

CABINET

21 APRIL 2022

REPORT OF PERSHORE AREA REVIEW CONSULTATION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevant Cabinet Member

Councillor Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education

Relevant Chief Officer

Director of Children's Services

Local Member(s)

Councillor Adrian Hardman
Councillor Daniel Boatright
Councillor Laura Gretton
Councillor Linda Robinson
Councillor Liz Eyre
Councillor Marc Bayliss

Recommendations

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education recommends that Cabinet:**
 - (a) notes the findings of the pre-publication Consultation undertaken in October – November 2021 as outlined in paragraphs 27 - 29;**
 - (b) agrees a commitment in principle to support a collective change of age range to align schools in the Pershore Education Planning Area (EPA) to a single, two-tier (primary and secondary) system of education subject to funding being fully secured;**
 - (c) recommends officers to continue to work with all partners including schools, Multi-Academy Trusts and the Department for Education to identify a collective solution to fund the changes required;**
 - (d) agrees that until a collective solution for funding the whole pyramid age range changes is identified, Cabinet cannot take proposals for LA Maintained schools forward; and**
 - e) the critical milestones (see paragraphs 62 & 63) for changes from September 2024 are not going to be viable unless funding is identified by September 2022 and changes are likely to be made from September 2025 at the earliest subject to funding.**

Background

1. Worcestershire County Council has a duty (under s13-14 Education Act 1996) to ensure there are sufficient school places to accommodate the children and young people who reside in the county and to ensure these places are efficient with a view to promoting high standards, with sufficient capacity to promote parental preference and diversity.
2. In April 2018 the Leader of the Council delegated authority for the publication of statutory proposals for prescribed alterations to maintained schools to the Director of Children Services and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education (Previously Cabinet Member for Education and Skills). This delegated authority was endorsed by Cabinet in January 2020.
3. The Pershore EPA incorporates part of the Wychavon district, made up predominantly of small rural villages. A map of the education planning area is available in Appendix 1.
4. Until 2019, the education provision in this area has followed a three-tier journey, where pupils attend first schools from the ages of 4-9 (reception to year 4), transfer to middle schools at age 9-12 (year 5 to 7), and then transfer for a final time to high school at age 12 to complete their education (year 8 to year 13).
5. From 2018 onwards the following changes were agreed or submitted for approval within the Pershore EPA:
 - a. Avonreach Multi-Academy Trust gained approval from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) in December 2018 to vary the age ranges of three first schools, The Orchard, Inkberrow, and Norton-Juxta-Kempsey CE, to convert to Primary Schools and in September 2019 Pershore High to convert to a Secondary School in September 2021, although still operate an intake point at year 8, meaning pupils either start at year 7 (two-tier pyramid) or year 8 (three-tier pyramid);
 - b. The Local Authority in April 2020 approved the conversion of Flyford Flavell to a Primary School in Sept 2020 (with Year 7 places agreed at Pershore High from September 2022);
 - c. Himbleton C.E. converted to a Primary School from September 2021, approved in October 2020 by Himbleton Governing Body (with Year 7 places agreed at Pershore High from September 2023); and
 - d. Crowle C.E. submitted an application to the RSC to convert to a Primary School from Sept 2022. This decision is on hold pending the outcome of the Pershore Review Consultation.
6. The above mentioned schools were not part of the pre-publication engagement as they are not proposing any further age range changes.
7. The above mentioned changes to age ranges in schools (5) has led to uncertainty and sustainability concerns across the EPA. This creates a risk to ensuring clear, quality, sustainable education journeys for pupils in Pershore and the surrounding rural villages and ensuring the sustainability of a number of small rural schools.

8. Further details of the schools currently operating in the Pershore pyramid are outlined in Appendix 2. As a result, the EPA is now made up of a mix of education tier journeys. The pyramids are outlined in Appendix 3.

9. Across Worcestershire we seek to maintain a 5% surplus in line with the agreed strategic aims as outlined in the Worcestershire Education and Skills Strategy (2019 – 2024). The creation of additional places in years 5, 6 and 7 as a result of the already approved changes above has resulted in a forecast level of surplus in these year groups of 31% in September 2021, 34% in September 2022 and 36% in September 2023 which is projected to rise. This is outlined in further detail in Appendix 4.

10. Over the last two years, parents have increasingly chosen a two-tier system of education in their admissions applications with an increasing percentage choosing to remain at converted primary schools or choosing to transfer from first to primary schools. For small rural first schools, this can have a notable impact on sustainability. Please note the increasing retention rates at primary schools in Appendix 5.

11. Between 2013 and 2018, an average of 3% of pupils moved out of the pyramid between year 4 and 5. In 2019 the area gained an additional 3% of pupils through in-year transfer. Despite this, the retention is not significant enough to offset the reduction in pupils in middle schools. The number on roll in middle schools is outlined in Appendix 6.

12. A decline in preference for a three-tier system has been further exacerbated by the Middle School Ofsted ratings. Abbey Park Middle (community maintained), St Barnabas CE First & Middle (DOWMAT academy) and St Nicholas CE Middle (DOWMAT academy) are currently rated as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted. Ofsted noted at the recent inspection (June 2021) of St Nicholas CE Middle School that it is an improving school.

13. Based on the impact of these changes and projection of further risk it was recommended to consult in review of the future provision required for this area to ensure a consistent and quality educational journey for all children; and to enable a coordinated and cohesive approach of change for the pyramid if this is required.

14. Since November 2020, at the request of all the schools and bodies in the Pershore area, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Officers have facilitated education partners (including head teachers, governing bodies, Academy Trust partners, the Diocese of Worcester, the Department for Education, Education Funding Agency (EFA) and Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)) in this area to work together to understand the issues and opportunities, to collaborate on agreed principles, and consider options for the future. Any coordinated change has required multiple parties to work collectively.

15. There are multiple proposers, including School Governing Bodies, Academy Trusts and the Local Authority, and multiple decision makers including School Governing Bodies, the Local Authority, the Regional Schools Commissioner or Secretary of State as per Appendix 7, which will require a coordinated approach to decision-making. The relevant decision-making body for each school is determined by the status of the school and the type of proposal.

16. The Council's revised Change of Age Range Policy on responding to change of age range requests (approved by Cabinet 30 January 2020) identified several criteria

that must be considered and satisfied prior to decisions being taken to propose such changes.

17. Between July and September 2021, the schools' governing bodies and Multi Academy Trusts confirmed their agreement / intentions to consult on the change to a two-tier EPA, seek changes of age range (where necessary) and in the instance of the Middle Schools amalgamate with the First Schools.

Pre-Publication Engagement (Consultation)

18. In September 2021 Cabinet approved pre-publication engagement with stakeholders on the proposal for a coordinated change of age range to align schools in the Pershore EPA to a single, two-tier (primary and secondary) system of education. Cabinet also supported Worcestershire Children First to continue to manage this change and coordinate the consultation with families, residents and other key stakeholders.

19. In line with the Code on School Admissions all admission authorities proposing any changes to admission arrangements, including policy and Published Admission Number (PAN), must conduct a full public Consultation within the statutory timeframes set out in the Code. It was therefore determined that both Consultations should be conducted at the same time and reference to each Consultation should be included in all documentation. Stakeholders were invited to provide their views in a seven week-engagement exercise running from 11 October - 26 November 2021. Consultation involved a survey advertised through the WCC and school websites, on social media, and shared directly to all Worcestershire schools, Pershore Early Years providers and local stakeholders including local councillors, parish councils and Unions. Hard copy surveys were also available from WCF and individual schools.

20. Each proposing school held Consultation events, both virtually and face to face to allow stakeholders including parents and the community an opportunity to find out more about the proposals and ask any questions. Cabinet Member Marcus Hart along with WCF Officers held an overall Consultation event at Pershore Civic Centre open to any stakeholders with a vested interest in the proposals.

21. The survey and details of Consultation events can be found in the Consultation Pack in Appendix 8, with a detailed summary of all responses in Appendix 9.

Consultation Proposals

22. The Consultation included the following proposals:

- a. Conversion of the following first schools to primary schools, resulting in accommodation changes:
 - i. Fladbury CE First School (Governing Body proposer) *including a decrease in Pupil Admission Number from 20 to 15 pupils per year group (link to Admission Arrangements Consultation and Cabinet Report)*
 - ii. Upton Snodsbury CE First (Governing Body proposer)
 - iii. Defford-cum-Besford CE First (Governing Body proposer)

- b. Conversion of St Barnabas CE First & Middle School to a primary school (Academy Trust proposer) including an increase in the Pupil Admission Number from 30 to 45 pupils per year group¹
- c. Amalgamation of Abbey Park First and Nursery and Abbey Park Middle School to provide a single primary school (Local Authority proposer)
- d. Amalgamation of Pinvin CE First School and St Nicholas CE Middle School to provide a single primary school (Academy Trust proposer) including an increase in Pupil Admission Number from 25 to 45 pupils per year group¹
- e. Increase of places at Pershore High School in year 7 (Academy Trust proposer); and a change of feeder school links for all Pershore Primary schools (as included in the School's Consultation).

23. A number of other changes, to include Early Years provision as pupils of these schools, were proposed including:

- a. St Barnabas CE First & Middle School to lower the age range of the school to start from age 2 to incorporate pre-school age children as pupils (Academy Trust proposer)
- b. Abbey Park First and Abbey Park Middle School to lower the age range of the school to start from age 2 to incorporate pre-school age children as pupils (Local Authority proposer)
- c. Pinvin CE First School to lower the age range of the school to start from age 3 to open a new pre-school (Academy Trust proposer)
- d. Fladbury CE First School to lower the age range of the school to start from age 3 to incorporate pre-school age children as pupils (Governing Body proposer)

24. Appendix 10 shows the pyramid structure if all of the above proposals were agreed in a coordinated approach.

25. There are several process timescales that could have implemented the conversion to a consistent tier structure. The following process timescales were included in the Consultation to gauge stakeholder views and an indication of their preference:

- a. Process 1: Transition in line with natural progression. All changes made by September 2024. This process sufficiently meets all school organisation and statutory requirements for making changes of this type.
- b. Process 2: Some disruption and greater impact for families. All changes made by September 2023. This would result in the change of age range at most First Schools in 2022, with all First Schools converted to primary by September 2023, in line with the removal of the year 5 intake at Middle Schools in September 2023. This process will require some families to make

¹ Paragraph 1.3 of the Code on School Admissions specifies that Own admission authorities are not required to consult on their PAN where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN

three school applications in three years, impacting on education journeys during transition.

- c. Process 3: Fastest change with least consultation. All changes made by September 2023. All First Schools converted for September 2022, with the final year 5 intake at Middle Schools in September 2021. An emergency variation does not provide sufficient consultation time before families will be asked to make a decision. Moreover, the Schools Adjudicator is the decision-making body for emergency variations and therefore the outcome of this application cannot be determined by current stakeholders.

26. Further details of the process timelines can be found in Appendix 11.

Consultation Findings

27. 270 responses were received to the Consultation Survey. The majority of respondents were parent carers (60%), members of staff at Worcestershire Schools (34%), and residents of Worcestershire (27%), other respondents included Governors and those with other vested interests. One response was received from a pupil at a Worcestershire School.

28. The full summary of the responses is outlined in Appendix 9 and key points summarised below:

- a. 95% of respondents felt they had been provided with sufficient information to make a decision on whether to support or challenge the proposals.
- b. Overall, respondents were in support of the proposals, with 78% agreeing and 16% disagreeing on the proposals to convert to a single tier structure in Pershore. A further 6% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- c. The most common reasons for supporting the proposals were a preference for children to stay at their (primary) school for 2 more years, fewer transitions, a preference for two-tier system, and support to keep First Schools viable.
- d. The most common reasons to not support the proposals were that the Middle Schools help with the transition to Secondary School from smaller schools, a preference for the three-tier system and a feeling that it was being forced by other schools who had already changed to two-tier.
- e. Overall, respondents supported the quickest timescale for changes to take place, although there was some variance between school responses (Appendix 12).
- f. The breakdown of summary responses in Appendix 12 shows the spread of preferences against individual school proposals, which shows different preferences for different schools, therefore the overall preference cannot be viewed in isolation or used to form recommendations.

29. Some schools received very low numbers of responses to the survey, for example Pinvin CE First School and St Barnabas CE First and Middle School, however parental preferences (see paragraph 30) are showing a majority of Year 6 parents applying for Year 7 places at Pershore High School.

Parental Preferences – School Admissions

30. For September 2022 the Year 7 places intake at Pershore High School was 181 first preferences for the 90 Year 7 PAN. In comparison, the 2021 Year 7 intake saw 109 first preferences received for the 90 places. This shows a significant shift in parental preference for Year 7 places at Pershore High for September 2022 (current Year 6 pupils).

31. For the Pershore High School Year 8 intake in 2022, circa 226 pupils are expected against the 282 places, this remains fairly consistent when compared with 2021 applications.

32. Some Pershore First Schools have reported parents requesting to move their children into the Pershore Primary Schools in-year or in September 2022 as they believe this will increase their likelihood of a Year 7 place at Pershore High School.

33. The forecasting of school places in Pershore prior to 2022 Admissions highlighted an over-supply of places in Middle Schools. The 2022 Admissions preferences has shown a majority of parent carers seeking to move into a two-tier system. This will exacerbate the efficiency and ability to improve standards at the three Middle Schools.

34. Based on the consultation feedback and parental preferences, Cabinet are recommended to agree a commitment in principle to support a collective change of age range to align schools in the Pershore Education Planning Area (EPA) to a single, two-tier (primary and secondary) system of education subject to funding being fully secured to ensure there is an agreed, clear and practical pathway for children to move on from each school affected by the change.

Proposals

Governing Body Proposals

35. Defford-cum-Besford and Fladbury require capital investment (as detailed in paragraph 53) to create the additional accommodation required for Year 5 and 6 pupils. Upton Snodsbury First School have accommodation they could utilise for one year of Year 5 pupils but would require capital investment (as detailed in paragraph 53) to create permanent accommodation required for Year 5 and 6 pupils.

36. Where a school is designated as having a religious character, they should ensure they have the consent of the trustees of the school, the Diocese or relevant diocesan board, or any other relevant faith body, where appropriate. The Diocese have confirmed their support for a coordinated approach to proposals and decision-making. These Governing Bodies have confirmed following consultation their support to continue with the proposed changes.

Local Authority Statutory Proposals

37. Abbey Park First and Nursery School (Community school) consulted to change the age range from First to Primary (from 3-9 to 2-11 years) including integrating pre-school school age children as pupils of the school. The Local Authority also consulted on increasing the number of pupils at Abbey Park Nursery and Primary School by 60 school age pupils, 30 Nursery pupils and 30 Pre-School pupils. Although this will not involve an enlargement of premises it is a permanent increase in capacity of the school

by more than 30 pupils and 25%. The Local Authority is the sole proposer for such alterations including adding nursery provision and increasing the capacity of the school.

38. Abbey Park Middle School (Community school) consulted on amalgamating with Abbey Park First and Nursery School, to do so Abbey Park Middle School would be closed and the age range of Abbey Park First and Nursery School changed to accommodate the year 5 and 6 pupils. It is proposed the Year 7 pupils would attend Pershore High School as included in the Pershore High Admission Consultation.

39. The Local Authority (LA) can propose these changes by following the statutory process. There is a strong expectation that schools and LAs will consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication to take into account all relevant considerations.

40. Abbey Park Nursery and Primary School will require capital investment (as detailed in paragraph 53) to remodel and refurbish parts of the First and Middle School buildings to create a Primary School and to relocate the Children's Centre to ensure the Pre-School can be accommodated close/next to the Nursery to provide good safeguarding and good access for children and parents. The mobile building on site will become surplus to requirements.

41. If proposals are agreed for Abbey Park First and Nursery School to amalgamate with Abbey Park Middle School to form a 1FE Primary School, there will be surplus accommodation on this site. The initial feasibility study details options for this surplus accommodation. There may be opportunities to consider additional specialist education provision and/or multi-agency provision on this school site, taking into account the longer term need for school places in the Pershore EPA.

42. Should a collaborative agreement be found to fund the additional Year 7 places at Pershore High School, Cabinet would be requested in a further report to agree the publication of the statutory proposals for amalgamating Abbey Park Middle School and Abbey Park First School and changing the age range of the school to a Primary School.

Academy Trust Statutory Proposals

43. The DoWMAT and Diocese have confirmed their preference to proceed in a collaborative approach to convert to a two-tier system.

44. Pershore High School (Avonreach Academy Trust) consulted to increase the overall physical capacity of the school to provide a Year 7 PAN increase from 90 to 282 places (included in the School's Admission Arrangement Consultation). Avonreach MAT have confirmed their intention to proceed to a fully collaborative two-tier system.

45. Pershore High has been named in the first 50 schools of the DfE rebuilding programme (SRP)²; the school, working with the Local Authority and DfE agreed to incorporate the surveys required for the additional accommodation into the feasibility study of the SRP.

² [School Rebuilding Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Coordinated Approach

46. Where local provision is organised in three-tiers and the aim is to move to a two-tier age range, the DfE expects Academy Trusts to engage with the local community at the earliest opportunity and to provide details in their application of how they will work with Local Authorities and, where the school is designated as having a religious character, the trustees of the school and the appropriate religious authority (in the case of church schools the Diocese or relevant diocesan board), to ensure the change is implemented in a coordinated way.

47. Approval will only be given, in this context, where the DfE is satisfied that a coordinated implementation plan is achievable and can be delivered before the new age range of the academy is operational.

48. The Diocese and Local Authority continue to support a coordinated approach to proposals and decisions for the Pershore EPA to move to a two-tier pyramid.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

Statutory Requirements

49. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of efficient school places for all children living in the Local Authority area who wish to access state-funded education with a view to promoting high standards and parental preference and diversity. The previous changes of age ranges and parental preferences for a two-tier system in Pershore is impacting on the distribution of places, creating surplus places in some schools and an over demand in Pershore High. Currently the Local Authority is meeting the sufficiency of places, yet the diminishing ability to provide the broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3 in Middle Schools is causing a risk to standards. Movement of pupils out of small First Schools into Primary Schools will not support the long-term sustainability of small rural First Schools.

Financial Impact

50. Basic need allocations are paid to Local Authorities to support the capital requirement for providing new pupil places by expanding existing maintained schools, free schools or academies, and by establishing new schools. This is un-ringfenced capital funding that is not time-bound so that Local Authorities can make the best decisions for their local area.

51. The Local Authority does not receive capital funding for School Re-organisation. The Pershore Review was not instigated to resolve a lack of school places / basic need requirement or an increased need for places from housing growth. The aims of the Pershore Review were to consider whether a re-organisation from a mixed tier system in Pershore to a consistent two-tier system would improve the educational journey for children and families and ensure longer term viability of all the schools in the area.

52. DfE guidance states that generally, the DfE does not provide funding for significant changes, and that Academy Trusts need to consider how to fund any associated costs in terms of capital funding.

53. The initial capital costs to deliver the accommodation changes of all proposals were estimated at a total of £4m across all schools and funding bodies, based on the cost per pupil place model. Costs were expected to increase due to time lag and impact of COVID-19 on materials. In the Cabinet paper on 6 January 2022 £1.3m has been allocated in the budget setting for the Capital Programme in relation to the Pershore Review for the Local Authority Maintained schools (Defford-cum-Besford, Fladbury, Upton Snodsbury and Abbey Park Federation).

54. Initial feasibility studies completed at each of the **Local Authority Maintained Schools** have estimated the capital investment required between **£1.7m-£2.1m** for the additional accommodation and remodelling of these four schools. There is a shortfall of capital funding required for the Local Authority Maintained School adaptations (£400k-£800k).

55. The DoWMAT have confirmed the accommodation changes required at Crowle, Pinvin St Nicholas and St Barnabas schools would be funded by the MAT.

56. The DfE School Rebuilding Programme conducted a feasibility to cost the additional **Year 7 places required at Pershore High School** for a consistent two-tier EPA. An **indicative £4.3m** is required to create the additional accommodation. Local Authority Officers have been working with the DfE and Avonreach MAT to identify potential sources of funding to deliver the Year 7 places at Pershore High School.

57. Avonreach have confirmed they funded the adaptations to the Primary schools in their Trust and funded the additional staffing and resources required. Avonreach Multi-Academy Trust has confirmed they support the proposed change to two-tier in Pershore EPA. The Trust are committed to find the most cost efficient use of the school buildings particularly at Pershore High School. Avonreach currently do not have the necessary levels of funding to permanently increase the accommodation required for the additional Year 7 places.

58. The School Rebuilding Programme will only fund the rebuild project and not increased pupil places. The RSC office have confirmed that no capital funding is available to create the additional Year 7 places at Pershore High School.

59. Local Authority funding sources instead of Council borrowing that could contribute to the creation of the additional Year 7 places at Pershore High School including: Basic Need Grant, Section 106 Developer Contributions, and Capital Receipts have been considered:

- a. Currently there is no unallocated Basic Need Grant funding (see Exempt Appendix 13);
- b. Section 106 (S106) funding received and expected could be utilised to support some changes across the EPA. Pupil growth from housing in Pershore EPA is expected over the next 4 years. Several S106 agreements are in place or expected in the Pershore EPA. Exempt Appendix 13 provides the details of these including existing status and possible strategies to maximise the use of S106 to support the sufficiency of places long term.
- c. Initial investigations into potential capital receipts in the EPA would indicate that whilst there is surplus capacity of places within the Middle Schools in the EPA for two years, beyond this (2025 onwards) there no options to release buildings (see forecasts within Exempt Appendix 13). The DfE have offered

the support of LocatED³ to review the Pershore EPA estate and consider any further options.

60. If a funding solution cannot be found from the Local Authority, DfE and / or the Academy Trust then the proposals cannot be fully funded to enable the proposed changes.

61. It is recommended to Cabinet that officers continue to work with DfE/RSC and Avonreach MAT to identify a solution to fund the changes required to align schools in the Pershore Education Planning Area (EPA) to a single, two-tier (primary and secondary) system of education the resolution of this is delegated to officers in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

Timescale Impact

62. Communication was sent out at the end of January 2022 to all stakeholders to confirm that process 3, some changes from September 2022, was no longer possible. Further communication aligned to the publication of this Cabinet report will confirm the stakeholders that changes in First Schools in September 2023 and conversion to two-tier in September 2024 is also no longer possible. Stakeholder feedback and parental preferences for September 2022 school places has clearly indicated that the majority of families want this to happen as soon as possible. There are some key milestone dates that all proposers and decision-makers will need to bear in mind to achieve a coordinated change to a two- tier system including:

April 2022	Cabinet Report with consultation findings
May – September 2022	Collective solution to fund all changes identified
By October 2022	Cabinet report with financial agreement and request to publish full proposals
By Jan 2023	Start 6-8 week Representation period for full proposals (Abbey Park and Fladbury)
By March 2023	DCS or CMR decision on full proposals
By April 2023	RSC / Advisory Board meetings
By June 2023	Governing Body decisions
By June 2023	Seek planning consent for First School projects
July - September 2023	Start on site at First Schools
September 2024	First Schools take Year 5 pupils
September 2025	All First Schools and Middle Schools convert to Primary Schools AND Pershore High School takes all Year 7 pupils

63. If partners do not meet these critical milestones for the proposed changes to the remaining First Schools, it is unlikely that the additional accommodation will

³ [LocatED – The government-owned property company creating much-needed school places for thousands of children](#)

be delivered in time for September 2024 and full implementation of the two-tier system by September 2025.

Staffing Impact

64. If proposals proceed, implications for schools would include reductions in some schools and the need for more staff in other schools. This does present a risk of potential redundancies and the costs associated with this. WCF Schools HR Team are providing support and guidance to individual schools.

65. A small number of staff may be affected or at risk as a result of this change. For the two Academy Middle Schools, the DfE and ESFA are working with the Multi Academy Trust to minimise this impact. For the Local Authority Maintained School, Human Resources colleagues are working with the school to minimise any impact.

66. Legal advice is being sought regarding whether TUPE will apply to Year 7 staff currently working in Middle Schools when the service provision transfers to the High School. Given that TUPE is so fact specific there will not be clarity at this stage, however, the initial indication is that TUPE may not apply. For a service provision change, the activities must be 'fundamentally the same', which may not be the case if activities and requirements for staff at the High School are different.

67. The Local Authority will work with the schools to ensure every effort is made to minimise the impact on staff and avoid redundancies. WCF Officers will continue to update and engage with the relevant Trade Unions.

Curriculum Impact

68. Due to falling numbers of pupils in the Middle Schools, the curriculum at these schools affects the delivery of the Key Stage 3 (Year 7) teaching as students prepare to enter year 8. WCF Officers have met with the Middle Schools and High School to address these concerns and is actively working between the schools to ensure a strong and balanced curriculum. Intentions are that Pershore High will share their year 7 and year 8 detailed curriculum plans with the Middle Schools. This action will enable Middle Schools to best prepare year 7 students for transition to year 8 at Pershore High School and develop a consistent approach across the area. There is a risk on curriculum delivery and standards dependent upon Middle School resourcing i.e., retaining suitable staffing levels.

SEN Resourced Provision

69. Abbey Park First and Middle and Pershore High School have Mainstream Autism Resources Base provision on site for children and young people with an identified Autism diagnosis and an EHCP naming resourced provision. There were no proposals as part of the consultation to alter this provision significantly apart from the age range for both bases in line with the school age ranges. WCF Officers will work with both schools to ensure any changes to these Bases lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for the children that attend.

Revenue Funding

70. Revenue implications for schools are yet to be fully determined – whilst Middle Schools and some First Schools are likely to be at increased risk from financial deficits during the change period as pupil numbers decrease, Primary and Secondary Schools will have the increase in numbers and pupil-led funding. The revenue implications will be reviewed and carefully managed on a school-by-school basis. The WCF Schools Finance Team have provided guidance to all the schools in the Pershore Area in relation to the impact of proposals on schools funding, further queries from individual schools continue to be responded to also.

Transport Impact

71. Any proposed changes would have an impact on the Schools Transport budget. The Education Transport Team have confirmed that the policy can be managed during the transition stage to ensure pupils are still eligible for transport support irrespective of whether they apply for Primary or Middle School places during this stage. Further technical analysis will be undertaken to understand the implications for transport costs longer term.

Risk Implications

72. At present, there is a mixed two-tier and three-tier system in the Pershore Education Planning area. This mixed system is continually affecting the sustainability and viability of all remaining First and Middle Schools and therefore in the longer term the Local Authority is at risk of failing in our statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of good school places in this area.

73. If the pyramid remains with individual and uncoordinated decisions for further age range changes it risks the small rural First Schools and the two Academy Middle Schools becoming financially unsustainable and risks the quality of education provision. WCF and WCC Officers are providing support and guidance to these schools to mitigate as much as possible financial and curriculum delivery impact.

74. Some schools are experiencing specialist staff choosing to leave ahead of decisions being made. There is a risk that schools will be unable to recruit and retain quality teaching staff during this period of uncertainty. WCF and WCC Officers continue to offer support to these schools on a case-by-case basis.

75. There is a risk that Section 106 funding may not be able to contribute to changes depending on the details within specific agreements. There is also a risk that some agreements may not be able to be varied.

76. There is a risk that partners will not identify capital funding to contribute to the additional places required at Pershore High. This will likely prevent any further changes being agreed and limit parental preference for school places. The Local Authority would need to work with the Middle Schools to identify solutions to mitigate falling pupil numbers and retention of staff.

77. There is a risk that partners will not agree contributions of capital funding to contribute to the additional places required at Pershore High in time for decisions to proceed for First School changes to be implemented from September 2024. There is a strong possibility that the deadlines required for decisions (paragraph 63 & 64) will not be met. Changes would then take longer to implement.

78. Pershore area population includes a larger than average Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community. Schools have engaged with those families known in their schools. There is a risk that GRT families might choose to withdraw their child(ren) from education at the end of year 4 (First Schools) and year 6 (Primary Schools) rather than transition to the next school. Further engagement work with families through the WCF GRT Team will take place in the 2022 summer term to ensure that this group of the community are full informed and supported.

79. Capital costs are increasing due to the impact of Covid-19 on material costs, WCF and WCC are working together to monitor and manage the education capital programme accordingly.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

80. A joint impact assessment (JIA) screening (Appendix 14) has been carried out in respect of the proposed options. It identified that further impact analysis will be required in respect of a full Equality & Public Health and Environmental Sustainability Impact Assessment to identify and manage the impact of the proposed changes to those with protected characteristic, together with any mitigation should this be approved by Cabinet following consultation.

Supporting Information (available electronically)

- Appendix 1 – Map of Pershore EPA schools
- Appendix 2 – Pershore EPA schools
- Appendix 3 – Current Pershore EPA structure
- Appendix 4 – Percentage surplus school places
- Appendix 5 – Primary school numbers on roll and retention rates
- Appendix 6 – Middle school numbers on roll
- Appendix 7 – Proposers and Decision Makers
- Appendix 8 – Pershore Consultation Pack
- Appendix 9 – Pershore Consultation Responses
- Appendix 10 – Two-tier structure
- Appendix 11 – Process Timescales
- Appendix 12 – Breakdown of summary responses
- Appendix 13 - Pershore EPA demand and S106 capital (EXEMPT)
- Appendix 14 - Joint Impact Assessment Screening

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

Sarah Wilkins, Director of Education, Early Years and Children with Disabilities.

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director for Children's Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Cabinet Member Report February 2022 – [School Admission Arrangements](#)
- Cabinet decision on Change of Age Range Policy – [Cabinet on Thursday, 30 January, 2020](#)
- Cabinet Report School Sufficiency and Organisation for the Pershore Education Planning Area – [Cabinet on Thursday, 23 September, 2021](#)
- DfE guidance on school organisation changes – [School organisation: local-authority-maintained schools](#) and [Academies: making significant changes or closure by agreement](#)