

## **Council Motion on School places – October 31<sup>st</sup>** **Briefing for Members on Current Position**

John Christie, Director of Children and Families 28/10/05

1. The Council has a statutory duty under section 14 of the 1996 Education Act to secure that sufficient schools for (a) primary and (b) secondary education are available for their area. Local Authorities are not themselves obliged to provide all the schools required but to ensure that they are available for their area. For example, like Brent, some London Boroughs, e.g. Kensington and Chelsea, have never had sufficient school places within the borders of the Borough to meet demand and have relied on places being available in neighbouring boroughs or elsewhere in London.
2. If no places are available and all avenues for placement have been explored Local Authorities have a power to instruct schools to admit above capacity. This power is more limited in the case of the schools of another LEA. This power is subject to the schools' rights to appeal to the Secretary of State who takes the final decision
3. Demand for school places within Brent has increased faster than expected in the last year owing to two factors:
  - Historically a large number of parents have sent their children to schools outside the borough but over the last few years, Brent schools have improved significantly and demand for places in Brent has increased.
  - There has been a significant increase in the number of new arrivals to the Borough arriving at the beginning or after the beginning of the school year. The arrivals are from elsewhere in London and the UK and from Europe, the new accession states and from Africa and Asia.
4. The current position for Primary and Secondary pupils is as follows:

### Primary

There are sufficient primary school places within the Borough for all who seek them. All applicants have been informed of vacancies. Such is the demand and supply of places that not all applicants can secure a place at the school of their preference, but the Council is able to fulfil its statutory duty in offering places at Brent primary schools.

5. Secondary

At the beginning of term around 260 applicants (spread through the age ranges of 11 – 15, years 7 to 11) informed the Department that they were seeking a secondary school place. Of these 180 had arrived in Brent since the end of the summer term. 39 were from elsewhere in London and the UK, 43 were from Europe, 46 from Africa and 55 from Asia. 28 are refugees and asylum seekers. The Department is working with schools in Brent and with other boroughs to identify vacancies and offer places.

6. Of the 14 the secondary schools in Brent, all bar one ( Wembley High Technology College) are their own admission authorities Discussions have been held with Secondary School Headteachers who want to work collaboratively with the Council to solve the problem in terms of making vacancies available and setting up assessment centres. They share the Council's concern that no one school should become overloaded but that each should play a part within their admission criteria. They are aware that the Council has a power to instruct schools to admit above admission limits but recognise that this would only be used as a last resort when no alternative vacancies have been identified and offered to parents.
7. There are very few vacancies available in Brent but they do become available during the school year as there is considerable turnover of leavers and entrants. One of the issues that has had to be resolved is that when we have referred pupils without a school place to schools with vacancies in Brent, their admissions criteria have required them to give priority to pupils already on their waiting lists, many of whom have already got a school place. Through consultations with the Admissions Forum and schools, over the last few weeks, we have put in place a Protocol for Hard to Place Pupils whereby schools can override their admissions criteria and give preference to pupils without a school place.
8. We know currently that there are a maximum of 255 applicants who are seeking a school place and we have informed them of vacancies in Brent and in neighbouring London Boroughs - Harrow, Hillingdon, Hammersmith & Fulham, Barnet and Camden. We are fulfilling our statutory duty in identifying and offering places. Free transport is provided for pupils where places are available which are more than three miles distant from their home address.
9. There is a time lag between vacancies being identified for applicants and places are being taken up and not all applicants inform us promptly when they have obtained a place. The Admissions Team has to constantly follow up the contacts with parents and schools to ensure places have been secured. The 255 is a maximum and in practice will be much less. To safeguard pupils we do not remove them from our database of children without

a place until we receive confirmation that they are on a school roll, this means that the number of children without a school place will always be overstated.

10. Although places can be identified to meet demand in the areas of West and North London, the Department has been working in expanding the number of places to meet demand in Brent to meet preferences for parents for places locally. Local and GLA forecasts two years ago were predicting that there would be no need for additional places in Brent. We commissioned a review of secondary places in January 2005 which has shown these earlier forecasts to be wrong and that an additional 7 Forms of Entry or 1050 places will be required by 2008 and 14 Forms of Entry or 2100 extra places will be required by 2014. This includes a 5% capacity planning margin.
11. Discussions with the DfES and schools have been undertaken to provide additional places. A report to be submitted to the Executive on November 14<sup>th</sup> will recommend the creation of an Academy to provide 900 extra places by 2009. Preston Manor School have submitted a proposal to expand by 1 FE on 150 places by September 2007 at the earliest. Discussions are being held with Copland School (150 places by 2009 at the earliest), John Kelly Colleges (300 places by 2011 at the earliest) and Queens Park School (300 places by 2009 at the earliest) to provide extra places.
12. The resources to provide the Academy places will be allocated by the DfES. At present funding is not secured for all the additional places needed by the expansion of existing schools. This is the subject of discussion with the DfES.
13. A sum of money has been reserved within the capital programme to provide additional temporary accommodation at existing secondary schools should this be required in the short term following discussions with schools.
14. We are setting up in November assessment centres for secondary aged pupils who are seeking places. The centres will provide information which will aid the process of placing children in appropriate provision whether that be places in schools, specialist provision for new arrivals with language needs and vocational courses in conjunction with the College of North West London for Key Stage Four students. The costs of this provision will be met from within the current School Budget.
15. It is proposed that this issue of school places is further examined at the Children & Families Scrutiny Panel meeting on November 10<sup>th</sup>. The situation will also be reviewed at the end of this month with subsequent reports to the Executive and Scrutiny Panel.