

13 January 2022

Update on School Organisation – Pupil Place Planning

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor Chris Towe – Education & Skills

1. Aim

The aim of this report is to:

- Summarise the role of the School Organisation Service
- Update on Pupil Place Planning for Primary and Secondary in Walsall
- Provide background information on the capital funding and school expansion schemes.

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of his report and decides whether there should be further information or updates.

3. Report Detail – Know

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for resident children who want a school place. A local authority has a general duty, under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, to secure that there are available, in its area, sufficient schools ‘in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education’.

To meet its statutory responsibilities Walsall Council needs to ensure it has an understanding of where the pressures on school places will come from, these pressures include changes in the population, housing developments, and cross border migration.

The projections of future demand are based on birth data sourced from the Office of National Statistics; historical pupil retention data from the school census, pupil yield from housing developments obtained from the Council’s planning department and inward and outward migration data.

For mainstream pupil place, planning purposes the Borough has been divided into planning areas. There are 11 Primary Planning Areas and 4 Secondary Planning Areas. These areas were drawn up taking account of ward boundaries, geographical features (such as major roads and housing

developments), and patterns from historical school admissions data. (See Appendix A & B)

In order to plan pupil places effectively the Council must be open and transparent communicating the details on the pressures on school places in each planning area. The Council must also manage expectations and avoid any adverse impact on schools regarding school development proposals. When new capacity is needed, it is important to establish guidelines to ensure that this new capacity is provided appropriately and in the right place:

- We should seek to meet demand locally to allow children a school place within a reasonable walking distance from their home.
- Our planning of school places should reflect our school improvement strategy: we should work to make all schools good or outstanding. When seeking to expand schools, we should favour the expansion of schools where there is proven demand and well-established and successful leadership and management at a good or outstanding school.
- We should consider the impact of any changes on the viability and standards at existing schools. Where necessary we should work with schools to provide optimum forms of entry appropriate to the capacity of the school site and the level of demand for that school. On occasions, over time, it may be appropriate to reduce the capacity of some schools as others grow in size.
- The guidelines set out above will need to be balanced against the need to make best use of scarce capital resources and the physical practicalities of available sites.

The Local Authority adopts an annual cycle to school organisation and place planning, linked to the Department for Education School Capacity (SCAP) survey for mainstream schools. This survey is submitted in July each year and comprises four parts:

- capacity of schools
- forecasts of pupil numbers per national curriculum year group by planning area
- additional places due to be created by planning area
- place planning commentary by planning area of local circumstances e.g. migration, changes of school category

The school organisation service prepares and submits this survey and its component parts, and during the yearly planning cycle updates its core data including changes to school capacity data following alterations and expansion of the school estate, planning department data on housing completions in each planning area, school census numbers and school admission application numbers and preferences.

The outcome of the validated and moderated submission by the DfE is an allocation of funding known as basic need funding. This capital grant is allocated to all LAs who have a forecasted demand for places above their

existing capacity to help in meeting the statutory duty in making sure there are enough school places for children in our area.

3.1 Primary Pupil Place Planning

Primary school intakes are forecast based on the number of births in a given planning area. However, not all children born in a particular area will stay to attend a school in that area and others may move in to the area. To account for this, a 'loss / gain' factor is applied to each area to account for inward and outward migration as well as children attending schools outside of Walsall or in the non-maintained sector. Finally, movement between planning areas is accounted for by comparing where children live and where they have recently attended school.

Since 2016, birth numbers have begun to reduce, which will lead to forecasted reduction in demand for corresponding Reception places from September 2022 onwards. Over the coming years, it may be that there will be too much capacity in some planning areas, so careful consideration will need to be given to removal of some places.

School place planning forecasts have to be agile and robust and will need to align to the Council's wider housing and regeneration plans and those of our neighbouring local authorities to ensure the impacts of new housing developments and cross border movement of pupils continues to be sufficiently planned for.

The table below shows the projected number of Reception places required against the capacity in terms of Published Admission Number (PAN) for Walsall as a whole: the planning area breakdown is provided at Appendix C to this report.

Measure	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25
PAN	3997	3997	3997	3997
Projected Intake	3702	3658	3559	3090
Surplus / Shortfall	295	339	438	907
Surplus %	7%	8%	11%	23%

Planning a sufficiency of school places requires a balance between two conflicting objectives. The first is to provide enough places to meet need along with a margin to allow some exercise of parental preference; the second is to ensure that there is not an excess of places overall or in any particular school or planning area. A working surplus across the whole Borough however is necessary to ensure there are sufficient places for in-year admissions and an ability to meet parental preference.

The falling birth rates as below suggest that there will be a requirement for conversations with schools about reducing their Published Admission Number to ensure a school does not become financially unsustainable. The School Organisation Manager will begin these conversations in the Spring Term 2021.

Year of Birth	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
No. of Births	3621	3607	3505	3425
Reception Entry	REC 22-23	REC 23-24	REC 24-25	REC 25-26

3.2 Secondary Pupil Place Planning

Secondary intakes are forecast in much the same way as primary school intakes. For each secondary planning area, the number of Year 6 pupils attending Walsall schools living in that planning area is compared against the next year's figure for Year 7 pupils attending Walsall schools living in that planning area to arrive at a 'loss / gain' factor. This is applied to projected future Year 6 figures for each planning area to predict how many Year 7 pupils there will be in Walsall schools living in each planning area. Movement between planning areas is calculated in a similar way as for the primary schools.

The Borough's secondary schools are starting to be impacted by the upturn in births that led to primary schools needing to be expanded. In order to increase the number of places available a review of all secondary school capacities has been carried out and the possibility of those schools admitting higher numbers has been identified. A number of schools have since been admitting above their PAN, making use of any spare capacity they had available. This means that these schools will be operating at maximum capacity and are likely to become very full over the next few years as projected intakes continue to grow. Despite this, projections indicate that there will still be a shortfall of places across the Borough. The overall picture is shown in the table below and a breakdown by planning area in Appendix D.

Measure	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28
Agreed Intake	3853	3853	3696	3696	3696	3696	3696
Projected Intake	3704	3850	3794	3830	3763	3806	3931
Surplus / Shortfall	149	3	-98	-134	-67	-110	-235
Surplus %	4%	0%	-3%	-4%	-2%	-3%	-6%

The situation with secondary intakes forecast that there would be sufficient places for September 2022 but shortages thereafter, as part of developing options for additional capacity the options are as follows:

1) Review of existing school provision – Net Capacity

The Local Authority is reviewing of all the secondary school Net Capacity Assessments that has determined the correct capacity that each school can admit. This will establish which schools have additional capacity that is not reflected in their PAN, in recent years a number of secondary schools have reduced their Published Admission Numbers to reduce surplus capacity against the wishes of the Local Authority.

For secondary schools, this would be a more cost effective and appropriate to meet future increased levels of demand for secondary places in the Borough by utilising surplus places at existing secondary schools and ensuring that published admission numbers reflect annual net capacity.

If further additional places are required, this requirement could be fulfilled by permanently expanding current provision or creating bulge year groups to give temporary increased capacity as appropriate.

2) Review of existing school provision – Expansions

The Local Authority may consider the option to address shortages of places by expanding the current school building. Should this be an option considerations have to be made for whether the sites could accommodate further development. There possibly could be restraint on the land by Sport England or the land being Green Belt that could affect this option. Deliberation must also be given into not just classroom space but staff rooms, dining, parking facilities so that the site is functional. This option should also be given consideration by planning and highways as increased traffic and congestion may not support the scheme.

3) Consideration of new provision – Free School

The Local Authority has worked with the DfE to validate pupil demand for places via the SCAP return to confirm the requirement and support of a Free School within the Borough. The DfE are now considering site options for the new school and completing their due diligence process before a decision to proceed with the Free School can be given

In the meantime, and recognising the increased demands on capacity needed, officers have started discussions with schools through Walsall Association of Secondary Heads (WASH) and their responsible bodies (Governors, Trusts etc..) to agree a secondary school place strategy and options for providing additional capacity for the Borough.

4. School Expansion Projects

As part of the school expansion proposals, the table below shows the most recent projects that are due for completion.

Name of School	Total place creation across school	Scheme Status
Short Heath Junior School	120	Due to complete January 2022
Christ Church	105	Due to complete January 2022
Total	225	

4.1 New Focus

The ongoing focus of the school organisation service is to review the requirement for SEND places across the Borough in terms of pupil place planning and future proofing our place requirement. Working closely with the Inclusion Service and particularly the SEND EHCP assessment team a five-year plan is being created to ensure our statutory responsibility for having ample school places.

The pupil place requirement for SEND places is broader than just Walsall and indeed the Black Country; it is an increasing need for many Local Authorities. There continues to be increased demand for specialist school places and increased levels of SEND needs across the region and nationally. The reasons underpinning this are multi-faceted including earlier identification of needs, changing complexity of need and general increased demand. The impact of this is that local authority areas may not have the sufficient or appropriate provision and capacity to deliver specialist support in their area and children may need to be educated in out of Borough commissioned high-cost independent settings that may not always be able to deliver good outcomes nor be value for money.

There are a number of areas where the additional place requirement could be created for Walsall pupils:

- 1) Expansions of existing provisions within the Borough.

The School Organisation team has requested Integrated Facilities Management to commission work from an external architect company to undertake desktop feasibility studies. Currently they are working to establish the number of places each school can accommodate based on the ambulant and non-ambulant requirement of children within the school.

The architects, alongside the school organisation team will then review the current arrangements model of our special schools and consider how the existing spaces could be utilised in other ways to create more places within the current school footprint. They will also evaluate the site to determine if

an expansion would be possible – taking into account any site constraints e.g. ground problems/mineshafts, highway implications etc.

In addition, working with our corporate landlord team, any existing corporate assets that are underutilised will be reviewed for consideration as satellite school expansion projects.

- 2) Review of capacity within mainstream settings that could accommodate and support a hub provision.

The School Organisation Team are currently reviewing all Net Capacity Assessments and floor plans for mainstream schools across the Borough to establish a baseline of teaching spaces and any surplus areas in the schools. These assessments will be used to have informed conversations with schools about the opportunity and suitability for a SEN hub to be created within the school. This would be utilising existing space within a school where appropriate, for children with SEND requirements to attend the provision at a mainstream whilst being on the school roll of their appropriate SEND school provision.

- 3) Creation of a Free School.

The Local Authority may have to review the need for a SEND Free School within the Borough, created through the DFE Free School Wave 15 application round – which we understand is likely to open in the Spring Term 2022. Whilst this may be a long-term solution for additional provision, this option does not solve the initial place requirements over the next few academic years.

5. Financial

The existing school expansion projects in section 4.2 have been funded from the Basic Need Capital Fund. The capital grant is allocated to the local authority by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to local authorities, based on pupil place forecasts, to deliver the additional places in schools to meet expected demands.

6. Decide

Scrutiny may decide to note the current position.

The committee may decide to request that a further briefing on place planning be offered to all elected members.

7. Respond

The committee may decide to request further information as pertains to individual planning area and school expansions.

8. Review

The pupil projections are annually reviewed in line with Office of National Statistics Data, Live Birth Data and the census information reviewed from schools.

The SCAP survey is moderated and validated by the DfE after submission in July each year. This validation leads to capital grant allocation for provision of additional school places.

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