

Report to: EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD

Date: 16 January 2024

Reporting Officer: Catherine Moseley – Head of Access Services

Subject: SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS AND SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Report Summary: The report sets out the proposed admission arrangements for Tameside community, and voluntary controlled schools for admission in September 2025. There are no proposed changes to the admission arrangements for September 2024. The latest information on school place planning is presented, which concludes that there are currently sufficient places to meet expected demand for mainstream primary and secondary schools with rising levels of surplus capacity in primary schools due to the current birth rate pattern in the borough. The report concludes that there is a need to continue to develop capacity for specialist places given the predicted continuing rise in demand set out in the SEN Sufficiency Strategy.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board note the contents of the report.

Corporate Plan: The proposals contained within this report will support the delivery of the Community Strategy, through the delivery of sufficient and suitable places in 2025/26.

Policy Implications: No change in policy is proposed.

Financial Implications: All schools places are funded from the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant, which must be fully allocated to all schools and Academies in the borough.

(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer) The Council's DSG for 2023/24 is £257.273m. The table below demonstrates the forecast outturn position as at Month 7 reporting.

DSG Funding Block	DSG 2023-24 (before recoupment and incl. block transfer) £m	Forecast Distribution/ Expenditure 2023-24 £m	Forecast (Surplus) / Deficit 2023/24 £m
Schools Block	(200.358)	200.349	(0.010)
Central School Service Block	(1.249)	1.249	0
High Needs Block	(37.604)	43.480	5.876
Early Years Block	(18.062)	17.511	(0.550)

Total	(257.273)	262.589	5.317
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The current DSG reserve balance is a deficit position of £3.306m. The four-year forecast to 2027/28 is for the deficit to grow to £66.842m without intervention.

Mainstream Schools and Academies are funded on a per pupil basis, any schools with falling numbers of pupils on roll face financial pressures, which will need be managed. Where mainstream schools are sponsored to academise, the school balance is offset against the DSG reserve. Where sponsored schools transfer with a deficit balance it worsens the position, this is a risk to the Council's General Fund as a Priority Education Attainment Area meaning Academisation is accelerated in the borough.

The continued demand for Specialist Provision is creating further financial pressures on the High Needs budget that is already significantly in deficit, as highlighted in the table above, and subject to a deficit recovery plan. The Local Authority is working with the Department of Education as part of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme to seek to address the deficit.

Without the DBV programme, the deficit by 2027/28 would be £72.409m. There is a statutory override on the DSG to 2026. At this point, without DBV, the deficit is forecast to be £33.967m. If this is not extended, the deficit will be a call on the General Fund, i.e. reserves. The Council holds £30m of unallocated reserves of the £160m earmarked alongside the General Fund Balance of £27m. The DSG deficit would therefore reduce reserves to an unsustainable level requiring significant and difficult decisions around financial retrenchment and other service cessations.

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the
Borough Solicitor)**

The Council has statutory obligations to consult upon its coordinated admission scheme and admissions arrangements pursuant to The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 and made under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and section 29(5) of the Education Act 1996. The report provides appropriate detail of the arrangements proposed pursuant to the legislation.

Risk Management:

Failure to determine admission arrangements and a coordinated admissions scheme by 28 February 2024 could result in the Secretary of State imposing admissions arrangements on the Council and lead to the displacement of children from community high schools

Access to Information:

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or members of the public.

Background Information: The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Catherine Moseley, Head of Access Services



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 All admission authorities are required to consult on their coordinated admission scheme and on changes to admission arrangements. Where no changes are proposed to the coordinated admissions scheme or admission arrangements, there is no requirement to consult. Admission authorities must ensure that their determined admission arrangements comply with the mandatory requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021.
- 1.2 Admission authorities must consult once every seven years as a minimum. They must also determine their admission arrangements on an annual basis by 28 February and must be published on websites by 15 March each year.
- 1.3 Tameside Council last consulted on amendments to the admission arrangements for September 2024. These were determined by Executive Cabinet on 8 February 2023.

2. ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS FOR SEPTEMBER 2025

- 2.1 For entry to community or voluntary controlled primary, junior and secondary schools in September 2025, no changes were planned and therefore consultation was not necessary.
- 2.2 Admission arrangements must be determined by 28 February annually and must be published by 15 March. Following determination of the admission arrangements objections to those arrangements must be made to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May.
- 2.3 The proposed admission arrangements for entry in September 2025 for community or voluntary controlled primary, junior and secondary schools are set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.4 The admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools will be considered and determined by Executive Cabinet on 14 February 2024.

3. SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

- 3.1 School place planning in the borough is reviewed on an annual basis and forms part of the annual report on admission arrangements that is reported to Executive Cabinet in January. **Appendix 2** sets out the latest information.
- 3.2 School place planning is a complex process that requires almost constant review to ensure that the Council is able to meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient places.
- 3.3 By being proactive and working in partnership with all our schools over a number of years, the Council has been able to meet the demand for places in spite of significant variations in pupil numbers.
- 3.4 After the sustained period of growth, data indicates the need to consider reducing levels of surplus that are predicted to increase in primary and secondary schools over the next few years.
- 3.5 There is a need to engage in dialogue with primary school leaders to begin to consider options to reduce projected levels of surplus capacity. Whilst levels of surplus in secondary schools are not expected to increase significantly for a number of years, dialogue will begin to ensure that temporary places added to cope with the increase in pupils over recent year are removed first.

- 3.6 Whilst there are currently sufficient places to meet expected demand in mainstream provision, this is not the case for specialist places. The draft SEN Sufficiency Strategy is important to understand the supply and demand issues for specialist places and to drive plans to meet identified need in a systematic way.
- 3.7 The school place planning process must continue to be dynamic particularly in view of significant housing development and predicted increases in children and young people requiring support for their additional needs within the borough and the impact that will have on demand and travel to learn patterns.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 As set out at the front of the report.