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Guidance

Local authority pupil planning areas: guidance

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Applies to England

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Introduction

This guidance provides information on how pupil planning areas (PAs) should be

structured to ensure data on the need for school places is accurately reflected and reported via the school capacity (SCAP) survey.

It focuses on the factors local authorities should consider if they are reviewing their current PA structure and the department's process for approving any changes.

Local authorities have the discretion to determine their PAs for the purposes of school place planning. However, we expect them to have regard to this guidance when determining their PA structure for the purposes of the SCAP collection.

Local authorities have a duty under [section 14 of the Education Act 1996](#) to ensure that sufficient schools are available for their area to provide primary and secondary education.

Each year the department collects information on school places from local authorities as part of the annual SCAP collection in accordance with the [Information as to Provision of Education \(England\) Regulations 2016 \(SI 2016/555\)](#).

Local authorities are required to provide, for each school within each PA, information about the number of registered pupils and the capacity of schools in their area.

The annual returns also include local authorities' own forecasts of pupil numbers, at PA level, by year group for whom primary and secondary education will need to be provided. The data is published in the [School capacity statistical releases](#). The statistical releases include place planning tables showing modelled estimates of places needed to meet future demand. The department may also use the data in the calculation of future Basic Need capital funding allocations to:

- aid departmental monitoring of local authority sufficiency
- support a range of policy developments and operational decisions

The data may be used in conjunction with other local authority surveys, such as the [Capital Spend Survey](#) and the [school preference survey](#), to support departmental decision making. The data also informs decisions about the locations and sizes of new schools, or school expansions, provided through centrally funded capital programmes.

Main points

Local authorities should:

- ensure that pupil planning area data reported for the SCAP collection is a true and accurate reflection of the need for school places
- structure pupil planning areas in accordance with the [general principles](#) laid out in this guidance
- obtain approval from the department for proposals to structurally change or create pupil planning areas for use in the SCAP data collection process

All local authorities will have a pupil planning area review by the department over a 5-year period. Priority will be given to the local authorities with pupil planning areas that diverge most from this guidance.

The department may propose regrouping planning areas differently where:

- the general principles in this guidance have not been applied
- the PA structure adopted is likely to generate an overestimated Basic Need capital funding allocation in the local authority

The department may also defer the decision about a local authority's Basic Need allocation until we can be confident that data submitted represents a true and accurate reflection of the need for school places.

Why data is collected at pupil planning area level

Effective pupil place planning is a fundamental element of the local authority's role as strategic commissioner of good school places. It is under-pinned by the use of local area knowledge and data to identify any early warning signs of insufficient numbers of school places in specific parts of the authority. The basic unit of this local knowledge is the PA.

A PA is a group of schools within the local authority that is used for the purpose of assessing current and future pupil demand for school place provision.

We know from previous SCAP collections that for some PAs containing large

numbers of schools (for example, one PA across a large county), the aggregated PA data does not provide full visibility of place pressures if pressure is being masked by surplus capacity in other areas of the authority. Data at a lower granular level is thus recommended to provide a more accurate picture of place pressure.

We also recognise that more detailed data would facilitate the more accurate targeting of Basic Need capital allocations provided by the department to support the creation of new pupil places.

We are also aware that some PAs containing a small number of schools can over-represent pressure and give an inaccurate picture of place pressure. PAs should therefore be an appropriate size for the area to ensure that place pressure is not masked or overrepresented.

As the landscape changes over time, some PAs may become less appropriate. Local authorities are therefore able to make changes when required to the structure of their PAs. This guidance provides information on the criteria and process by which PAs used in the SCAP survey should be defined.

We also recognise that place pressure can be artificially created by changing a PA structure. As such, robust and stable PAs (ideally stable for at least 5 years) will provide a more accurate picture of need.

How we use pupil planning areas

Basic Need capital funding allocations are made to local authorities to help fund new pupil places by expanding existing schools (maintained schools, free schools or academies) and by establishing new schools.

Allocation decisions made by the department are based principally on data collected from local authorities via the annual SCAP collection.

SCAP collects information on the capacity of schools and the local authority's own forecasts of pupil numbers for several years ahead, for each PA of every local authority.

[Basic Need capital funding](#) is allocated on the basis of a comparison of forecast pupil numbers with school capacity, with shortfalls in capacity attracting funding.

The data collected through SCAP also informs the locations and sizes of new

schools, or school expansions, provided through centrally funded capital programmes. Decisions on the need for and the location of new schools or school expansions will not be made entirely on the basis of the data collected through SCAP. However, accurate data using appropriate PA structures help ensure decisions are well informed.

The department may propose regrouping PAs differently where:

- the [general principles](#) used to structure PAs have not been applied
- the structure adopted is likely to cause an overestimated Basic Need funding allocation in the local authority

We may also defer the decision about a local authority's allocation until we can be confident that data submitted represents a true and accurate reflection of the need for school places.

Local authorities have a responsibility for proposing and designing PA structures to reflect local circumstances. However, proposals to structurally change or create PAs for use in the SCAP data collection process will require approval from the department. The process for this is outlined in [When to request changes to pupil planning area structures](#) and [How we review and approve changes for the annual SCAP collection](#).

How to structure pupil planning areas and make changes

PAs should be structured separately for primary and secondary phases, and it is usual for local authorities to have multiple PAs.

Pupil place planning is a dynamic process. Factors such as school reorganisation, evolving local demographics or changing geographical circumstances can mean existing structures are no longer fit for purpose. Changes to these structures are sometimes necessary. However, PAs should be structured to minimise the number of changes that are necessary. We recommend that PAs should be designed to remain stable for at least 5 years where possible.

Local authorities should reflect on the structure of their PAs regularly to ensure that it complies with the [general principles](#). The impact of changes that have taken place or will shortly take place, such as housing developments, schools opening or closing

and any infrastructure changes like new roads, should be assessed. Following this assessment, a PA structure should be designed to reflect the changed landscape more effectively.

A local authority may also wish to reflect on its PA structure where no such changes have occurred but it has other reasons for reviewing, such as:

- an increase in inward migration or birth rate
- higher pupil numbers now impacting on the secondary sector

Where a local authority has identified that a different PA structure is essential, changes can be proposed before 5 years of PA stability.

When reviewing PA structures, local authorities should consider:

- geographical characteristics
- distance to nearest school or schools
- parental preference patterns

PA structures should also be robust to ensure that minor or known regular changes to the landscape do not necessitate a change to PAs. For example, where it is known that parental preference often changes between a group of schools, grouping these schools in one PA may prevent necessitating a future change to the PA structures.

Where a local authority has divided its geographical regions into areas for pupil place planning purposes and those areas align with the following general principles, the PAs used in the SCAP collection should align with these areas.

General principles

Schools located in close proximity, and which pupils could reasonably attend, should be grouped together in one PA.

For the purpose of the SCAP collection, PAs should:

- contain existing school capacity

- include more than one school
- not group schools with discrete characteristics
- not group first, middle and upper phased schools into separate PAs (for local authorities operating a [3-tier education system](#))
- keep split-site schools within the same area where possible
- be stable and avoid frequent changes

Existing school capacity

Individual PAs should have at least one open school located within them.

For the purposes of the SCAP collection, a PA that does not have existing school capacity to report will not be approved.

Number of schools in planning areas

The creation of a single school PA should only be considered in exceptional circumstances – for example, where a school is geographically isolated and it is unreasonable to allocate places at any other school due to distance and travelling time.

We will only approve proposals for single-school PAs where the local authority can provide clear evidence that it would be unreasonable to group the school with others in the authority.

Schools with discrete characteristics

For the purposes of the SCAP collection, local authorities should avoid grouping schools with discrete characteristics, such as [selective schools](#), university technical colleges (UTCs), faith or free schools, into separate PAs overlaid on top of others of the same educational phase.

For example, local authorities should avoid grouping all faith schools in a local authority in one PA, regardless of geography, as this can result in the need for places being inaccurately reported.

We will only approve proposals to create a separate PA for these schools in exceptional circumstances, where the local authority can provide clear evidence that it would be unreasonable to include the schools in the existing PAs where they are located. See [How we review and approve changes for the annual SCAP collection](#) for more information on the evidence that may be required.

Proposals will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and a decision to approve the changes will be based on the evidence provided for that individual case. Where

such PAs are agreed with the department, forecasts of pupil numbers in the PAs containing schools with discrete characteristics collected through SCAP should be capped at current capacity unless there is a shortfall in places in all appropriate underlying PAs.

3-tier education systems

Where a local authority operates a [3-tier education system](#), it should not, for SCAP reporting purposes, separate the first, middle and upper phased schools into separate PAs. All school places up to year 6 should be included within the primary PA structure, and all places from year 7 should be included in the secondary PA structure.

Split-site schools

For the purposes of the SCAP collection, local authorities should ensure that all the constituent sites of split-site schools are contained within the same PA unless a compelling local case can be made, such as the constituent sites not being reasonable alternatives due to distance or travel time.

The department will consider this on its individual merits.

Where we have agreed that split sites can be contained within different PAs, the local authority will be required to provide information for each site during the annual SCAP collection.

Stability of planning areas

For the purposes of the SCAP collection, PAs should be structured to minimise the need for future changes to the PAs.

PAs should remain fixed for at least 5 years unless there are compelling reasons to change.

Changes to PAs that do not require departmental approval are listed in [When to request changes to pupil planning area structures](#).

Further guidance

[Annex B](#) of this guidance includes a number of case studies illustrating the department's approach to assessing proposed PA structures in a range of circumstances for SCAP reporting purposes.

However, due to the diverse range of geographical sizes and factors relating to the location of schools within local authorities, PA structures vary, and there is no 'one size fits all' structure.

Understanding pupil planning area profiles

As at 1 May 2025, there were 3,651 PAs across 153 local authorities, of which:

- 2,580 were primary PAs
- 1,071 were secondary PAs

The accuracy of the forecasts collected via the SCAP survey is crucial to:

- assess shortfalls and surpluses in school capacity
- inform the calculation of Basic Need capital allocations to support new pupil places

Table 1 shows the mean error in forecast accuracy in primary and secondary PAs by the number of schools within those PAs.

Table 1

Number of schools within the planning area	Percentage of mean forecast error (primary)	Percentage of mean forecast error (secondary)
1	10.8	7.9
2	7	5.2
3	5.7	4.8
4	5.4	3.8
5	4.8	4.2
6	4.4	4.1
7	4.5	3.4
8	3.7	2.4
9	4.2	4.1

10	4	5.1
More than 10	3.8	4.4

In general, the larger the number of schools in the PA, the more accurate the forecast. The number of schools in a PA should be determined by the [general principles](#) in this guidance. For primary PAs, the mean forecast error rate reduces considerably as the number of schools within the PA increases from one to 6.

We recommend that PAs for primary schools contain a minimum of 4 schools but ideally contain 6 or more schools, unless there are exceptional circumstances as described in the general principles.

In most cases, PAs that align to the [general principles](#) in this guidance will be considerably larger than the recommended minimum number of schools.

For secondary PAs, the mean forecast error rate reduces considerably as the number of schools within the PA increases from one to 2. The mean forecast error rate reduces consistently up to 8 schools, after which the current small number of PAs with 9 or more schools makes any assessment of the mean forecast error less reliable.

We understand that the different geographical characteristics of local authorities may make it difficult for some local authorities to have secondary PAs with a larger number of schools. Therefore, we recommend that PAs for secondary schools contain a minimum of 2 schools unless there are exceptional circumstances as described in the [general principles](#).

It may be reasonable for some local authorities with large rural areas containing isolated schools to have a PA structure that includes several PAs containing fewer than the recommended minimum number of schools.

Table 2 shows the mean error in forecast accuracy^[footnote 1] in primary PAs (on the left) and secondary PAs (on the right) by the number of pupils within those PAs.

Table 2

Number of pupils within the planning area by decile (1 = 10% of PAs with	Percentage of mean forecast	Percentage of mean forecast
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the fewest number of pupils)	error (primary)	error (secondary)
1	10.2	13
2	6.5	7.4
3	6.2	6.8
4	4.7	7.2
5	4	6.1
6	4.3	5.7
7	4.3	4.3
8	4.7	4.3
9	4	3.7
10	3.7	4

PAs in which a small number of pupils attend schools have been shown to have a higher mean forecast error rate.

The mean forecast error rate reduces as the number of pupils attending schools in a PA increases, both in primary and secondary PAs. The number of schools in a PA and the number of pupils attending schools in a PA will usually be closely linked. However, to promote accurate forecasts, it is beneficial for PAs with a smaller number of schools to cover a larger number of pupils if possible.

How we ensure consistency across local authorities

The department undertakes a review of local authorities' PA structures each year in advance of the SCAP data collection. The purpose of this review is to ensure PAs are fit for purpose and there is consistency across authorities of similar size and geographical location or characteristics.

All local authorities will have their PAs reviewed over a 5-year period. Prioritisation is given to local authorities with PAs that diverge most from this guidance.

Criteria for identifying local authorities for prioritisation

When identifying local authorities whose PA structures are to be prioritised to review as part of this exercise, the department uses a range of criteria. This includes:

- local authorities with a lower forecast accuracy than other local authorities with similar socio-economic characteristics ([statistical neighbours](#)), over a number of years
- local authorities with PAs that are not geographically isolated and contain fewer than the recommended minimum number of schools
- local authorities whose structures do not correspond with one or more of the [general principles](#) and are not clearly or known to be in exceptional circumstances
- local authorities that have historically not increased capacity in line with Basic Need capital allocations
- local authorities that actually plan and deliver places on a different basis from the PAs they use for the SCAP survey
- local authorities that have regularly required changes to PAs outside of the changes that do not require departmental approval (listed in [When to request changes to pupil planning area structures](#))

The department will detail to local authorities identified for review the specific PAs, data and criteria that appear to diverge most from this guidance.

Engagement with local authorities

Those local authorities that are identified as per [the criteria](#) will be contacted by the department to discuss their PA structure. They will be asked to supply:

- proposals for changes to the PA structure to bring it into line with this guidance, with robust evidence to support this
- robust evidence to support the structures of PAs within the authority (where the

local authority considers that changes to the PAs would be detrimental)

- where the proposed structure is based on catchment areas and travel distances:
 - robust data detailing this catchment data and supply or demand on places
 - maps illustrating the PA structure to be adopted
 - information on the distances between schools
- where the proposed structure includes any single school PAs:
 - an explanation as to why this is the case
 - evidence of catchment data for schools' intake years
 - details of other schools in close proximity
- maps or data showing the flow of pupils that live in one PA and attend schools in another – the heat maps developed by the department, when available, can be used as evidence if appropriate

Depending on the scale and number of PAs that diverge from this guidance, the department may only require these details in relation to the PAs we identify as diverging from this guidance.

Assessment and outcomes

The evidence provided is assessed to determine whether the proposed PA structure is appropriate and to ensure that the local authority is not over-estimating or under-estimating when reporting a need for additional places as a result of their PA structure. The department will work with the authority to restructure the PAs if necessary.

Local authorities that have agreed a PA structure with the department after a review will not be prioritised again for review for at least 5 years, unless essential.

When to request changes to pupil planning area structures

Local authorities are encouraged to ensure their PA structures are robust and likely

to be fit for purpose for at least 5 years. However, local authorities can request changes to PAs annually. Any changes to the structure of PAs must be approved by the department prior to the SCAP survey, as changes in the number of PAs or changes to their boundaries impact on the data collected. Proposals to change PAs will be assessed against:

- this guidance
- the impact on surpluses or shortfalls
- departmental understanding of the local authority

Only proposals that adhere to this guidance will be taken forward for review. The proposals that are not taken forward may be rejected or deferred until the following year.

Local authorities can change the structure of a PA without Department for Education (DfE) approval only where:

- a school previously opened in temporary accommodation is moving to a permanent site that is located in a different PA to the temporary accommodation
- a new school has opened, in which case the local authority should assign it to the appropriate PA
- a school has closed (unless it results in a single school PA or a PA with no existing open school capacity)

Local authorities do not need prior approval for changes to individual school details that do not affect the structure of PAs – for example, where there is a change to a school's age range, governance arrangements, name or establishment number. Local authorities are required to inform the department of these changes via the annual checking of the schools list.

Timings

Changes to PA structures affect the data that local authorities submit for the annual SCAP collection. For this reason, local authorities need to know if approval has been granted for their proposed PA changes well in advance of the date of the next SCAP collection.

The following timetable shows the key dates local authorities should be aware of if

they plan to request changes.

Timetable for changing pupil planning areas for the SCAP collection

The timetable tailored to each SCAP collection with specific dates will be circulated separately.

April to September

- local authorities identified as priorities for a PA review will be contacted. The department will share the evidence and analysis used to identify the local authority as a priority. The local authority will be asked to begin work with the department to determine and propose new PAs, or alternatively provide robust evidence to support the current structures of PAs within the authority
- all other local authorities receive an email, asking them to confirm their current PA structure is correct
- local authorities to confirm by mid to late September that there are no changes to their current structure, or that they wish to request changes
- local authorities wishing to make changes should provide a clear explanation of the changes and the reasons behind the proposals. Supporting documentation (such as maps) should be provided. However, where proposals are clearly explained and well evidenced, not all supporting documentation may need to be provided at the time of the requests for change

October

- the department to continue to work with local authorities identified as priorities for a PA review to propose new PAs
- the department to work with local authorities requesting changes to provide any further supporting documents required
- the department to triage and prioritise local authority proposals to restructure PAs using [the criteria](#) specified in this guidance
- local authorities are made aware of whether proposals have been rejected, deferred or are being fully received

November and December

- a full review into the proposals takes place
- local authorities proposing changes may be asked to provide:
 - further explanation of the changes
 - the reasons behind the proposals
 - supporting documentation, such as maps

January

- the department to inform local authorities wishing to restructure whether the changes have been approved. If not approved, the department and the local authority to discuss further until agreement is reached on the PA structure. An updated list of PAs and schools to be sent to the local authority. Where agreement of the PA structure cannot be reached (because these general principles have not been applied or the structure adopted is likely to generate an overestimated Basic Need capital allocation in the local authority), the department may propose regrouping PAs differently

February

- a list of schools and their related PA currently held by the department is sent to local authorities, who should check and return the final list of schools and their related PA to the department. Local authorities make any changes to PAs that do not require approval – see [When to request changes to pupil planning area structures](#)

The department may be able to informally review proposals outside of this timetable when essential. For example, when planning applications for a new housing development are being considered, and that development will necessitate a change to the PA structure, the department can consider the local authority's evidence and provide an "in principle" view on the future PA structure.

How we review and approve changes for the annual SCAP collection

Local authorities wishing to change the structure of their PA should supply the following:

- supporting documentation to explain the construction of and rationale for the proposed PAs within the authority

- where the proposed structure would take the local authority outside the recommendations on the minimum number of schools in a PA, a clear explanation for this
- where the structure is framed around catchment areas and travel distances:
 - data (including mapping information) detailing this catchment data and the supply and demand for places
 - mapping information on the distances between schools
- where, in exceptional circumstances, the PA only has one school:
 - an explanation as to why this is the case and, in particular, why it would be unreasonable to expect pupils to travel to the next nearest school, and if the situation has changed from the previous year
 - evidence of catchment data for intake years
 - details on alternative schools in close proximity
- forecasts of pupil numbers for all the PAs affected by the proposed changes, and a statement detailing the methodology used for the forecasts
- a clear rationale supported by documentation should be provided for each other element of the PA structure that does not comply with this guidance
- maps or data showing the flow of pupils that live in one PA and attend schools in another – the heat maps developed by the department, when available, can be used as evidence if appropriate

How we assess proposals and make decisions

On receipt of the local authority's rationale and evidence, analysis is undertaken within the department to determine whether the proposals are appropriate and do not overestimate or underestimate the need for additional school places.

We review each case on its own merits and consider a range of factors when reaching a decision, including:

- does the proposed PA structure seem reasonable compared to other local authorities that are [statistical neighbours](#)?
- do the proposed changes align the PA structure to this guidance?
- will the proposed changes create single school PAs?

- will the proposed changes creates PAs with fewer schools than the recommended minimum number of schools?
- if the local authority operates a 3-tier education system, could the proposed PA structure create a false picture of shortfalls if there are age range changes within schools?
- has a robust case been made for each proposal?
- does analysis of SCAP data indicate that the proposed changes will overestimate or underestimate the need for school places?
- does the proposed PA have existing schools? We will not approve the creation of a PA if there are no open schools in the proposed area
- do the PA boundaries appear reasonable? We consider the location of rivers, roads and railway lines
- are the proposed PAs likely to require changing again within the next 5 years?

Local authorities will be advised of the outcome of their request in accordance with the detailed timeline to be issued separately.

Where DfE is unable to reach an agreement with a local authority on an existing or proposed PA structure, we may propose regrouping PAs differently.

DfE will also provide the local authority with details of the reasons why the existing or proposed PA structure is unsuitable.

Annex A: glossary

Basic need capital allocations

DfE provides Basic need funding 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. More information can be found at [Basic need allocations](#).

Net capacity assessment

The net capacity of a maintained school is measured using a net capacity assessment. This is based on the net area of all buildings that are available to that school. It should include all extra places that have been added to the school (even though they may not yet be in use) and any classrooms that have been temporarily taken out of use or non-teaching space that has been re-designated as a classroom.

The [Net capacity assessment tool](#) includes further information.

Pupil planning area

An area within the local authority that is used by that authority for the purposes of assessing current and future pupil demand for school place provision. Local authorities may also use the term 'planning area' or 'pupil place planning area' to describe a PA.

Pupil forecasts

Forecasts of pupil numbers broken down by year group for each PA in the local authority.

School capacity

The number of places the school can physically provide.

For maintained schools, capacity is defined as a physical measurement using the net capacity assessment.

For academies, planned capacity is set out in the funding agreement.

Selective schools

State-funded schools which, since 1997, have either been wholly selective by ability (such as grammar schools) or have been partially selective by aptitude or ability.

These schools can be either academy schools or maintained schools.

Statistical neighbours

The National Foundation for Education Research was commissioned in 2007 by DfE to identify and group similar local authorities in terms of the socio-economic characteristics.

Each local authority is assigned 10 such neighbours.

3-tier education system

A 3-tier education system refers to those structures of schools, present in some parts of the country, where pupils are taught in 3 distinct school types:

- first schools, for children between the ages of 5 and 9
- middle schools, for children between the ages of 9 and 12 or 13
- upper schools, for children between the ages of 13 or 14 to 16, or 18 if the school includes years 12 and 13

Annex B: case studies

Case study 1

Local authority A is geographically small (7 by 3 miles) and is unitary, currently operating a local authority-wide primary PA consisting of 30 primary schools. The authority is proposing to create 10 primary PAs, including 4 single-school PAs:

Current number of PAs: 1

Proposed PA structure: 10

- 4 PAs each consisting of 1 school
- 5 PAs each consisting of 4 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 6 schools

Reasons why proposals are unreasonable:

- the schools proposed-for single school PAs are not isolated – they are within a 2-mile radius of neighbouring schools
- with the exception of the PA consisting of 6 schools, the proposed PAs fall below the minimum number of schools recommended for a primary PA

The department would reject these proposals as there is no justification for these single-school PAs.

Approved number of PAs: 4

- 3 PAs each consisting of 8 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 6 schools

Case study 2

Local authority B is non-unitary and operates a mix of 2-tier and 3-tier education systems across the local authority area.

There are 40 secondary schools in total:

- 25 secondary schools
- 10 middle-deemed secondary schools
- 5 upper schools

The authority currently operates 4 secondary PAs but has identified that the need for places is not being correctly reported due to the way schools have been grouped together in secondary PAs.

The authority has submitted the following proposals to increase the number of secondary PAs:

Current number of PAs: 4

Proposed PA structure: 8

Consisting of:

- 1 PA consisting of 5 upper schools
- 1 PA consisting of 5 middle schools
- 5 PAs each consisting of 5 secondary schools

Reasons why proposals are unreasonable

Grouping middle-deemed secondary schools together in a PA, and separate from the upper schools, could result in an incorrect picture of the need for places being reported in the future.

Future age range changes to schools could result in pupil forecasts being submitted (for the SCAP collection) in PAs where there is currently no existing school capacity in that year group.

To avoid an inaccurate account of the need for places being reported, upper schools should be located in the same PA as the feeder middle schools.

Approved number of PAs: 8

- 1 PA consisting of one upper school and 2 middle schools
- 5 PAs each consisting of 5 secondary schools
- 2 PAs each consisting of 2 upper schools and 4 middle schools

Case study 3

Local authority C is unitary and currently operates one secondary PA consisting of 19 widely spread schools.

For the annual SCAP collection, the local authority has previously submitted local authority-wide secondary pupil forecasts and school capacity data, despite it not being reasonable to expect pupils to travel across this area. In doing so, there is a danger that this is masking the expected pressure for secondary places that may be present in specific areas within the local authority.

Internal local authority analysis has highlighted a need for additional places at year 7 (due to larger primary pupil cohorts), which are currently being masked due to the current single secondary PA structure.

The local authority has submitted proposals to re-structure the PA in line with the 3 geographic clusters used for partnership working within the authority. The local authority is proposing to have 3 PAs as follows:

Current number of PAs: 1

Proposed PA structure: 3

- 1 PA consisting of 7 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 9 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 3 schools

Reasons why proposals are reasonable

Local authority C provided very clear information (including heat maps showing pupil travel patterns) setting out the case for change, which included a map of the local authority carved into the current 3 secondary PAs showing the location of the secondary schools.

Local authority analysis using the proposed 3 PAs highlights the actual place pressure for both year 7 and pupil numbers on roll in excess of capacity – which is currently being masked under the current local authority-wide secondary PA.

The department is satisfied from the supporting documentation that a local authority-wide secondary PA is unsuitable for planning purposes and reporting an inaccurate account of increasing pressure.

Approved number of PAs: 3

- 1 PA consisting of 7 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 9 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 3 schools

Case study 4

Local authority D is non-unitary and currently operates 5 secondary pupil planning areas in which there are 30 secondary schools. The local authority has submitted proposals to create an additional single school, authority-wide secondary PA overlaid on all the other PAs.

The new PA is intended to accommodate a UTC only, which opened at the start of the 2021 to 2022 academic year and will operate year groups 7 to 13. The authority has advised that although the school is located in a town, they feel it is inappropriate to include it in an existing PA, as the school will serve a very wide catchment area.

Current number of PAs: 5

Proposed PA structure: 6

- 1 PA consisting of 3 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 1 UTC
- 1 PA consisting of 6 secondary schools
- 3 PAs each consisting of 7 secondary schools

Reasons why proposals are unreasonable

It is unreasonable to create a single school PA for the UTC when the local authority has 6 secondary schools within the town and can offer places due to the short travelling distance between schools.

Although the authority has advised that the UTC is intended to serve a very wide geographical region, a single school PA could potentially report a pressure for places where alternative places are available in neighbouring PAs over which the proposed PA would be laid.

The department would not approve this structure for these reasons. To avoid an

inaccurate picture of the need for places being reported, the UTC should be located in the same PA as other secondary schools in that area.

Approved number of PAs: 5

- 1 PA consisting of 3 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 6 secondary schools and UTC
- 3 PAs each consisting of 7 secondary schools

Case study 5

Local authority E is unitary and currently operates 6 primary PAs consisting of 50 primary schools divided between the areas.

The authority has advised that 2 new towns are in the process of being built and it has submitted proposals to re-structure and increase the number of PAs as follows:

Current number of PAs: 6

Proposed PA structure: 8

- 2 PAs each consisting of 10 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 9 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 8 schools
- 2 PAs each consisting of 6 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 1 existing school and 1 new school not yet built
- 1 PA consisting of 1 new school not yet built

Reasons why proposals are unreasonable

The local authority has requested creating PAs due to new housing developments. One of the proposed PAs does not have existing school capacity due to the planned new school provision not due to open until the following academic year.

For the purposes of SCAP, the authority will report pupil forecasts for the area, but there is no corresponding school capacity to offset them against.

The department will reject these proposals, as one of the proposed PAs does not have existing school capacity. The local authority should retain the existing primary

school in its current PA until the new schools are open or adjust proposals to ensure all proposed PAs have existing school capacity. The authority should include the pupil forecasts generated from the new housing developments in the forecasts for the existing PA or adjusted structure.

Approved number of PAs: 6

- 2 PAs each consisting of 10 schools
- 2 PAs consisting of 9 schools
- 2 PAs each consisting of 6 schools

Case study 6

Local authority F is non-unitary and currently operates 52 primary PAs.

The local authority is proposing to increase the number of primary areas to 53 by dividing one existing PA into 2 – east and west. The current PA has 21 schools and the new structure will consist of 12 schools in the east and 9 in the west area.

Current number of PAs: 52

Proposed PA structure: 53

- 1 PA consisting of 12 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 9 schools
- 51 PAs which will remain the same

Reasons why proposals are reasonable

Local authority G provided very clear information setting out the case for change. The proposals are due to a large number of schools in the existing PA that greatly exceed a 2 mile travel distance from one side of the PA to the other. The current structure makes it difficult to identify whether there is a need for additional places in the area.

The local authority provided illustrative maps, which clearly demonstrates a clear segregation of pupil movement between the proposed areas. The department is satisfied from the supporting documentation that the current structure of the PA is unsuitable for planning purposes and reporting an inaccurate account of increasing pressure on school places.

Approved number of PAs: 53

- 1 PA consisting of 12 schools
- 1 PA consisting of 9 schools
- 51 PAs which will remain the same

1. Mean forecast error in the 2019 to 2020 forecasts made in the 2017 SCAP collection. [↩](#)

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