

Report to OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY SELECT COMMITTEE

School Places Application Process

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21 March 2019

Purpose of the Report

To provide a briefing and update to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee (PVFM) on the school places application process.

To provide a statistical analysis of the allocation of school places over recent years to include the following:-

- Places Available
- Take up of places
- The percentage of residents who are offered a school place of choice (1st and 2nd preferences)
- The number of parents missing the school places application deadline
- An overview of schemes and initiatives designed to assist parents when applying for a school place.
- Overview of the current school place plans
- Future plans to increase parental choice.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the committee note the contents of the report and feedback any comments and suggestions to the Director of Education and Early Years and the Head of School Support Services. It is also recommended that a follow up report is provided to show evidence of improvements in the application process and the number of parents gaining a school place of their choice.

School Places Application Process

1 Background

1.1 The School Application Process:-

Allocation of Places

All school applications for allocation are through the Oldham Council website. <https://www.oldham.gov.uk/admissions>

Parents fill in the application online which is briefly as follows:-

Step-by-step guide to online applications

1. *Create an account (email and password required).*
2. *Verify your account (you'll be sent an email).*
3. *Click the link at the bottom of the email and sign in.*
4. *Continue with your application.*
5. *Add your child's details and the schools you are applying for.*
6. *Select the reasons for choosing the school(s) - e.g. sibling.*
7. *Check you have selected the correct schools and listed them in the right order.*
8. *Tick that you have read the disclaimer.*
9. *Print a copy of the summary.*
10. *Submit the application.*
11. *Check your email for confirmation.*

Once they have completed and submitted an application they simply wait for offer day and receive their email.

In year transfers

If parents wish to transfer their child to another school 'in year', the process is very similar. The LA coordinate transfers for the majority of schools in Oldham but for some schools parents have to go too directly to the school.

Parents apply on line and the previous school completes the background information. A place is then looked at by the Admissions Team.

The LA run drop ins on Thursday mornings at the One Stop Shop with staff from the Admissions Team available to support all types of applications.

1.2 School Allocation Data (Secondary)

Appendix One shows the detail of the number of places available in Oldham Secondary and Primary Schools for the years 2015 to 2019. In 2015 81% of parents were allocated a place in their preferred first choice of school, this dropped to 79 % in 2016, 73 % in 2017 and 2018 and has improved in 2019 to 74%. There has been significant pressure on places in the secondary sector in recent years due to an increasing population and the rapid expansion of a number of primary schools. In addition two secondary schools were closed by the Dfe in 2017 (Collective Spirit and the GMUTC). These closures put additional pressure on places in the borough.

1.3 **School Allocation Data (Primary).**

Appendix One shows the detail of the number of places in Oldham Primary Schools. The primary sector has been significantly expanded in the years 2011 to date in order to address demand caused by a rising population. In 2015 90 % of parents were allocated a place in their preferred first choice of primary school, this has stayed relatively static in the years 2015- 2019 rising to 92.5 % in 2016 and is currently at 90% for 2019.

2 **Current Position**

2.1 We are aware that improvements can be to the Admissions Process and work is already underway to increase the number of places available for pupils at good and outstanding schools. Once these places become available we strongly anticipate that the number of residents gaining a place at their first preference school will increase significantly. Increased provision of good and outstanding places will also help to reduce the number of school appeals in future years.

There are current plans to increase secondary schools places in the following:

Crompton House Academy – 112 additional places available in 2019
North Chadderton Academy – 30 additional places available in 2018
Oldham Academy North - 30 additional places available in 2019
Free School Wave 13. The LA is supporting a bid from Cranmer Trust to open a new secondary school in the town centre in 2022 providing an additional 240 places.

There are current plans to increase primary school places in the following schools/areas:-

East Oldham – 1 FE expansion in 2020 (not yet approved)
Clarksfield Primary School – 1 FE expansion in 2019
Free School Wave 13. There is a bid currently in place to open a new 2 FE Primary School in the Chadderton Area in 2020/21.

All these expansions will have a positive effect on the number of parents gaining a place for their children at a school of their choice.

Please note we are expecting announcements on Wave 13 Free School bids in Spring 2019.

Appendix Two provides a more detailed breakdown of the number of capital projects currently ongoing in the borough.

2.2 **Late Applications**

Any application received after the closing date is recorded as late. Once the offer dates have passed for primary and secondary offers, all applications that are on a waiting list are ordered by the oversubscription criteria and not by the date the application was received. Late applications are recorded until August (this is an IT system default).

The number of late applications received in Oldham is comparable to Tameside - who confirmed that of their 2759 received, 309 were recorded as late (11.20%). We have requested data on late application from other councils but at the time of writing these have not been received. We will continue to chase this data and provide it as soon as we are able.

The demographics of Oldham presents a significant challenge together with the high levels of migrants moving into Oldham who are not familiar with the application process. This is currently being addressed by the Emerging Communities Team who will be

running drop in sessions every month at Oldham Library to give new arrivals an opportunity to find out about services and what's on offer in Oldham. This will include advice on school places.

How Oldham school admissions inform and supports parents

In September, all maintained school nurseries receive leaflets to distribute to parents and posters to display in their settings. Posters are also sent out to libraries and children centers.

The Family Information service emails the PVI's and childminders a copy of the leaflet and poster. All settings are asked to inform parents of the application process and timeline to apply through their newsletters and webpages.

The LA sends an information letter to all primary schools. The letter is printed off by the school and given to each child in nursery and a separate letter to pupils in Year 6. Similarly, a year 5 letter is also sent to the primary schools to be handed to the pupil before the end of the summer holidays.

Oldham Councils marketing and communications team send out regular Facebook messages and tweets regarding the importance of application.

The School Admissions website contains comprehensive information and advises parents of the 'help' sessions that are available every Thursday in the Civic Centre (Access Oldham) from 10.00 am to 12 noon. Members of the public can also complete applications throughout the week at the Civic Centre (Access Oldham) supported by the 'Do it on line Team'

For reception and Year 6, the schools can view through SAM (school admissions module) which parents have made applications for their school (does not guarantee a place in reception) or secondary school. Oldham schools are active in encouraging parents to apply on time.

The Contact Centre provides information and advice to parents. Calls that are deemed to be 'level 3' are passed through to school admissions team to answer. As part of their continued training, the Contact Centre staff also support with the Thursday help sessions and come and work with the school admissions team. Q&A's and training is refreshed each year.

The School admissions team respond to emails well within the 10 day expected turnaround.

During the summer the school admission team contacts parents to establish why they have not made an application and to ensure a school place is allocated or the pupil's destination is recorded i.e. independent school.

2.3 Future Plans to Reduce the Number of late applications

We intend to speak to the marketing and communications team about how we can improve our lines of communication with parents. Regular reminders are sent to primary heads/offices to support parents to make applications on time. In addition the family information service to send regular reminders to PVI's and childminders.

We will consider targeting particular communities for example through targeting marketing in community centres and shopping centres/community hubs.

We will also look at targeting marketing internally to social workers and public health teams to further disseminate the message and importance about applying for a school place on time.

Finally we will undertake a survey parent/careers to explore the reasons for the reason(s) for making a late application and use this information to improve service delivery next year.

3 **Key Issues for Overview and Scrutiny to Discuss**

- 3.1 The key challenges for the borough and the school admissions service are to maximize the number of good and outstanding school places available to parents. This will result in more parents gaining a place in the school of their choice. We would be keen to hear of any other suggestions members may have that would reduce late applications.

4 **Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider**

- 4.1 I would like to provide an update to the board at this time next year when some of the expansions in the secondary and primary sectors will have taken effect. I anticipate that the number of first preference allocations will increase at that point. I would also appreciate the opportunity to update the board on the implementation of the recommendations made in the report to engage further with the community and reduce the number of late or non-applications. In addition I would also like to opportunity to update members on what I anticipate will be a reduction in the number of appeals.

5. **Links to Corporate Outcomes**

- 5.1 A key link is the ambition to develop a co-operative service with the LA Admissions taking ownership to drive change and continue to work with a resident focus.

6 **Additional Supporting Information**

- 6.1 Please see attached appendices.

7 **Consultation**

- 7.1 N/a

8 **Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix One – School Place Data
8.2 Appendix Two – Capital Works Update
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