Appendix B - Developing Proposals

1.1 The council's approach to addressing the issue of reducing demand for school places due to falling numbers of children in the city has developed over time. Initially where governing bodies have wanted to reduce their PAN these requests have been accommodated.

1.2 More recently the focus has been upon looking at where pupils are living and adjusting the number of places available to align with the number of children requiring places. There has also been a focus upon larger primary schools where the impact of a reduction in a form of entry would have less of a proportionate effect on that school.

1.3 The council has also focussed on, or proposing changes of, a full form of entry (30 places) to minimise the impact of schools having to adjust to mixed age classes and the demands that would put on teachers.

1.4 The recent determinations by the Schools Adjudicator has required the council to adapt its local approach to reflect the principles outlined in the school admission code.

1.5 The Schools Adjudicator has made the following observations:

1.6 "many schools educate children successfully without having groups of approaching 30 children of the same year group; many have classes with more than one year group, often known as mixed age classes. Mixed age classes may be less popular with parents and are more complicated to manage but I do not accept that it is necessary for every school in the local authority area to have a PAN that is a multiple of 30 in order for it to operate in an educationally effective and financially sustainable manner".

1.7 "Planning areas are useful tools but many parents prefer their children to attend schools outside of the planning area in which they live, as suits their circumstances."

1.8 "The evidence shows that the local authority has reduced the PAN at the school in order to secure an effect that 30 children every year will attend other schools so that the budgets and futures of these other schools are protected. This will clearly significantly frustrate parental preference and so would need powerful justification."

1.9 "I have been provided with no evidence and I have seen none in the committee report provided to me that any school is at risk of closure if the number of vacant places across the local authority is not reduced. Therefore I do not consider the stated potential risk of other schools closing as a justification for reducing the PAN at the school"

1.10 There is, however, little evidence that the parents of more than 30 children will want to attend the school…therefore I see a risk to the school and its financial situation if the PAN were to be set at 60 without creating any

particular benefit. That risk is shared with the local authority which is also the admission authority".

1.11　　As a result, the council is seeking to remove surplus school places where there will be limited frustration of parental preference. In other words, reducing places at schools which are currently not admitting up to, or close to, their PAN.

1.12　　In addition, the council is proposing four schools reduce by half a form of entry (15 pupils), admitting 45 pupils instead of 60 pupils.

1.13　　Decisions were taken based on the pattern of applications and the numbers of pupils forecast to be living in the area. This would mean that over time the schools are likely to see the following pattern of classes.

1.14　　For the benefit of this modelling no account of the forms of entry in other year groups in the school has been considered. It is possible that where there are surplus places in other years groups different groupings could be put in place.

Calendar Year		Chronological Year Groups							Classes	Total
		Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6		
Year 1		45								45
		23 | 22							2	45
Year 2		45	45							90
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1							
		30	30 | 30						3	90
Year 3		45	45	45						135
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1	Year 2						
		30	30 | 30	23 | 22					4	135
Year 4		45	45	45	45					180
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1	Year 2	Year 2/3　Year 3					
		30	30 | 30	30	30 | 30				6	180
Year 5		45	45	45	45					225
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1	Year 2　Year 2	Year 3　Year 3/4	Year 4				
		30	30 | 30	23 | 22	30 | 30	30			8	225
Year 6		45	45	45	45	45				270
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1	Year 2　Year 2	Year 3　Year 3/4	Year 4	Year 5　Year 5			
		30	30 | 30	23 | 22	30 | 30	30	23 | 22		10	270
Year 7		45	45	45	45	45	45	45		315
		Year R	Year R/1　Year 1	Year 2　Year 2	Year 3　Year 3/4	Year 4	Year 5　Year 5/6	Year 6		
		30	30 | 30	23 | 22	30 | 30	30	30 | 30	30	11	315

1.15　　There is research into the effect of mixed age groups in primary education and one overview of national and international research from the Cambridge Open-Review Educational Research e-Journal vol 6 2019 pp165-179, examines 28 significant studies in this area. On the issue of attainment, this research overview paper states:

1.16　　'The majority of studies identified no significant differences in mixed-age or single-grade student performance and about an equal number found either slight positive or negative significant results.' (P.170)

1.17　　While no clear evidence re outcomes for pupils, the overview cites research that indicates parent views tend to be negative as do teachers where there is a conviction that these groupings increase organisational and time demands on teachers. Mixed-age students in one study were found to have

more negative views of their own behaviour and believe themselves to be less popular.

1.18   In summary, research does not seem to indicate much impact on attainment, but seems to indicate that teachers and parents prefer a 'single-grade' system because they fear negative consequences and teachers fear the additional organisational demands on their time. There does not seem to be much hard evidence of benefits.

1.19   Regarding OfSTED, they have found that the structure and organisation of a class should not on its own affect the quality of education. However, their research indicates that streaming does not improve pupil outcomes and if schools are mixing ages and can have an adverse effect on some pupil groups. It would not therefore be desirable if schools began to organise classes by perceived ability. There is also the potential for disadvantaged pupils to be adversely affected through bias or perception, in effect being kept in the "lower" sets or groups. In exam/assessment years schools may consider it appropriate to keep pupils separate for at least part of the day which could lead to additional resourcing and financial challenges for the school.