**Best practice in efficient delivery of school places**

**Introduction**

The Educational and Building Development Officers Group (EBDOG) is working with Department for Education (DfE) to encourage greater collaboration between local authorities to drive down school delivery costs to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The aim is to help local authorities improve value for money in the delivery of school places and fulfil their sufficiency duty. Becoming more efficient, will free up funding to invest elsewhere, for example on improvements to existing school buildings.

This is a joint guidance note developed with input from local authorities, which have offered direct peer support to local authorities that need to make efficiencies.

A Local Authority should consider the following areas when reviewing how it can improve efficiency on capital education projects.

* Assess sites in terms of the size of the site and opportunity to develop.
* Look for sites that propose the minimal impact educationally, least development risk but maximum benefit.

1. **Options appraisal and site selection**

Consider the Options Appraisal process undertaken for selecting a suitable site for your most expensive projects. How can this be improved on and developed for future schemes? Conduct a full and detailed options appraisals process for every project which considers the cost of different options and costed benefits. Consider different sites and/or different locations within a site boundary. The [Treasury Green Book](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governent) sets out advice on options appraisal. You may need to seek further professional advice on site selection. Department for Education (DfE) can ask LocatED (the Department sponsored body set up to find sites for new schools) to provide advice to local authorities and academy trusts on site selection (please contact [LocatED.SPONSORSHIP@education.gov.uk](mailto:LocatED.SPONSORSHIP@education.gov.uk) if you would like to request advice, website <https://located.co.uk/>).

Examples of approaches taken elsewhere include:

* Purchase of land to complement existing sites where two schools could be merged on to one site. The capital receipt from the two existing sites will help fund the project for the larger new build school reducing the need for Basic Need.

Bring back into use existing disused buildings

1. **Area**

Review whether your design briefs are fully in line with DfE’s standard output specification. These deliver functional, adaptable and environmentally sound schools that provide a high quality education space and secure value for money

* + [DfE output specification](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/output-specification-2017) - Part B and Part C of the Employers Requirements for DfE projects procured through the Construction Framework 2017
  + [Information about school building design and maintenance](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-building-design-and-maintenance)

Develop all new school building designs in accordance with the following guidance:

* [Building Bulletin 103 - Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools.](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324056/BB103_Area_Guidelines_for_Mainstream_Schools_CORRECTED_25_06_14.pdf) Strong and robust management may be required to manage schools demanding accommodation space in excess of BB103
* [Building Bulletin 104 - Area Guidelines for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485223/BB104.pdf)

Develop a business case for any derogations from the area guidance, setting out costs and costed benefits.

1. **Specification**

Develop new school building designs (including extensions) in accordance with [DfE’s standard output specification](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/output-specification-2017) and develop business justifications for any derogations from the standard. Demonstrate where improvements and specific efficiencies in design and specification will be achieved in future schemes. Create a standard design specification for education projects going forward and understand the process for agreeing any derogations.

1. **Abnormals**

Develop a policy for the agreement and the sanctioning of additional costs relating to abnormals, facilitating works and externals. School Capacity (SCAP) Survey Capital Spend Data (CSD) guidance includes the following definitions:

* abnormals and facilitating works are defined as: Costs required due to site or building constraints which would not be required to meet the place requirements for a typical project, (eg improvements to highways, major demolition work, asbestos removal.)
* externals: Works outside the building e.g. landscaping, drainage, fencing.

In your abnormals policy make reference to ways of reducing abnormal costs. e.g. ensure adequate surveys are done prior to starting on site. Also include information from case studies where the local authority encountered unexpected costs but managed to minimise abnormals/ externals costs, to help future projects learn from past mistakes.

1. **Procurement Route**

Review procurement arrangements for new school facilities on a regular basis to keep up with changing market conditions. Areas to focus on include tendering procedures, the frameworks used, batching of schemes, and contracts. Aim to improve value for money through changes to these arrangements. Use benchmarking of cost data to compare actual costs against market norms. Sources of benchmarking data include the [Local Authority School Places Scorecards](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-places-scorecards) and the [EBDOG National School Delivery Cost Benchmarking reports.](https://ebdog.org.uk/article/national-school-delivery-cost-benchmarking-4/)

Given the range of projects that you will need to deliver it is important to have a range of procurement routes available. Generally, and particularly for larger projects, frameworks and design and build contracting tend to offer better value for money, although this will vary according to the specific project and framework. Consider the new [DFE construction framework](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-buildings-esfa-construction-framework). The latest framework is suitable for use for projects from £1m in value, with the number of contractors on the framework increasing from 18 to 32. The use of the DFE framework is free to users and to our contractors. For further information on the new framework, please contact [Framework.ENQUIRY@education.gov.uk](mailto:Framework.ENQUIRY@education.gov.uk). An overview of construction frameworks across the country is available at <http://www.nacframework.org.uk/pages/home-nacf.html>.

1. **Cost Management**

Consider how costs are currently managed and reported through the life of the project. Are there formal governance arrangements and procedures in place and clear delegation of authority? How are improvements to the management of costs being put in place? Are Key Performance Indicators in place to measure the variance between the original contract sum and the final outturn cost? How are cost variations managed and reported?

1. **Risk Management**

Consider how risk is managed and shared throughout the procurement process currently and where improvements can be put in place. Prepare a risk log for every planned project and include known local issues in the risk log. Consider ownership of risk and who takes responsibility for management of each identified risk – risk should reside with the party best placed to manage it. Passing all risk on to the contractor may not represent the best value for money option.

1. **Value Management**

Consider how value for money will be achieved in future, which can include value engineering workshops, collaborative working agreements, supply chain management etc. Learn lessons from past projects to add to value management reports on any live or future schemes.

1. **Delivery teams**

Consider delivery team arrangements for the future. Evaluate the cost/benefits of using internal directly employed teams, outsourced arrangements or using a variety of private consultants. Regularly benchmark the costs of your team and their performance in delivering projects in terms of time, cost and quality and the performance indicators that are in place to enable successful results. It is particularly important to review payment arrangements, which could risk perverse incentives, such as paying consultants a percentage of the costs of the delivery of a contract. Delivery team costs should not exceed 10% of the total cost of your capital programme. If it does, then you may wish to carry out a rigorous value for money review.

How will project briefs be developed and communicated in future to ensure the project requirements are achieved in terms of prioritising time, cost and quality for each scheme?

In some cases local authorities use joint venture partnerships to carry out all design work. This provides design, maintenance, buildings compliance, quantity surveying and procurement services.  In other cases there are in-house teams that commission the delivery of education projects from a private contractor. Both have benefits and weaknesses and an assessment of local circumstances needs to be undertaken to identify the best approach.

1. **Planning issues**

Plan for and mitigate the risk of any challenges in delivering schemes that might arise during the planning process. Options appraisal should identify where there are planning risks affecting a potential project, such as insufficient highway capacity or proposed development on playing fields, green belt, or sites of historic interest. Consider the challenges presented from organisations such as Sport England, Historic England, Highways England etc, setting out how you intend to address these and what further advice and support might be required. Where there are known issues, early engagement with the local planning authority is essential.

We recognise that adopted planning policies must be adhered to, and recommend that, where justified, you challenge these requirements in relation to school developments when local plans are reviewed. There may be insights that you could gain through discussion with local authorities that are dealing with similar challenges. It is important to build good relationships between education, planning, property and highways teams. Constructive pre-application discussions and strategic alignment at head of service level can make all the difference to how local plan policies are applied or planning applications dealt with. High-level agreements between relevant heads of service and early engagement with elected members might resolve some issues such as strict adherence to parking requirements if acceptable alternatives can be identified.

Ensure adequate sites are brought forward through the local plan site allocation process and develop a strategic approach to education provision for large-scale regeneration and new community schemes. Seek developer contributions, when justified, to put towards the expansion of existing schools or construction of new schools.

Common planning issues include:

* + - **Section 106/ Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – Many local authorities have experienced difficulties with restricted pooling of developer contributions and access to CIL funding. DfE engaged with Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government on revised CIL Regulations and updates to Planning Practice Guidance, and we have published separate guidance on [Securing developer contributions for education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governenthttps:/www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-schools-to-support-housing-growth).
    - **Schools required before housing** – this may require investment ahead of developer contributions being received, and have an impact on other schools. The local authority should consider the various delivery options, aiming to minimise negative impacts while supporting strategic planning of new communities. DfE has published guidance on [establishing schools in garden communities.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-schools-to-support-housing-growth)
    - **Building Research Establishment Environmental Assesment Method (BREEAM)** – DfE aims at BREEAM ‘Very Good’ standard on school developments and does not seek certification. We are keen to see any evidence of longer term value for money as a result of investment in environmental sustainability. Where blanket requirements for BREEAM ‘Excellent’ certification do not appear to represent value for money in relation to school delivery, DfE can support local authorities by challenging such policies in emerging local plans.
    - **Blanket requirements**– some blanket requirements such as contributions to public art are arguably not reasonable in the context of providing a school and could be challenged, though we recognise that adopted planning policies are most effectively challenged when local plans are reviewed.
    - **Transport infrastructure requirements** - we recommend that Heads of Property, Planning and Highways agree a plan of action for school delivery that takes account of house building rates, programmed infrastructure improvements and the phasing of developer contributions to ensure transport infrastructure is in place ahead of the school places being required.
    - **Car parking** – local authorities can seek to influence car parking planning requirements as they relate to schools, through planning policy consultations when they take place.

1. **Land transactions and Secretary of State consent**

Through a combination of legislative and contractual controls no-one may dispose of or grant an interest in, or make material changes to, publically funded education land without reference to the Secretary of State.  DfE guidance (which is currently being updated) can be found [here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protection-of-school-playing-fields-and-public-land-advice)  Applications or enquiries should be sent to the Real Estate team via [SchoolsAssets.CAPITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:SchoolsAssets.CAPITAL@education.gov.uk) There is a strong public interest in protecting the use of playing field land.

Though we encourage schools to think creatively about how to make best use of their school sites, the DfE and other planning authorities will generally only approve proposals that lead to the loss of playing field where there is no reasonable alternative solution. Sport England [policy and guidance](https://www.sportengland.org/media/13458/playing-fields-policy-and-guidance.pdf) set strict criteria regarding the loss and replacement of playing fields through development. Where a loss or reduction in playing field space is unavoidable, we would expect responsible bodies to also give consideration to additional measures that improve remaining sporting facilities; for example the installation of artificial pitches which can be used all year round.

1. **Condition of the estate**

Consider how you manage school condition:

* What information do you hold on the condition of your school buildings, and how is it collected and updated?
* How do you plan and prioritise the use of your School Condition Allocation?
* What support do you provide to your schools on condition and maintenance?
* How do you and your schools make use of the [Good Estate Management for Schools](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools)?