

 Brent	<p style="text-align: center;">Schools Forum 18th September 2013</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Director of Children & Families</p>
For Information	
Budget Review of Admissions & Pupil support	

Consultation and Decision Making Points

The council has a duty to consult and seek views from the Schools Forum regarding the DSG funded element of the combined budgets covered in this report and this report represents part of the on-going process of consulting on DSG contributions with the Forum. The outcome of this review would be taken into account in setting the 2014/15 Schools Budget.

1 Summary and Report Structure

- 1.1 This report is one of a series of reports that allow the forum to review and challenge the spending on services provided by the council and funded through DSG. It reviews the work which has been carried out by Brent Customer Services and Pupil and Parent services, in relation to schools admissions, free school meals and home to school transport.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2: Provides an introduction and background to the arrangements for managing schools admissions, free school meals and home to school travel.
- Section 3: Provides details of the context of the services provided
- Section 4: Provides details of improvements and progress made in 2012/13 and 2013/14 year to date
- Section 5 : Provides details of comparative benchmarking information
- Section 6 : Provides detail of the costs of providing the services

- 1.2 Officers are aware of concerns a number of schools had regarding the admissions process last September and the Customer Services team is addressing the process issues raised by schools.

A number of changes have been made to working procedures for September 2013 to ensure vacancies are obtained, offered and cleared down more speedily.

These include:

- Working more closely with schools to ensure vacancies are captured immediately rather than waiting for the Friday update on SAM

- Offers made every day of the week replacing the previous practice of making offers on 2 days of the week
- Parents given 3 days to contact the school and arrange a start date rather than 7 days which was the previous timescale.
- Implementation of a document management system which improves management information on applications received and processed, allowing better monitoring to ensure they are loaded on tribal within 5 days of receipt unless all the information needed is not available

An online application for In Year school places is now available which allows parents to apply via the Brent website; this further improves the speed of applications as they are downloaded every day.

An online application for free school meals has been implemented so parents can apply for and receive immediate notification of their entitlement to a free school meal. Schools received next day notification of the entitlement via SAM.

2 Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide sufficient school places for all children in their area and to ensure that all children are offered a school place. Whilst the administration of school applications can vary from school to school, the fundamental responsibility to ensure that every child is provided with access to formal education remains with the Local Authority.
- 2.2 In Brent responsibility for administering schools admissions currently rests within the Council. Provision is made to process applications for schools, free school meals, home to school travel and develop policies and procedures to govern the overall admission process. This process covers the point from which an application is made to the point at which the child accepts a place or is referred to Educational Welfare because they remain out of school.
- 2.3 All of these functions were previously carried out within Children and Families Department. However following a Council wider review of Customer Contact arrangements in 2011, some aspects of the service were transferred into a new Brent Customer Services Unit. These functions included the management of schools admissions in year and coordinated for primary and secondary), administration of free school meals and home to school transport.

The Children & Families Pupil and Parent services unit continues to manage the appeals process (community schools), assessment centres for children of secondary school age, fairer access panels and educational welfare. In addition Pupil and Parent services take lead responsibility for the development of admissions policies and for place planning to ensure that future provision is sufficient to meet demand for places.

- 2.4 Brent Customer Services costs in relation to schools admission and related functions are recharged to the Dedicated Schools Grant through Children & Families on an annual basis. These costs are agreed on the basis of agreed resource levels and are checked and scrutinised by Children and Families to ensure that they have been fairly stated, before funding is agreed.
- 2.5 The main roles of Pupil and parent services are as follows:
- Processing applications for coordinated primary school admissions
 - Processing applications for coordinated secondary schools admissions

- Processing in year applications for primary school
- Processing in year applications for secondary school
- Submitting details of primary schools coordinated admissions to Pan London and updates at each iteration of the offer process
- Submitting details of secondary schools coordinated admissions to Pan London and updates at each iteration of the offer process
- Identifying, offering and chasing acceptance for in year applications
- Maintaining details of vacancies at all Brent schools
- Administering free school meal applications
- Administering home to school travel applications
- Responding to all enquiries about schools admissions, free school meals and home to school travel via Phone, Email, On Line Applications and correspondence (including complaints, MP and Member enquiries)

3.0 Context of Service Provision

3.1 The following summarises the key aims of the schools admission service in Brent:

- To provide a good school place for every child
- To offer places parents want for their children where this is possible
- To ensure all children are in school
- To increase provision through permanent and temporary expansions
- To provide good quality, fit for purpose school buildings which enable children to thrive and achieve their potential
- To provide an efficient and responsive admissions service for Parents, Schools and Members

3.2 Brent has a growing and transient population and this presents some difficult challenges in meeting demand for school places, particularly in the case of applications which are received during the academic year. Between 2001 and 2011 Brent's population increased by 18% rising from 263,464 to 311,215 respectively. The population of 0-4 year olds increased by 37.7% and for 5-19 year olds by 12.1%. The overall school population has increased by 5% since 2010, with a total of 45,154 children at school compared to 42,972 in 2010.

3.3 In 2012/13 there were 4356 applications for reception places in September 2012. There were 2996 applications for secondary school transfer in September 2012. During the academic year a further 3976 in year applications were received (primary and secondary) a number of which concerned children who were not attending school and required a place urgently. Whilst plans have been made to create additional school places to meet this demand, places are often not available in areas or in schools that parents are prepared to accept. This generates high volumes of contacts from parents, MPs and Councillors in relation to offers made, waiting list positions or general dissatisfaction.

4.0 Progress Achieved in 2012/13 and To Date

4.1 Since the new arrangements were implemented in January 2012, Brent Customer Services and Pupil and Parent services have been working closely together to improve the overall service to schools and families. Given the high volumes of applications received every year and the high volumes of contacts made in respect of enquiries about these, one of the earliest priorities was to ensure that applications were processed quickly so that timely offers could be made, in particular in relation to children who did not have a current school place.

4.2 At the time of transfer to Brent Customer Services, all applications were paper based making it difficult to resolve telephone enquiries or face to face enquiries without trawling paper files. Improvements have been achieved through the implementation of an electronic document management system (EDM) which was introduced in the spring of 2012. The EDM system

converts all paperwork related to a child's application to an electronic case file which then enables information to be retrieved quickly and easily without the need to refer to hard copies of the papers. This means enquiries can be resolved by any officer, including customer services officers based in the Council's Customer Service Centres.

- 4.3 The introduction of the EDM system has been complimented by efforts to significantly increase the number of coordinated schools admissions that are received on line. On line submission of secondary school applications has increased from 51% in 2011 to 93% in 2012 and primary school on line applications from 51% to 84 %. The on line process enables parents to amend preferences through the portal, receive on line acknowledgement that it has been received, email offer of a place and the ability to accept or reject a place offered on line. The self service facilities available through the on line portal are enabling staff on the schools admissions team to focus more time on placing children who have not yet had an offer and where necessary referring children who are out of school to Educational Welfare.
- 4.4 Since January 2012 all telephone calls to the schools admissions team have been handled through an Automated Call Distribution system (ACD). This technology enables callers to be routed to the first available officer, to be advised of likely waiting time and provided with the option to leave a message. Reports from the ACD system have enabled us to develop a much better understanding of the volumes of calls received and the extent to which we have been able to answer them.
- 4.5 A dedicated School telephone line was introduced in September 2012. The implementation of this has resulted in school enquiries being dealt with in a more prompt and timely manner. In addition to this, a dedicated School mail box was also set up in July this year for schools emails. The team have been able to manage emails more effectively by having separate mail boxes for Schools and Parents.
- 4.6 There are still a number of parents who prefer to make enquiries about school applications at the Council's customer access points. Up until January 2012 these enquiries were made at Chesterfield House however since the transfer of the Schools admissions team to Brent Customer Services, these enquiries have been dealt with at Brent House (Civic Centre from June 2013) and Harlesden Customer Services centres. Brent Customer Services has a team of Customer Services officers who are trained to handle a range of enquiries including schools admissions and this has provided greater capacity to handle peaks in contacts typically experienced during the schools admissions process.
- 4.7 A detailed Service Level agreement (SLA) has been agreed between Brent Customer Services and Pupil and Parent services specifying the standards of service that we aim to achieve. The key performance indicators are as follows:
1. In Year applications are input on Tribal within 5 working days of receipt and acknowledged.
 2. Coordinated applications are input prior to the first round of data matching in line with the timelines stated in the Business User Guide.
 3. Applications for FSM and travel grant are processed within 5 working days of receipt
 4. No child will be out of school without an offer more than 10 days unless there are no vacancies to offer.
 5. Offers made are cleared down within 14 days of the offer or 7 days at key annual events such as census
 6. Quality checks on data accuracy for applications achieve 95%
 7. 95% of all enquiries are fully resolved or sign posted effectively by Customer Services at first contact
 8. Abandon Rate – No more than 10% of calls after initial recorded greeting. This is subject to peaks and local variation.

9. Complaints made against Customer Services with regards to school admissions processing, customer care , that are upheld is less than 0.05% of all contacts
10. 80% of schools, when surveyed, are satisfied, or very satisfied with the service provided by Customer Services
11. Length of time taken to refer a child out of school to Education Welfare Service

Current performance against SLA standards are set out below:

1. 90% of calls answered –
 - a. Resources within the team have to be balanced between answering calls, responding to emails and processing work. Call answer rates have steadily improved from 60% in March '13 to 67% in July 2013. There are further improvements that need to be made however prompt processing of applications and offers are critical to managing customer contacts.
2. All applications input within 5 working days -
 - a. It has taken time to develop accurate systems for measuring speed of processing for applications as this information is not easily reported via the Tribal system used to administer admissions. Reports have been developed through the EDM system and these will enable reporting from July 2013. There is some further work that needs to be undertaken for the team to improve processing times to achieve the SLA 5 day target. This will now be reported and closely monitored on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.
3. 100% of the Coordinated “on time” applications were input prior to the first round of data matching in line with published timelines
4. The total number of children out of school in May 2013 was 195, this compares to 388 in May 2012. The team make weekly in Year offers and all out of school children are made an offer where vacancies are available.
5. The team has been focussing on clearing down vacancies offered on a more regular basis. As soon as vacancies are offered, letters are sent out to parents asking them to take their child to the school to enrol within 3 working days. If the child does not start school within the 3 working days, the clearing down commences and subject to when we can make contact with the parent, the vacancy will be offered to another child within 7-14 days of the offer having been made
6. Recent quality checks conducted in July show 64% data input accuracy. The learning from this has been incorporated into a team Learning and Development Plan and clear targets for improvement have been set. There will be another detailed quality check exercise conducted for each team member in September to track progress. Any learning from these checks will be discussed with the team.
7. The team very rarely receive complaints which are upheld in respect of admissions processing and customer care. The indicator of no more than 0.05% of all contacts resulting in an upheld complaint has been met
8. The team aims to refer all pupils out of school at 6 weeks to the Education Welfare Service. The team has been reviewing unplaced children out of school to ensure that our records are up to date and that referrals to Educational Welfare are made. The team has referred 20 children to the service in the past few weeks. Further referrals will be made in the coming weeks.

4.8 A number of improvements have been made in preparation for the pupil census in October 2013. These include a requirement for all parents to accept or decline a place offered , proactive chasing of offers made but not accepted and reoffer of places not taken to children not yet placed or following an in year application. A dedicated Accept/Decline mail box has been set up for parents to respond to offers made. These changes should help to maximise the number of children on school rolls in October and at the time the census is run.

5.0 Benchmarking information

- 5.1 A benchmarking exercise was carried out in December to help evaluate the arrangements for schools admissions in Brent with other London Authorities. It has been difficult to make like for like comparison between respondents because arrangements and issues differ so greatly from Borough to Borough . For example, levels of in year applications in Brent are much higher than many of the survey recipients and this makes it more difficult to compare the resources allocated. Some Authorities also split responsibility for administering schools admission between back office teams and generic call handling teams. The total level of resource involved in schools admissions for these Councils is not wholly quantified and thus cannot be compared to Authorities such as Brent who have a single team administering the function on an end to end basis. However a broad comparison of the resources allocated and volume of applications received shows :

Number of In Year applications received

With approximately 4,000 applications per annum Brent was 3rd highest when comparing the number of In Year applications received. Brent received more than twice the number of applications received by 9 of the authorities and over 30% more than the remaining 3 authorities. This is indicative of the general population trends for Brent and the transient nature of a large number of residents.

Resources

Results show that the resource allocated to deal with school admissions in Brent is low when compared to the majority of authorities who replied. The survey indicated that the ration of staff in Brent to overall caseload is in the lowest quartile of respondents.

Pupil Census

8 of those who responded said moving the national pupil census date to October impacted on their ability to fill school places on time for the census. Reasons given by those boroughs included the vacancies resulting from student churn at the beginning of the school year and the reduction in time to offer places particularly those that occurred as a result of the vacancies.

Brent council is of the view that this change makes it more difficult to fill places in time for the October census.

Schools admissions structures

Brent administers pupil admissions within the Customer Services team as an end to end process. Of the councils who responded, their admissions processes were managed as follows.

End to end process in the Children's department	End to end process in another department	Phone contact in customer services and processing in Childrens' department	Other
8	2	5	3

The survey shows that Brent has a flatter structure than most other respondents.

6.0 Service Costs

- 6.1 The Children's team in Brent Customer Services consists of a dedicated team leader and 9 Customer Services Officers. Support is also provided to the team from senior managers

within Brent Customer Services, a Corporate web team, a central service improvement team and a centralised post team. There are running costs associated with IT, accommodation and telephony as well as more general costs such as stationery, printing and other staff costs.

- 6.2 A breakdown of actual expenditure in 2012/13 and the 2013/14 budget for the Parent and Pupil Services and Customer Services elements of the schools admissions service is shown below.

Parent and Pupil Services	2012/13 (£000)			2013/14 (£000)
	Budget	Outturn	Outturn Variance	Budget
Employee Expenses	33	34	1	33
Running Expenses	23	52	29	23
Total	56	86	30	56

Customer Services	2012/13 (£000)			2013/14 (£000)
	Budget	Outturn	Outturn Variance	Budget as at 31.07.13
Employee Expenses	417	321	(96)	417
Management Charge	0	95	95	0
Total	417	416	(1)	417

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