

# Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23 February 2021

## Formulation of the Education Sufficiency Strategy

### Recommendation

Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee to comment on the existing processes and methodology used to formulate the Education Sufficiency Strategy and identify areas for further discussion or where value can be added.

#### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Under the Education Act 1996 each local authority has a legal duty to ensure that enough school places exist in an area to meet local demand. Warwickshire's approach to meeting this education sufficiency duty is underpinned by the relevant legislation and national guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).
- 1.2 The Warwickshire Education Sufficiency Strategy is published every five years and sets out how the Council plans for and anticipates the growth in demand for school places and sets out the principles underpinning school place planning; the ways in which places will be delivered, the information which will be used and the way we work with Warwickshire's family of schools. It looks at how to maximise the use of capital funding in the local area to ensure high quality, accessible school, post-16 and early years places for all learners. It aligns with other published strategies relating to Early Years, Post-16 and SEND learners.
- 1.3 The Annual Education Sufficiency Update is published annually to provide the current context for the delivery of the Education Sufficiency Strategy. It provides pupil number forecasts for pupils in mainstream schools only, covering a 5-year period for primary phase and a 7-year period for secondary phase, and an overview of the forthcoming pressures expected during that period.
- 1.4 All schools in the Warwickshire 'family of schools', including academies and free schools, are considered equally in the County Council's planning of school places.
- 1.5 The WCC Education Sufficiency team adhere to the DfE 'Guide to forecasting pupil numbers in school place planning' (the Guide) when producing pupil forecasts.

As stated in the Guide:

“Robust forecasts are important for:

- Identifying short, medium, and long-term capacity requirements of the school system
- Planning other children’s services
- Agreeing investment from other services and housing developers for infrastructure projects

Accurate and consistently derived forecasts of pupil numbers are also essential in providing the DfE with information to support basic need capital allocations and other strategic decisions (for example placement of free schools).”

- 1.6 Effective pupil place planning is a fundamental element of the local authority’s role as strategic commissioner of good school places. Warwickshire’s pupil forecasting methodology follows the DfE guidance and the Sufficiency team has developed and maintains a pupil forecasting model following this national guidance. This model is kept under constant review and updated regularly to ensure forecasts are based on the most recent information. The data contained in the forecast model is published in the Annual Sufficiency Update and the team continue to update the model to ensure any significant changes are factored into the decision making throughout the year.
- 1.7 A detailed explanation of the methodology used is included as Appendix 1, and summarised below:
  - 1.7.1 Forecasting starts with the Reception year intakes for each school priority area. The latest population data, in the form of GP registration information, is provided annually from NHS Digital. A number of factors are then applied to that data to account for recent trends in parental preference, attendance at independent provision, and attendance patterns from pupils who live outside of Warwickshire.
  - 1.7.2 Subsequent year group forecasts are based on the attendance numbers for each school’s previous year, taken from the most recent October School Census, and again a number of different factors are applied to account for variations such as in year applications. These factors are reviewed in line with the local context for that area to ensure no double counting exists as a result of housing growth or previous bulge classes at individual schools.
  - 1.7.3 The impact of all approved housing development is then calculated, based on a Pupil Yield estimate, (i.e. the expected number of school aged children per new dwelling) unique for each District or Borough. This yield is calculated in accordance with DfE guidance and based on historical development in that District or Borough and is applied to all new housing development.

- 1.7.4 Once developments are approved by the relevant planning authorities the expected number of additional children are included in the forecast model, in line with the housing completion trajectories published. This element does present challenges as housing construction may be delayed or change for a variety of reasons and the family make up may well differ from any assumptions made. Therefore, this element is closely monitored and supplemented with local intelligence where necessary.
- 1.8 Forecasts are then used to assess each area of the County and identify where there may not be sufficient places for local children in future academic years. As part of this process practical considerations around a school's site size and physical constraints, geographical location, school transport impacts and the existing number of pupils on roll are reviewed, as well as Ofsted ratings and intelligence from WCC School Improvement team to determine the suitability of schools for expansion.
- 1.9 Those assessments and associated forecast data inform the Annual Education Sufficiency Update which is published on the WCC website and circulated to schools each Autumn term. The team then liaises with schools in those areas facing pressure, working together to further explore the options to provide additional school places through bulge classes (a temporary additional class, typically for one year only), or permanent expansion of an existing school.
- 1.10 Providing additional places may be possible using existing school facilities but may require an expansion through the provision of temporary buildings or more significant construction work to deliver permanent new classrooms and school accommodation.
- 1.11 Where forecasts indicate a very significant shortfall of school places, likely to be a result of major housing development, consideration is given to the provision of new schools. This consideration is given early on in the District or Boroughs Local or District plan process and the pupil forecast model is designed to be adapted specifically to predict the strategic long term need for school places as a result of the strategic development sites proposed.
- 1.12 The forecast model is kept under constant review in terms of the methodology and the utilisation. Currently an extension is under development to expand Post-16 forecasting beyond school sixth form numbers, linking to the offer available at colleges and to the wider skills and economy requirements of the county.
- 1.13 The economic outfall from the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential impact that this might have on school place requirements is not yet known. Changes in demand will be kept under review and subsequent years pupil forecast data will be adjusted to factor in and shifts in demand for school places or disruptions to housing developments across the county if required

## 2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 Individual schools use WCC's pupil forecasts and local intelligence provided by the Sufficiency team in their strategic planning, notably to inform budget-setting, with the team engaging regularly with schools as an active part of the Sustainability Action Groups looking to help school address budget difficulties.
- 2.2 A fundamental purpose of WCC's pupil forecasting is to respond to the DfE's annual School Capacity (SCAP) survey. It is this annual return that determines the level of Basic Need capital grant funding Warwickshire receives from Central Government each year to provide the new mainstream school places.
- 2.3 The annual SCAP survey response requires detailed data to be provided regarding Warwickshire's school capacity, pupil forecasts, number and method of additional places being delivered and contextual commentary about the sufficiency situation in the county. The forecast methodology provided in Appendix 1 is also submitted to the DfE as part of the survey.
- 2.4 The SCAP survey response, including the forecast data, is subject to considerable scrutiny from the DfE. Any variations in the forecast figures compared to previous years returns require detailed explanation of the underlying changes to the calculations.
- 2.5 The pupil forecast numbers submitted in the SCAP survey in 2019, resulted in an allocation of funding for Warwickshire of £24million.
- 2.6 Submission of SCAP for 2020 was suspended due to the global pandemic and the allocation will be based on the previous year's submission, the funding allocations for SCAP 2020 are still unknown at this time.
- 2.7 In addition to the Basic Need capital grant funding the pupil forecasts published in the Annual Update, factoring in any significant changes since publication, form the evidence base to justify any education infrastructure funding contributions secured from housing developers through the planning process.
- 2.8 Housing developers frequently challenge the data presented as part of the planning process; this is in addition to the scrutiny the forecasts receive from the DfE. Developers are required to make a financial contribution to meet the cost of providing new school places when new housing is proposed, and a shortfall of available places is predicted. Contributions are calculated based on the number of new homes, forecast capacity in existing local schools and other factors. Details on how contributions are justified and calculated is published online in the Developers' Guide to Contributions for Education and Early Years Provision.
- 2.9 In the financial year 2019/2020 a total of £14.8million, as well as land for a new school, was secured through such S106 agreements to provide new school places across the county.

- 2.10 Developer contributions secured in 2019/20 are in addition to £38million received before 2019/20, of which £22million has been allocated or spent on education provision.
- 2.11 The capital resource requirements of school expansions or bulge classes are often significant and additions to The Education (Schools) Capital programme are subject to member approval. To date the current Education Capital programme stands at £56.6million.
- 2.12 The capital programme is a live workstream with new projects working through feasibility simultaneously as current projects are in the delivery stages. Member approval for the addition of new schemes is usually sought twice per year and the Education Capital Programme report provides the detail and exact costings of the schemes proposed by the Annual Education Sufficiency Update.
- 2.13 All capital schemes submitted for member approval are subject to full feasibility studies, working with the schools in question and the District and Borough Councils as needed, as well as colleagues in WCC Highways, Planning and Infrastructure and reviewing overall value for money.
- 2.14 The Education Sufficiency Strategy recognises that it is important to help support all schools to remain financially viable. This is particularly important for the smaller or more rural schools across the county, as those schools often fulfil other needs within the local community beyond providing school places.
- 2.15 Linking with the ongoing School Sustainability work a proactive process for identifying areas of overcapacity is currently in development. Criteria will be developed to identify those schools where overcapacity is likely to negatively impact the financial position, or risk future viability, and therefore a reduction in capacity is required. Each case will be viewed in the individual school and local area context, with options explored in partnership with the schools in that area. This may involve reorganisation, reduction of a school's capacity, or more structural solutions to a school's leadership model and will complement the wider sufficiency approach to future growth across the county. All relevant associated statutory processes and consultations will be undertaken as needed.

### **3. Environmental Implications**

- 3.1 Ensuring that sufficient school places are provided locally to the areas that need them reduces the need for pupils to make long journeys to access schools, which are likely to be by car or bus with the associated environmental impact.
- 3.2 Following the County Council's declaration of a Climate Change Emergency the design brief for all Education Capital projects will require the consideration of Carbon Neutral build methods to ensure the environmental impacts of delivering and operating the new provision are reduced where possible.

- 3.3 Environmental risk assessments together with mitigation statements to reduce any potential environmental impacts are required for each capital project. Where a risk of environmental damage is identified measures will be required to ensure these risks remain at a minimum throughout the construction process.

## **4. Supporting Information**

- 4.1 Education Sufficiency planning depends on effective admission processes however there is a distinct difference between strategic planning for school places and the practicalities of individual families applying for their children to attend schools.
- 4.2 Academies, Free Schools, Foundation Schools and Voluntary Aided Schools have autonomy in setting their own admissions arrangements, which means that they can decide on their own oversubscription criteria, priority/catchment areas and the Published Admissions Numbers (PAN) determining how many pupils they can admit. WCC administers the Admissions process on behalf the trust or governing body for such schools and the Education Sufficiency team works with those partners to influence and guide such decisions but has no direct power over such school's policy decision making.
- 4.3 The increasing autonomy of schools and the split within the education system between Local Authority maintained schools and Academies can present challenges when trying to manage sufficiency across all schools in an area. As the number of new schools opening increases and pupil numbers fluctuate across the county it is important the Education Sufficiency team takes a proactive approach to partnership working.
- 4.4 Building on previous local area discussions and the ongoing school sustainability work it is proposed regular local area level briefings and workshops are undertaken with all schools, including academies, via the existing consortia groupings where possible to ensure all parties are aware of the forthcoming proposals and pressures and to actively promote partnership working between schools. This would also provide the opportunity to collate and incorporate, where appropriate, the individual aspirations of local schools into the longer-term sufficiency strategy while ensuring the Local Authority can still meet its sufficiency duties.
- 4.5 The outcome of the School Admissions process highlights the sufficiency planning in practice, for academic year starting in September 2020  
97% of reception applications and 93.5% of Secondary school applications that applied by the closing date were offered a place one of their top three preference schools. All school places are allocated in line with the relevant published admission arrangements as well as the DfE Admission Code and associated legislation.
- 4.6 Parental preference plays an important role in sufficiency planning and even in areas where there is pressure on school places not all schools will see a uniform increase in demand. Popular schools often attract children from a

wider area which can reduce the future number of places available for local residents. When families move into those areas in year this may lead to children being offered school places at other schools in the local area. Home to school transport will be provided if families are eligible under the adopted Home to School transport policy.

- 4.7 The DfE publishes a Local Authority School Places Scorecard annually, which displays a snapshot of the progress local authorities are making in delivering good quality school places. Extracts of the latest Scorecard are provided at Appendix 2 and report the good level of accuracy that Warwickshire has been awarded by the DfE.
- 4.8 The Education Sufficiency team work in partnership with the District and Borough Councils to identify the long term education infrastructure needs of the county and represent WCC in the role of education infrastructure provider as part of the development of Local Plans, providing the necessary evidence and representation at examinations where required.

## **5. Timescales associated and next steps**

- 5.1 Forecast model updated January – March
- 5.2 DfE SCAP return submitted in April
- 5.3 Local area workshops with schools - ongoing (priority areas April – June to inform drafting of the Annual Sufficiency Update)
- 5.4 Annual Sufficiency Update drafted April - June
- 5.5 Annual Sufficiency Update published September- October
- 5.6 Input into Local Plan reviews, responding to planning applications – ongoing
- 5.7 Monitoring outcomes of planning process – ongoing

## **Appendices**

- 1. Appendix 1 – Forecast Methodology
- 2. Appendix 2 – Extract of DfE LA Scorecard

## **Supporting Documents**

- 1. WCC Education Sufficiency Strategy 2018 - 2024
- 2. WCC Annual Education Sufficiency Update 2020
- 3. DfE School Capacity Survey 2019 Guide to forecasting pupil numbers in school place planning
- 4. WCC Annual Infrastructure Statement 2019/20

5. WCC Developers' Guide to Contributions for Education and Early Years Provision August 2019
6. Warwickshire County Council School Admission Arrangements Coordinated Scheme 2021/22
7. DfE School Admissions Code December 2014
8. WCC Home to School Transport Policy September 2020
9. WCC SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023

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