

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	EDU/9/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 30 May 2024

Report Title: School Roll Forecasts and Capacity Modelling

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report advises Members on the updated 15-year School Roll Forecasts (SRFs) that were published in April 2024 and the recent work undertaken to support the roll forecasting and school capacity modelling processes. There will be a presentation at the Committee meeting that will provide more information, including graphics to illustrate current statistics and future trends.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **NOTE** the updated 15-year SRFs and the recent work to establish a consistent approach to capacity modelling for all types of schools.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource:** The SRFs are a key component in establishing capital investment priorities, developer contributions and the management of the school estate.

3.2 **Legal:** The SRFs provide information to support statutory consultations in relation to proposed changes to the school estate.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island):** The SRFs provide key information on the issues facing schools in some rural and island areas in the future.

3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever:** There are no implications to report at this stage.

3.5 **Risk:** There are no implications to report at this stage.

3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no implications to report at this stage.

3.7 **Gaelic:** The SRFs help to identify future pressures in the provision of Gaelic Medium Education and to support funding bids to the Scottish Government.

4. School Roll Forecasting Process

- 4.1 The 15-year SRFs for the entire school estate are reviewed and updated annually. The forecasting methodology has been refined in recent years to improve the accuracy of the outputs. The process relies on close collaboration between Council teams and the expertise of external partners to ensure that all data used is as accurate as possible.
- 4.2 The annual review starts with a baseline of the pupil numbers at the start of each school session and the current school capacity information. It then incorporates a range of variable factors, such as Scottish Government population projections, new child registrations from the Community Health Index, local migration patterns and the impact of new house builds.
- 4.3 The Housing Land Audit provides information on the forecasted phasing of new housing developments. Applying established pupil yield ratios for each location produces an estimate of the number of enrolments from new housing in each school catchment area over the 15-year period.
- 4.4 The Housing Land Audit has several purposes; to monitor the availability of effective sites; to identify progress of sites through the planning process; and to provide analysis on new house completion rates. A link to the Housing Land Information on the Council's website is below.
[Housing land information | Housing land information | The Highland Council](#)
- 4.5 The implications of the updated SRFs and Housing Land Audit are factored into the Council's Delivery and Action Programmes that set out the timescales and actions for the delivery of development and infrastructure for each of our local development plans. A link to the Delivery Programme information on the Council's website is below.
[Delivery Programmes | Delivery Programmes | The Highland Council](#)
- 4.6 As the Scottish Government has not yet published the full data from the 2022 Census, the recent review of the SRFs used the latest available interim publication as recommended by both the National Records of Scotland and the Office for National Statistics. A link to the SRFs published on the Council website in April is below.
[Current school roll forecasts | School roll forecasts | The Highland Council](#)
- 4.7 The updated SRFs produce data that can be used to analyse trends in geographical areas as well as for each school and Associated School Group. However, the overall position across the Highland area is that the total number of school age children is projected to fall by almost 10% over the next 5 years, and then by over 7% in the subsequent 5 years, as set out in the table below.

	Total Number of Pupils	Percentage Reduction	Cumulative Percentage Reduction
September 2023 Census	33,353	N/A	N/A
Forecast for 2028/29	30,012	10.0%	N/A
Forecast for 2033/34	27,818	7.3%	16.6%

- 4.8 The report to the Council meeting in December 2023, “Assessing Future Population Related Challenges in the Highland Council Area”, contains information on the population trends affecting the Highland area and the resulting challenges.
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/82662/item_9_assessing_future_population_related_challenges_in_the_highland_council_area

5. School Capacity Modelling

- 5.1 Planning Capacity is a measure of the number of pupils that could be accommodated in a school, based on the number and size of teaching spaces, the different maximum class sizes for year groups in primary schools, and the accommodation required for practical subjects in secondary schools. A consistent basis to calculating the capacity of all schools is essential for the following reasons:
1. **Forward Planning:** The assessment of the need for future investment in the school estate (e.g., new builds, extensions, improvements) and to anticipate the impact of new housing to secure appropriate developer contributions.
 2. **Curricular and Organisational Needs:** To establish the number of children that the school can deliver the curriculum to, and to assess the implications of any new standards or changes to methodologies and resource requirements.
 3. **Placing Requests:** To provide information to assist in the consideration of placing requests and identifying schools that are currently over capacity or may exceed capacity in the future.
 4. **Calculation of Performance Indicators:** Accurate capacity and roll information for each school to monitor and evaluate the usage of school places.
 5. **Informing Consultations on Proposed Changes to the School Estate:** To meet legal requirements to provide clear, accurate information in consultations on changes to the school estate that the public can have confidence in.
 6. **Impact of Changes in Policy:** To take account of any revised Scottish Government priorities and objectives, such as class sizes, teachers’ terms and conditions, changes to policy and guidance, and the facilities required to deliver the curriculum.
- 5.2 The Report from the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education published in 2013 proposed that “A consistent approach to school capacity modelling should be agreed between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities”.
- 5.3 The Scottish Government issued the guidance document “Determining Primary School Capacity” in 2014 and this was subsequently adopted by Highland Council. The guidance stated that “Following consultation with Local Authorities, it was generally agreed that providing guidance on calculating Secondary School capacities was not a priority at this time.”
- 5.4 The Service Lead (Capital Planning and Estate Strategy) has been leading on a workstream on Secondary School Capacity Modelling with colleagues from the Northern Alliance, the Regional Improvement Collaborative between eight local authorities across the north and west of Scotland. The outcome of the work to date was presented to a meeting of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland in March 2024. Other local authorities were invited to review the methodology that has been developed and several have agreed to participate.

5.5 The current target is to complete this workstream by the end of June, after which the proposed methodology and user guidance can be considered for adoption across Scotland. This will result in a consistent approach to determining the Planning Capacity of all primary and secondary schools. Although local authorities are not required to report to the Scottish Government on the capacity of Special Schools, a separate exercise is underway to establish a consistent approach to this as well.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The information from the SRFs and school capacity modelling exercise will be a key component in the work now being undertaken following the approval of the report on the Highland Investment Plan at the Council meeting earlier this month.
- 6.2 Once the pupil enrolment figures for the 2024/25 school session are available, then the annual review process will begin again. The aim is to publish the updated SRFs by the end of 2024, subject to the availability of the required information.
- 6.3 Any changes to the Planning Capacities of schools resulting from the proposed methodology outlined in Section 5 will be incorporated into the annual review.
- 6.4 It is proposed that reports will be presented to this Committee each year once the review process has been completed and the updated SRFs are available.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 20 May 2024

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