

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on 3 October 2024

Report of the Director of Finance and Commerce

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2024-27

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

This report sets out the draft School Place Planning Delivery Programme for 2024-27, proposing a series of projects which aim to provide additional places in existing schools and proposals to deliver two new primary schools and a new secondary school in Preston.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the requirements of the council's Cabinet procedure rules (Standing Order C18, Consideration of Key Decisions) have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2024-27 set out at Appendix 'A'.
- (ii) Approve the commencement of work to design and obtain planning permission for a new primary school at the former Whittingham Hospital site.
- (iii) Approve the commencement of work to design and obtain planning permission for a new secondary school at the Tulketh High School site in Preston.

(iv) Agree to the commencement of the presumption process to secure sponsors for the new free schools.

Detail

As the education authority for Lancashire, the county council has a range of statutory duties to fulfil. The county council's ambition to provide good access, quality and outcomes in education are set out in the Lancashire Education Strategy 2022-2025.

One of the seven pillars of the Education Strategy is the School Planning Strategy 2022-25 which delivers on this ambition with the aim to provide 'the right number of school places, in the right areas, at the right time to meet need'. It sets out a series of priorities for improvement, areas of growth and reduction in the need for school places, and areas for future action.

The annual forecast of school place demand across Lancashire has identified several school planning areas where additional places are needed. These areas will require the delivery of a range of building projects, as set out in the School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2024-27 at Appendix 'A'. This is an update to the areas of growth and reduction currently set out in the School Planning Strategy 2022-25.

Additional places are required in both primary and secondary schools, due to the rise and cumulative impact of sustained births, housing development and migration. The School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2024-27 includes projects to provide additional primary places in:

- Goosnargh & Grimsargh with Longridge (Preston & Ribble Valley West)
- Burnley North

Secondary place projects are proposed in:

- Preston
- Burnley

To mitigate the impact of these shortfalls, the School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2022-2025 sought to deliver three new schools - two primary schools, one at Cottam Hall and one on the former hospital site at Whittingham, and a secondary school at preferably a site at North West Preston.

To meet the county council's statutory duty, in September 2024, Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation to pursue a temporary expansion of 210 places at Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School, with permanent places from September 2026. This will provide an interim solution to the timing of a new school at the former Whittingham Hospital site. The county council is currently seeking the acquisition of land to support this expansion.



Thereafter, the proposal is to build a new school at Whittingham, initially for 210 places, with infrastructure to expand to 420 places. This would be delivered in a phased approach, enabling sufficient opportunity to review data and provide places as needed.

Delivery of projects at both Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School and Whittingham will minimise the impact of destabilisation to current local schools. The site at Cottam Hall will therefore not be pursued at this time.

It was planned to have a new secondary school at North-West Preston but due to the lack of suitable land coming forward there is no option but to pursue delivery of a 600-place secondary school at the former Tulketh High School site. The old High School has now been demolished and it is now proposed that a new secondary school is built on the site as this is required for September 2027.

Consultations for the new schools at the former Whittingham Hospital site and the Tulketh High School site have already been completed. The Department for Education is satisfied that existing consultations remain valid. The proposals for Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School are currently out for consultation.

Further consideration is also being given to primary pressures within the Preston North, Preston West and Preston East areas. However, officers are mindful of the need to ensure that the current infrastructure is not destabilised and are therefore taking a cautious approach to bring forward capacity in a controlled manner; this work remains ongoing.

New housing within the Wyre area has also had a significant impact on the need for additional primary school places. Officers are currently undertaking an analysis in the areas of Garstang & Surrounding, Calder Vale & Claughton and Great Eccleston to better understand the position.

There are also known pressures in Burnley. This is a complex area, with a vast majority of schools having Private Finance Initiative contracts. Officers are therefore considering their options.

Assessment Framework for the Establishment of New Schools

Where a local authority considers that a new school needs to be established within its boundaries, Section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places the local authority under a duty to seek proposals to establish an academy/free school, also known as the 'presumption' route. The type of new school to be delivered would be determined in consultation with Education and Children's Services, as part of the development of the specification for the new school. Potential academy trust sponsors would need to evidence that they meet the school specification, via their application, to operate the new school which would provide part of the information against which the proposals would be judged.



Processes and Timescales

Commissioning a new school and the selection process for a sponsor may take up to 12 months, from the identification of need to the final decision by the Secretary of State for Education.

It is anticipated that it will take approximately two to three years from confirming the need for a new school to opening a new establishment. This is an ambitious proposal and, to date, Lancashire has not commissioned a new school via the presumption route.

Milestone	Timescale
Cabinet permission to commence consultation on new school proposals	October 2024
Submit New School Expression of Interest to the Regional Schools Director	November 2024
Public Consultation	These are completed, with the exception of Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School which closes on 13 th October 2024
Competition	February to June 2025
Decision Making	September 2025
Capital Build	Two years
Completion	Summer/Early Autumn 2026
School Opening	Academic year 2026-27

Decision Making

The Secretary of State will make the final determination in respect of the successful proposer to operate a new school. However, the local authority has a critical role to play in operating the assessment and selection process that will generate a recommendation from Cabinet to the Secretary of State for consideration.

Delivery

It is proposed that, should a decision be made to start the commissioning process for a new school, it may be necessary to provide temporary additional places in existing schools in the relevant planning areas for September 2025, pending completion of the process to establish new schools which would be ready to open in September 2026. Whilst each new primary school would be commissioned with capacity for up to 420 pupils (two form entry), the build design for the school would be delivered in a phased programme, which will allow local growth to generate the need and capacity, therefore maintaining a stable community infrastructure for existing schools.



Expansion and New primary school: Goosnargh & Grimsargh with Longridge

The Goosnargh and Grimsargh planning area is being considered in conjunction with neighbouring Longridge, due to the areas becoming increasingly connected through housing development. Longridge is also on the border with the Preston district, where Preston City Council is considering planning applications for large housing developments along the border, which has the potential to enlarge the town and create additional demand for school places within five years.

The School Place Planning Delivery Programme identifies the need for one additional form of entry in 2025/2026 and a further one form of entry by 2026/2027. To meet the county council's statutory duty, a one year temporary increase in the published admission number from 30 to 60 from September 2025 is being pursued at Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School, with permanent places being available from September 2026. This would gradually increase the capacity of the school from 210 to 420 places. This provides an interim solution to the timing of a new school at the former Whittingham Hospital site. The county council is currently seeking the acquisition of land to support this expansion.

New primary school: Preston Rural, North, and West

Pupil numbers are also rising in the Preston Rural area, driven by City Deal housing growth and the popularity of existing schools, generating a proportionate increase in the number of preferences for admissions.

Preston West, North and Rural school planning areas are being considered together as housing growth is expected to impact upon all three. Migration is impacting later year groups as the reception cohorts move through the schools.

To ensure that the right level of capacity is brought forward at the right time and, in light of the delivery of 2 forms of entry in the Goosnargh and Grimsargh and Longridge planning areas, the timing of additional capacity needs to be carefully considered and therefore remains under review.

New secondary school: Preston

Increased numbers from primary phase have started to move through to the secondary phase, with additional places needed from 2026-27 onwards. Discussions are ongoing with Preston secondary schools to secure plans to increase the number of places available. There are limited options at existing schools for the scale of additional provision required and therefore a new secondary school will be needed.

The School Place Planning Delivery Programme identifies the need for a one additional permanent form of entry in September 2026, and an additional four forms of entry by September 2027. This will require a new secondary school in Preston. Several sites have been considered, but due to the lack of suitable land being brought forward it is recommended that the Tulketh High School site is the only option to meet this need at this time on the basis of speed of deliverability in terms of construction and overall cost to the authority.



Permanent expansions: Burnley

There is an increased pressure in school places in both primary and secondary phases in Burnley. Projects in this area are complex, due to the shortfall of primary places presenting in Upper Year groups and, for secondary, due to the status of schools and the Private Finance Initiative contractual arrangements. Officers are currently working with local schools and the Pupil Access team to mitigate these shortfalls.

Consultations

The county council has already undertaken consultations for the new primary schools on the former Hospital site at Whittingham and Cottam Hall, and for the secondary school on the former Tulketh High school site, in line with the Department for Education Guidance [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/guidance/making-significant-changes-to-maintained-schools). The Department for Education has confirmed that any existing consultation outcomes remain valid.

There is currently an open consultation in place for Goosnargh Oliverson's Church of England Primary School, which closes on 13 October 2024. The outcome of the consultation will be brought to the November 2024 Cabinet.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

If additional school places are not created, there is a risk that the county council would fail in its statutory responsibility to make sure that a maintained school place is available to all Lancashire children of the appropriate age range who want one.

Providing additional places increases the overall capacity in the area and, if projected pupil numbers fail to materialise as expected, there may be surplus places created by the proposals. In these circumstances, the authority proposes to work with the group of schools within the School Planning Area, to ensure that there is a strategic approach to managing the sufficiency of school places available.

Equality and Cohesion

The proposed School Place Planning Delivery Programme 2024-27 will impact most protected characteristics groups but will have its greatest impact on children and young people (age). It is anticipated that the programme will contribute positively towards the Public Sector Equality Duty's general aims of advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between protected characteristics groups.

Legal

The county council is under a statutory obligation to ensure the sufficiency of school places in its area. Where an expansion project constitutes a significant change, the council must follow Department for Education Guidance in managing the project.



Guidance is set out in: [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/making-significant-changes-to-maintained-schools.pdf)

'[The Free School Presumption](#)' (Department for Education, May 2024) provides guidance to local authorities in commissioning new schools. This sets out model templates for the School Specification (Annex A); Application Form for potential sponsors (Annex B) and Model Assessment criteria (Annex C).

In June 2020, Cabinet approved adoption of the Department for Education framework for the establishment of new schools in Lancashire. This and any subsequent guidance will be considered in developing each proposal for a new school.

Financial

The requirement to build the schools proposed in this report in Preston will require significant investment. Historically this has been met from Department for Education basic Needs Capital Grant and developer contributions towards education infrastructure. However, due to the current funding regime and commitments via the growth agenda, these proposals will require significant county council investment. Whilst this report starts the formal processes to create new schools, the final funding decisions will need to be made at Full Council in February 2025, as part of the overall budget setting process. At that time, the full costs and funding requirements will be laid out to determine the level of investment alongside the other pressing priorities for investment.

Local authorities are responsible for the start-up costs for new schools. The details of these costs, as they relate to capital project, and which elements are to be funded from revenue budgets need to be established.

The county council will need to consult with the Schools Forum to determine the criteria and forum policy to be applied in relation to the start-up costs that are to be funded from the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Schools Forum should also be consulted on the total sum to be top sliced from the Dedicated Schools Grant, and the local authority will need to provide the Schools Forum with regular updates on the use of the funding.

Therefore, the commissioning of a new school should only be approved where there is a high degree of certainty on financial viability. Should a school prove not to be financially viable, then in the short term the Dedicated School Grant may underwrite initial financial risks. However, in the medium term the liabilities could significantly accumulate that would then impact on the authority's finances.

Property Asset Management

The approval of a school expansion requiring a build project that will extend the footprint of the building will be subject to obtaining relevant planning permission and Section 77(3) consent for the change of use of the land (or meeting the terms of The School Playing Fields General Disposal and Change of Use Consent (No 5) 2014.)



Should the commissioning of a new school be approved, then there is an expectation that the site be made available free or on a peppercorn basis by the local authority to the academy trust operating the school.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. Appendix 'A' contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It is considered that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

