

OPEN

BRIEFING REPORT

Children and Families Committee

Information Briefing on the recently submitted 2025 Schools CAPacity return (SCAP)

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report

1. This paper reports on the outcome of the 2025 primary and secondary mainstream and specialist placements forecasts which will be submitted to the Department of Education (DfE). The forecasts will ultimately inform the amount of Basic Need grant awarded to the authority for the 2028/2029 academic year. Notification of any award is usually received around April / May of the following year.

Executive Summary

2. Each year local authorities have a statutory duty to submit information relating to individual schools and planning areas. This return is called the SCAP (Schools CAPacity) return and is submitted to the DfE between June and July, closing date for 2025 submission was Friday 25 July.
3. The SCAP return consists of 6 different pieces of data with the main emphasis on the pupil forecasts, 5 years for primary (2025 to 2029), 7 years for secondary (2025 to 2031). The forecasts submitted will determine the amount of Basic Need monies that the authority receives from the DfE to provide any additional pupil places required and which are not covered by section 106 monies received from developers.
4. In addition to mainstream forecasts, the Authority is required to submit forecasts for Special Education Needs pupils in both Special Schools and Resource Provision/SEN units within mainstream schools. The forecasting periods are the same, 5 years for primary and 7 years for secondary.

5. Forecasts for special placements submitted within the SCAP return is based on our mitigated forecast outlined within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan. Key mitigations within our DSG management plan include growing our own provision which will result in being less reliant on Non-Maintained Special Schools and Independent Special schools which are usually high-cost placements, in other local authorities and therefore financially unsustainable in the future. Please see appendix 6 with tables detailing unmitigated and mitigated forecasts for Education Health Care Plans (EHCP).

Background

6. Local authorities are required to plan for pupil places by Planning Areas that have been agreed with the DfE. Cheshire East has 29 planning areas for primary and 12 planning areas for secondary. Generally, these planning areas are centred around main towns but due to the geographical nature of Cheshire East some of the rural primary schools form a planning area of their own. i.e. Disley, Kettleshulme, Wincle and Bosley.
7. The SCAP return consists of 6 different pieces of data: -
- Published Admission Numbers (PAN) – This is reported by school and is the number of children usually admitted to each year group.
 - Schools Net Capacity – This is reported by school and is a calculation of the total number of children that a school can reasonably be expected to accommodate.
 - Planned Places – This is reported by school and is any local plans to add or remove places from a schools Net Capacity over the next 3 academic years.
 - Pupil Forecasts – This is reported by planning area but split into 2 sections the pupil forecasts and Section 106 contributions from developers: -
 - 1) Pupil Forecasts are prepared in two parts. First part is referred to as the Basic Need and these figures are calculated using a variety of data including, birth rates, GP Data, average pupil intakes, transfer rates for secondary schools and migration of pupils between neighbouring authorities. The second part is referred to as 'With Housing' and these figures include the additional pupils anticipated from new housing developments. New developments are only included in the forecasts once planning permission has been granted and any section 106 agreement has been signed. The anticipated additional pupils are added to the basic need element to produce the final anticipated numbers on roll for each school which are then reported to the DfE by planning area.
 - 2) The SCAP return also requires the authority to separate out the number of pupils that have been included in the forecasts but have

been funded by section 106 contributions even though those contributions may not have been received yet.

- Commentary – A written report on the planning areas, detailing any current projects or any future plans which impact on the availability of places overall. This can include school expansions, new free schools, reduction in schools' capacity or school closures.
 - Forecast Methodology - A written statement detailing the forecasting model and data used to produce the forecasts.
8. It should be noted that pupil forecasting required on the SCAP submission relates to all primary and secondary schools regardless of status, including Cheshire Studio School at Knutsford Academy and Crewe Engineering and Design UTC. Although two sets of forecasts are produced, Basic Need and With Housing, it is the with housing figures that are submitted to the DfE .
9. Please see in 'Background Papers' the Revised Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31, approved by Children and Families committee on the 29 April 2024 and the Reprofiled Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31, shared with Children and Families committee on X November 2024, which provides information on the forecast number of specialist placements.

Briefing Information

10. A summary of the anticipated position for the primary planning areas over the next 5 years is included in appendix 1. This summary shows that of the 29 planning areas 5 are indicating a shortfall in places either immediately or within the next 5 years. It should be noted that whilst a planning area may not indicate an overall shortfall there could be an individual school within the area with a shortfall, but the shortfall is offset by neighbouring schools having surplus places.
11. The summary provided in appendix 1 also identifies areas with large number of surplus pupil places, this includes Macclesfield, Middlewich and Crewe although some smaller rural locations are also showing larger than average surplus places. This could be due to the falling birth rates, migration to other parts of the council boundary or in some rural areas no new housing.
12. A summary of the anticipated position for the secondary planning areas for years 7 to 11 only, is included in appendix 2. This summary shows a number of planning areas indicating a shortfall within the next seven years. The majority of the shortfalls fluctuate and are small in comparison to the overall capacity and spread across 5 year groups.
13. It should also be noted that the large surplus places shown at Crewe are in part due to surplus places within the UTC. For instance, the UTC has a capacity of 400 for years 9-11 but has 204 on role.

14. Appendix 3 summarises the anticipated position for the secondary planning areas for years 7 to 13. Although the shortfalls appear higher than the overall totals for years 7 to 11 a small number of schools do admit more into their sixth form than the official net capacity figures allow for but because pupils utilise the same spaces as all the other year groups this doesn't seem to impact greatly on a school's capacity. Again, the large surplus of places shown at Crewe are in part due to surplus places within the UTC. For instance, the UTC has a capacity of 543 for years 9 -13 but has 305 on role. It should be noted that this has been reduced from 800 in previous years because the UTC have reduced their PAN from 200 per year group to 125 for years 10 and 11 and 75 for years 12 and 13.
15. Apart from being a statutory requirement to submit forecast information to the DfE, the forecasts inform the 5-year forward plan for pupil place planning purposes. The 5-year plan, as detailed in appendix 4 shows the expansions that are underway including when they are due to complete and potential future need for places.
16. Our DSG management plan includes additional Cheshire East high needs places both in special schools and resource provisions/SEN units within mainstream schools - 620 (CEC only) special school places increasing to 1067 places and 147 RP/SEN unit places increasing to 430 places. Please see appendix 5 for details.
17. The SCAP Submission portal, COLLECT, opened to local authorities on Monday 2 June 2025 and deadline for submission was Friday 25 July 2025. After the closing date, the DfE review all the data submitted and will come back to the authority with any queries. Once the DfE are satisfied that all the information is correct the Executive Director of Children's Services will be asked to sign off a form to attest to the accuracy of the final SCAP data submitted by the local authority, this is usually late November.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

18. The Local Authority as the Strategic Commissioner for school places has a statutory duty (under section 14 of the Education Act 1996) to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet the demands of its residents in the area. The DfE have issued updated guidance for Local Authorities in May 2025, School capacity (SCAP) Survey 2025, as to how the SCAP return should be submitted.
19. The requirement to submit the SCAP return by the deadline of 25 July is mandatory. Failure to submit by the deadline will risk the Authority's entitlement to Basic Need Allocation. SCAP is a statutory collection under The Information as to Provision of Education (England) Regulations 2016.

20. The information contained within the SCAP return should form part of the overall picture from a suite of reports that include the SEN provision and should align with Children and Families capital programme.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

21. Grant allocations from the DfE, including Basic Need and High Needs Capital Allocation combined with Section 106 contributions from developers may be insufficient to provide the additional places to ensure sufficient places for pupils' resident in Cheshire East this includes new places for pupils with SEND.
22. If there is any shortfall in funding an assessment would need to be made regarding the scope of the scheme, if additional funding is needed would have to be found within the existing capital programme and any necessary approvals would be required by Children and Families committee.
23. If further funding is required and there is no existing budget available, then schemes would need to be prioritised and decisions made by committee as to which schemes can be removed/delayed within the Children & Families capital programme and/or the wider capital programme to allow certain schemes to proceed.
24. The MTFs approved capital budget for Education and 14-19 Skills is £34.283m for 2025/26. The SCAP return has no direct impact on the Council revenue budgets. Mainstream schools' revenue DSG funding is determined each year based on the October pupil census return. The SCAP return provides an early indication of how pupil numbers may change in future years and can be used for forecasting purposes.

Human Resources

25. There are no increased human resource implications for the Council.

Risk Management

26. The requirement to submit the SCAP return by the deadline of Friday 25 July is mandatory. Failure to submit by the deadline will risk the Authority's entitlement to DfE grants including Basic Need and High Needs Capital allocations, and in consequence, its ability to meet this statutory duty in providing sufficient places for our Children and Young People.

Impact on other Committees

- 27 Not applicable

Policy

- 28 Local Authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996). Submission of the mandatory SCAP

return by the given deadline will support the Council in meeting its duty to provide sufficient school places.

Other Implications

Rural Communities

- 29 There are no direct implications for rural communities although providing sufficient places in rural schools will ensure that pupils can stay in their local community.
- 30 The creation of additional places across the borough will potentially bring benefits to rural communities by providing settings within more reasonable travel distances if a local school place cannot be met.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 31 Providing sufficient school places for all children and young people resident in our area is a statutory duty.

Public Health

- 32 There are no direct implications for public health, however providing sufficient places in their local community could improve a child's social and emotional wellbeing.
- 33 By providing local school places the distances which some children may have to travel to attend school should be reduced thus reduce congestion on the roads and therefore reduce emissions, improving the air quality and making a better environment to live in.

Climate Change

- 34 Providing additional school places will enable Cheshire East children and young people the ability to secure a place at their local school, thus reducing the need to travel outside of the area which will reduce energy consumption.
- 35 Cheshire East Council are very aware of their environmental education and stewardship role and are very interested in promoting sustainability in general.
- 36 Cheshire East Council is committed to being carbon neutral and in future capital build schemes are required to align with this expectation.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned

<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer	05/09/25	10/09/25
Kevin O'keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	05/09/25	10/09/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Julie Gregory	Head of Legal Services	13/08/25	13/08/2025
Roisin Beressi	Principal Lawyer (People)	13/08/25	27/08/25
Kathy Oliver	Principal Accountant	13/08/25	15/08/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director Children's Services	11/09/25	12/09/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Joanne Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager joanne.prophet@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - 2025 Primary Shortfall/ Surplus by Planning Area Appendix 2 – 2025 Secondary Shortfall/Surplus for years 7-11 by Planning Area Appendix 3 – 2025 Secondary Shortfall/ Surplus for years 7-13 by Planning Area Appendix 4 – 5-Year Plan Appendix 5 – SEN Overview Appendix 6 - Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan EHCP Forecast
Background Papers:	<u>2024 submitted Schools CAPacity(SCAP) return</u>