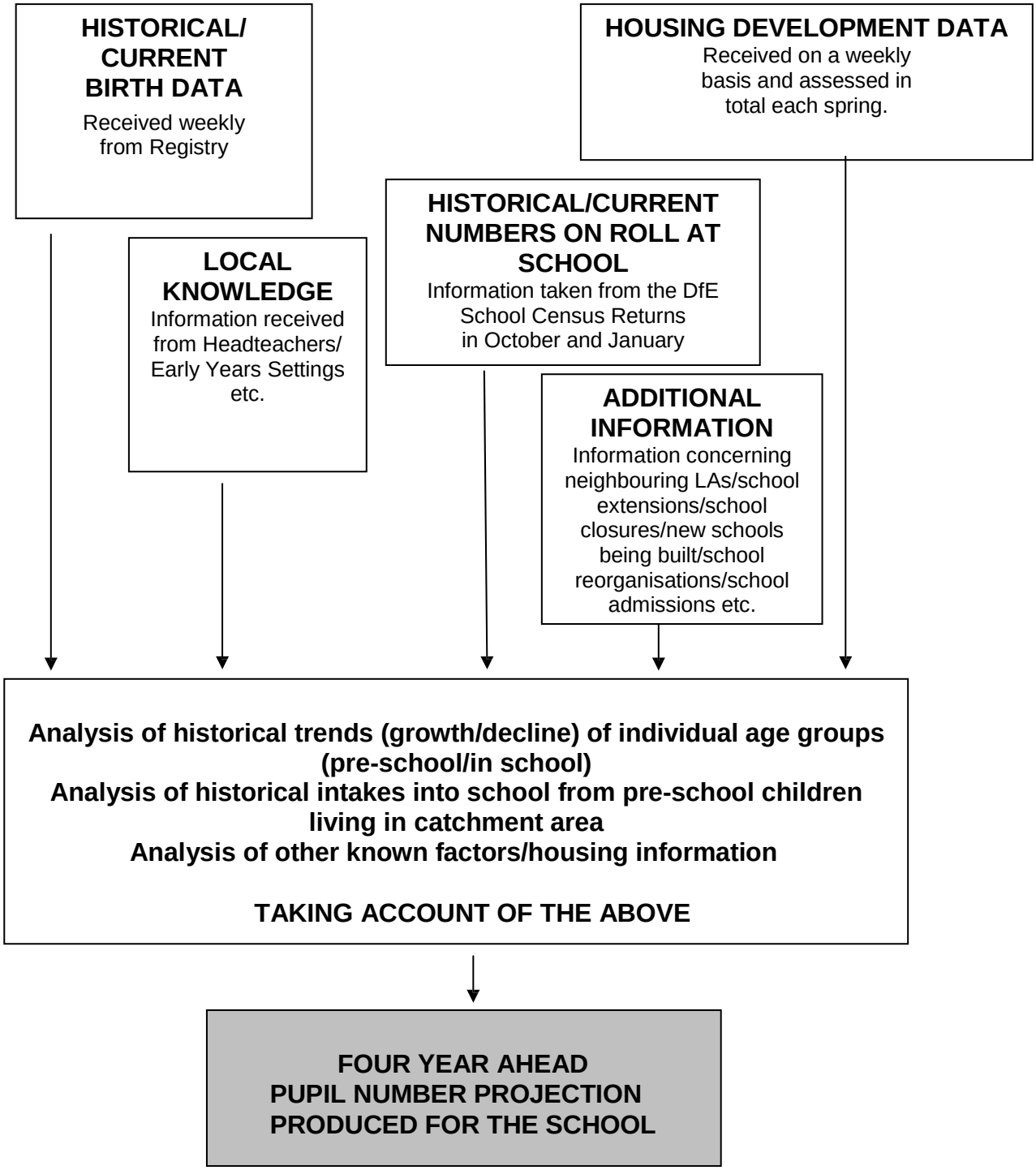
PROJECTING PUPIL NUMBERS FOR A PRIMARY (4 to 11) SCHOOL

FACTORS TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION



Forecasting

Following the DfE January School Census exercise, the numbers on roll at all schools is known. Each year the intention is to produce pupil number projections, based on these January numbers on roll, for the borough as a whole, for the cluster areas and individual schools in each cluster area.

For reception admissions the birth rate four year previous is used as a base and historical percentage of birth to admission is used. In Southend on Sea this percentage is, on average, 95.4%, however for some school cluster areas the percentage can be as high as 124% (Eastwood Cluster).

For year seven admissions the year six numbers along with the percentage gain (currently 18%) based on historical data is calculated.

The recent higher birth rate has now settled, but at a higher rate. The first cohorts of the increases will enter secondary from September 2018 and this is expected to increase the gross gain from year six to seven as neighbouring authorities pupil populations increase in the same way. This gain is influenced by the following

- Pupils travel in from Essex principally to attend the grammar and faith schools.
- Pupils from private schools in the borough gain places in the grammar, faith and other secondary schools.
- Pupils also travel from Southend to Rochford and Castle Point.

Housing

Each year, during the spring term, data gathered throughout the year regarding housing developments approved and submitted to the planning authority. The information collected for each site (however large or small) includes the tenure (private/housing association/mixed), the actual start and end dates of developments, the annual completions and, in some instances, the type of dwelling e.g. bungalow/flat/house etc. Also, at the time of the survey, the number of dwellings which are under construction is collected as is the number of dwellings which are outstanding i.e. dwellings planned but yet to be constructed. The housing developments are then allocated to schools' catchment areas.

Incorporating the effect of new housing developments into a school's projection can presents difficulties. There are a significant number of factors which need to be considered such as:

- when the planned housing development is due to begin
- what the construction rate is likely to be - developers can change the rate and type of build at short notice which is difficult to predict/track; the new housing may not be completed and occupied according to the originally planned timescales.

- what type of accommodation is to be built - certain properties are likely to have more children living within them than others e.g. more expensive houses tend to have fewer children living within them; the dwellings could be second homes, retirement communities; are the new developments likely to attract new residents with school-age children?
- the impact of on-going housing developments causing 'internal' migration may already be reflected in the historical uptake factors which have been determined and used to produce projections at year group level for a school, through increases over time in the cohort survival rate - this may well be the case if the developments have been taking place for some while.
- it can sometimes take a while for a new housing development to impact on the demand for school places in the local area e.g. there may be no initial effect, followed by a bulge effect after 2 or 3 years which then tails away.
- housing developments may not actually increase the overall number of children attending schools in an area, but they may have an impact on where the children go to school in that area, particularly if there is a corresponding pattern of demolition. Therefore, increasing pupil numbers at a school due to new housing may result in decreasing numbers at another school.

When producing the forecast for a school, the housing development information for the school's catchment area is noted.

Conclusion

Producing pupil number projections is not an exact science but the results need to be reliable. Historical Trends can supply this reliable base, especially across cluster areas and the Borough as a whole.

Assumptions need to be made using the evidence and information available at the time of making the projection, with any 'significant' assumptions along with reasons being clearly noted on the projection.

Accurate projection of pupil numbers can be made more difficult by one-off events such as a new housing development, change of school management or loss of parental confidence following a bad Ofsted report. School level projections are much more difficult to produce accurately than for the local authority as a whole.

A school level forecast needs to take account of the individual circumstances at that school. School level forecasts therefore can, and invariably do, change from year to year.

They remain the best estimate that can be arrived at, using data that is known at the time of producing the forecast.