

11 March 2021

Update on School Organisation – Pupil Place Planning

Wards(s): All

Portfolios: Councillor Chris Towe – Education and 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.

In recent years, an upward trend in births in Walsall, as in many other areas, resulted in a corresponding increase in demand for Reception school places and this increased demand is expected to continue for September 2021. This increased demand for school places resulted in the need for primary school expansions and the Council has successfully delivered a number of projects creating much-needed additional places across the Borough.

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-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Reception Capacity (PAN)	3,997	3,997	3,997	3,997
Projected Intake	3,963	3,750	3,706	3,609
Surplus / Shortfall	34	247	291	388
Surplus %	1%	6%	7%	10%

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 1% working surplus across the whole Borough will cause some operational difficulties for in-year admissions and ability to meet parental preference, so there are some ongoing conversations to increase the number of Reception places available through consideration of bulge classes. Initial conversations have started to take place and these will continue as part of the school organisation service role in ensuring sufficiency for school places.

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-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28
Year 7 Capacity (PAN)	3894	3894	3894	3894	3894	3894	3894	3894
Projected Intake	3762	3897	3935	3906	3911	3931	3925	4052
Surplus / Shortfall	132	-3	-41	-12	-17	-37	-31	-158
Surplus %	3%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	-1%	-4%

The localised pressures of places are in Secondary Planning Area 4, the schools within this planning area are:

- Walsall Academy,
- Bloxwich Academy
- Pool Hayes Arts & Community
- Willenhall e-ACT Academy
- St Thomas More Catholic – Business & Enterprise College

Secondary intakes forecast that there will be sufficient places for September 2021 but shortages thereafter and that additional capacity will be needed. Options for additional capacity are:

1) Existing capacity at secondary schools:

The Local Authority is reviewing all the secondary school Net Capacity Assessments that have determined the admission capacity that each school can admit. This will establish which schools have underutilised capacity that is not reflected in their current PANs and allow opportunities for discussion with schools for either temporary bulge classes or a permanent increase in admission numbers from September 2022.

2) Review of existing school provision – Expansions

The Local Authority may consider expanding schools through building projects – either extensions to the existing buildings or construction of new blocks. Feasibility studies will need to be commissioned where schools have parental demand and the school site is able to accommodate further development. Any expansions will need to consider the additional classroom teaching spaces together with non-teaching spaces such as dining facilities, halls, staff rooms and welfare areas required to make the increase in pupil numbers sustainable across the whole school environment. Sport England, planning and highways assessments will also need to be considered to avoid adverse impacts on local communities.

Consideration of satellite sites for schools would also be considered as part of any feasibility for expansion of an existing school where the local authority could identify any surplus sites or assets that could be suitable for educational provision.

3) Consideration of new provision – Free School

The Local Authority is working with the DfE to determine the viability to deliver the pre-approved Free School within the Borough. Validation of pupil demand within planning areas is ongoing together with consideration of potential sites.

For a secondary school, a large site would be required: based on Building Bulletin 103 government guidelines it should be around 80,000 square metres, although nationally some Free Schools have opened in much smaller premises perhaps with sporting provision offered off-site. The DfE will continue to work with the local authority as part of site identification as part of the formal approval process for the Free School.

Moving Forward

Discussions of the above options with schools through Walsall Association of Secondary Heads (WASH) and their responsible bodies (Governors, Trusts etc.) is needed to agree a secondary school place strategy for providing additional capacity for the Borough.

These discussions will form the focus for the remaining part of the 2020/21 academic year.

3.3 School Expansion Projects

As part of the school expansion proposals, the table below shows the most recent projects that have been completed or are currently planned.

Name of School	Reception created	Places	Total place creation across school	Scheme Status
Old Church Primary School	15		105	Completed
Rosedale Infant School & Short Heath Junior School	30		Infant School – 90 Junior School – 120	Ongoing – due for completion September 2021 intake
Manor Primary School	15		105	Ongoing – due for completion September 2021 intake
St Michael's CE (C) Primary School	15		105	Ongoing – due for completion September 2021 intake
Christ Church CE (C) Primary School	15		105	Ongoing – due for completion September 2021 intake
Sunshine Nursery & Infant School & Blakenall Heath Junior School	30		Infant School – 90 Junior School – 120	Ongoing – completion tbc
Total	120		840	

4. Financial

The expansion projects will be funded from the Basic Need Capital Fund. The capital grant is allocated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to local authorities, based on pupil place number forecasts, to deliver the additional places in schools to meet expected demands.

Monies allocated to the schemes are as follows:

- Old Church Primary School - £1,712,000
 - Rosedale Infant School & Short Heath Junior School - The Short Heath Federation - £3,795,000
 - Manor Primary School - £1,512,000
 - St Michael's CE Primary School - £1,914,000
 - Christ Church CE (C) Primary School - £1,800,000
 - Sunshine Nursery & Infant School & Blakenall Heath Junior School - £300,000 & £1,800,000
- Total Spend/Allocated Funds = £12,833,000

5. Decide

The Committee 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.

6. Respond

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

7. 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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