

Strategy for Ensuring Sufficient School Places and School Modernisation (June 2014)

Introduction

1. Barking and Dagenham is striving to develop excellence throughout our educational provision. We are driving forward standards at all Key Stages. To support improvement in the educational offer and to meet the rapidly accelerating demand for school places (Basic Need including SEN places) at all ages we need to review and address school building capacity and condition as well as suitability (modernisation).
2. This document outlines our strategy and Future Planning Programme to meet Basic Need (including SEN places) over the next 5/6 years. The programme is outline only and must remain flexible since needs and available resources are constantly shifting, we need to respond quickly to any additional financial resources that may be provided by Central Government. Decisions regarding actual proposals will always be agreed through Council decision making processes: but this document sets out a framework for making those decisions, which will be reviewed at 6 month intervals to address the Borough's rapidly changing demographics.
3. Neither the Basic Need nor the Condition figures are high enough to provide for long term robust facilities. Optimising value for money is therefore essential, including where practicable joining up funding streams.

Basic Need

4. We shall continue to lobby for the additional funds required to meet Basic Need (including Learning Disabilities / LDD/SEN).
5. We will also bid for all available funding streams using them to match to our strategy as closely as possible, whilst meeting any funding criteria and gaining optimum value for money.
6. We will investigate innovative funding routes, and shall explore radical strategies and partnerships e.g. alternative sites and premises and alternative school providers (e.g. Free Schools) to optimise our use of available buildings and facilities to meet growing demand.
7. Our main strategy for developing new school places has been to develop on existing school sites, and to revitalise older school sites bringing them back into use as education facilities.
8. This practice, it has always been felt, has bought benefits of economies of scale as existing primary schools have been able to absorb the general administration and shared areas, halls etc. within the existing provision. The programme sets out to mirror this practice for some secondary schools where this is possible.
9. Realistically the demand will require that we think more radically for the future and begin to create whole new sites and schools with the consequential financial impact. Creating things from new will obviously be more costly and may include site purchase costs; it also comes with greater risks.

10. The proposed programme is shown as an Appendix to this document, entitled Future Planning Programme to meet Basic Need (including SEN places) 2013 to 2020.

Condition and Suitability (Modernisation)

11. In view of the pressing nature of the condition of many school buildings, consideration must be given to seeking and obtaining other sources of investment and funding, as far as practicable. The Asset Management Plan (AMP) for schools indicates a potential spend of £51m which has never been achieved. In practice, building systems, e.g. boilers, lifts, electrical systems as well as building fabric are presenting significant annual problems which require urgent remedial work. In addition, Members have indicated schools and other Children's Services' buildings where they would wish to bring about improvements.
12. We need to ensure that in the absence of a funded planned maintenance programme, that we utilise the available Government Grant to ensure schools remain open.
13. In the light of the demise of former programmes to support the modernisation of schools agenda including BSF and Primary Capital Programme to support where possible building improvement, giving priority to Health and Safety matters but recognising there is a joint responsibility shared with the schools and this is wholly the schools responsibility where the school is a voluntary aided or free school.
14. There are a number of schools in the Borough which need repairs to ensure that we avoid closures. The approach taken is to work in partnership with schools to jointly address the most pressing items.
15. The school building stock in Barking & Dagenham have a number of similar characteristics as many are of similar design and were constructed between the first and second wars last century (1920's -1930's). As a consequence we have a number of schools in similar condition but also with issues around suitability.