

Cabinet Meeting

22 July 2015

Report title	Primary School Organisation	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Claire Darke Education	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Dr James McElligott, Director of Education	
Originating service	School Planning and Resources	
Accountable employee(s)	Bill Hague	Service Manager, School Places and Transport
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Report to be/has been considered by	Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel	8 July 2015

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018.
2. Approve the delegation of authority to the Cabinet Member for Education, in consultation with the Director of Education and Director of Finance, to accept suitable tenders for the capital works required as a result of the enlargement of the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme (Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School, Lanesfield Primary School and St Bartholomew's CE Primary School).

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The outcome of consultation on the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018.
2. The current status of the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report introduces the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 and provides an update with regard to the Council's 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a duty to ensure the sufficiency of school places.
- 2.2 Levels of demand for primary school places in Wolverhampton have increased markedly in recent years. In order to meet demand, the Council has recently invested in the provision of a significant number of additional primary school places in areas of high demand across the City.
- 2.3 Levels of demand are anticipated to continue to increase in the short term and projections suggest that additional school places will need to be introduced into the school estate in order to ensure that sufficient school places are available.
- 2.4 On 24 June 2014, Cabinet noted the potential need to amend the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme as a result of external influences and the potential resultant call on resources.
- 2.5 Adopting a flexible approach is crucial in order to undertake successful school place planning in the current environment. Given the potential for both the establishment of new free school provision and the constantly changing demographics of the City, it is essential that the factors that influence both demand and supply are closely monitored.

3.0 Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018

- 3.1 The Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 outlines strategic policy with regard to primary school organisation and provides a framework to guide the future development of primary school provision in the city.
- 3.2 In light of the changing educational environment and the dynamic demographic position, strategic policy with regard to primary school organisation is subject to annual review.
- 3.3 The development of the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 has been informed by contributions from senior representatives across Education and the maintenance of an issues log which highlighted potential changes to the predecessor strategy (Primary School Organisation Strategy 2014-2017).
- 3.4 Following approval from Strategic Executive Board on 28 April 2015 and in order to support the development of the strategy, key stakeholders including; Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of all Infant, Junior and Primary Schools in the City, all Ward Councillors, Trade Union Representatives, local Diocesan Authorities, local Educational Trusts, members of Wolverhampton's Schools Forum and Wolverhampton Schools' Improvement Partnership were consulted.

- 3.5 Consultation with stakeholders commenced on 11 May 2015 and concluded on 29 May 2015. Consultation documents were distributed via email, hard copy and were also made available through the weekly School Bulletin (the main communication mechanism between the Council and Headteachers across Wolverhampton). In addition, Council representatives attended meetings of Wolverhampton's Schools Forum (21 May 2015) and Wolverhampton Schools' Improvement Partnership's Directors (15 May 2015) to introduce the Strategy.
- 3.6 The Council received no formal responses during the consultation period. The strategy was well received at Schools Forum and Directors of Wolverhampton Schools' Improvement Partnership were understanding of the issues facing the school estate.
- 3.7 A copy of the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 can be found at Appendix A.
- 3.8 The Primary School Organisation Strategy, aligned with the Council's School Improvement and Governance Strategy, seeks to secure sufficient school places where high quality education is provided that contribute to improved educational outcomes across the City. The strategies recognise the Council's role in ensuring sufficiency of provision and in influencing the quality of education provided regardless of how schools are organised or governed.
- 3.9 The Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 contains frameworks to support both the identification of schools for expansion and, in cases where there is considerable surplus capacity, the removal of provision.
- 3.10 The strategy also highlights that the Council is not in full control of all factors relating to the effective and timely supply of school places. In order to ensure that the needs of families and pupils can continue to be met effectively it may, on occasion, be necessary for the Council to adopt a more responsive approach to school place planning.

4.0 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme

- 4.1 Levels of demand for primary school places in Wolverhampton have increased significantly in recent years. In order to ensure sufficient school places continue to be available the Council developed the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme (2015 PSEP).
- 4.2 The existing 2015 PSEP will introduce an additional 840 primary school places in ten primary schools across the City. The Programme includes both permanent expansions and the introduction of bulge classes (time limited expansions of the capacity of individual year groups within schools).
- 4.3 Council representatives have worked closely with expanding schools to develop capital investment schemes that will effectively meet the needs of pupils.

4.4 The Royal School Wolverhampton

4.4.1 The Royal School Wolverhampton is currently an independent, fee paying school based in the south of the City. Following a strategic review initiated in 2012, the School's Governing Body proposed that the School ceases to be independent and fee paying and converts to free school status with effect from September 2015. As part of the conversion process, the School also proposed an expansion to enable it to cater for additional pupils.

4.4.2 On 9 March 2015, it was announced that the Secretary of State for Education had determined that The Royal School Wolverhampton's application should proceed to the pre-opening stage of the free school opening process.

4.4.3 However, the Department for Education recently advised The Royal School Wolverhampton and Wolverhampton City Council that the agreed ministerial view is that the school will be better placed to open in September 2016.

4.4.4 The Council had factored the conversion and expansion of The Royal School Wolverhampton into its strategic planning and the expected additional capacity formed a key part of the range of solutions employed to meet anticipated demand with effect from September 2015. The conversion and expansion was included in the Council's strategic plans in order to protect the existing school estate and to ensure that scarce Council resources were effectively employed.

4.4.5 In order to ensure sufficiency of provision, Council representatives have worked closely with schools across the south of the City to urgently implement contingency plans and enlarge the 2015 PSEP.

4.5 Four additional schemes have been introduced into the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme. Schools were selected for expansion in accordance with criteria as detailed within the approved Primary School Organisation Strategy 2014-2017;

- Parental Choice – schools which are most popular with parents
- School Performance - schools judged as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted
- Attainment - schools whose end of key stage results consistently exceed floor standards
- School Leadership – schools with stable and proven leadership
- Location – schools located within areas of high demand
- Viability for expansion – schemes which can be most easily and efficiently implemented
- Value for money - schools that can most cost effectively be expanded.

It should be noted that given both the scale of previous expansion programmes and the need to consider the practicality of delivering school places in a timely manner, that available options to enlarge the programme were severely constrained.

4.6 The following schools have been selected for expansion:

- Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School (Bilston East Ward)
- Lanesfield Primary School (Spring Vale Ward)
- Springdale Infant School/Springdale Junior School (Merry Hill Ward)
- St Bartholomew's CE Primary School (Penn Ward).

4.7 Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School:

4.7.1 Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School is a highly popular and successful school judged Outstanding by Ofsted.

4.7.2 Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School is currently a one form entry school (30 places per year group). In order to meet demand, the school's Reception admission limit will be increased from 30 to 45 in the 2015/16 academic year. This bulge cohort will flow through the school and the Reception admission limit will revert to 30 in 2016/17.

4.7.3 Council representatives have worked closely with the school to develop a capital investment scheme which will meet school and pupil needs. In order to enable the school to accommodate additional pupils, the school will be provided with a single modular construction classroom with self-contained cloakroom and toilet provision.

4.8 Lanesfield Primary School:

4.8.1 Lanesfield Primary School is a popular and successful school judged Good by Ofsted.

4.8.2 Lanesfield Primary School is currently a 1.5 form entry school (45 places per year group). In order to meet demand, the school's Reception admission limit will be increased from 45 to 60 in the 2015/16 academic year. This bulge cohort will flow through the school and the Reception admission limit will revert to 45 in 2016/17.

4.8.3 Council representatives have worked closely with the school to develop a capital investment scheme which will meet school and pupil needs. In order to enable the school to accommodate additional pupils, the school will benefit from the addition of a new classroom to an existing teaching block.

4.9 Springdale Infant and Springdale Junior Schools:

4.9.1 Springdale Infant and Junior Schools are popular and successful schools judged Good by Ofsted.

4.9.2 Springdale Infant School and Springdale Junior School are currently two form entry schools (60 places per year group). In order to meet demand, Springdale Infant School's Reception admission limit will be increased from 60 to 75 in the 2015/16 academic year. This bulge cohort will flow through both the Infant and Junior schools and Springdale Infant School's Reception admission limit will revert to 60 in 2016/17.

4.9.3 Additional pupils will be catered for through the utilization of existing accommodation.

4.10 St Bartholomew's CE Primary:

4.10.1 St Bartholomew's CE Primary School is a highly popular and successful school judged Outstanding by Ofsted.

4.10.2 St Bartholomew's CE Primary School is currently a 1.5 form entry school (45 places per year group). In order to meet demand, the school's Reception admission limit will be increased from 45 to 60 in both the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. These bulge cohorts will flow through the school and the Reception admission limit will revert to 45 in 2017/18.

4.10.3 Council representatives have worked closely with the school to develop a capital investment scheme which will meet school and pupil needs. In order to enable the school to accommodate additional pupils, the school will be provided with a double modular construction classroom block with self-contained cloakroom and toilet provision.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 The capital requirements of the enlargement of the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme will be met through a combination of the additional Basic Need top-up grant (£1.764 million) received by the Council in 2015/16 and the remaining contingency funding identified in the existing 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme (£399,000). This unallocated funding was included within the report on Capital Outturn 2014/15 considered by Cabinet on 23 June 2015.

5.2 Increasing the admission limits of schools also has revenue budget implications for expanding schools. On the 9 October 2014, the Schools' Forum agreed to the establishment of a Growth Fund to support the needs of pupils in expanding schools. As a consequence, expanding schools are supported through the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and therefore do not require any additional commitment from the Council. As detailed within this report external developments beyond the Council's control have resulted in the need to expand additional schools, the potential consequences of this are an overspend of the Growth Fund in 2015/16. Any overspend will need to be met through DSG resources from 2016/17.
[OJ/02072015/L]

6.0 Legal implications

6.1 Under sections 13 and 14 of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by the Education Acts 2006 and 2011), a local education authority has a general statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the population in its area. The local authority must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. It must also ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area and promote

diversity and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty the local authority has to undertake a planning function to ensure that the supply of school places balances the demand for them.

- 6.2 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires local authorities to promote choice and diversity when carrying out their strategic duties in relation to the provision of new school places.
[RB/06072015/B]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 An initial equality analysis has been undertaken with regard to the Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 and a full equality analysis is not required. The Primary School Organisation Strategy 2015-2018 focuses on the supply of sufficient high quality school places for primary school pupils who may belong to groups with different characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010.

8.0 Environmental implications

- 8.1 This report does not have any direct environmental implications.

9.0 Human resources implications

- 9.1 This report does not have any direct human resource implications.

10.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 10.1 All capital works required to support the enlargement of the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme will be commissioned appropriately through the Corporate Landlord.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

- Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel (8 July 2015) Primary School Organisation
- Cabinet (23 June 2015) Capital budget outturn 2014/15 including quarter one capital budget monitoring 2015/16 and financial strategy
- Cabinet (Resources) Panel (10 February 2015) 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme – Funding Strategy/Programme Enlargement
- Cabinet (12 November 2014) Final Decision Regarding the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme
- Special Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel (4 November 2014) Final Decision on the 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme
- Council (17 September 2014) 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme – Funding Strategy
- Cabinet (Resources) Panel (9 September 2014) 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme – Funding Strategy

- Individual Executive Decision Notice (August 2014) 2015 Primary School Expansion Programme – Outcome of Initial Consultation.
- Cabinet (25 June 2014) Primary School Organisation.
- Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel (19 June 2014) Primary School Organisation.

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION STRATEGY 2015 - 2018

1. Introduction

Background

This Strategy is a key feature of Wolverhampton City Council's approach to meeting its statutory duties as an advocate for parents and families, supporting vulnerable children and championing educational excellence.

Underpinning both the Council's Corporate Plan and Wolverhampton's Children, Young People and Families Plan 2015 - 2025, this document details the significant challenges that the Council faces with regard to the sufficiency and distribution of primary school places in the City and outlines a set of recommendations to guide the future development of primary school provision across Wolverhampton.

The Primary School Organisation Strategy, aligned with the Council's School Improvement and Governance Strategy, seeks to secure sufficient school places where high quality education is provided that contributes to improved educational outcomes across the City. The two Strategies recognise the Council's role in ensuring sufficiency of provision and in influencing the quality of education provided regardless of how schools are organised or governed.

The principles that have guided the development of this Strategy are:

- The right of every child to fulfil their potential
- The needs of local communities
- The value of partnership working
- The need to respond effectively to the dynamic demographic position
- The requirement to consider the sustainability of the school estate
- The need to ensure resources are used efficiently.

Context

Key Statutory Duties:

Councils are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. They must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in their area, promote diversity and increase parental choice.

There is a legal requirement that any class containing infant aged children (five, six and seven year olds) will not exceed a maximum of 30 pupils with a single class teacher, other than when an additional pupil admitted fits the criteria for an 'excepted' pupil (as defined in the School Admissions Code).

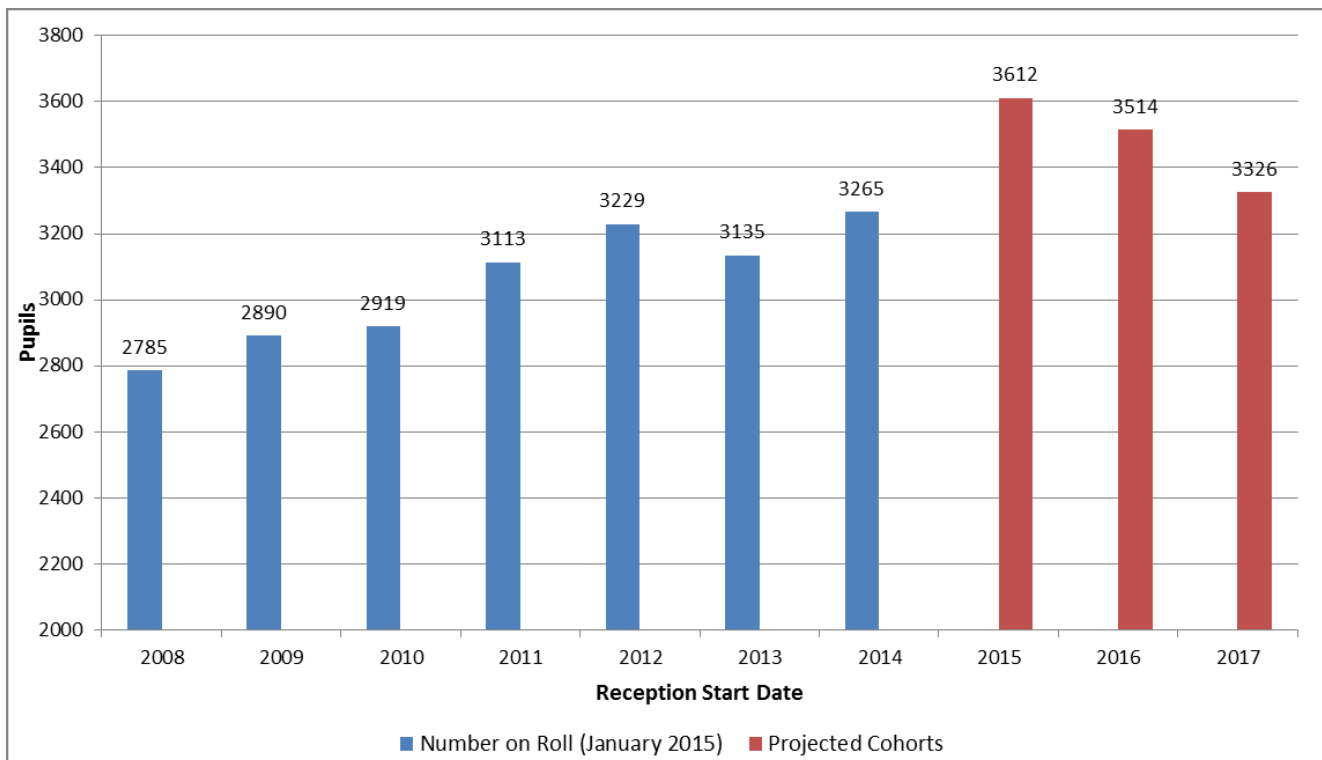
Demand:

The main challenge that the City faces, in relation to the organisation of primary school provision, is ensuring that sufficient high quality school places are available to meet the needs of local communities across the City.

As illustrated in Figure 1, levels of demand for primary school provision across the City have increased significantly in recent years. This upsurge has been primarily driven by an increase in the number of births to Wolverhampton residents; a 23% increase between 2002 and 2013 (Office for National Statistics).

In order to meet demand, the Council has recently invested heavily in the provision of additional primary school places in a number of areas of high demand across the City. Pupil projections suggest that the size of Reception cohorts across the City will peak in the 2015/16 academic year.

Figure 1: Numbers on Roll by National Curriculum Year and Projected Citywide Reception Cohorts



Source: School Census (January 2015), ONE Database (January 2015) and Wolverhampton City Council (2014)

As demand has increased, the number of surplus school places has reduced and levels of surplus within lower year groups are now constrained. Figure 2 below illustrates the levels of surplus in each national curriculum year group and the recent fluctuations in the size of individual cohorts.

Figure 2: Surplus and Demand by National Curriculum Year Group (January 2015)

National Curriculum Year Group (2014/15)	Number on Roll	Surplus Places Against Admission Limits (Percentage)	Overall Cohort Fluctuation Since Cohort was in Reception (January Census)	Cohort Fluctuation January 2014 to January 2015
R	3265	109 (3.3%)	N/A	N/A
1	3135	152 (4.7%)	+10	+10
2*	3229	31 (1.0%)	+138	+65
3	3113	89 (2.8%)	+83	+26
4	2919	261 (8.3%)	+44	-15
5	2890	288 (9.1%)	-17	-30
6	2785	379 (12.0%)	+17	-22

*Please note that in order to meet levels of demand for places in Year 2 that three schools in the City have recently introduced additional capacity by agreeing to admit significantly above their admission limits.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the primary school estate is being impacted upon by the recently observed growth in the size of existing younger cohorts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this growth is also being experienced by neighbouring local authorities and is likely to be the consequence of migration rates.

Autonomous School System:

Central government policy initiatives, including the establishment of Free Schools and the conversion of schools to Academy status, have changed the landscape in which education is delivered and school organisation is undertaken.

Legislation dictates that, when considering the establishment of a new school, Free School/Academy proposals should be considered in the first instance and that Academy Trusts can apply directly to the Secretary of State to make significant changes to individual establishments.

The Council is not in full control of all factors relating to the effective and timely supply of school places and as a consequence, successful partnership working is of paramount importance in order to ensure that the needs of the city's communities can be met.

The Council recognises the value of sustaining an effective partnership with all schools regardless of their status or governance arrangements. In order to support the Council with its duty to ensure the supply of sufficient school places within an increasingly autonomous school system, the Council will seek to establish and maintain a strong working partnership with Free Schools, Academies, Trusts, the Department for Education, the Education Funding Agency and local Diocesan Authorities.

Opportunities to expand on the number of Free Schools in the City will be explored in order to meet basic need; however introducing additional Free School provision in geographically appropriate locations and in a timely manner presents a significant challenge. In order to ensure that the needs of families and pupils in Wolverhampton can continue to be met effectively it

may, on occasion, be necessary for the Council to adopt a more responsive approach to school place planning and to develop contingency plans to cater for external influences on the supply of school places.

2. Primary School Organisation

This section details the key recommendations that the Council will use to guide the organisation of the primary estate:

School Size

In order to ensure the efficient use of resources, whilst avoiding the loss of a more personal primary ethos, it is recommended that primary schools in the City provide a minimum of 30 places per year group (one form entry) and a maximum of 90 places per year group (three form entry).

Larger primary schools (2 form entry and above) can potentially offer: greater opportunity for specialism, a workforce that has a wider spectrum of experience and expertise, increased opportunity to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, greater flexibility to cover staff absence, increased potential to provide strategic leadership succession opportunities, the opportunity to use resources more efficiently and an increased ability to respond to change more readily. This Strategy supports the development of larger schools, where appropriate.

Admission Limits

Admission limits will be managed in accordance with Infant Class Size Regulations and in order to promote the most efficient use of resources. This Strategy recommends that admission limits, which exceed a form of entry (i.e. 30 pupils), are either set as full forms of entry (multiples of 30) or half forms of entry (multiples of 15).

Surplus Place Position

Surplus places are school places that have not been filled.

This Strategy recommends that a minimum level of surplus within each year group of 5% (against admission number) is available at a citywide level.

A level of surplus is essential in order to provide for parental choice, to allow for fluctuations in demand and to offer flexibility to cater for mid-year entrants. Too few surplus places can result in reduced parental choice, increased travel times, and increased class sizes. However, too great a number of surplus places can lead to the inefficient use of resources.

To ensure that pupils can access a local school and that pupils' travel times are reasonable this Strategy recommends that, where required, a primary school place is available within a maximum of two miles (walking distance) of each primary school pupils' home. An aspiration of this Strategy is to offer pupils a school place within their local community.

In order to support this aspiration the Council employs Primary Planning Areas. The City has been divided into three planning areas which enable a localised approach to be adopted when

developing solutions and reporting upon primary school organisation. This approach also recognises the differing pressures facing local communities across the City.

The Introduction of Additional School Places

In order to meet rising demand for primary school places the Council will continue to consider, where feasible, the expansion of existing schools across the City. However, it should be noted that, given the scale of recent expansion programmes, there are a limited number of remaining opportunities available within the existing primary school estate.

The following factors will be considered when prioritising potential school expansion schemes:

- Parental Choice – schools which are most popular with parents
- School Performance - schools judged as ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted
- Attainment - schools whose end of key stage results consistently exceed floor standards
- School Leadership – schools with stable and proven leadership
- Location – schools located within areas of high demand
- Viability for expansion – schemes which can be most easily and efficiently implemented
- Value for money - schools that can most cost effectively be expanded.

In order to safeguard the sustainability of the school estate, the expansion of existing schools will be investigated in the first instance, prior to considering the introduction of new provision.

In order to support the needs of pupils in expanding schools and in line with the Education Funding Agency’s recommended approach, the Council will seek the continued support from Schools’ Forum for a Growth Fund to support resultant revenue needs of schools which are required to provide extra places in order to meet basic need.

Bulge Classes

In specific circumstances, where local demand is predicted to rise and then fall within a short period of time, the Council will consider the introduction of bulge classes. These are time limited expansions of the capacity of individual year groups within a school, for example, a temporary increase of a school’s admission limit by one form of entry in an individual year group to meet demand. Bulge classes would only be considered when the permanent expansion of a school to meet demand would not be sustainable.

The Introduction of Additional Capacity into Existing Cohorts

Whilst it is recognised that introducing additional capacity, at points other than standard years of entry, can potentially destabilise both individual cohorts and the wider school estate, the recently observed level of growth in specific primary cohorts has resulted in a need to introduce additional capacity into existing cohorts.

As illustrated in Figure 2 (page 2), some existing primary school cohorts have recently grown significantly and levels of surplus in specific year groups have reduced considerably. As a consequence, and in order to ensure that pupils can access school provision within a

reasonable distance of their home address, the Council has recently worked closely with schools to introduce additional capacity into existing cohorts to cater for rising demand.

In order to support the needs of pupils in schools that introduce additional capacity into existing cohorts, the Council will seek approval from Schools' Forum through the aforementioned Growth Fund to support the resultant revenue needs of schools that have provided additional places in order to meet demand.

Given the restricted levels of surplus across younger primary year groups and the continuing growth of existing year groups, there is a potential requirement for further additional capacity to be introduced into existing cohorts in the future.

Vertical Grouping

Vertical Grouping (or the employment of mixed age classes) is most commonly employed in primary schools with intakes of 45 or 75 and works successfully in a number of schools across the City. However, the use of this structure can increase the complexity of planning and delivering the curriculum.

When an opportunity or need arises consultation will be conducted with Headteachers and Governors to consider increasing or reducing admission limits in schools with existing 45 or 75 admission limits. This Strategy recommends that the introduction of additional 45 or 75 admission limits only be considered once other practical solutions have been exhausted.

Intervention

The Council will consider proposing the adoption of structural solutions (including both federation and sponsored academy status) in order to improve standards in underperforming schools.

Federations:

Federations offer schools the opportunity to share best practice and support one another. The term federation is used to describe the creation of formal shared governance structures, which enable schools to raise standards and enhance provision by sharing resources, staff, expertise and facilities. There are a variety of federation models that allow schools to choose which model best suits their needs.

Regardless of the federation model adopted, individual schools retain their identity, continue to receive individual school budgets, have separate Ofsted inspections and report on performance individually.

Federating schools can have a number of benefits, including:

- Providing a structured way for schools to learn from each other and share best practice
- Offering opportunities for improved teaching and learning through increased specialism
- Building capacity across the federation
- Saving on planning and administration time

- Offering better support and development opportunities for School Governors
- Providing broader career opportunities across the federation
- Extending curriculum entitlement.

Sponsored Academies:

In certain circumstances, the Council will facilitate the sponsorship of schools to become academies or support eligible schools to convert to academy status. Such steps will only be taken to support the overall improvement of education in the City, including the raising of pupils' attainment and progress.

Where appropriate, the Council will work with other agencies to identify locally sourced sponsors to support the conversion of schools.

In order to improve the quality of education across the City the Council will continue to recommend the adoption of structural solutions (including federations and sponsored academy status) and seek to influence the implementation of effective governance arrangements that promote school improvement.

Specialist Provision

This Council recognises the value of some specialist provision being attached to primary schools. For example, sensory resource bases are the most appropriate way to meet the needs of pupils with sensory needs and this Strategy requires that any primary school reorganisation does not detrimentally impact on such provision.

It should be noted that resource base provision across the City is commissioned by the Council and that service level agreements are in place with individual providers/schools.

Infant and Junior School Provision

This Strategy recommends that the Council invites responsible bodies (e.g. Governing Bodies or Trusts) to consider the merger or amalgamation of infant and junior schools whenever the Headship of a school becomes vacant. For merger to be considered, the leadership of the establishment that is proposed for expansion must be at least 'Good'.

Bringing infant and junior schools together offers a number of advantages, including:

- Reducing the number of major transitions that pupils face
- Reducing the likelihood of lost learning at the beginning of Key Stage 2
- Increasing the opportunity for specialist teachers to work with a wider range of pupils
- Providing the opportunity for a consistent approach to the curriculum to be adopted
- Ensuring the continuity of teaching, learning and achievement
- Cost savings through economies of scale.

Please note that, in this context:

- The 'merger' of infant and junior schools is the process of joining the schools together by discontinuing one establishment and expanding and altering the age range of the other.
- The term amalgamation relates to the process of joining the schools together by discontinuing both establishments and creating a new school.

Removal of Maintained Provision

In certain circumstances the Council will consider the removal of maintained provision.

This Strategy requires that the Council considers the closure of a school if the school meets two or more of the following criteria:

- The school is judged Inadequate by Ofsted
- The performance of pupils at the school is unacceptably low
- The school has a significant number of surplus places
- There are significant suitability issues in respect of the school's accommodation and/or site
- Closure could be effected without denying any pupils access to at least one alternative school with available places within a maximum of two miles (walking distance) of their home.¹
- The substantive Headteacher has left or is leaving.

Prior to initiating any statutory processes to close a school, the Council will consult with the school's Headteacher and the Chair of the school's Governing Body to discuss how the criteria may apply to their school. As part of this process the Council will review and consult with schools' Governing Bodies regarding:

- The likely impact of a school's closure on other schools in the local area, taking account of numbers on roll and the capacity of schools to enhance provision for children and families
- Projected levels of future demand
- The importance of the school to the wider community
- The condition, suitability and sufficiency of school facilities.

Estate Management

It is recommended that a long term approach is taken to the management of educational assets in order to ensure that fluctuations in demand can be effectively and efficiently catered for. Where appropriate, sites should be reserved as contingency to cater for anticipated increases in demand, such as that resulting from new housing developments. However, it should be recognised that adopting a longer term approach will result in short-term budgetary pressures as sites must be secured and maintained.

¹ If the closing school is denominational, then alternative denominational provision should be available within a maximum of two miles of pupils' homes, where appropriate.

Where circumstances arise that present the opportunity to use existing school accommodation in different ways, this Strategy would require that priority is given to the provision of statutory school places.

Change Management

Whilst any primary school reorganisation or development scheme seeks to minimise disruption to pupils and parents and avoid any longer term detriment to pupils, it is recognised that making significant changes to individual establishments can have a disruptive effect on the delivery of education.

This Strategy requires that schools are effectively supported through the change process; schools can request additional school improvement support as required.

Other Considerations

This strategy requires that when considering primary school organisation:

- The Council works closely with Diocesan Authorities and other bodies representing local schools' religious denominations to ensure that an appropriate balance of denominational and community places are available.
- That, if at all possible, the need for compulsory redundancy is avoided.
- Equal opportunities are promoted and that particular groups of children are not disadvantaged.

Strategy Review

The Strategy will be subject to review on an annual basis.