

A Shropshire Strategy for Pupil Place Planning

Shropshire Council, together with the Schools Forum Task & Finish Group on School Sustainability, has recently highlighted - in the face of falling pupil numbers - the need for a cost effective and sustainable network of schools to deliver high quality education for all Shropshire children. A briefing note on schools sustainability was circulated to schools, Council members, Parish Councils and the media in September 2014.

The overall reduction in pupil numbers in Shropshire schools over the next few years is bucking the national trend, but is not evenly spread and varies across the county. In the short-term, the current updated projections - following the last school census in October 2014 - indicates an overall reduction in pupil numbers of 3.2% (1,122 pupils) between 2014 and 2018 (3.7% in primary and 2.6% in secondary). This equates to a potential loss in funding to schools, via the Dedicated Schools Grant, of around £5 million.

This reduction in pupil numbers will have an impact on the post-16 phase over time, and post-16 providers know that they need to plan for this potential reduction in student numbers and in funding for post-16 places.

While there is an overall demographic decline, the Council's pupil projections confirm that in some areas of the county there will be pressure on school places, mainly linked to proposed large scale housing developments. In the majority of cases this increased demand is neither significant nor imminent and can be absorbed within the existing provision, particularly where there are places available within neighbouring schools.

The Council is required to plan carefully for these predicted rises in a timely and flexible way, and to be clear about where the pressures will apply and the potentially different timelines for primary and secondary phase. The methodology used has been subject to external scrutiny and judged to be accurate and reliable.

There is a need to involve key stakeholders - including school leaders, governors, local members and communities - and to plan for the necessary local and political decision-making.

It is important to note that:

- The Local Authority (LA) is required to respond to the demographic changes for each school and their individual circumstances in a dynamic and changing environment. The LA's routine and robust pupil forecasting and assessment of need means that current local issues are, as usual, being managed in a timely and appropriate way.
- In many circumstances predicted demand will be in schools which currently accept children from outside their catchment area because they have unfilled places. Where pupil populations are growing, this take-up pattern will gradually change at the point when children join the school. The admissions process will prioritise places to in-area children and out of area children will be able to access places at their catchment or other schools. Over time this will help ease the pressure of additional demand but also improve the sustainability of neighbouring schools where pupils take up places.

Appendix 2

- Although the responsibility for the provision of sufficient places is a statutory responsibility of the LA, academy schools can make decisions independently of the LA which can impact on local provision. It is therefore important that the LA liaises closely with all schools, including academies, so that all stakeholders can base their decisions on detailed, accurate and up-to-date information.

Where additional pupil places are demonstrably required there are a range of funding streams which may be available to meet the costs of any required capital works. These include Government allocated Basic Need capital grant to the LA, contributions from housing developers (including Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106) and any potential capital receipts from the sale of surplus school sites within Council ownership (subject to Cabinet approval to allocate such receipts to Learning & Skills). Academies also have access to additional capital grant funding through the Education Funding Agency's Academies Capital Maintenance Fund.

The table below summarises the current projections for additional school places over the current plan period for the LA.

Area	2017/18, 2018/19 & 2019/20 Academic Years	2020/21, 2021/22 & 2022/23 Academic Years	2023/24, 2024/25 & 2025/26 Academic Years
Primary			
Shrewsbury	2 classrooms	5 classrooms	5 classrooms
Ellesmere		1 classroom	1 classroom
Ludlow		1 classroom	2 classrooms
Market Drayton	2 classrooms	1 classroom	2 classrooms
Oswestry		3 classrooms	3 classrooms
Shifnal	3 classrooms	1 classroom	
Whitchurch	1 classroom	1 classroom	2 classrooms
Primary Total	8 classrooms	13 classrooms	15 classrooms
Secondary			
Shrewsbury		7 classrooms	5 classrooms
Oswestry		1 classroom	4 classrooms
Secondary Total		8 classrooms	9 classrooms

Note - An additional classroom represents approximately 30 pupils.

It is important that all stakeholders understand that these are forecasts, and that they change. Information will therefore be regularly updated and used to review schools' admissions numbers and plans for the use of available funding.

The first task is to publish and consult informally on a Strategy for Pupil Place Planning which will include:

- a detailed analysis of the demand forecast for school places across Shropshire
- a breakdown by area and by school
- consideration of the impact on the admissions process and the take-up of unfilled places
- a timeline (including of any statutory processes) which identifies key actions related to consultation, decision-making, funding and building works.

Much of this information exists and work to collate it is already underway. The strategy is expected to be published in draft early in the Summer term 2015 and will then be shared with all key stakeholders.