

CAPITAL WORK GROUP REPORT FOR FORUM MEMBERS – 4 OCTOBER 2021 MEETING



Date of Work Group meeting: Wednesday, 13 October 2021

Items discussed (brief summary of key items):

School Place Planning/Commissioning Strategy Update (Ann Pearson) – AP raised the following key points:

Mainstream Provision

- There are currently two major projects in progress:
 - Alderbrook Secondary Academy** – The planned 1FE expansion in response to housing developments and longer term demand associated with the Local Plan is experiencing supply chain issues.
 - Cheswick Green Primary** – The planned 1FE expansion to meet demand from 1,000 additional houses at Blythe Valley and Mount Dairy Farm, has experienced a number of difficulties. Despite receiving formal approval for expansion, planning permission has not yet been granted due to concerns around additional traffic and parking. It is not possible to walk to the school from Blythe Valley and public transport is limited. Resolutions to mitigate the difficulties are being explored, including a school bus for primary age pupils. However it was noted that these are unfunded.
- Despite the birth rate being fairly static, Solihull (and other authorities) is experiencing an unusual lack of take-up of nursery and reception places. This could be linked to reduced migration post-pandemic and data will be investigated further following the October census. In the meantime, the DfE has advised authorities not to start significant new projects.
- The past year has seen a large number of Hong Kong nationals move into Solihull. In contrast to the DfE's forecast figure of 23 children last year, school places were required for 418 children and young people, with emphasis on Years 8 and 9. As there is no historical data to support forward planning for these families, a longer term solution is needed to respond to this type of need.

Specialist Provision

- The SEND Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 was formally approved by Cabinet Member in September. Each of the priorities will now be scoped out and decisions made on how to move them forward. The biggest issue is lack of capital funding, so creative solutions will be needed. Regular reports will be brought to Capital WG and EdSEND.

Capital Programme Update (Phil Dawes)

- **Corporate Landlord Arrangements** - PD explained the proposed changes to how schools' capital projects will be managed in future. The schools' estate will move away from being managed in isolation and be brought under a central management position, with the LA as 'corporate landlord' and school projects managed in the same way as other Council assets. Schools should not see a major change and it is hoped the move will help to identify under-utilised Council assets which could be used to support increased school places.
- **Schools' Capital Programme** – Pressures on the capital budget, increasing materials and labour costs and delays, as mentioned above, have all impacted the delivery of projects and have resulted in a return to the procurement phase for Cheswick Green and Alderbrook, in a bid to control costs. Proposals for Valley Primary are in the planning phase and contractors are on-site at both St Peters and Olton Primary. A range of work is in progress to support additional High Needs provision: at Reynalds Cross, Hazel Oak, the ASD Free School, Solihull Academy and ARPs in north and south Solihull.
- **Schools Maintenance Programme** – The £3-4m budget for 2021-24, will support projects based on the Stock Condition Survey. A newly recruited Project Manager will be working with the team to prioritise projects and ensure effective delivery.