Bearwood School question and answer sheet after a meeting at the school on 15/09/2026.

Wokingham BC officers attending:

Piers Brunning, School Place Planning Manager

Oliver Gill, Head of Education Access and Sufficiency

School Representative

Funmi Alder, Head teacher

Initial presentations

Piers Brunning made a short presentation on the background to the proposals:

- Rolls were falling in most parts of the borough.
- Surplus capacity was rising, despite reductions in admission numbers.
- Further reductions in places were required.
- In Shinfield, an area of new housing developments, rolls were rising.
- The Council had a plan (since 2010) for a new primary school in Spencers Wood.
- While mainstream rolls were falling the need for specialist places was increasing.

In response, the Council proposed to:

- Relocate the Bearwood School to a new school in Spencers Wood from September 2028.
- Open a new SEND Base for 14 children with Education Health and Care Plans at the school on relocation.
- Although not part of the expected official consultation, the Council's intention was to refurbish the school's Sindlesham premises as a new Special School.
- To support parents free transport would be provided for the three years after relocation at the beginning and end of the school day.

A parent then made a short presentation on why the school was so important and why they felt it would be damaging to the children attending and the local community if it were relocated. Points included:

- That the school, parents and children formed a community. The distance to the new site was perceived to be too great to sustain this.

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- Many families came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and did not have cars, so could not easily visit the school for what would currently be routine and important discussions.
- Many children had additional needs and may have issues using ordinary transport arrangements.
- The move may be detrimental to the children's mental health.

These and other points made are captured in the issues sections below.

The summary of the points made and questions raised on the night are set out below. The responses are a combination of the brief comments made on the night, and more elaborated responses to make this question and answer sheet more useful, particularly to the significant number of parents who did not attend the meeting.

Transport issues

The proposals are for free transport at the beginning and end of the school day for 3 years after the relocation.

Concerns raised by residents were:

1. Some parents cannot drive to the new location. This has implications for the relationship between parents and the school.

Response: While this is true, this should be seen in the context of the positives of the proposal, including the elimination of the possibility of school closure in the Wokingham Town West area.

2. What would happen if a parent had to collect a sick child but could not drive?

Response: the Council would commission an ad hoc taxi service for this and similar essential journeys, specifically for parents who are unable to drive.

3. The distance to the new school was too far to walk.

Response: agreed. There is no expectation that parents or children will walk or cycle between Winnersh and the new site.

4. The time required to move children between the current site and the new site (estimated by parents to be circa ½ hour per trip) was seen as excessive at the start and end of the school day in normal traffic at these times.

Response: the Council expects the journey time to be significantly below the maximum recommended journey time of 45 minutes for pupils of primary school age, as set out in the relevant statutory guidance:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a10649929bb11891b1cf096/Travel_to_school_for_children_of_compulsory_school_age.pdf

5. How would parents be able to use breakfast clubs and after school provision?

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Response: This point is noted and will be considered when reviewing proposed arrangements before any final decision is taken. The Council is considering whether transport at the beginning and end of the school day can be supplemented by transport to accommodate breakfast and after school clubs. The Council will provide a parent / carer survey as part of the formal consultation process, to assess demand for these two transport services, in order to assess the optimal mix of provision in this respect.

6. Transport should be provided for the full 7 years of a child's primary schooling.

Response: This point is noted and will be considered when reviewing proposed arrangements before any final decision is taken. If extended provision were to be agreed, it would only be open to children who were already registered at the school at the beginning of the informal consultation period (1 September 2026), including those who were starting Reception Year in September 2026. The only exception to this would be children who were siblings of pupils who were registered at the school at the beginning of the consultation period.

7. Transport arrangements should be extended to siblings, otherwise parents would need to move children from the school when siblings started school or otherwise risk having young children in two different schools (which might make work impractical).

Response: This point is noted and will be considered when reviewing proposed arrangements before any final decision is taken. An initial response is provided against Q6.

8. Parents of current Reception children should have been notified in June when they could have sought an alternative school. It was unfair to penalise these families by not providing transport for their last two years of primary education.

Response: This point is noted and will be considered when reviewing proposed arrangements before any final decision is taken. An initial response is provided against Q6.

9. What would the arrangements be for children who couldn't travel with the majority of relocating children due to their SEND / medical needs? Would the Council re-imburse the costs parents incurred in these circumstances?

Response: the transport commitment was universal, so if this occurred a bespoke arrangement would be commissioned. Each application for bespoke support would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Again, this will be addressed within the parent / carer survey indicated in the response to Q5.

10. How would the transport needs of children with additional needs (for example, anxiety), but below a level to justify a clinical assessment (a "pathway") be assessed?

Response: the Council would seek assessments by qualified members of WBC staff in such circumstances.

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11. Children under 12 are required to use car seats, how will the council ensure that coach travel arrangements are safe? How would travel risk assessments be made?

Response: the Council will assess needs of individual children closer to the transfer day. It is noted though that booster seats are not required for coach travel.

12. Would there be escorts on coaches?

Response: in addition to the driver, at least one additional adult will accompany children on the coaches. This may be a member of school staff, or a dedicated passenger assistant, dependent on availability, which would be assessed closer to the transfer date.

13. It was stated that coach based transport arrangements for mainstream primary children were unknown in the UK.

Response: On bus/coach transport for mainstream primary age children:

A number of UK school were identified where school bus routes were provided for transport to school. In particular:

- *Long Sutton CoE, Hampshire*
- *Baildon CoE Primary School, Bradford*

These arrangements are understood to be commonplace in other countries (e.g. USA, Canada, Ireland).

14. What arrangements would be made to provide any necessary medical support for children on the journey?

Response: the Council will assess needs and ensure necessary staff are on board transport vehicles. These assessments cannot be made until much closer the proposed date of transfer.

15. What arrangements would be in place to support parents if they needed to attended school to provide medicines or other help to children with serious medical conditions at the school?

Response: the council will fund an ad hoc transport service for essential visits to the school, specifically for parents who are unable to drive.

Admissions issues

While those present, who expressed a view, wanted the school to remain on its current site, a number would prefer to relocate their child to another school, if the relocation proposal is approved. Others were concerned about the admission of older children to the relocated school.

Specific queries or challenges were:

1. Parents had checked, but there were no Reception places available in other nearby schools.

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Response: A post meeting check with the admissions team confirmed that places are available at other local schools in all primary year groups, and a list of vacancies and schools will be circulated to families of pupils at Bearwood,

2. The value of the relocation to Shinfield residents was questioned, given the number of current Bearwood children who would relocate.

Response: the advantages to Shinfield residents is that admissions of children to the new school would favour Shinfield residents from 2028 admission, if the school is oversubscribed. Ranking is based on distance from the school site.

Siblings of children expected to be on roll at the point of entry to the school are likely to be the siblings of current children on roll, and will have higher priority than children with no sibling or other higher priority. However, this will be a small proportion of the intake in any given year and diminish over time.

3. Would Bearwood children (e.g. siblings of current Year 6 children) be given high priority for admissions to other schools. What priority would be given to siblings in admission to (a) Bearwood Primary School and (b) other schools.

Response:

(a) Bearwood Primary School – under current arrangements the Council gives high priority to siblings of pupils on roll at the school when the application is made, wherever they live.

(b) Other schools – no additional priority for 2027/28 admissions will be given to children seeking places at other schools, as admissions authorities must follow adopted oversubscription criteria when making allocation and these will not give priority to former Bearwood Primary School pupils. However, it is understood that there is sufficient surplus capacity at schools in the broader area to mean that any parents wishing to secure a local primary school place should be able to do so.

A query was raised about changing the school catchment area in response to the low admissions.

Response: The Council no longer (from 2027/28) has designated / catchment areas for community schools. Priority is granted on the basis of distance to school, rather than any defined admissions boundary.

Impact on children

Apart from the issues associated with school transport, a number of issues concerning the impact of the relocation on children were raised. These were:

1. That the relocation of children was unsettling and would be particularly so for those with conditions such as anxiety or neurodiverse children who are averse to change, and so detrimental to their mental health.

Response: the Council is confident that with support from school staff that any such impact will be temporary, for the overwhelming majority of such children.

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2. That it would be difficult for many children from Winnersh to form friendship groups with children from Shinfield because of the challenges associated with maintaining contact (e.g. through playdates) outside of school hours.

Response: Whilst this may be true for some children, this is also true for children living in the many small villages and isolated homes that characterise the rural parts of Wokingham. We do not consider this to be an issue in terms of children's fundamental right to access appropriate education. Again, should a particular family have the formation of friendships in the local community as an overriding concern, the opportunity to access vacant places at other local schools exists.

Process issues

Questions were raised about the approval process, and the development process to date. These were:

1. How could the proposal be stopped?

Responses:

1) Currently the proposal was just that, a proposed change, that would be determined at a later date. The decision makers would be the Council's own Executive, a formally constituted body of Councillors (members of the Council) that meets monthly to take decisions on recommendations in formal reports drafted for them by the Council's officers. The proposal would cease if the Executive decided not to approve the recommended scheme.

The Council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has though considered the principle of school relocation versus other options for managing rising need for primary school places in the Shinfield area (link to report here).

They supported school relocation over the other identified options.

2. Who were the decision makers and how could they be contacted?

Response: The contact details for the decision makers, the Council's Executive, are on the Council's website (link here). As at 17/09/2026 the Councillor members were:

- Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Children's Services - Prue Bray
- Executive Councillor for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Adrian Betteridge
- Executive Councillor for Adult Services, Health & Wellbeing - David Hare
- Executive Councillor for Climate Emergency, Community Safety and Public Protection - Lou Timlin
- Executive Councillor for Digital & Change - Basit Alvi
- Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Sport, Leisure, Countryside and the Arts - Mark Ashwell
- Executive Councillor for Finance and Governance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

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- Executive Councillor for Refuse and Recycling - Stephen Newton
- Executive Councillor for Resident Services, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty - Rachel Bishop-Firth
- Imogen Shepherd-DuBey Finance
- Imogen Shepherd-DuBey Finance and Governance
- Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Housing, Partnerships and the Local Plan - Stephen Conway
- Lou Timlin Community Safety and Public Protection
- Mark Ashwell Economic Development, Sport, Leisure and the Arts
- Martin Alder Planning and Enforcement
- Rachel Bishop-Firth Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty

Full contact details of all Executive members who are also councillors is appended.

3. What was the purpose of the initial school bidding round?

Response: The reference to the bidding process relates to the process by which schools and trusts were invited to submit expressions of interest in relocation to Spencers Wood. After the capital finance for the new school was agreed in March 2026, officers set about the process of identifying a school to be relocated. A specification was written, with bid documents and an evaluation panel was recruited. Schools and Trusts operating in Wokingham were invited to submit an initial expression of interest. There were a number of expressions of interest, leading to detailed bids. A panel made up of members of the Council, council officers with aligned service responsibilities, a local representative and other interested parties evaluated the proposals. They determined that the Bearwood proposal was the best fit with the established criteria.

The school governing body agreed to the submission of the bid because it understood that given the continued fall in rolls, the current staffing arrangements (based on one class per year group) were not sustainable and would lead to a budget deficit if no action was taken. Relocation to an area where demand was high would not only enable the school to balance its budget, but would also reduce the rate of pupil turnover at the school, something that is detrimental to school standards. It is important to note too, that given the established reducing birth trend, that the Council may have to close schools to protect education standards in the borough. While no closure programme has been agreed (or is in preparation) Bearwood would be vulnerable, because its falling rolls have reduced the roll well below the 210 statutory school age places that could be generated by the school's current admission number of 30 children.

4. Why the school governors were not present at the meeting?

Response: The head teacher confirmed that the intention was that the governing body would be represented by their chair of governors, but unfortunately she was unable to attend. She was though intending to attend the next (online) meeting and any future formal public engagement meetings.

5. Can a member of the WBC Executive be present at future meetings?

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Response: The Executive Member for Children's Services will be present at all meetings during the statutory consultation period.

Development

1. Attendees asked why the projections tabled at the meeting did not show rising rolls because of the Loddon Valley development and why relocation was proposed when major new development in Sindlesham was proposed.

2. More generally, it was asked why new developments could not rely on existing school capacity?

Response:
The 2025 Roll Projections (used in the presentation) take account of known housing developments. The fact is that the majority of proposed housebuilding in the Wokingham Borough will not complete within the current pupil forecast period and, even for those houses that do complete, the 'pupil yield' is only fractional per dwelling.

The most significant local development is the Loddon Valley Garden Village (LCGV) development, with incorporates a scheme on land around the Hatch Farm site. This can be seen as a single integrated area of development delivered by a consortium of developers, centred around the current Hall Farm. This development, of 4,000 homes, will include provision for two new primary schools. These will be adequate to meet needs generated across the whole area. The Council expects all home builders active in the scheme to make appropriate contributions for infrastructure to meet needs generated by their sub-developments across the Loddon Valley Garden Village.

The development is of sufficient magnitude that the number of primary age children to be generated would not be accommodated by existing local schools and given the distance to alternatives, would (a) generate higher traffic levels on existing roads; (b) create a sustained drain on the council's home to school transport budget, if the Council were to rely on out of area provision; and (c) not meet the Council's ambition to create sustainable local communities through new housebuilding, with essential services such as schools located within walking distance of new homes

Appended Councillor contact information for Executive and Winnersh ward

All can be contacted by letter at:

c/o Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices
Shute End
Wokingham
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Further contact details are available on the Wokingham Borough Council website.

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Cllr Rachel Bishop-Firth

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Cllr Prue Bray (also member for Winnersh Ward)

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Cllr Stephen Conway

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Cllr Lou Timlin

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Cllr Chetna Jamthe (member for Winnersh ward, not on the Executive Committee)

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