

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date	17 th November 2025
Subject:	School Capital Investment Strategy
Lead Member:	Cllr. Puja Bedi – Lead Member for Finance, Education and Children's Services
Chief Officer:	Sue Butcher – Executive Director for Children's Services
Contact Officer:	Neil Hoskinson – Director of Education
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – High Needs Provision Capital Allocations Appendix 2 – Condition Programme

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 To seek endorsement from the Cabinet on the capital investment strategy for education provision in Slough, including nursery, primary, secondary, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) places. The report outlines current and planned expenditure funded through Basic Need grant, School Condition Allocations (SCA), High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA), and Section 106 developer contributions.

Recommendations:

- 1.2 Cabinet is recommended to:
- a) Approve the School Capital Programmes in Appendices 1 and 2.
 - b) Approve the re-profiling of £900K from 2026-27 to 2025-26 to meet the increased requirement of the Special School Expansion Programme in 2025-26.

Reason:

- 1.3 This report pulls together the different funding streams and programmes currently underway to invest in school buildings. It sets out the Council's strategy for investing the available resources to ensure that Slough continues to have well maintained schools and the right provision of school places of the right types to meet current and projected demand.

Commissioner Review

“The school’s capital investment strategy sets out a strategic plan for capital expenditure and guide for investments in school buildings and facilities. The strategy aims to deliver modern, safe, and energy-efficient learning environments, support educational goals, ensure enough school places are available, and represent value for money. Projects need to be realistic, affordable, and aligned with council and government priorities, while also managing risk and maintaining safety.

The programme of work also has the ability to build on the capital plans developed by individual schools in undertaking preventative maintenance or enhancement to facilities, from within their Devolved Formula Capital funding or retained capital balances.

The MHCLG commissioners are content with this report being considered.”

2. Report

2.1 Strategic Priorities

2.1.1 Slough Corporate Plan 2023-27

Priority 1 - A borough for children and young people to thrive

- available capital funding will be invested to create new school places to meet demand
- condition funding will be invested to address the highest building priorities to make schools safe and suitable learning environments.

2.1.2 SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2025-28

The Strategy was agreed this year by Cabinet in July 2025. It sets out the vision and strategic priorities for Slough Council, which will be delivered through a planned programme of work, to ensure that Slough children and young people receive the right support at the right time and in the right place.

The review undertaken considered demographic data, showing school numbers dropping since 2016, which has reflected in a reduction in the number of school places, over time, in Slough. Whilst the SEN 2 data demonstrated considerable growth in the number of children with an EHC plan, on further exploration, the growth is partly represented by an increasing number of children and young people within mainstream, where there is a requirement, in Slough, for an EHC plan in order to access Top- Up Funding. This is also reflected in the High Needs Block spend for Top- Up Mainstream Funding.

Current special school demographic data shows over 38% of children in special schools have Moderate Learning Difficulties, including a growing number at Post 16. The local authority is clear that the governance processes that have been developed now need to be embedded, to ensure children are appropriately placed.

The SEND capital programme of work compliments the priorities highlighted in the SEND sufficiency strategy, overseen by the SEND operational board, reporting into the SEND partnership board, and will monitor the action plan, associated costs, risks, dependencies, milestones, and benefits.

2.1.3 School Places Strategy 2023-27

The Strategy highlights that the right number of secondary places were created for the peak in demand due to the increased birth rate up to 2011-12. However, there is a continuing pressure on primary places in the Central and East Planning Areas at Key Stage 2.

An update to the Strategy is required in 2026 to take account of the rising birth rate over the last 3 years and the higher-than-expected rate of in-year admissions over the last few years. The SEND section has been superseded by the new Sufficiency Strategy 2025-28.

Options

- 2.2 School Condition Allocation – New condition surveys were conducted for schools where the LA has capital responsibility. Each school was visited to discuss the outcomes of their survey. Fire Risk Assessments, Door Surveys and other relevant health and safety surveys were also considered. From this meeting a list of priority projects was agreed with the school. Officers then took the information gathered and compiled a programme that addressed the highest priorities across the estate while remaining within the budget envelope available in each year. The programme is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.3 Basic Need (primary and secondary mainstream places) – Having expanded primary capacity by 50% and secondary capacity by 60% between 2008 and 2019, schools that can offer further places are limited. Slough approaches all schools in the Central and East Planning Area on an annual basis seeking candidates for offering additional capacity. Expansions are agreed following a prioritisation process and are rolled out with schools as and when places are required.

The options for creating the additional capacity are:

- Larger key stage 2 classes – more than 30 in a class, usually up to 32. This has the advantage of providing places across the town where they are needed.
- Bulge classes – creates 30 places at once, ideal if a large number of places are required but has the disadvantage of creating the places at a single school. Where there is more than one option, projects are prioritised at non-faith based schools where additional classrooms are already available.
- Extra key stage 2 forms of entry – this means 4 extra classes for Years 3 to 6. Slough requires more key stage 2 classes than key stage 1 classes. Extra key stage 2 forms of entry provide a longer-term solution,

acknowledging that there will always be significant growth, from in-year admissions, between Reception classes and Year 6.

Background

- 2.4 Slough continues to experience significant demographic change and housing growth, particularly in the town centre. This has led to increased demand for primary school places across all phases, including specialist provision for children with SEND.

The Council has the following capital income sources available for investing in school buildings:

- Basic Need Allocation – the LA submits a School Capacity (SCAP) return annually to the DfE, which includes planning area forecasts and capacity information for each school. This data is analysed by the DfE and where they calculate a shortfall of primary or secondary places in future years, the LA is allocated an amount per school place after Free School places are deducted.
- School Condition Allocation (SCA) – an annual allocation provided by the DfE based on building condition and pupil numbers. Allocated for maintaining the LA's 5 nurseries, 7 primary schools and 1 secondary school, that is, Community, Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools.
- High Needs Provision Capital Allocation – an annual formulaic allocation for improving and expanding SEND provision to meet rising demand.

Ringfenced and/or time-limited income:

- Section 106 Contributions – funding requested from developers to mitigate the impact of new housing through contributions required to fund additional capacity. Where there is an assessed shortfall developers are asked to fund early years, primary, secondary, post-16 and SEND places. Section 106 income is always ringfenced and can be specifically for one school, an area or a type of provision.
 - Devolved Formula Capital – a small formulaic annual allocation based on pupil numbers and building condition, this is passported directly to schools. The school can spend this on any capital works including as a top up to the grant allocated by SBC as part of the Schools Condition Programme. £126K for 2025-26 and this is omitted from all the tables below.
- 2.5 The income received each year through these funding streams is unpredictable and cannot be estimated in advance. Except for the SCA grant which will rise by around 2% on average each year, although any future academy transfers will reduce the level of income received.
- 2.6 Early Years capital grants can be announced at short notice and generally have very targeted outcomes.

Primary Places:

- 2.7 The peak in births reached Reception in 2014-15 and 2015-16, and since then overall Reception numbers have been decreasing. The impact of this reduction in births is different for each planning area of the town:
- **West** Planning Area: There is a large surplus of Reception places due to births reducing by 25%. All year groups have surplus capacity and this is expected to remain the situation.
 - **Central** Planning Area: There is a pressure on places in most year groups as birth levels have remained high and this area of the town has seen significant development of new homes. As further large developments are imminent in the centre of Slough, it is expected that there will remain a pressure on places.
 - **East** Planning Area: The number of births has dropped by 20% and this means there is capacity in Reception and this is likely to continue, however there is considerable pressure for places in all other year groups which can mean options are limited for in-year applications.
- 2.8 Primary Place Planning has become more complex in recent years, while birth numbers have been reducing, at the same time in-year applications have been the highest level on record. This increase is due to a complex range of factors including government policy and local house building and is impossible to predict in advance with any accuracy. The result of this situation is that Slough primary schools have 256 more Year 6 pupils than Reception pupils, this is the equivalent of 8.5 classes. Put another way, Slough needs 3 more large schools for Year 6 pupils than it requires for pupils coming in the bottom at Reception.
- 2.9 5 bulge classes have been opened for 2024-25 to ensure all pupils continue to be offered a school place. Extra capacity will be opened in 2025-26 in the centre and east to meet demand.
- 2.10 A certain level of surplus is planned in all year groups to accommodate new arrivals to Slough. While surplus places need to be planned by the Local Authority to ensure a sufficiency of places, it can put a financial pressure on those schools with too many empty places due to the per pupil funding model. This can lead to schools reducing their admission numbers in the short term when these places may be required in future years.
- 2.11 A number of schools, mainly in the west but also the centre, have reduced their admission numbers in response to lower demand for places, two more schools will reduce their admission numbers for 2026. While these reductions were a response to the birth data at the time, new data means that there will be shortages going forward and new places will be required.

Birth Data:

- 2.12 The cohort applying for Reception school places for September 2025 is the smallest cohort for more than two decades, this will create a large number of surplus places. This appears to be a blip; for the last 3 years the birth numbers have been rising with a large jump in 2023-24. For 2028, it will be necessary to

increase the admission number at some schools that have previously reduced numbers.

Secondary Places:

- 2.13 Over the last 12 years the number of pupils obtaining a year 7 place at a Slough secondary school has increased by just over 50%. Capacity has been increased to keep pace with this rising demand: 4 new free schools have opened in Slough and many existing schools have increased their admission numbers including all 4 grammar schools.
- 2.14 2023-24 was the year the largest cohort applied for Year 7 places as a result of the peak in births 11 years before. Sufficient places were available to meet demand. While the demand for year 7 places is expected to reduce year on year due to the decline in birth numbers since 2011-12, the recent increase to in-year admissions suggests that demand for places may reduce less than originally anticipated. No new places are required going forward, although there is a pressure on current Year 9 due to a school reducing their PAN for that cohort.

Post-16:

- 2.15 Post-16 numbers at Slough schools have risen by more than 60% over the last 15 years and this rate of increase was projected to continue however a limit on capacity has meant that numbers may stabilise, for a while at least. 3 new academy free schools have delayed the opening of their sixth forms, this has meant fewer pupils than expected started in Year 12-over the last 3 years. Alternative places are available at local colleges.

SEND Place Planning

- 2.16 As a result of the review and subsequent strategy, Slough council is committed to implementing an additional 80 special school satellite places and an additional 20 mainstream specialist places to develop its post sixteen pathways and to further increase its graduated offer of specialist setting provision, including the number of places within the nursery undertake further reviews of children currently placed out of area to consider the development of in-house provision.
- 2.17 The programme set out in Appendix 1 includes a range of projects which can be split into the following categories:
- Special School expansions – Arbour Vale and Haybrook College
 - Improvements for high needs pupils in maintained schools
 - Improvements to existing resource bases/units or new bases
 - Early Years projects

Governance

- 2.18 School place planning is monitored through the School Place Planning Board, an officer led group that includes Slough headteachers from a range of school types. Reporting to this group are a number of sub-groups that look at various specific elements of place planning, one of these being SEND.

- 2.19 All Council Capital projects are monitored monthly by the officer led, Capital Board. The Board includes the s151 officer and senior officers from each directorates as well as monitoring progress on capital projects the Board considers new projects and whether they should proceed to the next stage of the Council's approval process.

3. Implications of the Recommendations

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The table below shows the current capital funding available for increasing school places and maintaining school assets. This money has already been received, the table excludes devolved funding held by schools.

Grant or Income Source	Allocation Year	Income £m
Basic Need	c/fwd	0.110
	2025-26	1.278
Condition	2024-25	0.555
	2025-26	0.923
High Needs Capital Allocation	2022-23	3.748
	2023-24	3.851
	2024-25	1.056
	2025-26	2.615
s106	various	1.233
Total capital funding available		15.369

- 3.1.2 The Council's agreed Capital Programme budgets are shown below. Currently £7.571 is forecast to be spent in 2025-26 and £5.79m in 2026-27, this totals £13.361 against an income already received of £15.369m. In total, this leaves £2m available for possible overspends on existing projects or new projects.

Schools Programme	2025-26	2026-27	Further Information
	£m	£m	
Primary Expansion Programme (P051)	-	0.400	No projects agreed yet
Secondary Expansion Programme (P095)	-	0.310	Legacy highway works for free schools
SEND Resource Expansion Programme (P101)	1.259	1.809	See Appendix 1
Special School Expansion (P153)	5.274	2.365	See Appendix 1
Childcare Expansion (P196)	0.030	-	Project at Holy Family RC Primary School
Condition Programme (P093)	1.008	0.906	See Appendix 2
Totals	7,571	5,790	

3.1.3 In June 2025 Cabinet agreed a budget of £2.1m for the conversion of a building at Our Lady of Peace School to create a satellite for Arbour Vale School. This was an opportunity project which was progressed at speed to ensure pupils could be retained in Slough for 2026-27, having now fully designed and costed the creation of the satellite, a higher budget is required. The budget requirement has risen to £3m (as detailed in the table below), the increase relates to Phase 1 which is underway now and it will be necessary to bring forward £900K of budget on the Council's Capital Programme in order to continue with the project as planned. Income is available as shown above and sufficient budget is available on the capital programme, however reprofiling is required.

Phase	Works	Budget Estimate
Phase 1	Separation of the 2 school sites Conversion of the Our Lady of Peace (OLOP) site for use as a Special School satellite Adaptations in order to consolidate OLOP onto the southern site.	£1.7m
Phase 2	Creation of 3 classrooms for OLOP New MUGA New entrance and school kitchen	£1.3m

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 The Council has a duty (s13-14 of the Education Act 1996) to promote high standards of education, provide fair access to education and a general duty to secure the sufficiency of school places. Specifically, it must consider the need to secure provision for children with SEND, including the duty to respond to parents' representations about school provision.
- 3.2.2 The Council is currently allocated capital on an annual basis for increasing SEND provision through a formulaic annual grant allocation called the HNPCA. The funds are allocated for investment in all types of SEND provision (i.e. is not limited to maintained schools) and the key condition attached to the funding is that local consultation is required and that the consultation steps and allocations are reported back annually to the DfE. The latest return to the DfE was submitted 1st October 2025 and matches the data contained in Appendix 1.
- 3.2.3 As the Council is allocated SCA capital grant by the DfE for maintaining Community, Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools, it has a joint responsibility (with the school management) in ensuring that the funding is invested in the highest priorities at these schools and that they are safe and secure for users.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1

	Risks	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
1	Legal	Primary pupils cannot be offered a suitable school place	Continue to expand key stage 2 in the Central and East planning areas as required. Look to create additional key stage 2 forms of entry.
2	Financial	The cost of expansion programmes exceed the capital income available.	Prioritise the best value projects. Delay projects until new income identified.
3	Financial	The cost of increased specialist high needs placements puts further pressure on the High Needs Block	Expand local provision where possible. Ensure pupils are placed in the most suitable provision for their needs.
4	Financial	Revenue funding required for Schools from the Growth Fund to support the lag in funding when extra primary capacity created	Ensure adequate levels of Growth Funding available through the DSG.
5	Timescale	Major development sites in Slough Central exacerbate primary place shortfalls	Strategically plan for providing the places that will be required. Seek adequate funding through section 106 agreements.
6	Timescale	New places delivered later than required.	While this ensures places are not overprovided it is necessary to have a pipeline of projects to meet planned demand.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 There are no known environmental implications arising from this report.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 There are no specific identified equality implications from this report outside the benefit to pupils including those with special education needs and disabilities being able to secure a local school place.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 Where SBC are delivering a project then all required procurement processes will be followed. Where projects are procured by a 3rd party through a grant, 3 quotes will be required.

3.7 Property implications

- 3.7.1 This report doesn't have any implications for non-school Council assets. Previous decisions to transfer two closed former Children's Centres to the adjacent schools will remove all running costs from the Council and future maintenance can be funded from DfE grants.

4. Background Papers

None

Appendix 1

High Needs Provision Capital Allocations

Total HNPCA income 2021-22 to 2025-26	£14,884,612
Total funding allocated below	£13,979,008
Total unallocated	£905,604

Name of School	New High Needs places	Reprovided High Needs places	HNPCA funding allocation	Section 106	SBC cost per place	Status
Haybrook College	35	0	£3,433,008	£386,992	£109,143	On site
Arbour Vale Car Park	87	0	£4,100,000		£47,126	On site
High Needs Capital Improvement Prog: Penn Wood, Holy Family, St Mary's, Castlevue, Claycots, Priory, Foxborough, St Joseph's Herschel Grammar, Arbour Vale.	0	0	£1,264,000		n/a	Mostly complete
Capital for Blue Willow Nursery (Horlicks)	0	0	£250,000		n/a	Complete
Convert OLOP for special school satellite	80	0	£2,100,000 plus £900,000		£37,500	On site – budget increase required
Conversion of spaces at Willow Primary	0	0	£30,000		n/a	Complete
Castlevue - SEND/ H&S project	8	22	£190,000 phase1 £260,000 phase2		£15,000	Procuring phase 1 works now
Marish new SEND accommodation	0	20	£500,000		£25,000	Planning stage
Conversion of 3 children's centres	18	0	£252,000		£14,000	
Windsor Forest Colleges Group*	tbc		£450,000			Being explored
Montem sensory base*			tbc			Being explored
Remodelling RBs for higher needs*	15	50	£250,000		£3,846	Provisional sum

Total allocated	£13,979,008	
Spent 2021-25	- £3,614,612	Spent in earlier years
Unallocated	+ £905,604	
Available for 2025-26	£11,270,000	This matches the High Needs total in the table in 3.1.1

Budgets highlighted red are new projects or budget increases. All can be funded within income streams already received and earmarked for these purposes

* These 3 projects are provisional only at this stage. Approval of the overall programme by Cabinet would enable further discussion to proceed with the final approval taken by the Executive Director of People: Children.

All new projects will obtain Capital Board approval before proceeding.

School Condition Programme

	Carry forward from 2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Income	£549,000	£923,000	tbc

School	Previous Years Committed	Year 1 - new programme Committed	Year 2 - new programme Provisional
Baylis Court Nursery		£10,000	
Cippenham Nursery		£13,000	£20,000
Slough Centre Nursery		£54,000	£50,000
Lea Nursery		£20,000	£10,000
Chalvey Early Years Centre		£5,000	
Claycots	£21,000	£71,000	£260,000
Penn Wood	£12,000		
Pippins	£175,000	£36,000	£25,000
Priory		£50,000	£180,000
St Mary's	£14,000	£61,000	£78,000
Wexham Court	£125,000		£64,000
Wexham Sec		£341,000	£80,000
	£347,000	£661,000	£742,000
Unallocated c/f	+£202,000	+£464,000	

2026-27 Condition Programme:

The full programme has already been endorsed by Capital Board and approval is sought from Cabinet within this report.

Once the 2026-27 income is confirmed by the DfE, grant letters will be issued to schools to allow the agreed capital works to go ahead as soon as possible.