

Committee:	<b>Lead Cabinet Member for Learning and School Effectiveness</b>
Date:	<b>6 October 2014</b>
By:	<b>Director of Children's Services</b>
Title of Report:	<b>Area Reviews of School Places</b>
Purpose of Report:	<b>To seek agreement to conduct area reviews of the organisation of early years and primary places in Lewes and Heathfield areas</b>

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**Recommendation: The Lead Member is recommended to:**  
**Approve area reviews of early years and primary school places in the Lewes and Heathfield areas to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet demand for places now and in the future but to also look more widely at the organisation of schools in each area to make certain they are well placed to deliver a viable, high quality education to their local communities.**

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 Revenue: There will be a cost attached for additional capacity to lead and manage the reviews of approximately £75k that will be drawn from the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve.

1.2 Capital: At this stage it is considered unlikely that there would be a requirement for capital investment in schools as a result of the area reviews.

## **2. Background**

2.1 The School Organisation and Place Planning Report (SOPP) for 2013/14 sets out where we think there is a need to provide additional places, remove surplus places or rationalise existing provision to ensure there are sufficient school places for all children in East Sussex.

2.2 The SOPP also sets out our approach to the organisation and leadership arrangements of schools to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of their local community and makes best use of public funding. Our stated aim is to maintain a sustainable network of schools, particularly in the rural areas, through exploring a range of partnership solutions where appropriate (e.g. collaborations, federations, trust status and academy chains).

2.3 Schools operate most efficiently and effectively when full or nearly full. However, it is generally accepted that a level of spare places is necessary in an area to allow parental choice given that there will be volatility in preferences from one year to the next, and to allow for differences in the size of individual cohorts. National guidance suggests that between 5 and 10% surplus places should be maintained in an area to facilitate parental preference and allow for a margin of error in the pupil forecasts.

2.4 The County Council has a statutory requirement to ensure a sufficient supply of high quality early year places for eligible 2 – 4 year olds. In reviewing where additional early year places should be provided the Council recognises the benefits and improved outcomes of having nursery provision on school sites.

2.5 Within this context it is recommended that a review of primary places in the Lewes and Heathfield areas is undertaken to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet the predicted demand for places in each area but to also look more widely at the organisation of schools in each area to make sure they are well placed to deliver a high quality education to their local communities.

2.6 Each review will be fully consultative, including engagement with schools, early year providers, the dioceses and other key stakeholders. It is anticipated that the outcome of each review will be reported to Cabinet in September 2015.

## **3. Lewes Area**

3.1 In the Lewes Area a higher level of births in academic year 2009/10 and 2010/11 coupled with inward migration will lead to Year R shortfalls of up to one form of entry in 2014/15 and up to half a form of entry in 2015/16. GP registration data indicates a one form of entry shortfall in 2016/17. Longer term, taking account of planned new housing development in the town, Year R shortfalls are currently predicted

to continue until early in the next decade.

3.2 In April 2013 a strategy was agreed with the Lewes primary heads to provide additional places in the area. Following this meeting it was agreed that feasibility studies should be undertaken at Southover CE Primary School and Iford & Kingston CE Primary School with a view to expanding them by 105 places and 70 places respectively. Lewes Area is considered a priority for capital funding from the Schools Basic Need Programme between 2015/16 and 2017/18 and these proposals will be taken forward as part of that programme.

3.3 Alongside the growing pressure on places in the Lewes Area there are concerns about the pattern of parent choice and the sustainability of smaller schools. It is important to consider potential developments for the area alongside emerging partnership solutions.

#### **4. Heathfield Area**

4.1 In recent years births in the wider Heathfield Area have fluctuated but continue to remain well below the number of school places available. The level of surplus places in the area at the January 2014 pupil census was 15%. This together with the lack of new housing development planned for Heathfield suggests that primary schools in the area will continue to be undersubscribed due to the lack of demand for places.

4.2 This has and will lead to an over-supply of places in the Heathfield area when measured against actual and predicted demand for places. It is important to consider the effect this is likely to have on schools in terms of their long term sustainability, both financially and in terms of their capacity to sustain improvements in standards.

#### **5. Proposed Area Review Process**

5.1 It is noted that a report was taken to CMT on 2 April 2014 on this matter, and CMT advised we look at carrying out an area review process to ensure a transparent consultative process with education providers and local communities. We were advised to look at other areas of the country where a similar strategy had been employed. Therefore, officers recently visited Devon County Council to understand more about the area reviews that they had led. Following this visit and building on the good practice identified in Devon it is proposed that the following process is adopted for the Heathfield and Lewes area reviews:

- November – February 2015: Key educational data set prepared for each area covering: school performance and achievement, collaborative structures in place, place planning and pupil migration, financial situation and predictions and premises information.
- March – April 2015: Desk top analysis of the key issues undertaken with Officers from all key services.
- May – June 2015: Stakeholder area review meetings held in each location to include all early year providers, schools, Diocese representatives, local Councillors, Children Centres. The meetings will provide a chance for stakeholders to discuss the key issues and to explore possible solutions.
- July – August 2015: Preparation of Options Report for each area.
- September 2015: CMT and Cabinet consider Options Report and final decisions made.

#### **6. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations**

6.1 For the reasons set out above, the Lead Member is recommended to approve area reviews of early years and primary school places in the Lewes and Heathfield areas to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet demand for places now and in the future but to also look more widely at the organisation of schools in each area to make certain they are well placed to deliver a viable, high quality education to their local communities.

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Background Documents: School Organisation and Place Planning report