

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2020

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGING ROLLS IN OXFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS: A STRATEGY FOR SUTAINABILITY

Report by Director for Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the trends in requirements for pupil places and to note the action plan to be monitored by officers.

Executive Summary

1. The report sets out factors affecting demand for education provision in the medium term, potential effects of those factors and a framework for actions to ensure sustainability of Oxfordshire schools.
2. The main factors affecting demand are birth rates, housing growth, Special education Needs and disabilities (SEND), school funding and school organisation.
3. An action plan and reporting mechanism to monitor the impacts of those actions is set out.

Introduction

4. Members of Scrutiny Committee received an update on population trends affecting the provision of education services for children and young people in the county at its meeting on 4th September 2019. The strategy to meet changing demand and promote sustainability for schools is set out below.

Aims and Objectives

5. **Aims**
 - a) Ensure sufficient places in mainstream schools for Oxfordshire's growing population.
 - b) Ensure sufficient provision for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, not only to meet population growth, but also related to changing policy, practice and incidence of specific needs.
 - c) Ensure sufficient Alternative Provision.
 - d) Support Oxfordshire's schools to respond to changes in demand, both down as well as up.

6. **Objectives**

- a) Monitor demographic changes and housing growth in order to inform annual pupil forecasts.
- b) Plan for new schools and expansions of existing schools.
- c) Identify emerging spare building capacity which could be reallocated to other uses.
- d) Provide guidance to schools on maintaining their affordability/sustainability.

7. Appendix 2 contains various diagrams (1-9) to illustrate the key points in the main body of this report.

8. After more than a decade of rising birth rates combined with housing growth which meant that the school place planning focus mainly led to expansions of schools and new schools to add capacity the context is more complex. The main features affecting this complex picture are set out below.

a) Birth rates

Nationally, birth rates have been falling in recent years, reversing the trend of the early 2000s. However, a longer term view shows that this is a return to the post “Baby Boom” norm, rather than being exceptional.

The recent pupil bulge is now moving from primary schools to secondary schools. In many cases, Oxfordshire secondary schools had spare capacity to absorb the first few years of higher numbers, but several schools have already needed to be expanded and other expansions are planned or underway. In addition, a number of new schools for secondary aged pupils have opened or are planned.

Conversely, primary schools which had got used to rising pupil numbers may now be experiencing the opposite.

b) Housing Growth

Not all primary schools are experiencing falling numbers. While the birth rate (numbers of births per woman) has fallen, total births can still be rising locally if there are more women of child-bearing age. Where young families are attracted to an area, for example because of large scale housing development, demand for primary school places is still rising. Different neighbourhoods within Oxfordshire (e.g. at Medium Super Output Area (MSOA) level) have experienced very different recent trends in births (see Diagram 1)

Existing Local Plans show how housing growth in Oxfordshire is planned to accelerate (see Diagram 2); the growth will be higher still including the further housing proposed in the Cherwell Local Plan Partial Review (under examination) and the housing proposed in the emerging SODC Local Plan (on hold pending consideration by the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government (see Diagram 3).

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It is the current intention that 100,000 new homes be built in Oxfordshire between 2011 and 2031, and work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is already looking further ahead to continued growth beyond 2031.

These new homes will not be evenly distributed across Oxfordshire. They will be largely concentrated around the main urban centres, although some villages are also experiencing disproportionate growth (see Diagram 4).

The combined impact of demographic changes and housing is expected to result in continued growth in pupil numbers overall (see Diagram 5). As this growth will not be evenly spread across all areas, some schools experiencing falling rolls could also see other schools being expanded or opened to meet a localised need for places.

c) Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The number of children with SEND is likely to grow broadly in line with the mainstream pupil forecasts above. Nationally, information from the school census on pupils with special educational needs in schools indicates the percentage of pupils with SEND has stabilised in recent years, although there has been a slight increase in the percentage of pupils with an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) to 3.1% of the total pupil population by 2019 after remaining constant at 2.8% from 2007 to 2017 (see Diagram 6).

However, within the total growth in numbers of pupils with SEND there has been a marked shift in type of special need diagnosed, both nationally and within Oxfordshire. Over the last five years, the number of Oxfordshire EHCPs listing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as the primary need has nearly doubled. SEMH and Specific Learning Difficulty (SPLD) needs have also grown significantly faster than other needs, although SPLD remains a small percentage of total EHCPs. SEMH and ASD needs together now account for nearly half of Oxfordshire EHCPs (see Diagrams 7 & 8).

This growth in SEMH/ASD need has not been met by an equivalent growth in maintained special education provision within Oxfordshire, resulting in year-on-year increases in numbers of children funded from the High Needs block in independent and non-maintained special schools (INMSS). This growth has doubled the cost of INMSS placements since 2013 (see Diagram 9).

An annual update to the council's approved SEND Sufficiency Strategy is being completed to complement and inform this area of work on planning for all types of pupil places.

Again, this committee has received recent reports outlining the increased demand for Alternative Provision places with a more even distribution geographically across the county. The analysis of needs and options to meet it are being considered by the Learner Engagement Board and will be dovetailed with this overarching approach.

d) School Funding

At its last meeting the committee received a presentation from the CEF Business Partner outlining changes in the way schools are funded and the potential impacts of the changes in pupil rolls for some schools. Whilst it is not the case that small schools are disproportionately affected by these changes they will be more vulnerable to changes in budget levels as smaller establishments are less able to offset these changes across a large number of classes.

e) School Organisation

As of September 2019, 98% of Oxfordshire secondary provision, 43% of primary provision and 47% of special school provision are academies.

Academisation has a significant impact on the role of the local authority as the strategic commissioner of school places. Academies are responsible for setting their own admission number, and thus capacity and any plans for expansion, with the agreement of the Regional Schools Commissioner. Capital funding for the basic need for new pupil places in all government-funded schools (including academies) because of local demographic changes is allocated to local authorities according to the relative need for new places, based on forecast data provided by authorities. In deciding where to use basic need funding to provide additional places, local authorities are expected to consider fairly both their maintained schools and local academies, and where the additional places will be of greatest benefit to their children.

Increasingly, therefore, strategic management of school capacity in Oxfordshire requires close working with academy trusts, as well as with the remaining non-academy schools.

9. **Opportunities for action**

To meet the aims and objectives set out at the beginning of this report the potential opportunities to influence sustainability of schools have been identified.

a) A Flexible Approach to New Schools

While dispersed population growth, including that from smaller housing developments, can be met through school expansions, large housing developments will usually require a new primary school in order to provide the necessary scale of additional capacity. A primary school at the heart of a new development is also important for the purposes of community development, and to enable children to walk or cycle to school to reduce car travel.

The planned opening of a new school is an opportunity for local academy trusts which wish to expand, but it can also be seen as a threat to existing schools. It is particularly challenging in areas where the nearest existing school is small (e.g. 0.5 form entry) but does not have sufficient site area to expand to meet population growth.

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In these circumstances rather than a completely new school a better approach would be to relocate and expand an existing school. This approach has been successful in the county when St Edburg's CE Primary School in Bicester relocated to the new SW Bicester development and doubled in size. It is further being explored in relation to villages where the scale of housing growth would not sustain a new school, but which exceeds the capacity of the existing school to expand (e.g. Shrivenham).

The advantages of this approach would be:

- School capacity is moved to where the demand for school places is concentrated, avoiding the emergence of surplus capacity;
- The vacated school site and building may be appropriate for other priority uses such as special needs provision;
- Travel distances to school may be reduced, if the relocated school was previously attracting more pupils from the area it relocates to than from its original location;
- A small school, which is likely to be financially vulnerable, can expand and benefit from a more robust budget – rather than being further challenged by the opening of a new school;
- The “new” school has a significant number of pupils from the outset, rather than relying on an unpredictable number of new applicants;
- A lower level of “start-up” funding is required from the council;
- Approval processes for relocating and expanding a school are quicker than for a new school and requires less intervention by the DfE and Regional Schools Commissioner.

However, relocation also has disadvantages:

- Families with children already at the school may object to having to travel to the new school, or to their children having to attend a larger school;
- If the school is moving out of a village, it may represent a significant reduction in village facilities;
- The new school building needs to be sufficient not only for the increase in population but also for the existing population attending the school. Capital funding for school capacity – whether from government “basic need” grants or developer contributions – is entirely driven by increased population. Building a school larger than required for population increase therefore incurs a cost which is not funded from basic need funding or developer contributions. The council would seek the disposal of the previous school site to generate a capital receipt, but in many cases where this has been considered, the capital receipt is less than the funding gap to build the larger school, and in some cases the site is not available for redevelopment.

b) A proactive approach to planned admission numbers

The School Admissions Code requires that all mainstream school admission authorities must set a published admission number (PAN) for each ‘relevant age group’. Own admission authorities (academy trusts and

voluntary aided schools) are not required to consult on their PAN where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN. For a community or voluntary controlled school, the local authority (as admission authority) must consult at least the governing body of the school where it proposes either to increase or keep the same PAN. As schools can agree to admit more pupils than their PAN, the consultation requirements are not a barrier to increasing intakes.

However, schools cannot “cap” their intakes at a level below their PAN. All admission authorities must consult where they propose a decrease to the PAN. Such consultation is required to last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in school year preceding that in which the new PAN will apply. This means that schools and admission authorities need to plan two years in advance if they wish to reduce an admission number.

In most cases, increases to PAN are required due to the expansion of a school. However, in some cases schools have been operating with lower admission numbers than their accommodation could support, to reflect the local need for places.

Less attention has been required in the past to reducing PANs. Some academies have now started to reduce their PAN, if they have been experiencing surplus places, and/or because they want to change how they organise their classes or timetables. While this can appear a sensible approach for an individual school to take it can conflict with the local authority’s statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places overall. Some degree of spare capacity is essential in the school system to allow for unforeseen fluctuations in population - for individual schools, being full is a measure of success; for the school system as a whole it is a failure.

In the increasingly complex school planning environment set out in this report, there may be some circumstances in which a reduction in PAN could contribute towards the aims set out above. These include:

- Some schools have previously set a PAN which is in excess of its capacity, and have only avoided becoming overcrowded because they have not historically admitted up to its full PAN. It would be sensible for all schools to have a PAN which does not exaggerate their ability to admit pupils.
- Schools in areas with surplus places could release for other uses by reducing their PAN. This could have added benefit if they were also thus able to improve how they organise their classes, or achieve a more affordable staffing structure.
- New schools inevitably create short-term surplus places. In order to manage this situation, it may be beneficial for one or more nearby schools to temporarily reduce their PAN in the year of a new school’s planned opening. This would only be feasible where a school’s staffing turnover allows such a change to be made without incurring redundancies, or perhaps where the new school is in the same academy trust as an existing school, and staff can be redeployed, and

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therefore may be of limited use, but could be discussed with local schools at the time of planning a new school.

- Pupil forecasts may indicate a short-term reduction in demand for places even though population is expected to rise again in the longer term. By looking ahead, it may be possible for a school to manage the impact of this through a PAN reduction; however, the council would need to be confident that the places would be restored once the population rises again.

Although the county council is not responsible for the consultation on the admissions arrangements (including PANs) for own admissions authorities, it has chosen to host the consultations on its website to make it easier for the public to find all admissions information in one place. It is also a statutory consultee.

c) Review of School Accommodation

Where a school has experienced falling intakes, by reducing its PAN and managing pupil numbers downwards, it may be possible to free up accommodation for uses which are a greater priority. This could include:

- SEND resource bases
- Special school satellites
- SEND assessment units
- Alternative Provision accommodation

d) Support and Guidance for schools

Actions which schools can take to improve their financial sustainability include:

- Ensuring staffing structures and remuneration policies are appropriate and affordable for the type and size of school;
- Managing class organisation to ensure viable class sizes, including mixed-age classes where appropriate;
- Working with other schools (including within collaborative companies, federations and multi-academy trusts) to share resources.

10. Monitoring Progress

Many of the actions set out below are undertaken on an ad hoc basis already. Given the changing nature of demand for pupil places it is proposed to monitor all the actions above in a more structured way and to report back to the relevant groups overseeing the different strategies referred to in the report. An overarching report on progress will be made to the School Organisation Stakeholders Group.

Action	Team Lead in CEF
Where a new school is required, consideration will be given to the potential to relocate an existing school before committing to a new school.	School Organisation and Planning

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<p>Capacities of all schools will be reviewed annually and where a school appears to be operating with a lower Published Admission Number (PAN) than their accommodation supports, and it is in an area where additional school places are required, officers will discuss with the school a timetable for increasing PAN if places are forecast to be needed.</p>	<p>School Organisation and Planning</p>
<p>When the council receives a consultation from an own admissions authority school seeking to reduce PAN, the School Organisation & Planning team will return a clear response setting out the impact of the proposed change on the local sufficiency of school places.</p>	<p>School Organisation and Planning</p>
<p>To ensure a proactive approach to forward planning of admission numbers, the School Organisation & Planning team will, each year, identify schools which may benefit from a reduced PAN, with reference to the latest pupil forecasts and forward plan of new school openings.</p>	<p>School Organisation and Planning</p>
<p>To ensure a proactive approach to forward planning of admission numbers, the School Organisation & Planning team will work with Multi-Academy Trusts to advise them on the likely pupil numbers for their schools, to inform their decisions on future pupil numbers.</p>	<p>School Organisation and Planning</p>
<p>The School Organisation & Planning team is reviewing all mainstream schools to identify those where there is, or may emerge, spare accommodation which could be made available for other uses. Discussions will then be held with those schools to explore how this accommodation could be best used.</p>	<p>School Organisation and Planning</p>
<p>The SEND and AP teams are clarifying the specific accommodation needs for different models of provision and will follow up with schools which may be able to provide space.</p>	<p>SEND and Alternative Provision teams</p>

Workshops will be run in 2019/2020 on “Affordable Schools”, including input from Governor Services, HR, Finance and School Improvement.	School Improvement
The School Organisation & Planning team will identify and work with groupings of schools where wider structural solutions should be considered.	School Organisation and Planning/ School Improvement

Financial and Staff Implications

- 11. There is a risk of increasing school budget deficits if impacts of changes outlined in the paper are not acknowledged and appropriate action taken.

Sustainability Implications (Environmental Impacts – Reducing our Climate Impact)

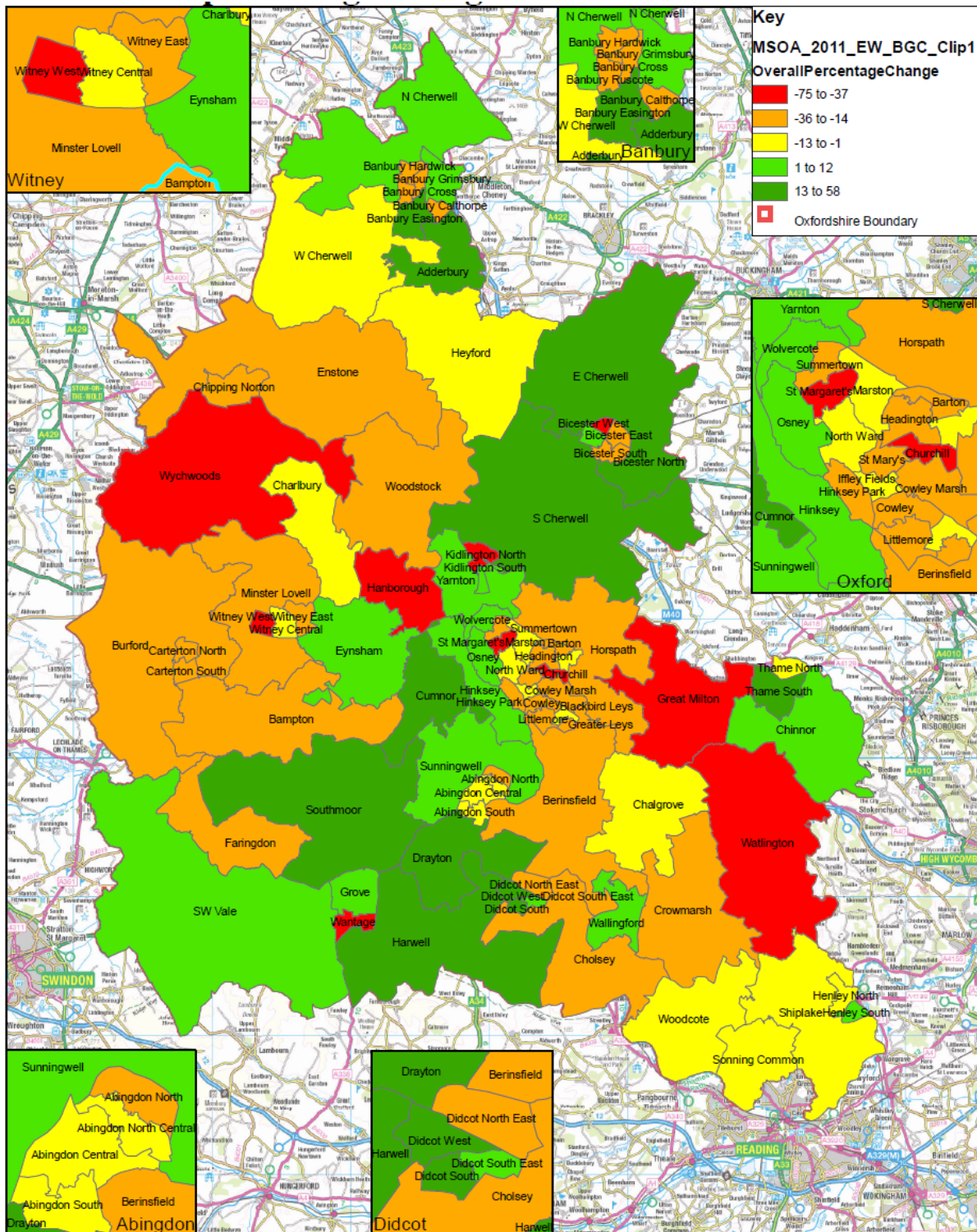
- 12. The approach set out in the report is designed to provide good local school places for families within their communities and is consistent with the council’s aims in relation to climate change.

LUCY BUTLER
 Director of Children’s Services

Background papers:

Contact Officer: Allyson Milward, Head of Access to Learning

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Source: Office for National Statistics

Diagram 2: Housing growth in adopted local plans

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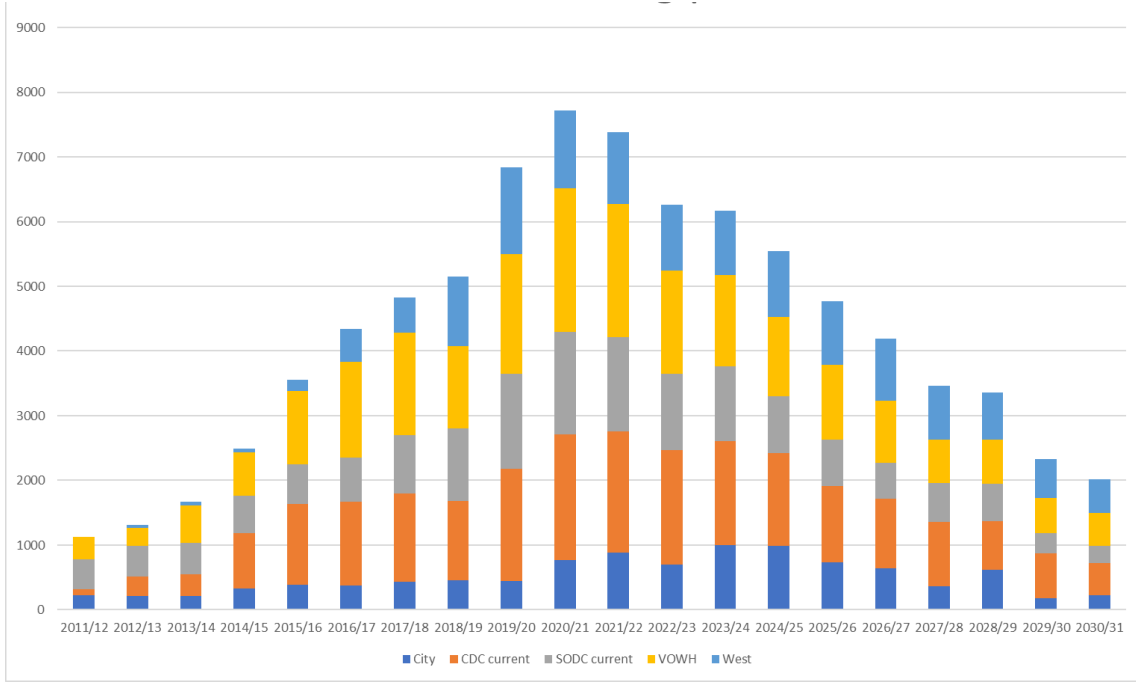


Diagram 3: Housing growth in adopted and draft local plans

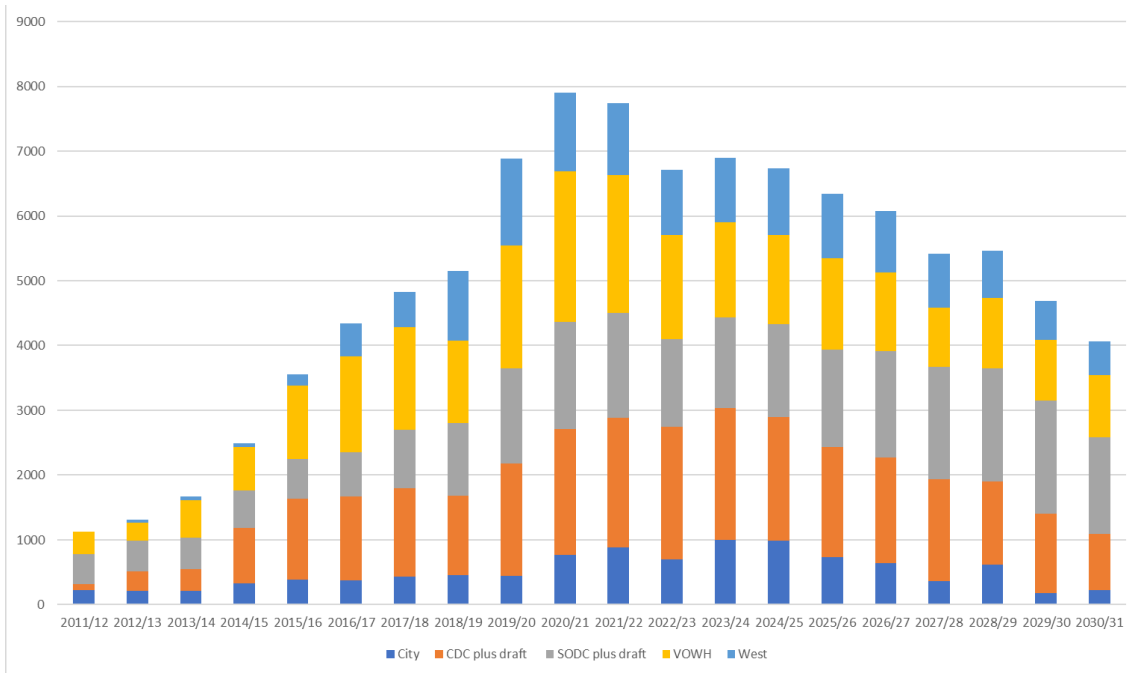
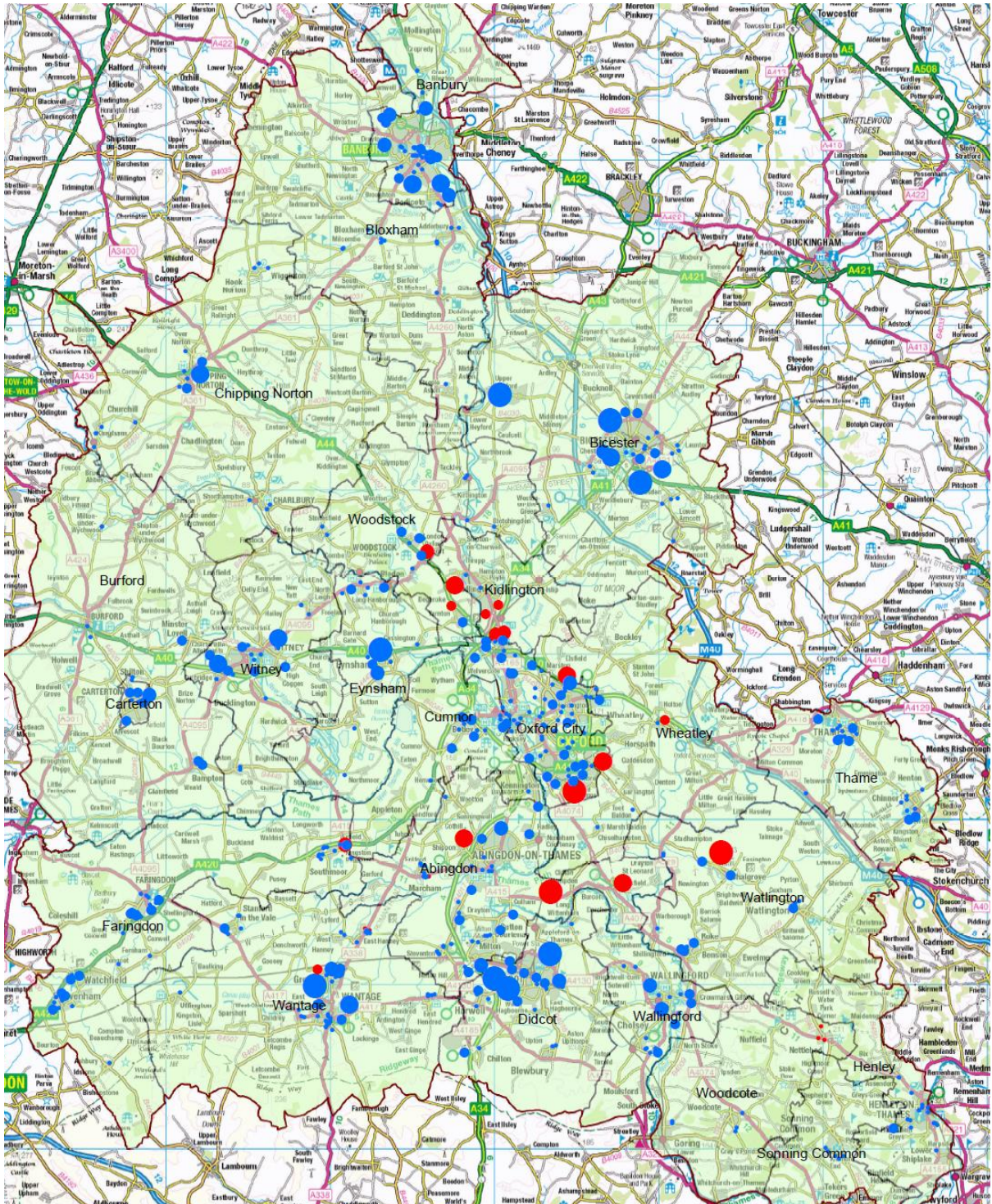
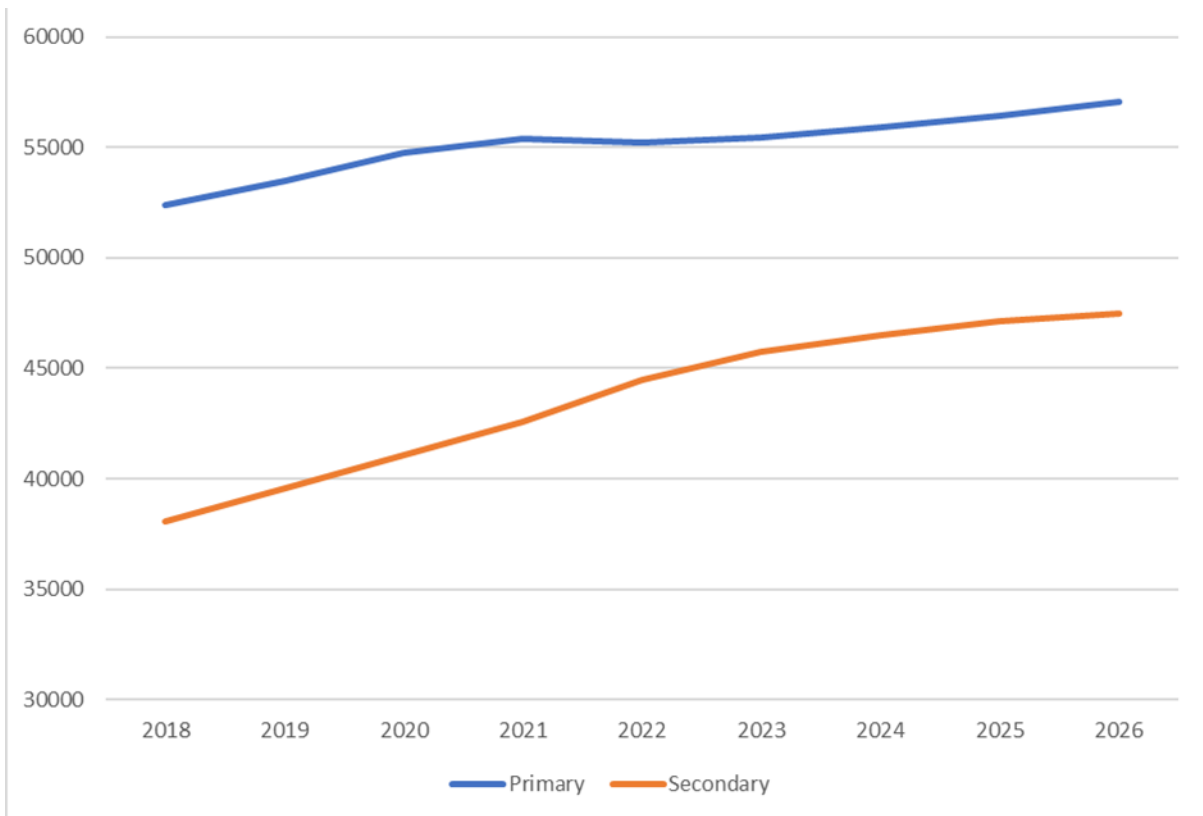


Diagram 4: Distribution of planned housing growth



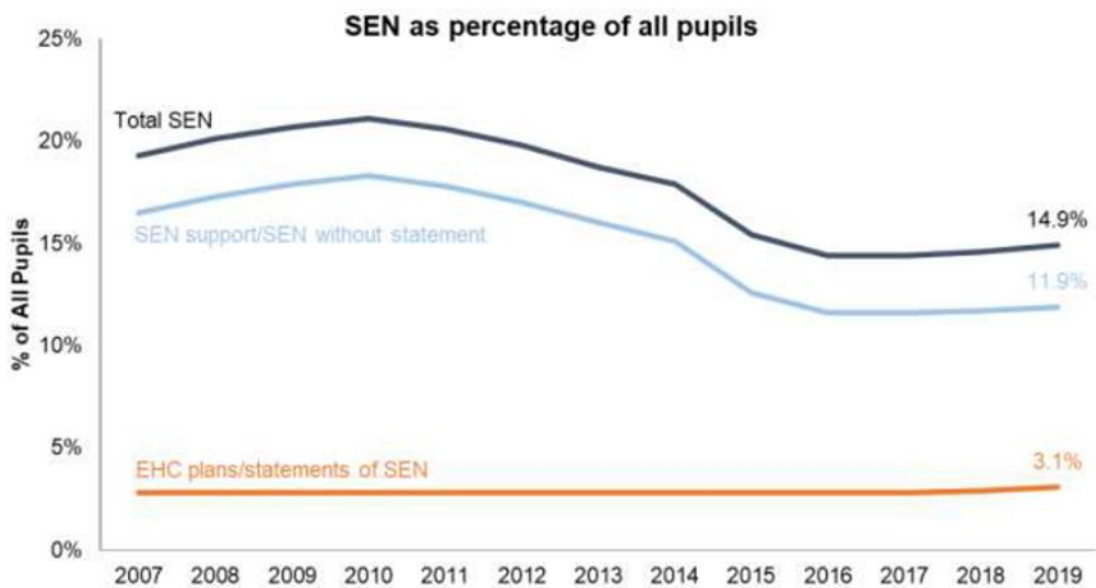
Source: 2018 Annual Monitoring Reports from district and City councils

Diagram 5: Forecast Oxfordshire pupil numbers in mainstream schools



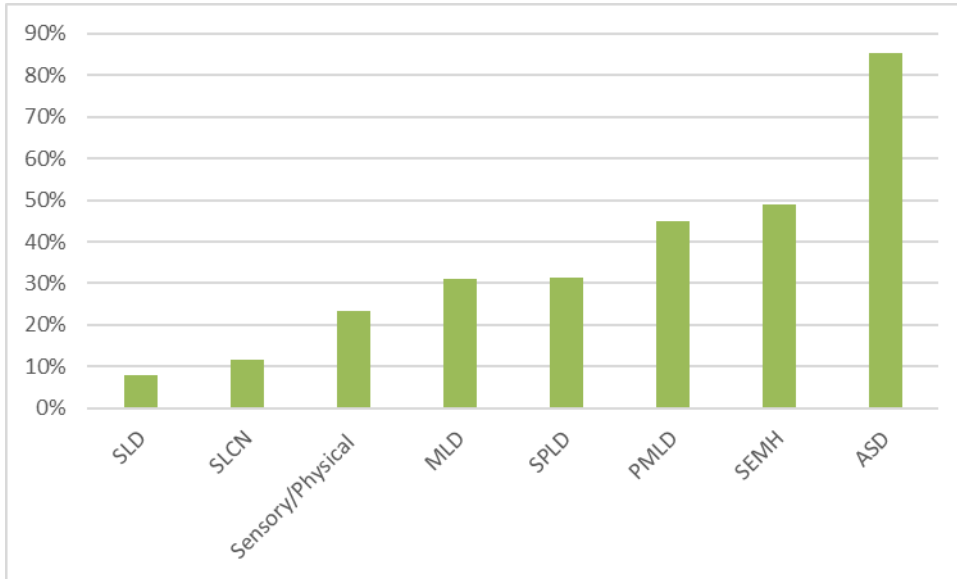
Source: OCC-calculated pupils forecasts, submitted to DfE for Annual School Capacity Return July 2019

Diagram 6: National trends in SEND



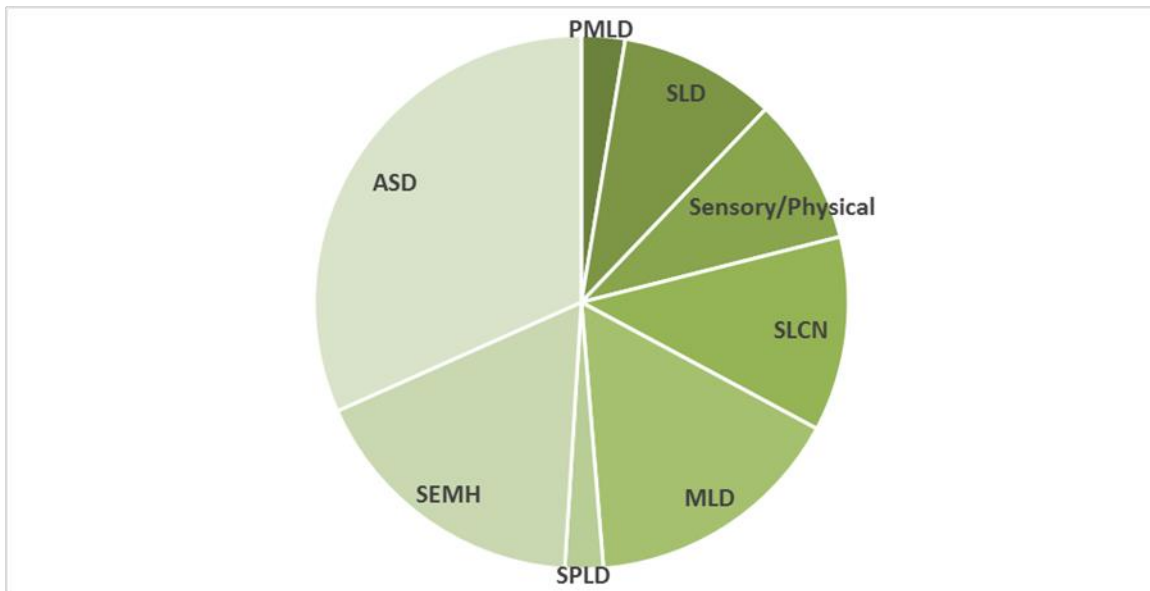
Source: Department for Education, Special educational needs in England: January 2019 (published July 2019)

Diagram 7: Increase in EHCPs (all ages) listing each primary need Oxfordshire 2014-2018



Source: OCC data

Diagram 8: Oxfordshire EHCPs (all ages) by primary need 2018



Source: OCC data

Diagram 9: Illustration of how a new school creates short term spare places

