



Department
for Education

Local Authority Pupil Planning Areas

Guide for local authorities

September 2021

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About this departmental guidance

This is non-statutory departmental guidance from the Department for Education. It sets out what we expect local authorities to consider when determining, or making changes to, their pupil planning area structure for the purposes of the [School Capacity Survey \(SCAP\)](#).

This guidance relates to the 2022 SCAP survey and the SCAP surveys conducted after 2022.

Expiry or review date

This guidance is valid until amended or withdrawn.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is primarily for local authorities involved in planning and organising school places.

Summary of changes

- Clarification on how pupil planning areas should be structured, and clarification of the general principles used to determine pupil planning areas. (Section 2)
- Recommendations on the minimum number of schools that should be contained within primary and secondary pupil planning areas. (Section 3)
- Updates to the criteria used by the department when reviewing pupil planning area structures. (Section 4)
- Updates to the approximate timetable for changing pupil planning areas for the SCAP collection. (Section 5)

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.
- Local authorities should structure pupil planning areas in accordance with the general principles laid out in this guidance.
- Proposals to structurally change or create pupil planning areas for use in the SCAP data collection process requires approval from the department.
- All local authorities will have a pupil planning area review by the department over a 5-year period. The local authorities with pupil planning areas that diverge most from this guidance will be prioritised.
- Where the general principles laid out in this guidance have not been applied and/or where the planning area structure adopted is likely to generate an overestimated Basic Need capital funding allocation in the local authority, the department may propose regrouping planning areas differently. 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.

Introduction

Local authorities have the discretion to determine their pupil planning areas for the purposes of school place planning though we expect them to have regard to this non-statutory guidance when determining their pupil planning area 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 pupil planning area (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 will be published in the ['School capacity' statistical releases](#). The 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, and to 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 School Preference Survey, to support departmental decision making. The data also informs decisions pertaining to the locations and sizes of new schools, or school expansions, provided through centrally funded capital programmes.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide information on how PAs should be structured to ensure data on the need for school places is accurately reflected and reported. It focusses on the factors local authorities should consider if they are reviewing their current PA structure and the department's process for approving any changes.

Section 1: 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 'pupil planning area': **a group of schools within the local authority which 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), that 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. It is also recognised 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 neither masked nor over-represented.

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 and the following sections provide information on the criteria and process by which PAs used in the SCAP survey should be defined. It is also recognised that place pressure can be artificially created by changing a PA structure, therefore robust and stable PAs (ideally stable for at least 5 years) will provide a more accurate picture of need.

How does the Department use pupil planning areas?

Basic Need capital funding allocations are made to local authorities to help them fund new pupil places by expanding existing schools¹ 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. It 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 funding². The data collected through the SCAP survey 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

¹ Maintained schools, free schools or academies.

² More information on Basic Need capital funding allocations can be found here: [Basic need allocations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

made entirely on the basis of the data collected through the SCAP survey, however accurate data using appropriate PA structures help ensure decisions are well informed.

The general principles that should be used to structure PAs are set out in section 2. Where these general principles have not been applied and/or where the structure adopted is likely to cause an overestimated Basic Need funding allocation in the local authority, the department may propose regrouping PAs differently. The department 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 sections 5 and 6.

Section 2: How pupil planning areas should be structured and how they can be changed

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 in which factors such as school reorganisation, evolving local demographics or changing geographical factors 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. It is recommended that PAs should be designed to remain stable for at least 5 years where possible.

Local authorities should reflect on the structure of its PAs regularly to ensure that the structure complies with the general principles set out below. 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, such as new roads should be assessed, and 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. For example, an increase in inward migration or birth rate, or 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 the following factors:

- Geographical characteristics
- Distance to nearest school/s
- Parental preference patterns (see below)

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 their geographical regions into areas for pupil place planning purposes and those areas align with the general principles below, the PAs used in the SCAP collection should align with these areas.

General Principles

Guiding principle: schools located in close proximity, and which pupils could reasonably attend, should be grouped together in one pupil planning area.

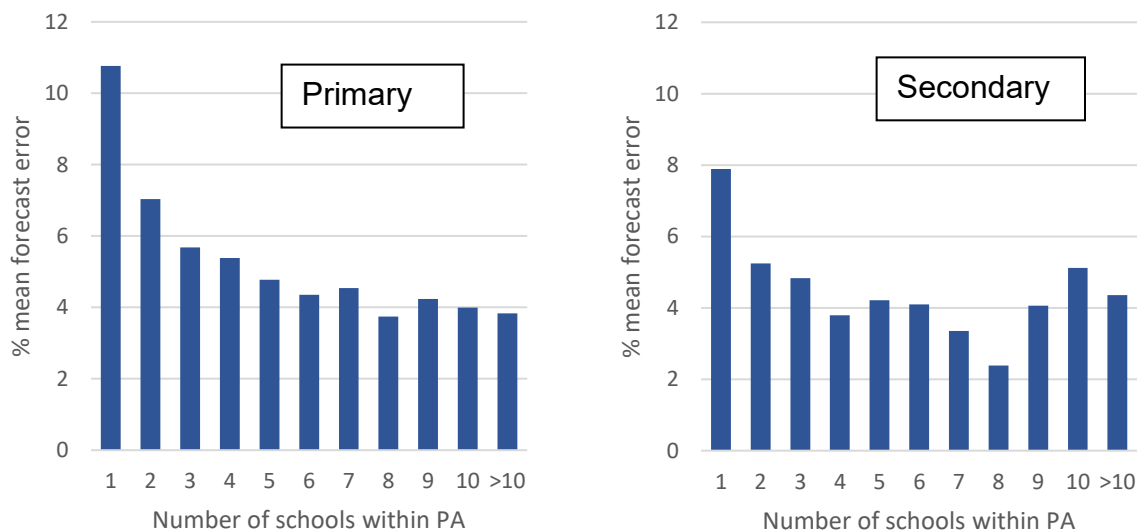
- Individual PAs should contain **existing school capacity** (i.e. should have at least one open school located within them). For the purposes of the SCAP collection, a PA that does not have existing school capacity to report will not be approved.
- For the purposes of the SCAP collection, PAs should contain **more than one school**. 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. Proposals for single school PAs will only be approved by the department where the local authority can provide clear evidence that it would be unreasonable to group the school with others in the authority.
- For the purposes of the SCAP collection, the above principle also applies to requests to locate single schools with **discrete characteristics**, such as selective schools, UTCs, faith or free schools, in their own single school PAs.
- For the purposes of the SCAP collection, local authorities should **avoid grouping schools of the above characteristics 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. Proposals to create a separate PA for these schools will only be approved by the department 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 Section 6 for more information on the evidence that may be required). Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and a decision whether to approve the changes will be made 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 the SCAP collection should be capped at current capacity unless there is a shortfall of places in all appropriate underlying PAs.
- 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.
- 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, which the department will consider on its individual merits. For example, the constituent sites not being reasonable alternatives due to distance or travel time. Where the department has agreed that split sites can be contained within different PAs, the local authority may be required to provide additional information for each site during the annual SCAP collection.

- For the purposes of the SCAP collection, PAs should be structured to minimize 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 which do not require departmental approval are listed in section 5).
- Annex B provides case studies illustrating the department's approach in 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 do vary and there is no 'one size fits all' structure.

Section 3: The profile of a pupil planning area structure

As at 1 May 2020, there were 3,630 PAs across 152 local authorities – 2,553 of which were primary PAs and 1,077 secondary PAs.

The accuracy of the forecasts collected via the SCAP survey is crucial to assess shortfalls and surpluses in school capacity and to inform the calculation of Basic Need capital allocations to support new pupil places. The following charts show the mean error in forecast accuracy³ in primary PAs (on the left) and secondary PAs (on the right) by the number of schools within those PAs.



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 whether the schools in the PA represent a reasonable alternative to each other (i.e. pupils who attend one school could also reasonably be expected to attend another in the PA) and the general principles in this guidance. This section recommends a minimum number of schools in a primary and secondary PA, however, these are not meant to be maximum or average numbers for a PA. **In most cases, PAs which align to the general principles in this guidance will be considerably larger than the recommended minimum number of schools stated below.**

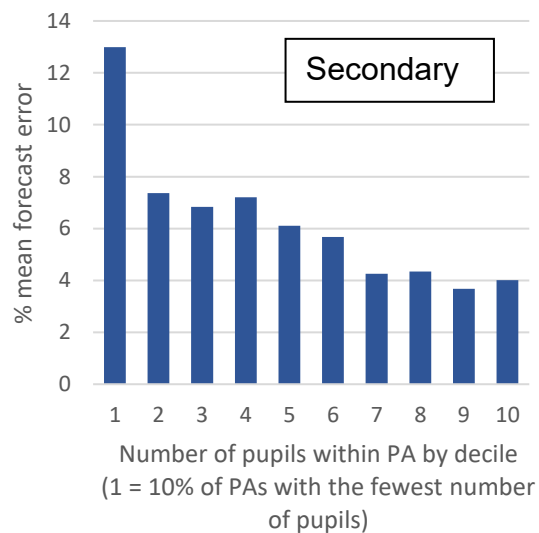
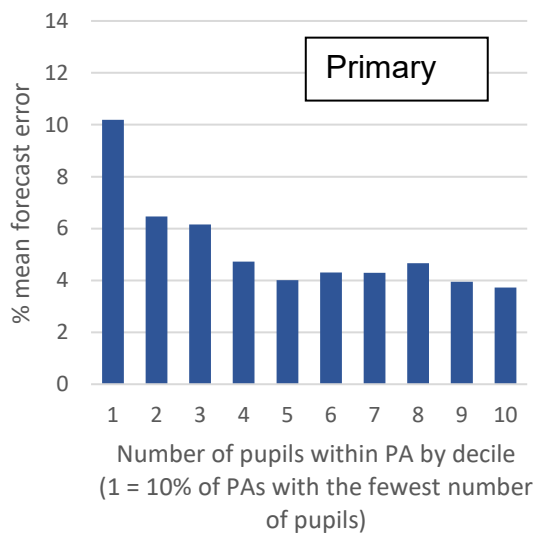
For primary PAs, the mean forecast error rate reduces considerably as the number of schools within the PA increases from 1 to 6. It is recommended that PAs for primary schools contain a minimum of 4 schools but ideally contain 6 or more schools, unless there are exceptional circumstances as described in the general principles. **In many cases PAs should be considerably larger than this, where the schools represent a reasonable alternative to each other.**

³ Mean forecast error in the 2019/20 forecasts made in the 2017 SCAP collection.

For secondary PAs, the mean forecast error rate reduces considerably as the number of schools within the PA increases from 1 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, it is recommended that PAs for secondary schools contain a minimum of 2 schools unless there are exceptional circumstances as described in the general principles. **In many cases PAs should in many cases be larger than this, where the schools represent a reasonable alternative to each other.**

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

PAs in which a small number of pupils attend schools have also 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 (on the left) and secondary (on the right) 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.

Section 4: How consistency is ensured 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, with the local authorities with PAs that diverge most from this guidance prioritised. 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 including the following:

- Local authorities with a lower forecast accuracy than other local authorities with similar socio-economic characteristics (statistical neighbours⁴), over a number of years;
- Local authorities with PA(s) 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 set out in section 2 and are not clearly or known to be exceptional circumstances.
- Local authorities who have historically not increased capacity in line with Basic Need capital allocations.
- Local authorities which actually plan and deliver places on a different basis from the PAs they use for the SCAP survey.
- Local authorities which have regularly required changes to PAs outside of the changes which do not require departmental approval (listed in section 5).

The department will detail to Local Authorities identified for review, the specific PAs, data and criteria which appear to diverge most from this guidance.

Those local authorities which are identified as per the above will be contacted by the department to discuss their PA structure and are asked to supply:

- Proposals for changes to the PA structure to bring it into line with the guidance, with robust evidence to support this;
- Or where the local authority considers that changes to the PAs would be detrimental, robust evidence to support the structures of PAs within the authority.
- Where the proposed structure is based on catchment areas and travel distances:
 - robust data detailing this catchment data and supply/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.

⁴ See the glossary for more information

- Maps or data showing the flow of pupils which 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 which diverge from this guidance, the department may only require the above details in relation to the specific PAs which the department identified as diverging from this guidance.

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

Section 5: When local authorities need to request changes to pupil planning area structures

Local authorities are encouraged to ensure that their PA structures are robust and likely to be fit for purpose for at least five years. However, they are able to 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 which adhere to the guidance will be taken forward for review. The proposals which are not taken forward may be rejected or deferred until the following year.

However, the local authority can change the structure of a PA without DfE approval **only** where:

- a school previously opened in temporary accommodation is moving to a permanent site which 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, or
- 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 planning areas. e.g. where there is a change to a school's age range, governance arrangements, name or establishment number, etc. LAs 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 timetable below shows the key dates which local authorities should be aware of if they plan to request changes:

Timetable for changing pupil planning areas for the SCAP collection

(N.B. the timetable tailored to each SCAP collection with specific dates will be circulated separately)

September

- Local Authorities which have been 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.
- (September and October) Local authorities wishing to make changes to provide a clear explanation of the changes, the reasons behind the proposals. Supporting documentation (e.g. 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 which have been 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 document required

November

- The department to triage and prioritise local authority proposals to restructure PAs using the criteria specified in this document.
- Local authorities are made aware of whether proposals have been rejected, deferred or are being fully reviewed.

December and January

- 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 and supporting documentation e.g. maps.

February

- A list of PAs and schools currently held by the department is sent to local authorities not wishing to make changes to PAs. Local authorities to make any changes to PAs / schools that do not need approval – see section 5.

- 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 and/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.

March

- Local authorities to return final list of PAs and schools correctly assigned in each area by end of March.

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 new housing 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.

Section 6: The process for considering proposals to amend current pupil planning area structures 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 of 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 which are 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 which does not comply to this guidance.
- Maps or data showing the flow of pupils which 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.

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 neighbours⁵
- Do the proposed changes align the PA structure to this guidance?
- Will the proposed changes create single school PAs?
- Will the proposed changes create PAs with fewer schools than the recommended minimum number of schools?

⁵ See the glossary for more information

- 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 the department is unable to reach an agreement with a local authority on an existing or proposed PA structure, the department may propose regrouping PAs differently. The department 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

The department 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 which is based on the net area of all buildings that are available to that school. This should include all extra places that have been added to the school (even though they may not yet be in use), any classrooms that have been temporarily taken out of use or non-teaching space that has been re-designated as a classroom. Further information on calculating the net capacity assessment of maintained schools can be found in the guidance document: [Assessing the Net Capacity of Schools](#).

Pupil planning area (PA)

An area within the local authority which 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 (see above). 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 (i.e. grammar schools) or which, since the same date, have been partially selective by aptitude and/or ability. These schools can be either academy schools or maintained schools.

Statistical neighbours

The National Foundation for Educational Research was commissioned in 2007 by the Department to identify and group similar LAs in terms of the socio-economic characteristics. Each local authority is assigned 10 such neighbours:

[The development of the children's services statistical neighbour benchmarking model: final report \(nfer.ac.uk\)](#)

3-tier education system

Refers to those structures of schooling, which exist in some parts of England, where pupils are taught in three distinct school types – first schools (children between the ages of 5 and 9), middle schools (children between the ages of 9 and 12 or 13) and upper schools (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 four 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. The department would reject these proposals as there is no justification for these single school PAs. 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.

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 two-tier and three-tier education systems across the local authority area. There are 40 secondary schools in total - 25 secondary schools, 10 middle-deemed secondary schools and 5 upper schools. The authority currently operates four 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 proposals to increase the number of secondary PAs outlined below:

Current number of PAs: 4

Proposed PA structure: 8

- 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 1 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 1 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 outlined below:

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 LA-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 five 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 2021/22 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 six 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 the reasons stated above. 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 six primary PAs consisting of 50 primary schools divided between the areas. The authority has advised that two 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:

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 1 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 or not 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



Department
for Education

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