



pupil projections were accurate. Bill told the working group that the current levels of school places will be exceeded by demand in 2015. However, in 2017, demand is expected to drop again. Therefore, this changing need will be met by a mix of temporary and permanent solutions.

Cllr Brookfield expressed her appreciation that planning areas have become more accurate, but asked how the demand will be met within these smaller planning areas. She enquired whether the bulge classes are being added to the most popular schools, where pupils are currently being rejected due to capacity. Bill Hague told the group that 95% of parents secured one of their preferred schools last year, with each parent having five preferences. He told the group that he is confident that the Council will be able to meet demand.

Cllr Hardacre said that the group wanted assurance of how the schools had been chosen. Cllr O'Neill added that in the last two years, education appeals had increased dramatically. He asked how the numbers of requests for school places affected which schools were given bulge classes. Bill Hague responded that popularity of schools was taken into account. Cllr O'Neill enquired as to whether there will be planned bulge classes for secondary schools, particularly in Bilston where there will be increased demand. Bill Hague responded that there may be an issue of secondary school places around 2017.

Cllr Warren asked whether the projections of a dropping number of pupils in 2017, took into account the new residential developments. Bill Hague acknowledged that there were a number of developments planned across the city and told the working group that the school places team liaise closely with regeneration colleagues to consider new developments and potential repercussions. He added that other unpredictable factors can increase demand for school places, such as international arrivals and movement from London. He said that across the city, generally each cohort increases by the equivalent to one form entry (30 places) across the school year, and an additional 4% of surplus places had been planned in.

Cllr Brookfield acknowledged that the strategy will be a big improvement but asked about how parents without transport will be able to access the schools with bulge classes. She voiced concerns regarding school places in her own ward. Bill Hague reassured the group that the ward levels are considered and that the team is confident that demand will be met. However, he added that some families may want to go to another ward for their school.

Cllr Hodgkiss voiced concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of high quality teaching staff when pupil numbers were so volatile. She also asked the working group if they had had experience with such large cohort numbers at infant level. Cllr Hardacre told the group that his colleague had been a head teacher at school with 700 infants and that it was a very caring school. Cllr Waite said that his children were in a school with 90 entry cohort and it was a 'good' school. Rosalie Watkins agreed, and said that her grandchildren had attended large and good primary schools.

Cllr O'Neill asked whether there are exceptions to the maximum class size of 30. Bill Hague responded that currently in Year 1 and Year 2, some maximum class sizes had been breached, as not all pupils could be catered within two miles of their home. If they are placed further away from their home, school attendance can be affected.

Under new legislation, the pupil can remain an 'excepted pupil' for the whole of Key Stage 1, rather than for the one year limit which had been in place previously.

Cllr Brookfield asked whether faith based schools are included in pupil planning numbers. Bill Hague responded that faith based schools are included, and faith based free schools are able to allocate up to 50% of places to faith-specific pupils. Cllr Brookfield asked whether the faith of the school can be grounds for appeal and Bill Hague responded that there have been appeals on a faith based grounds but they were unsuccessful. Currently there are only faith ethos schools, rather than full faith based schools.

Cllr Hardacre expressed his concern that some schools being expanded had not had an Ofsted inspection for a number of years. Bill Hague responded that there had been a good use of soft data, including information from Her Majesty's Inspectors and teachers, to ensure that an informed decision has been made. There had been engagement with the schools in question and learning communities across the city have been consulted.

Cllr Hodgkiss raised concerns around accessing some schools by car, as the roads and community was already very busy. Cllr O'Neill asked why the increased birth rate had not allowed earlier planning. Cllr Brookfield suggested that drive through drop off points were included in future planning. Cllr Warren added that some schools that were expanding were very recently built, and asked why the schools were not increased during the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Cllr Brookfield requested that in the future birth rate per ward was broken down to add information to the mapping area.

Resolved:

To forward the following comments to the Cabinet meeting on 25 June.

This item was considered on 19 June 2014 as pre-decision scrutiny by a working group composed of members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Working group. The working group welcomed the work that had been conducted to reduce the potential likelihood of primary school classes exceeding 30 places, and the improvement of pupil projections planning. They also recognised the benefit of expanding popular schools to reduce the number of school appeals. However, the working group expressed concern at the potential implications of bulge classes moving through to secondary schools in the city and recommended long term planning to cater for the subsequent increased demand for secondary school places. They also agreed that vertical forms should be avoided where possible. The working group requested more detailed information for future similar reports, such as the birth rate by ward. Finally, they expressed their concern over the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers during periods of volatile pupil numbers.