

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

Delivery of Additional School Places and Admissions

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Purpose of the Report

To provide a briefing and update to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee (PVFM) on delivery of additional school places and admissions.

To provide an update on the delivery of additional school places and the work of the Admissions Team including: -

- Pupil Numbers
- Allocation of school places by preference
- The percentage of residents who are offered a school place of choice (1st and 2nd 3rd 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 Interim Director of Education and Early Years and the Head of School Support Services.

Additional School Places and Admissions

1 Background

1.1 School Places and Pupil Numbers: -

The demand for school places in Oldham has increased significantly in recent years, in 2019 there were around 42,000 school age children by 2024 this will have increased to 45,000 and by 2028 to almost 47,000 pupils.

The Council has a statutory role to ensure that every child in the borough has a school place. In addition to this it is the clear aim of the Council is to go beyond statutory requirements and ensure that these places are in good or outstanding schools and that as many people as possible are offered a place in a school of their choice.

The Council has an Education Provision Strategy for 2020 to 2024 which outlines our approach to school places for that period a copy of which is attached to this report. (Appendix One)

1.2 School Allocation Data (Secondary)

Appendix Two shows the detail 1st to 3rd preferences in Oldham. In 2015 81% of parents were allocated a place in their preferred first choice of secondary school, this dropped to 79 % in 2016, 73 % in 2017 and 2018, 74% in 2019 and 75% in 2020. 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 and the closure of two secondary schools (Collective Spirit and the UTC). This additional pressure should reduce as new provision fully opens in the form of Oasis Leesbrook (2021) and Bluecoat 2 (2022 or 2023). For reference the national average is around 82%

1.3 School Allocation Data (Primary).

Appendix Two 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 as a result of 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 91% in 2019 and 2020.

2 Current Position (Secondary and Primary School Places)

2.1 In recent years we have increased the number of places available for pupils at good and outstanding secondary schools. Further work is currently being undertaken to provide additional places in Oldham. As these places become available the number of residents gaining a place at a school of their choice will increase. Increased provision of good and outstanding places will also help to reduce the number of school appeals in future years.

There have been recent increases and further proposed increases in secondary school places at the following schools/academies:

Crompton House Academy – 112 additional places from 2019
North Chadderton Academy – 30 additional places from 2018
Oldham Academy North - 30 additional places from 2019
Oasis Leesbrook -150 additional places from 2021

Bluecoat 2 – 240 additional places from 2022 or 2023

There are a number of recent increases and future planned increases in primary school places in the following schools/areas: -

Mayfield Primary School– 1 FE expansion in 2020

Clarksfield Primary School – 1 FE expansion in 2019

Free School Wave 13. There is a bid currently in place to open a new 1 FE Primary School in the Chadderton Area. 2 Local Trusts are currently being considered by the Dfe.

These expansions and new builds will have a positive effect on the number of parents gaining a place for their children at a school of their choice. This in turn should also have a significant impact on the number of appeals for school places.

Appendix Three shows the number of appeals although this year's figures are not fully available it looks very likely that there will be a downward trend.

2.2 **Update on Late Applications**

Late applications run until the end of August, so this year's final total is not yet known. However, comparison with the secondary late applications with last year's figures is very encouraging. Last year the LA recorded 229 late applications, this year that figure stands at 135. This is unlikely to move up by many before the end of August and shows a significant decrease. The primary comparison is also encouraging with 391 recorded for 2019 and 270 so far for 2020.

A lot of work has been done by the admissions team to chase up partly completed applications. Increased marketing also takes place including posters and signs within the One Stop Shop entrance. The team also reintroduced their attendance at open evenings. It is believed this supported both the decrease in late applications and also reduced the number of redirected pupils in the secondary sector, 9% 2020 compared to 11% in 2019. Constant communications took place between the team and primary schools to increase the focus on families who are yet to apply and make sure they are fully supported.

How Oldham school admissions inform and support parents

As outlined in my update in 2019 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'.

Unfortunately this support was halted once national lockdown measures were introduced, therefore the drop in sessions are currently on hold. The admissions team call parents back who need to speak to the team whilst the working from home arrangements are in place. This seems to be running well and there have been no complaints around this amended and hopefully temporary change to the service.

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 will continue to expand only good or outstanding provision in order to meet the preferences of parents.

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

4.1 I would be happy to provide a further update to the board at this time next year when some of the expansions in the secondary and primary sectors will have taken full effect. I anticipate that the number of first, second and third preference allocations in the secondary sector will further increase at that point. In addition, I would also like to opportunity to update members on what I anticipate will be a further 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 detailing place allocation, appeals data and the current provision strategy.

7 **Consultation**

7.1 N/a

8 **Appendices**

8.1 Appendix One – Education Provision Strategy 2020-2024

8.2 Appendix Two – Place Preferences Data

8.3 Appendix Three – Appeals Data