

## **CABINET**

### **27 OCTOBER 2022**

# **REPORT OF PERSHORE AREA REVIEW CONSULTATION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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#### **Relevant Cabinet Member**

Councillor Tracey Onslow, 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) Considers notes the findings of the pre-publication Consultation undertaken in October – November 2021 as outlined in paragraphs 27 - 29;**
  - b) subject to confirmation of a successful business case to HM Treasury by the Department of Education, which proposes funding an expansion at Pershore High School being included in the Schools Rebuilding Programme, agrees a commitment 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;.**
  - c) notes the capital funding detailed in the Council budget for 2022-23, including the County Council's capped contribution from borrowing of £1.3m in order to deliver either additional accommodation or repurposed accommodation at the LA Maintained schools:**
    - i) Defford-cum-Besford CE First School**
    - ii) Fladbury CE First School**
    - iii) Upton Snodsbury CE First School**
    - iv) Abbey Park First & Nursery School and**
    - v) Abbey Park Middle School**

- d) Note the request from the DfE regarding disposal of surplus land, as set out in paragraph 56, and agree in principle that if surplus land as identified is sold by Worcestershire County Council at a future date, the proceeds are paid to the DfE for costs incurred in the expansion of Pershore High School;**
- e) If a coordinated collective solution can be agreed, delegates to the Cabinet Member for Education, , the decision to publish the statutory proposals for Abbey Park First and Middle School to change age ranges to a Primary School; and**
- f) Notes the critical milestones set out in paragraph 59 for changes from September 2025 at the earliest, subject to funding for Pershore High School from the Department for Education.**

## **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 Education Planning Area (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 (paragraph 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 several 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. 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. Abbey Park Middle School improved from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good' in June 2022.
  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 representative 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 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 Cllr 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 group<sup>1</sup>
- 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 group<sup>1</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

25. There were several process timescales that could be taken to implement 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 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 consulted on can be found in Appendix 11.

## **Consultation Findings**

27. 270 responses were received to the Consultation Survey. Most 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 decide 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 most of the 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 September 2022, 238 pupils were admitted for 282 places, this is higher than 2021 intake of 221 pupils admitted.

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. Pershore High School have admitted 90 Year 7 pupils this year in line with their current admission number.

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 most 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 51 and 52) 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 51 and 52) 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. 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 consider all relevant feedback.

39. Abbey Park Nursery and Primary School will require capital investment (as detailed in paragraph 51 and 52) to remodel and refurbish parts of the First and Middle School buildings to create a Primary School.

40. 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.

## **Academy Trust Statutory Proposals**

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

42. 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.



43. Pershore High has been named in the first 50 schools of the DfE rebuilding programme (SRP)<sup>2</sup>; 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. This work is underway and it is through this programme that the DfE have proposed to fund the additional accommodation for the larger pupil admission number.

## **Coordinated Approach**

44. 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.

45. 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.

46. 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**

47. 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**

48. 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.

49. 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

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

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.

50. 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.

51. 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 the broader economic climate. In the Cabinet paper on 6 January 2022 a maximum capped borrowing of £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).

52. Initial feasibility studies completed at each of the **Local Authority Maintained Schools** have estimated the capital investment required across these four schools could increase giving rise to a of capital funding required for the adaptations of between £400k-£800k. Any shortfall will need to be drawn from other sources including additional Basic Need capital, S106 Housing Developer contributions, school contributions, capital receipts (noting conditions agreed with DfE included in this report), or grant.

53. The DoWMAT have confirmed in writing the accommodation changes required at Crowle, Pinvin St Nicholas and St Barnabas schools will be funded by the MAT and do not require any underwriting by the LA. For some of these schools where Section 106 Housing Developer agreements are in place, and where additional permanent accommodation will be provided, these contributions will be reviewed to support the changes.

54. Avonreach MAT 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.

55. 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. This study indicated 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. The DfE have confirmed in writing that, subject to a successful business case to HM Treasury the expansion of Pershore High school to accommodate the additional Year 7 places will be funded through the DfE School Rebuilding Programme (SRP). The SRP is now undertaking further feasibility work in relation to this project. The SRP will not fund any other works related to age range changes in this EPA.

56. Capital Receipts from within the EPA have been considered. The DfE LocatED<sup>3</sup> Team have reviewed the education estate within the EPA and have identified potential for surplus parcels of land at both Pershore High School and Abbey Park Federation

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<sup>3</sup> LocatED – The government-owned property company creating much-needed school places for thousands of children

site. The DfE have requested that if the Local Authority determines disposal of the identified parcels of land, the capital receipt from this land would be repaid to the DfE for the expansion of Pershore High School up to a maximum amount of the final cost of the physical expansion of PHS to accommodate an additional 192 pupils.

## Timescale Impact

57. Communication was sent out at the end of January 2022 to all stakeholders to confirm that changes from September 2022, was no longer possible. Further communication was sent out in March and April 2022 confirming WCF were continuing to work with the DfE and Multi-Academy Trusts to find a collective funding solution and therefore confirming to stakeholders that changes in First Schools in September 2023 and conversion to two-tier in September 2024 is also no longer possible.

58. Stakeholder feedback and parental preferences for September 2022 school places clearly indicated that most families want this to happen as soon as possible.

59. The following indicative milestone dates will now need to be met by all proposers and decision-makers to achieve a coordinated change to a two- tier system fully by September 2025:

By October 2022	Cabinet report with financial agreement and request to publish full proposals
November	HM Treasury decision to fully fund Pershore High School changes
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 for Academy School changes
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

60. If this timeline can be met, the pupils entering Year 3 in September 2022 would continue into Year 5 and 6 in their Primary School and then onto Year 7 at Pershore High School.

## Staffing Impact

61. 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 and Trusts.

62. 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.

63. Legal advice will be sought regarding whether TUPE will apply to Year 7 staff currently working in Middle Schools if the service provision transfers to the High School. Given that TUPE is specific there will not be clarity at this stage.

64. 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 and Academy School leaders will continue to update and engage with the relevant Trade Unions.

### **Curriculum Impact**

65. 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. The DfE are supporting a revenue grant fund bid to support joint work between the Middle Schools and High School to address these concerns and ensure a strong and balanced curriculum during any period of transition.

### **SEN Resourced Provision**

66. 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**

67. 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**

68. 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**

69. 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.

70. 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.

71. 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. The Academy Trusts and WCC Officers continue to offer support to these schools on a case-by-case basis.

72. 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.

73. 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.

74. 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 possibility that the deadlines required for decisions (paragraph 59) will not be met. Changes would then take longer to implement.

75. 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. Joint work between schools, this community and other professional would focus on mitigating any unintended impact on this community group.

76. 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**

77. A joint impact assessment (JIA) screening (Appendix 13) 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

- 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 - Joint Impact Assessment Screening

## Contact Points

### Specific Contact Points for this report

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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](#)