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**To: Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2)**

**Date: Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024. 10:00am**

**Subject: School Admissions and School Sufficiency**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To update the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on the current process and position in relation to School Admissions and Sufficiency, and to outline actions in place to respond to sufficiency challenges.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
  - 1) Note the current sufficiency challenges in relation to school place planning.
  - 2) Note the steps being undertaken to sustaining availability of places.
  - 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

## **3 Background and Information**

- 3.1 Under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996, Coventry City Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places and fair, appropriate access to education. It is the Council's role to plan, commission and organise school places in a way that raises standards, manages supply and demand.
- 3.2 The Coventry One Strategic Plan, first presented to Council on 2nd October 2018, and annually thereafter, with the most recent report on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, sets out the city pupil forecasts for special, primary, and secondary, broken down across planning areas. It outlines the capital funding strategy proposed by the Local Authority and the Coventry Education Partnership to respond to rising or falling pupil cohorts across the City and provide additional school places required between 2023-2027.
- 3.3 School places within the city are allocated by the City Council's School Admissions team. The Local Authority (LA) has the following statutory duties in relation to School Admissions:
  - to determine and administer the admission arrangements for community schools.
  - to determine an annual co-ordinated scheme for reception and transfers for all schools and academies in the city.
  - to co-ordinate the annual admissions process for reception and transfers (normal intake year) including receipt of every application, exchange of

information with other admission authorities including other LAs, resulting in the communication of a single offer of a school place to a parent.

- the LA's co-ordination responsibility begins from the launch of the application process in September (including compilation and statutory publication of an annual prospectus) until the end of the summer term before admission to school, therefore includes communication of any subsequent offers from waiting lists.
- to advise parents about applying for schools in-year, to provide parents with information about which schools have places, and to provide a common application form.
- To work alongside the Fair Access Protocol team to ensure that vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible, minimising the time the child is out of school.
- We also have a duty to ensure that every child is receiving a suitable full-time education so monitor the outcome of every application.

3.4 Admissions officers receive all applications from Coventry residents applying for a school place. They handle the intake, processing, evaluation, and determinations of submitted applications. They verify the accuracy of information and confirm that application packages are complete and contain all details relevant to the application – Baptism certificates, details on any siblings already at the preference school. They ensure adherence to all regulations and department policies, with specific reference to the school admission code.

3.5 The City Council receive applications through two different processes – these are the co-ordinated process and the in-year process.

- Co-ordinated process: for pupils applying for Reception and Year 7 places for schools to transfer between phases of education. Applications for this process are received between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October (Secondary) and 15<sup>th</sup> January (Primary). In all around 8000 applications are received per year for this process, this figure has been fairly consistent over the past few years but has slowly increased.
- In-year process: for pupils applying for all other year groups or for newly arrived pupils to the city who are of statutory school age in need of a school place. The City Council administers in-year admissions for all schools in Coventry. Over the past 2/3 years Coventry has experienced significant changes in its in-year pupil demographics. Despite a lower birth cohort moving through primary the total statutory school cohort (i.e. not including sixth form and nursery provision) has increased from 52,095 in Jan 2022 to 53,636 in Jan 2024, as a result of in-year migration from new arrivals to Coventry (from either overseas or other parts of the country).

3.6 There is a robust pupil place planning process in place which uses birth rate, and new housing development information to estimate pupil numbers and plan where school places increase and decrease. Net growth in in-year migration is much harder to estimate and has not needed to be factored in previously – Coventry has traditionally seen a high number of in-year applications, but with an equal amount of migration out of the city. To address this unexpected issue pupil number forecasts have been adapted to include higher levels of in-year migration and the strategy to ensure adequate school place provision across the city is to implement additional classes (temporary and permanent) to create additional learning spaces without overburdening schools or compromising the quality of education.

## **4 Primary Co-ordination**

- 4.1 The birth cohort for September 2024 entry to Primary Schools is 300 pupils lower than the 2023 intake (4309 and 4004 pupils respectively.) Despite this reduction in birth rate the number of pupils being allocated a school place in Reception is broadly similar, because of the increase of in-year applications from pupils relocating from outside of the city. This means limited action is required to change the number of available places for Reception intake. There are several schools which are looking to increase Published Admission Number (PAN) in time for September 2024 and 2025 with the support of the LA.
- 4.2 On National Offer Day (NOD) (16 April 2023) for September 23 admissions 94.2% of 'on-time' applicants received their first preference, with 99% receiving one of their three preferences. This figure is above the national averages of 92.5% and 98.6% respectively. The 1% of parents who were offered a place at a school they did not put down as a preference had largely placed a single preference that the School Admissions team were unable to accommodate as the school was full due to other families requesting the same school and placing higher on the criteria.
- 4.3 When parents apply for a school place via the co-ordinated system the vast majority (89.9%) of applications are made through an online portal. This portal strongly advises parents to name three different schools for consideration with the family's catchment school being one of these preferences. For parents who apply via a paper application, a leaflet is available, at school nurseries Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) Early Years settings, advising parents to also name three preferences.
- 4.4 The birth cohort remains stable for the 2025 – 2027 entry to Primary School and any substantial changes in either increases or decreases to that birth rate for 2028 onwards will be monitored and action taken accordingly.

## **5 Primary In-Year**

- 5.1 In-year admissions / migration has had an impact on the availability of places in all other primary year groups. There is a low number of vacant places across most year groups, with year groups 1 and 3 over PAN at citywide level, and in all other year groups, some schools over PAN. This has a number of impacts:
  - There is no guarantee of a school places being available in the immediate area of a home address;
  - The average distance of the school place from home address has increased meaning pupils are having to travel further to get to school;
  - There are increased cases where siblings are being offered different schools as the first preference school may not have spaces in the relevant year groups to accommodate all siblings;
  - An increasing number of parents are refusing to take up the school place they have been offered, resulting in a higher number of children of statutory school age not in school;
  - There are an increasing number of school appeals being submitted as parents' express dissatisfaction with the school places they have been offered.
- 5.2 Below outlines the total increase in the number of applications received by the School Admissions Team for Primary In-Year Applications

Primary School Transfers (Applications received between)	Total Applications made to the School Admissions Team
01/09/2018 - 31/08/2019	1,255
01/09/2019 - 31/08/2020	1,454
01/09/2020 - 31/08/2021	2,243
01/09/2021 - 31/08/2022	3,124
01/09/2022 - 31/08/2023	3,056
01/09/2023 - 02/04/2024	2,097

- 5.3 The increased number of in-year applications over the past 18 months further emphasizes the surge in demand for primary school places. The consequence of this increased demand is that it has significantly reduced the number of school places available in Coventry primary schools. This reduction in available places indicates that schools are reaching or exceeding their capacity to accommodate students, leading to potential challenges in meeting the educational needs of the local population. Education will continue to monitor the rate of change, particularly inline with wider Government policy on migration.
- 5.4 The table above is “gross growth” referring specifically to the overall increase in applications within the primary sector of Coventry's education system; Coventry has traditionally seen a high number of leavers meaning that impact on sufficiency has been less pronounced. The “net growth” highlights the strain on available school places and underscores the need for effective planning and management of educational resources to meet the needs of the growing student population. In the 22/23 academic year in-year net growth added the equivalent of 28.9 additional classes into the primary sector. In the current academic year the equivalent of 20.7 additional classes to date.
- 5.5 To respond to this the Council has adopted the following strategy:
- Working in partnership with schools to introduce bulge (temporary) classes. Temporary expansions are for a single year (e.g. Year 2 increase, and that increase then moves through the school until that cohort reaches Year 6). Seven new classes have been opened at Moat House Primary School (Y2), Frederick Bird Primary School (Y's 1, 2 and 4), and Moseley Primary School (Y's 1,2 and 4). More temporary school expansions will be implemented from September 2024 onwards to manage and assist with the increased temporary demand for school places. This will be flexible and developed in partnership with schools in the city.
  - Using the Fair Access Protocol to offer an alternative school place in exceptional circumstances
  - Review of the School Refuser process to minimize delays in getting statutory school age children into a school place.

## 6 Secondary Co-ordination

- 6.1 Since September 2018, additional capacity has been added in Secondary schools to provide for the larger birth cohorts identified through the pupil forecasts (highest birth cohort currently in Year 7). As agreed at Coventry Education Partnership meetings, the plan has been to deliver and adopt a model of both permanent and temporary expansions to ensure sufficiency of places, viability for schools, and cost efficiency.
- 6.2 These increases have so far provided the necessary places for Year 7 intake. On National Offer Day (1 March 2024) for September 24 admissions, 81.3% of ‘on-time’ applicants received their first preference, with 94.6% receiving one of their three

preferences. This is slightly below the national averages for 2023 (the national averages for 2024 will be published in June 2024). The main reason for this being below the national average is due to having a very low number of places available in comparison to places required e.g low surplus places on offer day.

6.3 The increased primary cohorts as a result of net in-year migration are impacting on secondary sufficiency, as larger than forecast Y6 cohorts are applying for Year 7 school place. Paragraph 7.3 describes how this is being managed. If the net in-year growth experienced within the primary school cohort over the last 2/3 years continues at the same rate then we will need additional places at Y7 for co-ordination. If we are not able to deliver this within existing provision then the City Council will need to consider securing land for permanent new provision within Coventry.

## 7 Secondary In-Year

7.1 The Secondary in-year admission numbers have been lower than in Primary. In the 22/23 academic year in-year net growth added the equivalent of 9.3 additional classes into the secondary sector. In the current academic year the equivalent of 6.3 additional classes. The challenge in secondary is that due to the birth rate / population growth there has already been significant expansion, and the level of available surplus is substantially smaller.

7.2 Currently, there is a low number of vacant places in year 7. One school in Year 8 has available places and this is due to the creation of a bulge class within that year group. Year 9, however, is the tightest year group for places, where most schools are significantly over their PAN. When this year group moves through to year 10 some additional places will be added through WMG, which only offers places in Years 10 and 11.

Secondary School Transfers (Applications received between)	Total Applications made to the school Admissions Team
01/09/2018 - 31/08/2019	1,267
01/09/2019 - 31/08/2020	1,117
01/09/2020 - 31/08/2021	1,399
01/09/2021 - 31/08/2022	1,794
01/09/2022 - 31/08/2023	1,849
01/09/2023 - 02/04/2024	1,279

7.3 To respond to this the City Council has adopted the following strategy:

- Working in partnership with schools to re-utilise former bulge (temporary) classes as part of the One Strategic Plan 2018 – 2024.
- Working in partnership with schools to introduce new bulge (temporary) classes. Due to the complexities of adding in a class mid-year at Secondary school and the difficulties in arranging new timetables for specialist subjects there has been limited take up on bulge class discussions with Secondary schools. This is compounded by a number of schools having already expanded to meet birth rate increase, so therefore having less flexibility to expand further.
- The limited success of the in-year bulge classes within secondary schools has highlighted the need to ensure that available spaces are created as part of the co-ordinated scheme, which is simpler for schools to manage logistically, which would give sufficient places to manage both co-ordination and then several years' worth of in-year applications.

## 8 Sufficiency of Specialist Places for children with an Education Health and Care Plan

- 8.1 The majority of children with an identified special educational need, have their needs met within their local mainstream school through the provision ordinarily available within a schools delegated budget. Children receiving ‘SEN Support’ are placed on the school’s SEN register and their progress is monitored through a ‘plan, do, review’ process as set out in statutory guidance: [SEND Code of Practice January 2015](#) Support arrangements commonly include access to external specialists, including Coventry’s specialist support teaching service and Educational Psychology.
- 8.2 In January 2023, 9,855 children (which represents 15.8% of the school population) were recorded as receiving SEN Support, compared to 13% national (source: SEN2 statutory return). This is the highest percentage of SEND Support across all West Midlands LAs, signalling that Coventry schools are inclusive and that they both identify and respond to children with additional needs.
- 8.3 In addition, a small percentage of children with ‘severe and complex’ special educational needs are referred to the LA for a statutory education, health and care assessment. The outcome of that assessment may lead to an Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan). An EHC Plan identifies a child’s difficulties, sets out the support the child needs and determines the school the child should attend to have their needs met. LAs have statutory duty to arrange the provision that is specified and quantified within the plan, including the delivery of a suitable school placement. This duty is needs led and cannot be legally constrained because of budget pressures.
- 8.4 Broadly 33% of children with an EHC Plan are placed in mainstream schools, 48% in special schools, 12% in FE and 7% have other arrangements. Circa 20% of the total number of EHC Plans maintained are for young people age 17 to 25.
- 8.5 However, year on year demand for EHC Plans has increased placing pressure on the specialist system. Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act which was enacted in September 2015, demand for EHC Plans has grown both nationally and locally as illustrated below:

<b>Number of EHCPs maintained by Coventry LA</b>									
<b>Year (Jan)</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>No. of EHCPs</b>	1559	1724	1861	2084	2145	2344	2572	2708	3091
<b>Cumulative % increase</b>	-	10.5%	19.3%	33.6%	37.5%	50.3%	65%	73.7%	<b>98.3%</b>

- 8.6 More significantly, it is evident both locally and nationally that in-year demand for new EHC Plans has increased significantly post pandemic. This appears to be because of an increase in Coventry’s pre-school and school age population and a disproportionate increase in the number of children presenting with severe and complex needs as illustrated below:

<b>Number of new EHCPs issued by Coventry annually</b>									
<b>Year</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>New EHCPs Issued</b>	176	209	313	271	272	382	354	367	562
<b>Cumulative % increase</b>	-	18.8%	22.2%	54%	54.5%	117%	101%	109%	219%

- 8.7 Consequently, demand for special school placements has increased exponentially thereby exceeding forecasts based on birth rates. This reflects the national picture. There are a range of hypothetical explanations to explain the national growth, but little evidenced research has been undertaken.
- 8.8 In order to ensure that Coventry has done all that it can to ensure that children 'receive the right support, in the right place at the right time' reflecting the Government's strategic direction of travel to secure a sustainable SEN system. Steps taken include:
- Development of a workforce strategy to increase the skills, confidence and capacity of mainstream schools to meet an increasing level of additional needs;
  - A programme to establish enhanced resource provisions (ERPs) initially across Coventry's primary schools estate. Two were opened during the last academic year at Alderman's Green and Whittle Academy creating an additional twenty places, two more are planned to open in autumn 2024, with provision for a further one during the academic year;
  - In-year commissioning expansion of current in-City special schools to a level of maximum capacity;
  - The Woodlands development programme to re-site Woodfield Special School (an all-age special school for children experiencing significant social, emotional and mental health challenges including those associated with autism) will deliver up to 100 additional placements;
  - The potential expansion through capital investment of the current broad spectrum special school estate to create additional secondary capacity;
  - Utilisation of the independent non-maintained sector as an interim solution to secure the Council's statutory duty.

## **9 Funding**

- 9.1 The capital programme for Education covers £126m of expenditure on school sites since 2017. Through this programme of work over 3000 new school places have, or are planned to, be added, at mainstream and SEN Schools. Of these 3000, just over 500 have been at special schools or schools that offer specialist provision in the form of Enhanced Resource Provision in a mainstream school. With projects of this nature accounting for c.30% of the total £126 million of capital funding utilised on school sites.
- 9.2 The revenue Growth Fund is a portion of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block which enables LAs to support schools with significant in-year pupil growth which is not otherwise immediately recognised by the lagged funding system. Since 2019/20 the Growth Fund has been allocated to LAs on a formulaic basis. This means that the level of growth funding Coventry receives is directly linked to the increased number of pupils in the city on school census day versus the previous year. It also means that Coventry's allocation of DSG for growth fluctuates annually. For the schools which have agreed to take a bulge class they will be allocated funding from the growth fund as funding will not be available through the National Funding Formula budget shares immediately.
- 9.3 The funding available is calculated on the basis of the full cost of a Teacher, a Teaching Assistant (including on-costs) plus 25% for overheads being paid for every available place in a bulge class. These values will be paid pro-rata where a bulge class starts after April. For example. If a school opens a 30-place bulge class in April 2024, they would receive £105K.

- 9.4 The High Needs Block of the DSG continues to be an area of pressure. National SEND spending has increased significantly in recent years with many authorities across the country now reporting DSG deficits. The main factors underlying this position stem from the consequences of reform including the expanded offer, rising demand and shortage of specialist provision creating an increased reliance on the independent sector. Ordinarily, authorities would be responsible for meeting any deficit position from other council funding, but currently due to the significance of the issues in this area the Treasury have enacted a national statutory override ringfencing the DSG position away from LAs until March 2026. Coventry currently has a DSG surplus but in-line with national trends it is continuing to experience growth in the overall number of young people with EHC Plans. This will increase pressure on its High Needs Block budget and those SEND services funded via Core budget. In Coventry, High Needs Block funding allocations have increased significantly since 2019/20, however the DfE have forecast more modest funding increases moving forwards. It is therefore key that the Council monitors the position and manages resources effectively to ensure that it remains within funding allocations as far as is possible.
- 9.5 As a result of the challenges outline above there are significant capacity issues across a number of teams in Education including SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), Capital, Admissions, Appeals, and Attendance and Children Missing Education (CME). There has also been an increase in the level of parental queries and complaints which impact on this capacity further. This has in some cases also been compounded by changes in legislation and policy (Attendance).
- 9.6 The majority of these teams are funded from high needs and central DSG although there is also core funding within SEND. There is no additional funding within central DSG to reflect this increase in capacity, and in fact as a LA on the funding floor, there are reductions in central DSG funding.

## **10 Next Steps**

- 10.1 Moving forward, further collaboration with schools to create new school places is essential for addressing the growing demand for quality education. With this partnership approach with schools, we can identify areas with the greatest need and develop strategic plans for establishing new schools or expanding existing ones.
- 10.2 The Department for Education (DfE) have outlined the expectation that schools increase their PAN when there is a requirement for additional places if they have previously reduced PAN and have the built capacity. Education is in discussion with these schools, and they will continue to be explored as a preferred option.
- 10.3 Due to existing pressures, the Council will work innovatively to address the pressing need for additional places. Leveraging modular construction techniques, and adaptive scheduling systems allows us to maximize existing resources and adapt quickly to changing demands.
- 10.4 The Council will continue to identify the amount of school places needing to be added each year, and then work within the growth fund allocations to identify schools which may be able to accommodate bulge classes.

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