

<b>Committee:</b>	Schools Forum
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> November 2024
<b>Title:</b>	Suffolk Pupil Projections – Growth and falling Rolls
<b>Author:</b>	Penny Bates, School Planning Manager, CYP & Michael Quinton, Senior Accountant, CYP
<b>Decision making / consultative / information:</b>	Decision Making
<b>Who can vote?</b>	All members with voting rights

### What is the Forum being asked to decide?

1. Schools Forum is being asked to decide if it would be appropriate to amend Suffolk's Falling Rolls policy to ensure that the funding can be utilised by:
  - a. changing the criteria within the Department for Education (DfE) permitted parameters.
  - b. Reducing the fund from £0.200m to £0.100m.
2. The purpose of this fund is to provide financial support to schools where there is a temporary fall in pupil numbers, but numbers are forecast to recover back to previous levels within 3 - 5 years. The funding is designed to support schools to avoid the need to take costly actions to reduce their capacity when demographic data shows capacity will recover in the near future.
3. As this funding is within the schools block, any movement of funding from the schools formula into the growth fund would not be treated as a transfer between blocks. Schools forum would still need to agree the total fund each year as part of the normal school budget planning cycle. Currently the amount set aside for falling rolls is £0.200m
4. The paper also provides and update on pupil projections and growth and provides details on demographic changes over the next 5 years including the number of schools that are likely to experience falling rolls.

### Reason for recommendation

5. The recommendation is being made due to due to the trend in falling rolls especially in the primary phase and if the fund can support schools in the short term before pupil numbers recover. This can lead to staff redundancies, larger class sizes, reduced funding to spend on resources and facilities and even school closures. Financial support would be required to assist schools in any reorganisation and planning. However we are bound by very clear criteria from the DfE which we are finding is restrictive due to most schools not seeing the recovery in pupil numbers over the short to medium term.

6. Based on our agreed criteria set in 2022, and agreed by Schools Forum, no schools were eligible in this financial year for the funding.

### **Alternative options**

7. Schools Forum could decide not to amend the criteria for the falling rolls fund and therefore not enabling the potential for this fund to support schools seeing shorter term falling rolls.

### **Who will be affected by this decision?**

8. All mainstream schools and academies will be affected as the falling rolls funding is funded from within the DSG schools block allocation.

### **Main body of the Report**

#### **Falling Rolls**

9. The problem stems from the fact that, following a primary pupil population “bulge” that peaked approximately 7 years ago, cohorts in Reception and key stage 1 classes are now smaller than the cohort currently in key stage 2 and moving in to secondary phase with the gap potentially getting wider.
10. DfE guidance states that Schools’ forum should agree both the value of the fund and the criteria for allocation. Schools Forum agree this each autumn as part of the usual school budget discussions.
11. For 2025-26 data suggests that there will be a small number of schools who could possibly qualify looking at provisional pupil data, however this is not finalised or confirmed. Therefore, it would be prudent to reduce the fund to £0.100m from £0.200m. This would mean that £0.100m would be redistributed into the schools block allocation.
12. Local authorities do have discretion over whether to operate a falling rolls fund and this can be reconsidered next year by Schools Forum. Where local authorities operate a fund, they will only be able to provide funding where the 2022 School Capacity survey (SCAP) 2022 shows that school places will be required in the subsequent 3 to 5 years. This SCAP requirement replaces previous guidance that funding may only be used where local planning data shows that the surplus places will be needed within the next 3 financial years.
13. Falling rolls will not affect schools in a uniform way – it is likely to hit certain types of school harder and could include scenarios such as:
  - Schools being financially stretched to "breaking point", with squeezed budgets – through less funding per pupil – exacerbated by the school funding crisis.

- School closures with the smallest schools arguably being the most vulnerable. There are 14 primary schools in Suffolk which to have fewer than 50 pupils and a further 55 which have 100 or fewer pupils.
- Teacher and support staff redundancies
- Bigger class sizes as schools compress year groups of three or four forms into fewer classes to cut costs
- Increased competition for places between schools
- Reduced funding to spend on resources and facilities. The school still must maintain their entire site, even if they are not using it all due to reduced pupil numbers.

14. The DfE criteria for allocating falling rolls funding should contain clear objective trigger points for qualification, and a clear formula for calculating allocations. The criteria have changed over the past year to make the funding slightly more accessible for schools that may potentially qualify. The following previous criteria items have been removed:

- schools judged good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection. **This has now been removed.**
- Local planning data shows a requirement for a minimum percentage of the surplus places within the next three years. **This has been expanded to 3 – 5 years**

### **Proposed revised criteria and methodology for funding**

15. Schools would need to contact to the Schools Infrastructure team in the first instance if there are any concerns around falling rolls / pupil numbers.

- The total number on roll has dropped by at least 5% between last October census and the previous year's October census
- The intake of pupils is less than 90% of the schools PAN. Funding would then be allocated based on the vacant places below the 90% using the relevant basic entitlement figures for each phase.
- School capacity data shows that school places will be required in the subsequent 3 to 5 years

16. The issue schools are facing is that the falling number of pupils on roll isn't a short term problem but more of a longer term one. This is a national issue.

17. We will write to the DfE to see if they are looking at the rationale for this area of funding and looking to support schools with falling rolls in a different way. However, if schools are seeing longer term reduction in pupil numbers, they should be taking strategic steps to ensure that budgets can continue to be balanced in subsequent years.

## Pupil Projections

18. Table 1 sets out the changes in the primary population in Suffolk since 2020, it also provides the pupil forecasts in the coming years (in yellow)

**Table 1 - Primary school population in Suffolk**

Year	Children of Reception age	Children starting school in R	Total pupil rolls	Total pupil rolls (including housing developments)
2020	8199	7647		54723
2021	7832	7507		54749
2022	7786	7412		54866
2023	7596	7171		54177
2024	7465	7150	53314	54755
2025	7155	6851	52233	54678
2026	7102	6837	51162	54389
2027	6775	6470	49711	53655
2028	6393	6153	48132	52767

19. The table shows the forecast fall in primary pupil numbers, from a total of 54723 pupils in 2020, to a forecast 49711 pupils prior to housing by 2027, and 53655, including the children forecast to arrive as a result of new housing developments. This is a fall of almost 1068 primary aged children. A significant fall can also be seen in the number of children entering reception, which has fallen from 7647 in 2020 to 7150 in 2024 and is forecast to fall to 6470 by 2027, a total fall of 1177 pupils across the county between 2020 and 2027.

20. Although the data includes forecasts for 2028, these are less reliable for primary school forecasts, as the children in this in year may have only just been born and there is a risk that the numbers may not be as accurate as those provided for 2027.

21. Although the housing clearly supports pupil numbers in the coming years, where there is a significant housing development or where schools are at capacity, it may be necessary to provide a new school to meet growing demand.

22. The effect this has on primary school rolls is significant, 125 primary schools are forecast to see a fall in roll between 2024 to '25 and 150 primary schools seeing a fall in rolls from 2024 to '27. Of this number only 1 school will see their numbers return to those seen in 2024 by the end of the 2027 and only 5 schools will see them return to previous levels by the end of the forecast

period ('28), therefore only 5 would be eligible for falling roll funding, if forecasts are accurate.

**Table 2**

Year	Children of Y11 age including housing (not including housing)	Children starting school in Y11 (not including housing)	Total pupil rolls	
			Not including housing	including housing developments
2020	7980			37555
2021	7942			37930
2022	8067			38512
2023	8256			39250
2024	8031	7892	39422	40067
2025	7950	7838	39645	40864
2026	7843	7738	39506	41156
2027	7841	7701	39288	41351
2028	7651	7485	38654	41100

23. In table 2 above, we see the importance of housing development in the forecast pupil numbers. The forecasts suggest that when housing is factored, total numbers on roll are forecast to increase by 3545 between 2020 and 2028. The number of secondary pupils is forecast to be at its peak in 2027, and based on pupil forecasts it is expected to continue to fall away following this date.

24. Capital projects may still be required in some areas where demand is increasing due to housing, however numbers will be monitored, and future forecast fall in population numbers will be factored in.

25. As a result of the previous birth rate peak now moving through secondary schools provision, only 17 secondary schools are forecast to experience a fall in roll between 2024 and 2028, with only 6 of those experiencing a fall of over 5%. 7 secondary schools are forecast to see a fall in rolls between 2024 and 25. Unfortunately, of those schools that see fall in roll over the next year, none of them see an increase in pupils to the numbers of 2024, by the end of the forecasting period (2028) and therefore none would be eligible for the falling roll funding.

26. ONS data suggests that the falling birth rates are a trend that is likely to continue, and it is uncertain if, or when, we will see numbers increase to the highs seen previously.

27. Given the data above and forecasts, schools should review their pupil forecasts, which are distributed annually, to identify if falling rolls are forecast for their school. Should falling rolls be forecast, maintained schools can access support from SCC to manage and plan future staffing and budgets and to ensure that the longer-term implications for the school are managed.