 - Strood Reception Year



6.19. Proposals are underway to change St Nicholas Church of England Infant School into a primary school so that pupils can complete their primary education uninterrupted without the need to transfer at key stage 2, and under decision 85/2021 the cabinet, ratified at full Council, agreed to commit to funding the expansion through future section 106 funding for the area. This also results in future changes at The Gordon Federation Schools, which is where the pupils from St Nicholas would generally have transferred to. An expected outcome of these proposals is that by 2029 there will be an additional 20 places per year group available in Strood, which will help meet demand from future developments.

6.20. Total roll forecasts (Figure 12) show that current capacity will cater for the forecast demand. However, this will depend on the rate of housebuilding in Strood, but also the lack of capacity in Peninsula West may result in pupils from that area attending school in Strood instead.

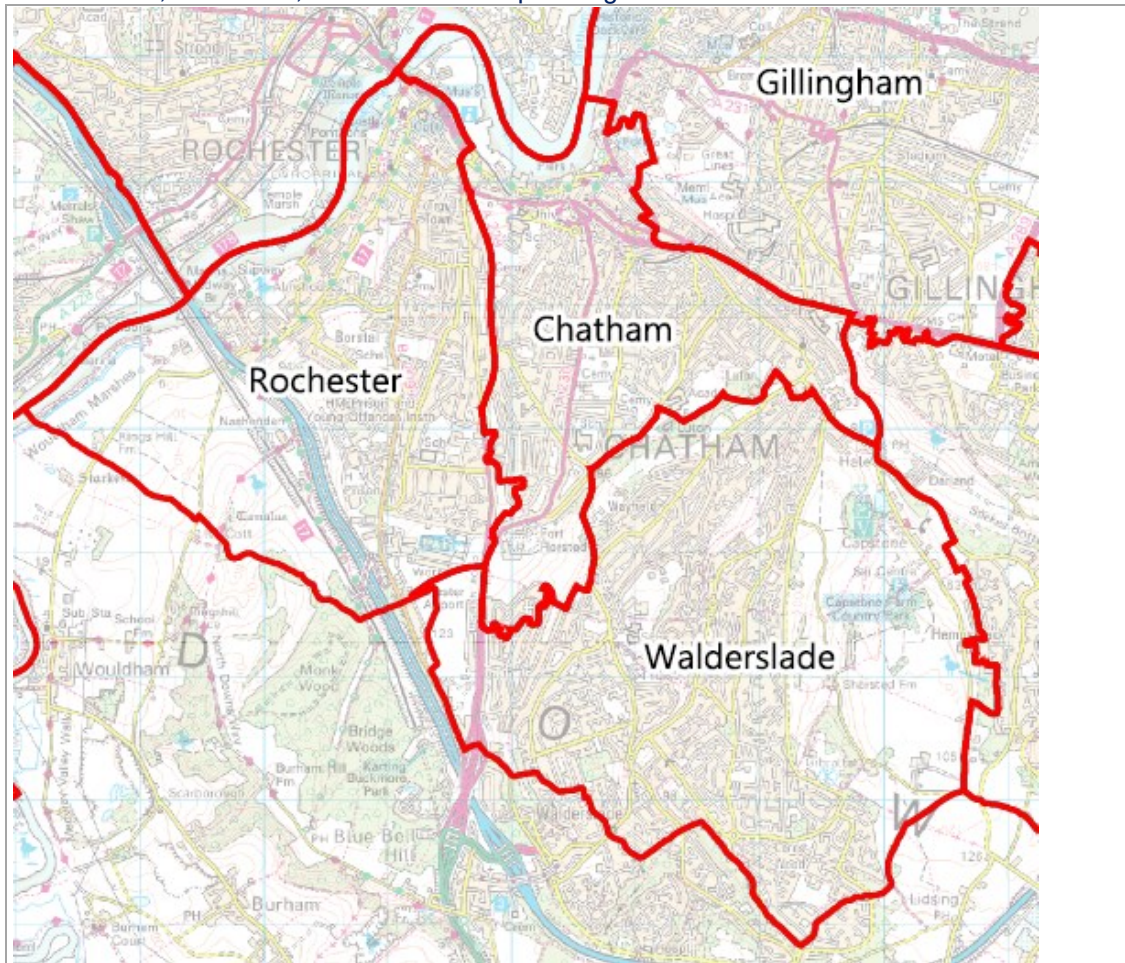
Figure 12 - Strood total primary roll



Chatham, Rochester and Walderslade

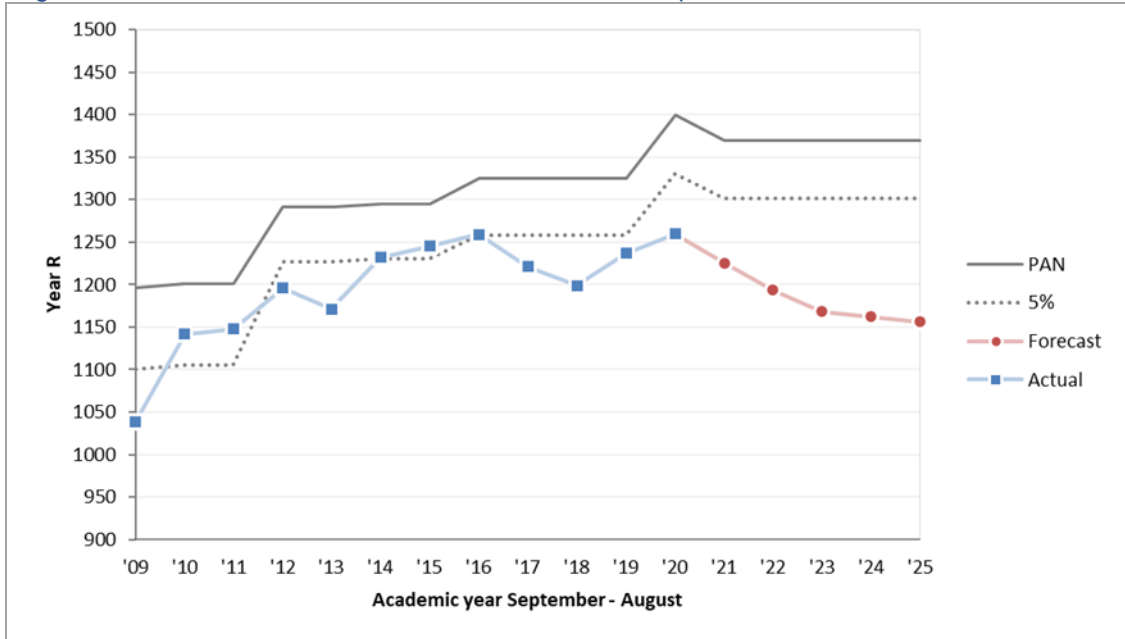
- 6.21. These three neighbouring planning areas experience some cross-boundary movement of pupils to attend schools. They are contained in the west by the River Medway, in the east by the Capstone Valley, and to the south by the M2 motorway.

Figure 13 - Chatham, Rochester, and Walderslade planning areas



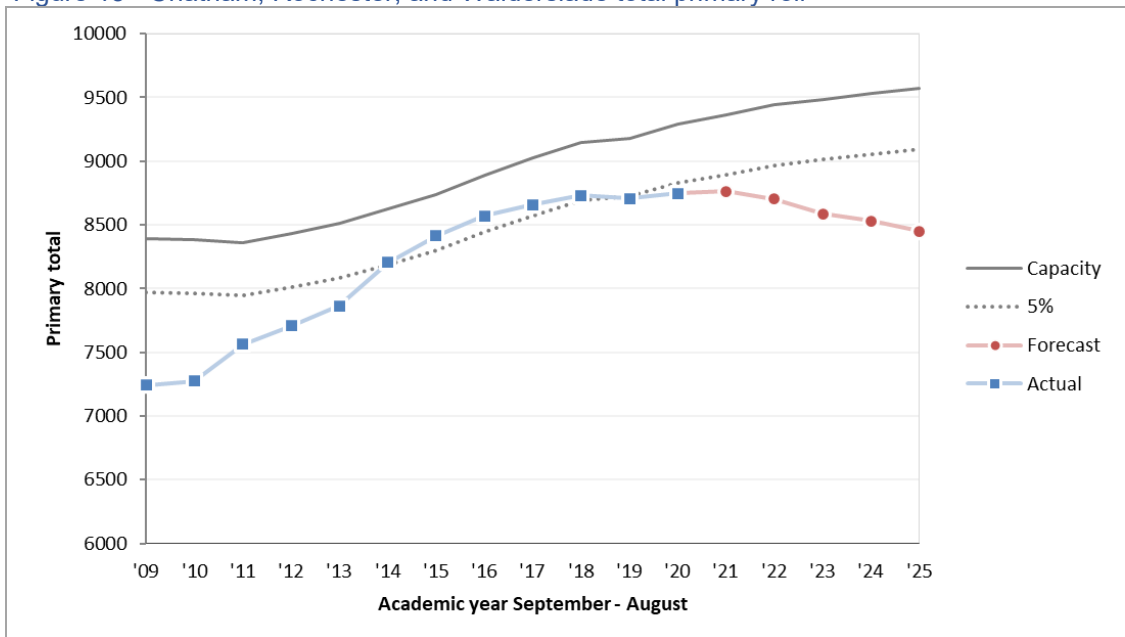
- 6.22. The graph below (Figure 14) shows that there are forecast to be sufficient places for Reception numbers. The housing development at Rochester Riverside will generate additional pupils but will benefit from an on-site school. The timing of occupations in the development and the construction of the school will result in a mismatch of supply and demand of school places in the short term.

Figure 14 - Chatham, Rochester, and Walderslade Reception Year



- 6.23. In 2020, Greenvale and Phoenix changed from separate infant and junior schools to two primary schools which will result in an additional 15 places per year group over time. Bulge classes at Walderslade and Wayfield primary schools in 2020 added 60 places for that year, keeping the number of places around the 8% surplus level.
- 6.24. To support the bulge classes at Wayfield Primary Academy, it is proposed to provide additional teaching space at the school utilising section 106 funding of £314,000 from the local former driving range housing development. The project will provide additional classrooms and specialist facilities to enable the full curriculum offer to be delivered with the additional pupils at the school for the entirety of their primary education.
- 6.25. The forecast (Figure 15) indicates that total rolls will fall from 2021, but pupils from Rochester Riverside are expected to make an impact further in the future.

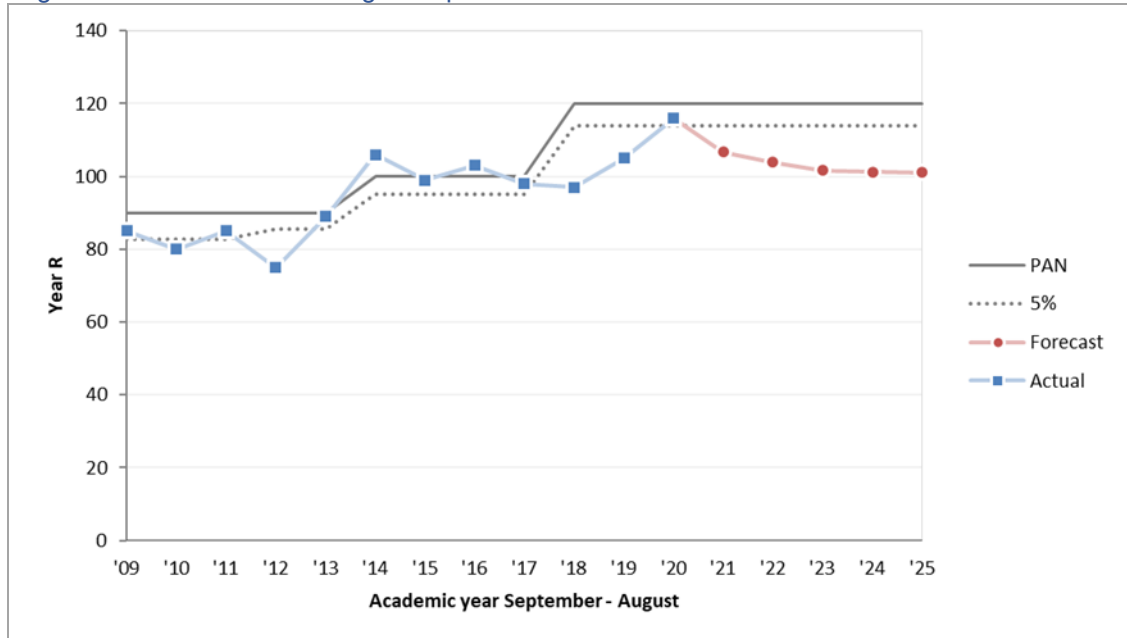
Figure 15 - Chatham, Rochester, and Walderslade total primary roll



Cuxton and Halling

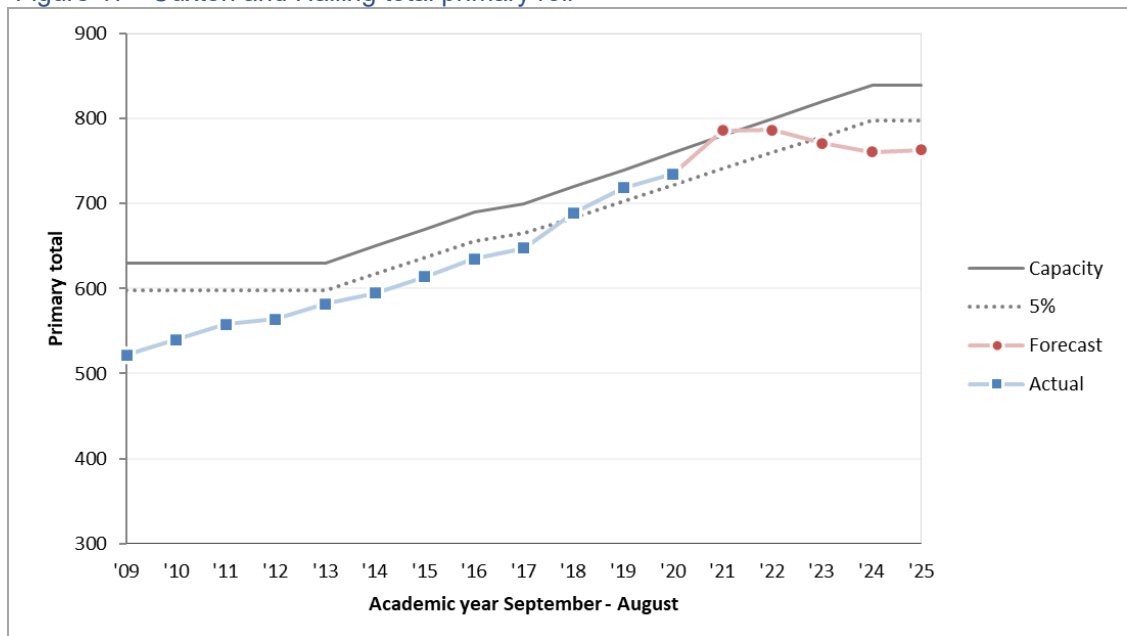
- 6.26. This is a mostly rural area with two primary schools. There have been some large housing developments both in Medway, and just over the border in Kent. Both schools have been expanded recently to ensure sufficient places are available (Figure 16).

Figure 16 - Cuxton and Halling Reception Year



- 6.27. The total roll forecast (Figure 17) shows that there may be pressure on overall rolls in 2021 and 2022, but this is due to the phasing in of the additional capacity and sufficient places are expected to be in place.

Figure 17 - Cuxton and Halling total primary roll



Primary summary

- 6.28. Table 1 below shows where primary school places have been added between 2013 and 2020. This additional capacity has ensured that the Council continues to meet its duty to provide sufficient school places.

Table 1 - Additional primary places added 2013-2020

School	Planning Area	Number of extra places	Year implemented
Wainscott Primary School	Strood	210	2013
Brompton Westbrook	Gillingham	105	2013
Napier Primary School	Gillingham	210	2013
Saxon Way Primary	Gillingham	210	2014
Cedar Primary School	Strood	105	2014
New Horizons Academy	Chatham	630	2014
Woodlands Primary	Gillingham	210	2014
Cuxton Infant and Junior	Cuxton	70	2014
Hundred of Hoo	Peninsula	210	2015
St Thomas of Canterbury	Gillingham	30 (Bulge Class)	2016
Delce Academy Infant Phase	Rochester	210	2016
Bligh Infant and Junior	Strood	210	2017
Cliffe Woods	Peninsula	105	2017
St Mary's Island Primary	Gillingham	210	2018
Riverside Primary	Rainham	210	2018
Halling Primary	Cuxton	140	2018
Wayfield	Walderslade	30 (Bulge Class)	2020
Walderslade	Walderslade	30 (Bulge Class)	2020
Greenvale	Chatham	30	2020
Phoenix	Chatham	75	2020
Total		3240	

- 6.29. These additional places should provide sufficient overall capacity for the forecast period. Forecasts will continue to be updated twice each year, and compared with weekly birth numbers, to identify any variations from this position.
- 6.30. To help meet demand for places in the Peninsula West area, in July 2021 Cabinet granted approval under decision 84/2021 to expand the Hundred of Hoo Primary School by 1 Form of Entry. This project will be funded through section 106 receipts and will enable demand from recent and upcoming housing developments in the immediate area.
- 6.31. As the majority of graphs in the primary sector have shown, demand for reception places is falling in line with declining birth rates. However, with the number of housing schemes expected in the coming years, demand will rise again, and the council is in a good position to cater for the additional applications. In the short term however to protect the viability of schools, officers are assessing where a reduction in the PAN of schools might help. Initially this review is focussing on the central Rochester area, but it would be prudent to extend that assessment to all planning areas to ensure that over provision is addressed in the short term to protect all schools for the future.

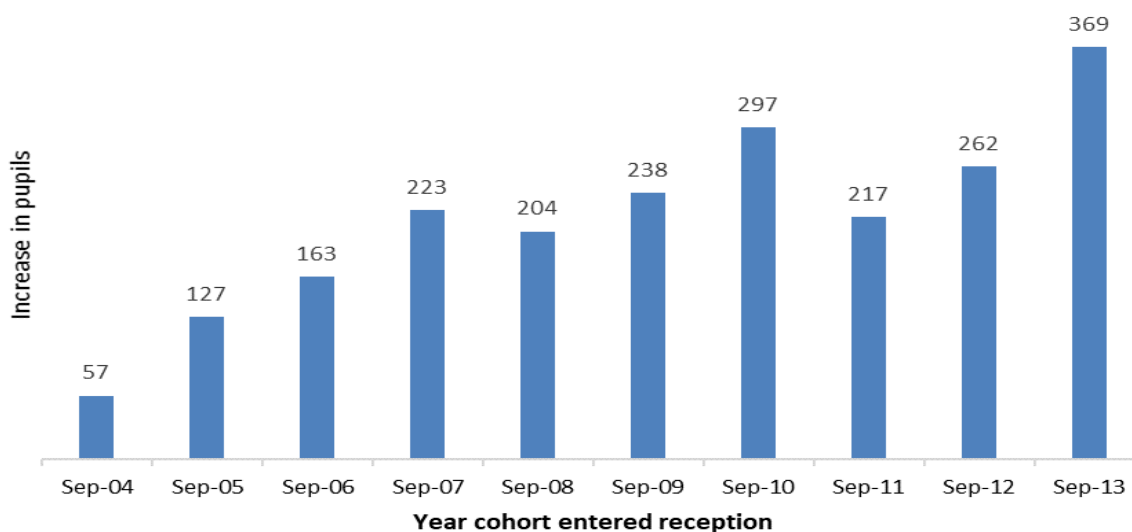
7. Secondary Schools

- 7.1. There are two secondary planning areas, one for the six selective schools, and one for the twelve non-selective schools. Both planning areas cover the whole of Medway, as secondary age pupils can more independently travel further than primary pupils. This also means a significant number of

pupils can travel from outside Medway. These out of area pupils are accounted for when forecasting.

- 7.2. The bulge in primary age pupils is now transferring to secondary schools. The pressure on places has begun to increase in year 7 as the larger numbers of primary cohorts feed into secondary education. This will extend through all year groups over time.
- 7.3. Figure 18 shows how the reception cohort size has increased by the time the cohort reaches Year 7. This is caused by a combination of new families coming to live in Medway, and also pupils coming from outside of Medway to attend Medway secondary schools.

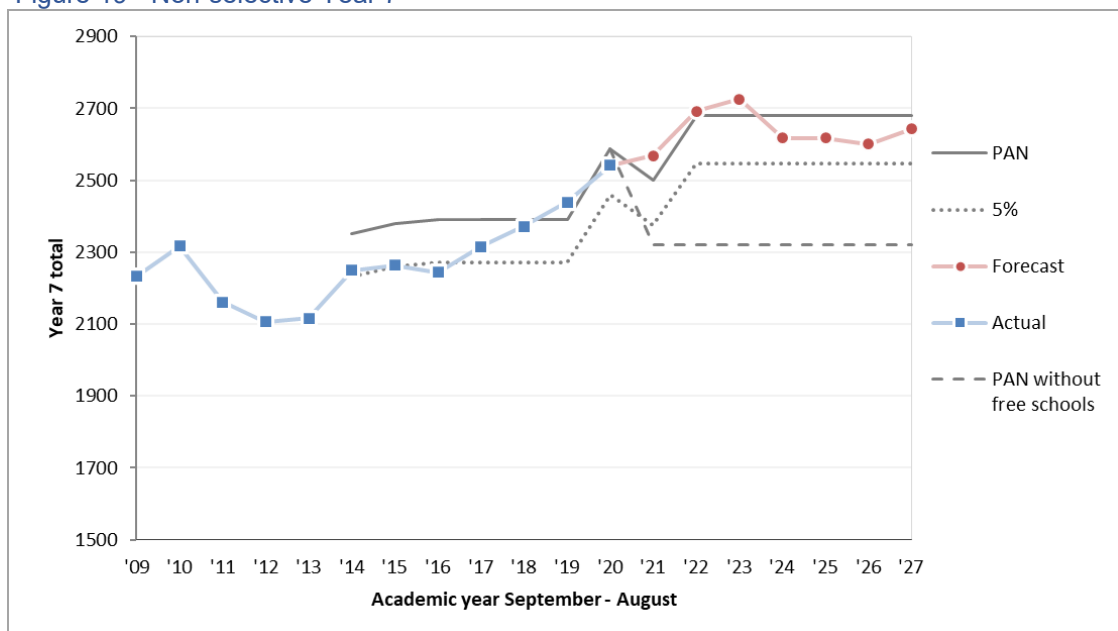
Figure 18 – Number of additional pupils joining a cohort in the time between starting reception and starting Year 7



Non-Selective

- 7.4. Demand for year 7 non-selective places has been rising steeply from 2016 and is forecasted to continue until at least 2023 (Figure 19). Sufficient capacity in year 7 was available in 2019 due to spare capacity in older year groups. Rolls were lower in the past, and so current older year groups are smaller. However, this still leaves a shortfall in the future.

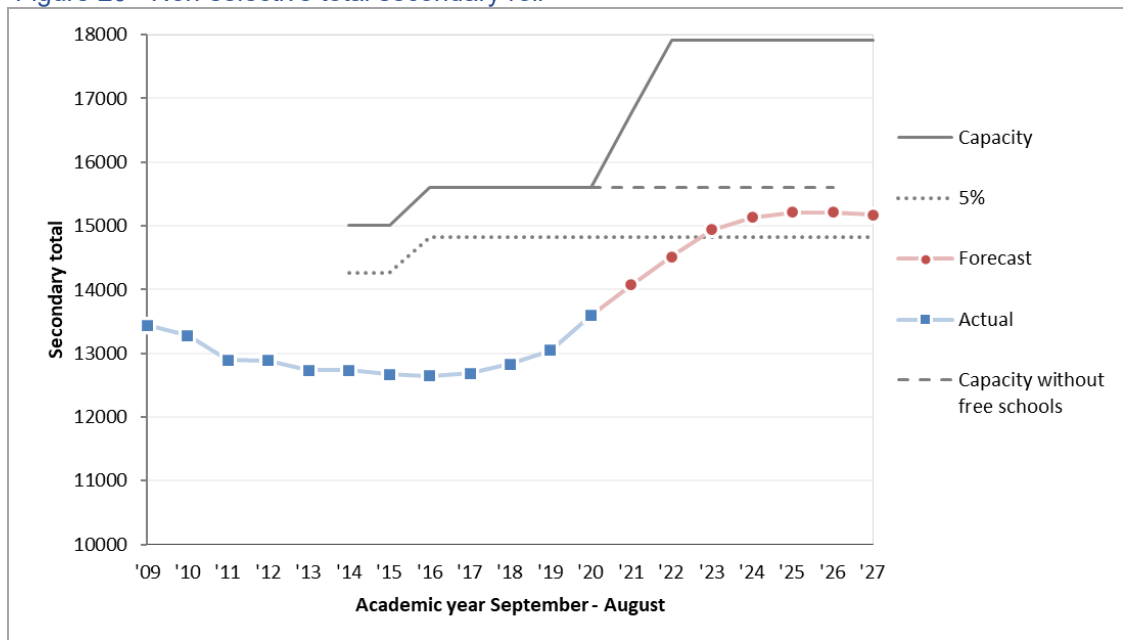
Figure 19 - Non-selective Year 7



- 7.5. This shortfall is planned to be met through the provision of the two new Free Schools; Leigh Academy Rainham, which opened in September 2021 and The Maritime Academy in Strood, due to open in 2022. These will be delivered and funded through the Government’s Free School programme. Free schools are new academies, rather than academies which have converted from an existing school.
- 7.6. The number of pupils was forecast to exceed current capacity before the free schools open. As an intermediate solution, in 2020 ten existing secondary schools agreed to take bulge classes. In 2021 Thomas Aveling, Hundred of Hoo and Robert Napier have taken a second bulge class of 30 pupils each, and the new Leigh Academy Rainham an additional 60 pupils. The extra capacity from these bulge classes, and the free schools, are included in the Published Admission Number (PAN) line on the graph.
- 7.7. The Maritime Academy has now been granted in-principle planning permission and the DfE will progress the project. However, the new permanent premises will not be ready for September 2022, with September 2023 now the target opening date. To meet the known demand for September 2022, the DfE is exploring options to open the school in temporary premises to avoid the need for further bulge classes within current schools.
- 7.8. Should the temporary option not be possible, then the challenge will be how to meet demand for around 250 year 7 pupils expected to require a place in 2022 over and above the number of available places. This will require significant investment to create bulge classes as the current secondary school capacity is already exceeded, and schools are in danger of overcrowding. It is likely that this responsibility both for delivery and funding, should it be the case, will fall to the council. There is limited Section 106 funding available for this purpose and so this could be a genuine cost to the council which is likely to extend beyond £10m as all straight forward and cost effective options were exhausted in the first round of bulge classes in 2019/20.

- 7.9. The capacity provided by the new free schools is forecast to be sufficient for the total non-selective rolls (Figure 20). These figures are based upon the current primary school rolls and approved housing. As further housing developments are approved, there is likely to be an increase in secondary pupil numbers and over time the need for further secondary provision to be created.

Figure 20 - Non-selective total secondary roll

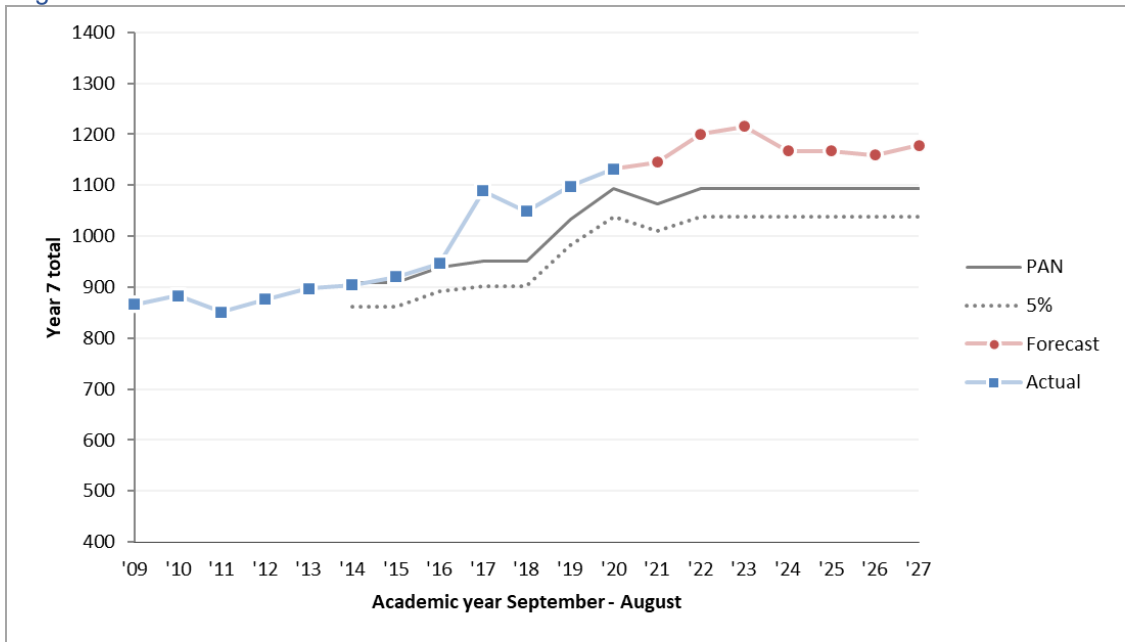


- 7.10. Figure 22 suggests that there will be a surplus of places in non-selective schools. However, this is not the case. The additional capacity shown will be filled as pupils work their way through the new free schools. The new schools will fill from year 7 upwards year by year and the 'spare' capacity will be the year groups yet to be utilised within those schools. Over time this will change as the schools fill into more year groups and this will be reflected on future graphs.
- 7.11. In July 2021, under decision 84/2021, the Cabinet agreed to the creation of additional capacity and facilities at The Hundred of Hoo School, Greenacre Boys and The Robert Napier School, using section 106 funding, to ensure that these schools can fulfil the full curriculum as they are in danger of overcrowding due to the additional pupils taken in recent years to assist the council in meeting demand in advance of the free schools opening. These projects are all underway to varying degrees.

Selective

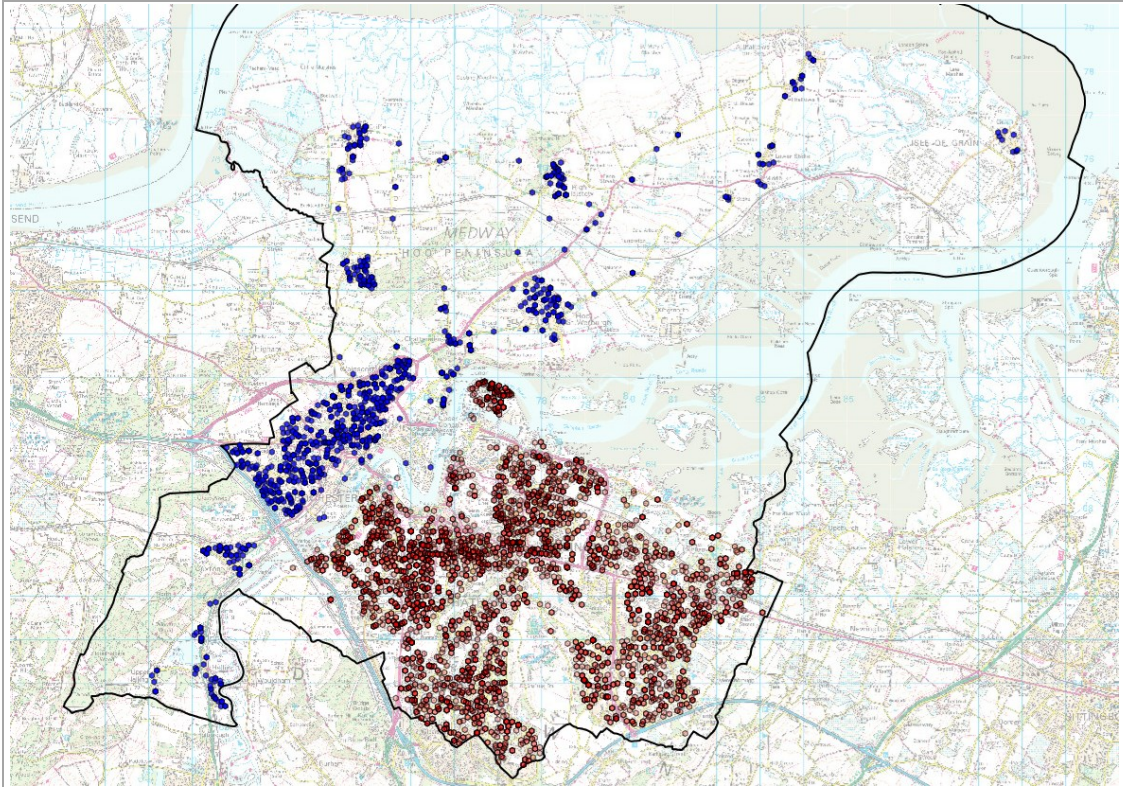
- 7.12. Secondary selective schools are also facing pressure on places (Figure 21). Schools have been admitting over their PAN, using surplus capacity from older year groups. Three projects were carried out to provide additional capacity, at Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rainham Mark Grammar School, and Holcombe Grammar School. This is reflected in the increasing selective PAN between 2015 and 2018.
- 7.13. Rochester Grammar School was also successful in applying for funding under the government's Selective Schools Expansion Fund (SSEF) and provided an additional 1FE from 2020.

Figure 21 - Selective Year 7



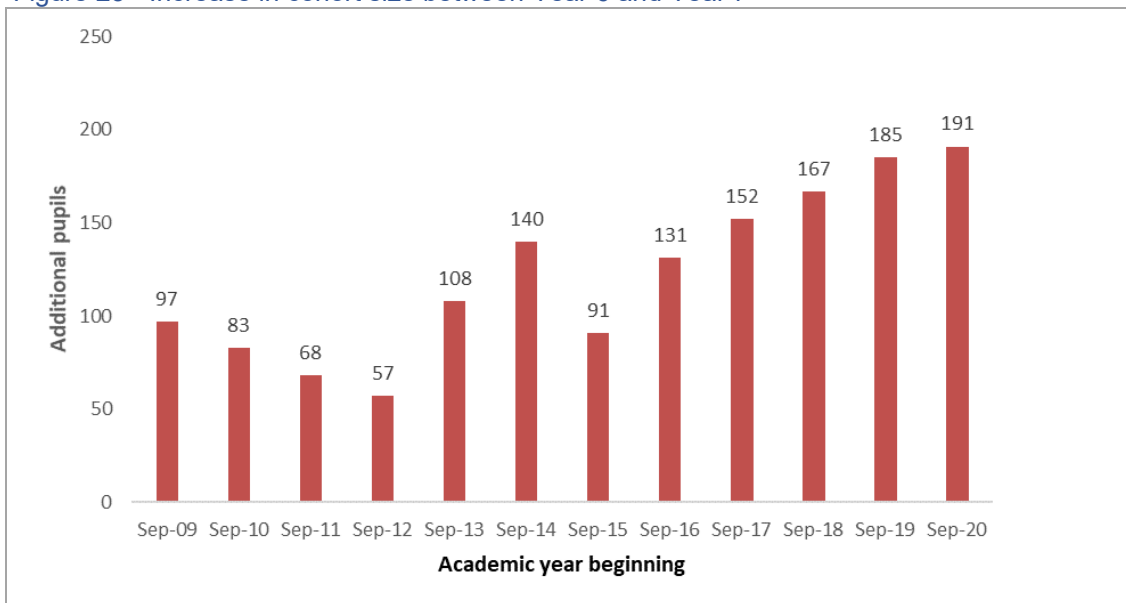
- 7.14. This expansion programme will provide places for the next few years. Current forecasts expect that selective Year 7 rolls will continue growing, above the additional capacity provided. In 2022 the shortfall is forecasted to be 82 places, growing to 122 places in 2023.
- 7.15. However, the demand line, which shows above the available PAN line, includes out of area pupils who will not necessarily acquire a place at a Medway grammar school. Sufficient places will be available for Medway pupils who achieve a pass in the Medway Test and are likely to be able to be offered a place as all selective schools have amended their admissions arrangements to favour local pupils rather than admitting on the Medway Test score.
- 7.16. These forecasts include approved housing developments, but Medway’s local plan will involve significant numbers of additional dwellings. This will increase future pupil numbers further but build rate will affect the time that these pupils arrive.
- 7.17. There will be a large number of dwellings built on the peninsula around Hoo. There is no grammar school provision west of the River Medway, and so currently 372 pupils from the peninsula area, 716 from Strood, and 119 from Cuxton and Halling travel daily into Rochester, Chatham, and Gillingham to attend a grammar school (Figure 22). With housing numbers expected to grow in future years, demand for grammar school places is likely to increase further.

Figure 22 - Selective school pupils who live west of the River Medway shown in blue



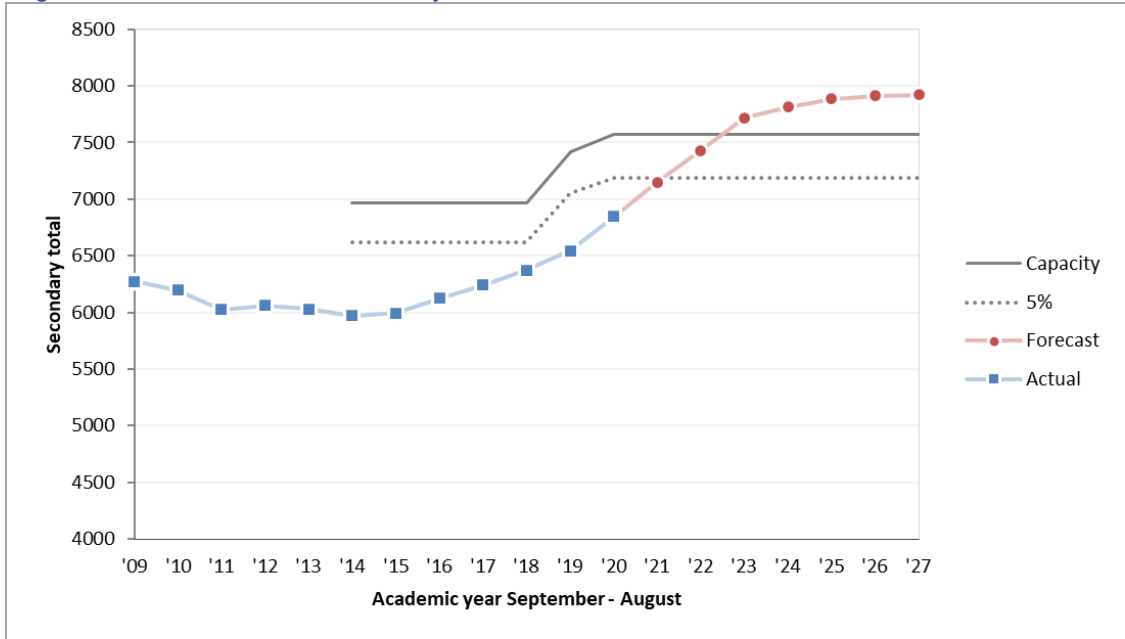
- 7.18. The Government's Free School programme does not include new grammar schools and therefore the Council is responsible for ensuring sufficient selective places. As funding becomes available, potential projects will be assessed for their viability, value for money and cost per pupil. It is likely that over time all six Grammar Schools will require some additional capacity to meet demand.
- 7.19. Medway grammar schools have altered their admissions criteria to prioritise applications based on distance rather than score in the Medway test. This will help to ensure that sufficient places are available for Medway pupils who pass the test and apply in the appropriate manner. Figure 23 shows the increasing numbers of additional pupils who join a cohort when it moves from Year 6 to Year 7.

Figure 23 - Increase in cohort size between Year 6 and Year 7



- 7.20. Therefore, it is recommended that the opportunity for providing selective education on the peninsula is explored, and officers are investigating how this may be taken forward. This will need to be in the form of an annexe to one of the current grammar schools that serve the area. This is a complex and lengthy process with no guarantee of success and would be dependent upon a site and sufficient funding becoming available.
- 7.21. Having grammar school provision on the peninsula area will significantly reduce travel patterns through Medway and in turn pupil time spent travelling. Over time this will free up places in the urban grammar schools for local children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 7.22. The overall grammar school forecasts (Figure 24) against actual and proposed capacity and indicates that when the current grammar school expansions are complete, then sufficient overall space should be available to 2022. However, it is important to note that the graph only takes approved housing schemes into consideration, and therefore it is reasonable to expect that as more housing schemes come forward following the adoption of the Local Plan, demand will increase beyond current capacity.
- 7.23. Officers are exploring ways to enable more Medway resident pupils to access grammar schools. This could be the expansion of current schools, but initially there is a need to balance the numbers of boys and girls places. Currently the number of girls places outstrips boys, which results in a higher pass mark for the Medway Test. This in turn means that whilst the boys places fill mainly from Medway pupils, there are often girls places available which are filled by out of area pupils. If more boys places were available the percentage of Medway pupils passing the test could increase and this would result in a greater proportion of places being taken up by all Medway pupils and reducing the numbers of out of area pupils.
- 7.24. One way to achieve this is by one of the girl's grammar schools becoming a mixed gender school, or by two girls and one boys school doing so. This would balance the breakdown of places. This option is currently being explored with schools and Trusts.
- 7.25. Should this be implemented the percentage of Medway pupils passing the test could increase from 23% currently to around 28%, which would in turn reduce pressure upon non-selective places.

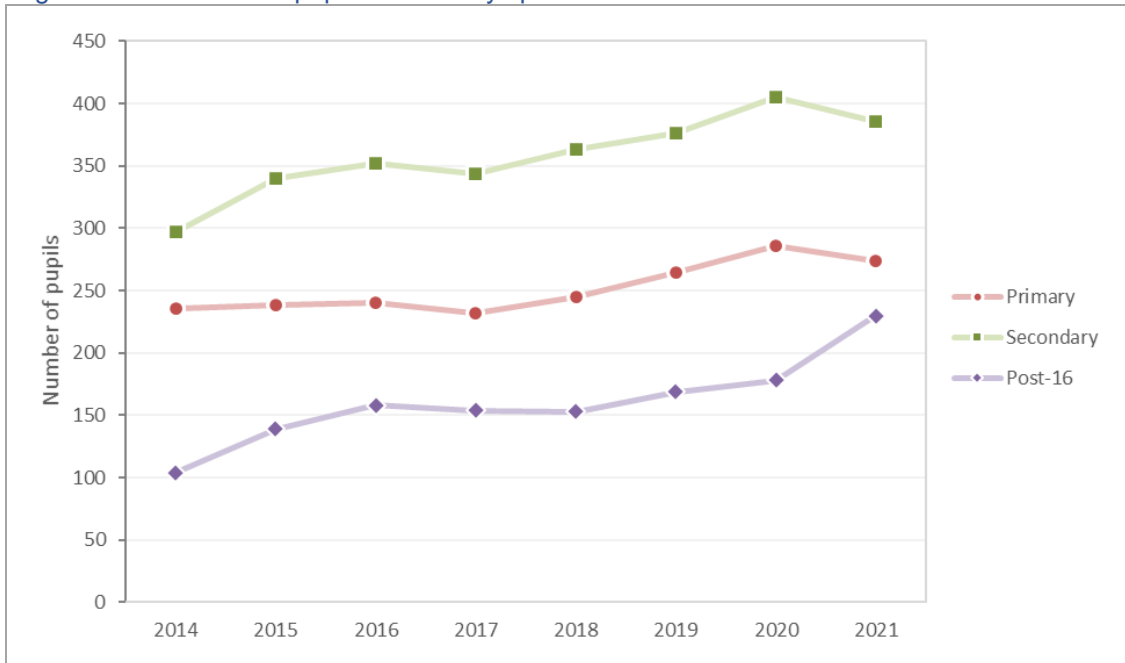
Figure 24 - Selective total secondary roll



8. Special Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- 8.1. In line with increasing pressure on mainstream places, demand for special school provision has also risen (Figure 25). In recent years the Council has taken action to provide appropriate additional provision and to reduce the numbers of pupils placed in expensive independent or out of area settings. This supports the SEND Strategy of increasing local provision for children with special educational need and disability.

Figure 25 - Numbers of pupils in Medway special schools



- 8.2. The SEN Capital Programme, a central government initiative, has meant that a total of £2.3m has been allocated to Medway to provide 164 additional places and facilities for pupils across Medway with Education Healthcare Plans. This has been received in equal instalments over three years from 2018.

8.3. The projects to benefit from this programme are:

School	Year	Benefits	Cost
Bradfields	1	Increase provision and improve facilities for ASD, MLD	£150,000
Thomas Aveling	1	Hearing Impaired Unit	£84,000
Hundred of Hoo	1	St Werburgh Centre for ASD	£ 225,000
Danecourt	2	Expansion of premises	£158,000
Hoo St Werburgh Primary School	2	Expansion of Marlborough Unit for children with ASD	£360,000
Elaine Academy	2	Expansion of SEMH unit for primary children	£52,000
Hundred of Hoo	3	St Werburgh Centre rebuild	£275,000
Bradfields	3	Primary Expansion	£272,723
Rivermead	3	Post-16 life skills hub	£35,000
Bradfields	3	Therapy class	£126,559
TBC	3	Contribution to Inspire Free School expansion and relocation	£600,000

8.4. Work is ongoing to create additional SEND places within resourced units in mainstream schools, with the aim of creating 250 additional places. One of the challenges of this is the lack of space in secondary mainstream schools, made more challenging by the increasing numbers of mainstream pupils.

8.5. Currently, the following projects are underway as part of this programme. Further options for additional resourced units are being considered.

School	Provision	Additional Pupils	Target date
Featherby Infants	ASD	22	Opened September 2021
Bligh Primary	ASD	24	Opened September 2021
Warren Wood PS	Speech and language	10	Opened September 2021
Strood Academy	ASD	50	September 2022
Howard School	ASD	25	September 2022
Victory Academy	SEMH	25	September 2022
Delce Academy	SEMH	25	September 2022

- 8.6. Despite the preceding actions, demand continues to increase, and a needs analysis has been undertaken to assess future demand for SEND provision. The needs analysis has highlighted that significant additional SEND provision will be required and currently officers are exploring the options of when and where to provide this as well as seeking appropriate funding streams.
- 8.7. The main areas of need highlighted in the needs analysis are for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Social Emotional and mental Health (SEMH) and Severe learning Difficulties (SLD)/ Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).
- 8.8. Wherever possible, children with SEND will be placed within a mainstream setting with appropriate support packages in place. However, despite this there will continue to be demand for specialist places in special schools.
- 8.9. Expansions at Abbey Court and Bradfields special schools are being progressed to provide additional secondary SEND places. Abbey Court's primary provision was relocated in 2016 to a new purpose-built accommodation. The site included sufficient space so that additional accommodation could be built there at a later date and the secondary provision transferred there. With funding now available, it is expected that the secondary relocation will commence from September 2022. The Abbey Court project will provide 56 additional places for pupils with SLD and PMLD and Bradfields 100 places for pupils across the range of ASD.
- 8.10. Officers are currently working with the DfE and the Parallel Learning Trust (PLT) to explore the option of relocating and expanding the Inspire Free School from its current restricted site in Wayfield to Cornwallis Avenue in Gillingham. This will provide 160 places for pupils with ASD and SEMH. This school will be funded through the DfE's free school programme, with the Council contributing the site. This will provide a significant increase in capacity to meet expected demand and make a major difference to Medway's young people by reducing the need for out of area placements. Currently, the project is progressing through the final design and pre planning stages. It is expected that subject to formal DfE approval that the school will be in place for September 2023.
- 8.11. Due to escalating costs in the construction industry, recent tenders and detailed costings have identified a shortfall in agreed funding for some of the projects named in paragraphs 8.5 and 8.9. The three secondary resourced provision projects (Strood, Howard and Victory) now have detailed costs totalling £3,622,500 as opposed to an estimated £2,250,000. This means a shortfall of £1,372,500 and average of £457,500 per project. The formal tender for the contract at Bradfield's has returned at £4,698,000 against initial estimate of £4,200,000. A difference of £498,000.
- 8.12. Therefore, to complete all projects named in 8.11 above will cost an additional £1,870,500 against initial estimates. If projects were either withdrawn or reduced in scope, there would be a reduction in the numbers of pupils catered for by these schemes and therefore the High Needs Block Recovery Plan would need to be adjusted accordingly to account for the reduction in places and subsequent savings, together with the continued placement of pupils out of area.

- 8.13. Cabinet is therefore asked to recommend full Council to add £1,870,500 to the Capital Programme in order to complete the projects (referred to in paragraph 8.11) fully and maintain the controls over the High Needs Block Recovery Plan.
- 8.14. It is recommended that the Council supports wider work to explore the opportunity of providing further additional specialist provision as required to meet future demand including residential accommodation within Medway to reduce the reliance upon potentially expensive and distant out of area provision.

9. Alternative Provision

Current Position

- 9.1. Following on from the Alternative Provision review in 2018, further work has been undertaken to assess the need in the sector. Currently, provision for 120 secondary pupils within Medway is commissioned at two state funded schools and one in the independent sector.
- 9.2. There is no indication that additional secondary provision is required. However, should the need arise, then the opportunity to spot purchase those within the independent sector is available.

Future Needs

- 9.3. The key gap in provision is in off-site and outreach behaviour support available for primary schools. Accordingly, officers' focus has been on undertaking the action required to provide this.
- 9.4. There has been an intention to provide a primary-focused behaviour support centre since 2016. Following the 2018 review of AP, a bid was placed and approved for a Free School through the governments central programme. The proposal for a 50-place provision, which is to be funded by the government, is now delayed from its initial target date of 2023, pushed back to 2024.
- 9.5. The free school, which will be an 'alternative provision' setting called The Beeches, will be managed by, and share a site with, The Rowans (of The Inspiring Change Multi-Academy Trust). Pupils attending the Beeches, or provided with outreach support in their school, will not usually have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- 9.6. In September 2021, in advance of the Beeches Free School opening in 2024, a temporary primary behaviour support unit opened. This provision is operated by The Inspiring Change Trust and is located at Mierscourt Primary School in Rainham. The provision offers on-site and outreach provision to support primary schools.

10. Climate change implications

- 10.1. No climate change implications arise directly from this report, however as all projects are progressed, designs and construction methods will consider such impacts and look to contribute to the council's ambitious and exciting

climate change agenda.

- 10.2. By creating local provision for children and young people, it is expected that there would be a reduction in car journeys across Medway which will reduce any impacts upon air quality.
- 10.3. Pupils are encouraged by schools to walk or cycle to school, and this becomes more achievable if the provision is local.
- 10.4. As part of the schools' maintenance and condition programme, as well as when expanding or building schools, officers will look to utilise methods and materials to help reduce the carbon footprint, examples include replacing fossil fuelled heating systems with greener alternatives, LED lighting, improving insulation, photovoltaics and providing vehicle charging points.

11. Risk management

- 11.1. There are no risks resulting directly from this report, however the following would be assessed as risks should recommendations from individual proposals flowing from this report not be implemented.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places	If insufficient school places are made available to meet demand, the Council would be failing to meet its obligations.	Implement proposals to provide additional good quality places in the areas of demand.	C1
That insufficient funding is available to fund proposals to provide sufficient places	Basic need funding is limited and the extent of the emerging need may mean that unless additional funding can be sourced, projects to provide places may not be able to be implemented, which could mean that the council fails to meet its statutory obligation.	Explore options to fund projects including bidding for funding initiatives. Look at cost effective ways to supply places.	A1
That the DfE do not continue to fund the temporary accommodation for the Maritime Academy in 2022 (see paragraph 7.7)	If the DfE decide not to proceed with the temporary accommodation for the Maritime Academy to open in 2022, then bulge classes will be required, most likely at a significant cost to the council.	Work with the DfE to ensure that the temporary accommodation is delivered and prepare a back up plan for bulge classes in the most cost-effective way.	A1
Borrowing funding in advance of s106 receipts	Whilst section 106 agreements are in place there is no guarantee that the funding will be received or that it will arrive as a receipt at the expected time, meaning that there could be limited options to pay back any of the borrowing in advance of S106 receipts, which becomes a cost to the council.	Ensure that where borrowing against future section 106 funding is agreed, that the receipt is likely to be received and avoid borrowing against any agreements that may not be honoured.	B2
That the level of forecast pupils fails to materialise	Should the expected numbers of pupils fail to materialise, then any funding committed could have been better spent elsewhere.	Continue to monitor births, migration and housing developments and accuracy of forecasting.	D3
Applications for Free Schools increases	Applications for Free Schools could be a risk to strategic planning framework as the Council has no control over where or by whom the application is made.	Monitor all applications to Secretary of State, and work with DfE to influence outcomes of applications to suit, and fit in with, the Council's wider pupil place planning strategy.	A2
Other Local Authorities placing children in Medway	Other authorities are placing children into Medway schools, including unaccompanied asylum seekers, which adds pressure to the system and is difficult to plan for.	Retain a certain level of flexibility within the system to meet unexpected inward movement of children requiring a school place.	A3

12. Consultation

- 12.1. No consultation is required for this report, but any specific proposals that are progressed as a result of this report will include a consultation process as appropriate.
- 12.2. No Diversity Impact Assessment accompanies this report. Assessments will be provided for individual proposals brought forward as a result of actions from this report.

13. Financial implications

- 13.1. All projects approved and undertaken as a result of this report will be funded through the Children and Adults' Capital Programme.
- 13.2. Where appropriate, developer contributions will be sought from new housing schemes to assist with the provision of school places in areas of demographic growth. Developments resulting from the Local Plan will be considered accumulatively to identify the most suitable and wider use of developer contributions or developer provided schools to provide the most benefit.
- 13.3. Currently no basic need funding is provided by central government to Medway Council to provide additional places, therefore the funding of projects is reliant upon section 106 receipts, or council borrowing in advance of future developer contributions due to the delay in receiving funding through this avenue.
- 13.4. Occasionally, additional funding sources and initiatives become available such as free school waves or targeted basic need initiatives. Where possible the Council will seek to make use of those opportunities to reduce the demands upon the limited funding currently available.
- 13.5. The Government's Free School programme provides an opportunity to create additional provision without the responsibility for funding. The funding waves announced under this programme are separate from the Free School presumption process, where new schools from housing developments are funded by the council. All opportunities to benefit from future Free School waves will be explored. This is particularly relevant to secondary provision which requires significantly higher capital funding than primary schools. However, the availability of land is an issue. Officers will seek to secure Free School provision for Medway as required and discussions with the DFE will continue.

14. Legal implications

- 14.1. The Council has the power under sections 18 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make "prescribed alterations" to a maintained school. The procedure for making prescribed alterations is set out in 'School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.

- 14.2. From 24 January 2014 there is no longer a requirement for a 'pre-publication' (informal) consultation period for prescribed alterations, there is however a strong expectation on Local Authorities to consult interested parties to develop their proposals prior to formal publication as part of their duty under public law to act rationally and take into account all relevant considerations. Specific proposals brought forward from this report will go through this consultation processes.
- 14.3. Where an expansion is proposed at an academy it falls to the academy trust to carry out the appropriate statutory consultation. In these circumstances the Regional Schools Commissioner is the decision maker on the proposals. If these proposals are to meet basic need for school places, then responsibility for funding falls to the Council. All decisions on funding approval will follow the Council's procurement procedures.

15. Recommendations

- 15.1. The Cabinet is asked to:
- 15.1.1. note the excellent progress made against the School Organisation Plan and School Place Planning Strategy frameworks, which have ensured that the Council has met its duty and sufficient school places are currently available to meet demand.
- 15.1.2. approve the commencement of a review of capacity and school organisation arrangements within Medway including the reorganisation of PAN's as a result of recent lowering birth rates, and the impact of local housing development to ensure that all areas have a sufficient supply of school places, whilst avoiding over provision as set out in paragraphs 6.5 to 6.6 of the report.
- 15.1.3. authorise officers to undertake further feasibility studies and statutory consultations as necessary to ensure that plans are in place to meet demand as and where it emerges.
- 15.1.4. note the ongoing work being undertaken to ensure sufficient Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision is available within Medway as set out in section 8 of the report.
- 15.1.5. note the limited funding position for providing school places and to support officers' efforts in acquiring additional funding or identifying alternative means of ensuring sufficient and appropriate school places across all sectors continues to be available.
- 15.1.6. approve the use of s106 funding to provide additional classrooms and facilities at Wayfield Primary School to accommodate bulge classes as set out in paragraph 6.24.
- 15.1.7. recommend full Council to add £1,870,500 to the Capital Programme to complete the resourced provision projects at the Howard School, Strood Academy and Victory Academy together with the special school expansion at Bradfields as set out in paragraphs 8.11 to 8.13.

16. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 16.1. By approving the recommendations in section 15 of this report, the Cabinet will be ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duty to ensure sufficient good quality school places are available.

Lead officer contact:

Paul Clarke – Head of School Services

Telephone: 01634 331031

E-mail: paul.clarke@medway.gov.uk

Background papers

School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=42617>

Appendices

None