

Meeting:	General overview and scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	30 September 2015
Title of report:	The development of a schools capital investment strategy
Report by:	Head of education development

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To provide General overview and scrutiny committee with the opportunity to review and comment on the progress made in developing a schools capital investment strategy, including considering a presentation of evidence at the committee meeting.

Recommendations

THAT: the committee

- (a) Advise on any amendments or changes to the principles that will underpin the schools capital investment strategy;**
- (b) Consider the presentation given at the meeting and provide options that might be included or prioritised in the strategy; and**
- (c) Endorse the consultative and evidence based approach taken to the development of the strategy.**

Alternative options

- 1 The strategy does not have any principles that support or underpin it. Without some principles it is very difficult to engage with the reasoning for particular strategic approaches.
- 2 Different principles are consulted upon. The cabinet member agreed a draft set of principles to be consulted upon which were developed with and between stakeholders at the initial rounds of discussion. The formal process and consideration by the committee offers opportunity to further refine these.
- 3 The council develop a strategy without consultation potentially missing opportunities for creative and innovative ideas and solutions. A consultative approach requires significant investment, particularly discussion time, and without careful management may lead to poor decision making.
- 4 Without clear agreed evidence about the current situation and the state of Herefordshire schools the basis of the strategy would be without a secure foundation which would adversely affect decision making.
- 5 There are inevitably a range of options about what schemes get taken forward and it is important all available options are presented and considered against the principles and evidence.

Reasons for recommendations

- 6 The council needs to develop a clear approach to investment in schools across the county. Without a clear agreed approach the council will not be supporting its core aims of giving children the best start in life and developing Herefordshire as a great place to live and work. Overview and scrutiny can provide an important contribution to the development of the strategy.

Key considerations

- 7 The approach to developing a schools capital investment strategy has been informed by feedback from school leaders and from councillors. It has been recommended that overview and scrutiny have the opportunity to review the principles that have taken on board feedback from the initial consultation sessions and also review the findings from the work so far. This will enable the committee to contribute to the development of the strategy at an early stage.
- 8 Herefordshire local authority has a duty to supply sufficient school places. Currently there is a surplus of school places across the county as whole in both primary and secondary schools. In some areas however there are pressures on places and parents cannot get their choice of school.
- 9 Parents and carers are encouraged by government policy to make choices about schools for their children. Across the county as a whole on average only 50% of parents choose to send their child to their local school or catchment school. The reasons for parents/carers making these choices are varied but creates a challenge for planning of school places.
- 10 In addition to the challenges of parents expressing a preference, academy schools have the freedom to admit in excess of their published admission number. There is also an underlying assumption in the national system that popular schools be supported to expand. Popular schools expand and this sometimes creates

challenges to other schools whose reduction in numbers may bring about funding issues

- 11 In fulfilling its school place planning duty the local authority needs to understand the numbers of children being born and moving into new or existing housing. The local authority is required to submit five year forecasts to government but needs to look further ahead to ensure there is a proper supply.
- 12 The local authority wants to supply high quality places for children. While the quality of provision is most closely associated with highest standards of teaching, learning and leadership, the buildings do influence outcomes for children. Parents and carers, the community and employers do want to see buildings that are in good condition and are well maintained. In addition to good maintenance it is important consideration is given to energy efficiency and accessibility for those with disabilities.
- 13 There are government standards (Building Bulletin 103) that set out the preferred number type and size of spaces in schools and the outside areas for the number of children. Without these spaces being a suitable size the quality of the provision can be affected. There are schools that have buildings that are too small or are of a temporary nature. Equally there are schools that are on sites that are much bigger than needed. The strategy will need to address some of the challenges and opportunities these situations create. It may be that some of the land could be released for development or schools could look at consolidating through coming onto a single site. In some instances this might provide opportunities for the further development of all through schools.
- 14 The demography of Herefordshire is such that there are different sizes of school in different areas. It is important schools are integral to their community and there is no set size of school. The financial viability of schools is affected by the number of children on roll and while all schools should be planning ahead, schools with less than 105 on roll should have a detailed plan about their future arrangements. In some cases this may lead to formal partnerships between schools with new and alternative models of leadership.
- 15 The funding available to the local authority by way of grant from central government to consider renewal and redevelopment of buildings has reduced as all centrally available funding has been channelled into providing new places in other parts of the country. Funding, through both necessity and as best practice, needs to be used effectively and efficiently and sourced creatively. The development of a cohesive coherent strategy should give rise to investors feeling confident that the council has a worthwhile approach. This coupled with looking at variety of sources of funding including the conversion of revenue to capital, disposal of surplus land for development and borrowing are necessary elements of a strategy.

Community impact

- 16 Schools are an important and integral part of communities. Having a thriving high quality local school will support growth and development of an area. Many schools see themselves as integral to communities and support them through shared use of facilities, accommodation of nursery provision, and before and after school provision.

Equality duty

- 17 The strategy will have full regard the public sector equality duty and any scheme arising will have a full equalities impact assessment.

Financial implications

- 18 The development of the plan is a council project and is resourced by officer staffing within current budgets.

Legal implications

- 19 The proposal as detailed within the body of the report accords with the local authorities' statutory duty under s.13 of the Education Act 1996 which requires it to contribute toward the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary and secondary education are available to meet the needs of the population of its area.

Risk management

- 20 Without a clear cohesive coordinated capital investment plan that is developed collaboratively the following risks have been identified.
- a. The fabric of the schools deteriorates leading to expensive emergency remedial action
 - b. Opportunities for planned funding are lost as investment is seen as piecemeal and not providing best value
 - c. Some schools may end in crisis due to lack of foresight and planning
 - d. Opportunity to further improve standards in schools are lost
 - e. Schools become insular and isolated as opportunities to renew and redevelop are lost.

Consultees

- 21 Officers of the local authority have met with groups of head teachers and governors in all the market town areas. Additionally elected members have been offered briefing sessions and information. Officers have met with groups of schools, planners, the Diocese of Hereford and Archdioceses of Cardiff. The discussions have been supported with data, information and presentations that are available on the web.

Appendices

Appendix 1 School capital investment strategy - draft principles

Background papers

None identified.