

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL	ITEM No.
REPORT OF: School Admissions Overview Project Group CONTACT OFFICERS: Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Schools, Academies & Colleges) Rachael Stirk, Team Manager, School Management Service Leigh Webb, Democratic Services Officer	
TITLE: FINAL REPORT – March 2014	

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the work, findings and recommendations of the School Admissions Overview Project Group.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Historically, the birth-rate in Bury was in steady decline until 2003 and, as a result, demand for primary school places has, until recent years, been falling.
- 2.2 The rate of decline and the subsequent increase in birth-rate has differed from one area of the Borough to another. Additionally, some areas have experienced increased demands for school places as a result of inward migration both from Eastern Europe, but increasingly from other parts of the UK. Notably, a significant number of neighbouring authorities are currently in the process of creating additional capacity in order to meet unmet demand for school places, in both the primary and secondary sectors.
- 2.3 Whilst there is currently sufficient capacity across the Borough to meet the overall demand for places, there are some significant "hot-spots" in demand, particularly for primary school places in the East Bury and Prestwich areas, where the level of demand has been greater than the number of places available. This has been exacerbated by the popularity of some schools, and the localised pressure on places that this can create.
- 2.4 In 2013 these pressures were exacerbated still further by the very high number of siblings applying for places at two neighbouring schools in East Bury, which subsequently lead to significant numbers of admission appeals for these schools.

- 2.5 The LA has worked with schools in East Bury and Prestwich in order to address the levels of demand for the 2013 intake, through the creation of bulge classes and using the flexibilities provided in the Admissions Code.
- 2.6 Due to the pressure on primary school places experienced in 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that a Project Group was set up to examine the provision and arrangements for school places in the Borough. The key purpose of the review was to:
- Re-assure Members as to the robustness of the Forecasting Model
 - Examine where problems exist and identify of potential solutions and development of strategy (short, medium and long term)
- 2.7 The Membership of the Group comprised of Councillor Fitzwalter (Chair), Councillors Caserta, Gunther, Simpson, Tariq and O'Hanlon.
- 2.8 The Project Group was delegated to agree its own project plan which is set out at Appendix 1 to the report. The focus of the Review to date has included:
- Examination of the Pupil Forecasting Model, including an overview of updated forecasts
 - Analysis of local demand pressures
 - Examination of the level of migration into the borough

3.0 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 As part of the review the Group interviewed/took evidence from:
- Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Schools, Academies & Colleges)
Rachael Stirk, Team Manager, School Management Service
Marcus Connor, Head of Strategic Housing
Salford City Council
- 3.2 The Group has met on four occasions and has received statistical and geographical information relating to:
- The location of all Bury Primary Schools by Local Area Partnership.
 - The geographical distribution of children from the Health Authority Information aged 0+ to 4+.
 - The comparison of primary school forecasts from 2000 – 2013 indicating the % difference between the forecast number and the actual intake number.
 - The forecast number, actual intake number and admission capacity of primary schools per Local Area Partnership.

- The number of siblings per school expected for Reception 2014 intake and the number admitted per school in 2013.
 - The levels of average deprivation per school and ranking tables for all Bury Schools.
- 3.3 The Group also received briefing papers providing background information regarding the supply and organisation of school places, and details about the admissions process.
- 3.4 Furthermore, information was also received from Salford Council relating to their experience in dealing with demand pressures and the measures in place to address these pressures.
- 3.5 Relating to the issue of Migration, the Group received information from Strategic Housing setting out the limited information held by the Council in terms of social housing and inter-authority moves.

4.0 PUPIL FORECASTING METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The LA has a well established model for forecasting future demand which has been recognised by Ofsted in terms of its detail and accuracy of future demand.
- 4.2 The Group examined the LA's forecasting methodology, including the variations in historical forecasts and actual intakes. In noting the accuracy of historical forecasts, the Group was reassured about the robustness of the incumbent model. However it was also recognised that due to the changing national and local context, it was necessary to review the current forecasting methodology and adapt as appropriate.
- 4.3 The Group also examined the demographic distribution of 0 – 4 year olds, and the forecast intakes, pupil rolls and surplus places in both the primary and secondary sectors.
- 4.4 In considering the local context, the Group noted that whilst Bury's resident population is expected to increase, as a proportion of the whole population, the younger age group will get smaller and there will be a 2% reduction in the 0-14 year old population by 2022.

5.0 PRIMARY FORECASTS

- 5.1 Primary forecasts are calculated using data supplied by the Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust and are updated annually. Forecasts are also revised following each school census in order to reflect movement in and out of the Borough during the academic year.

- 5.2 In 2011, the forecast intake for 2012 was 2206 and the actual intake was 2178, a difference of 1.3%. Similarly the forecast intake for 2013 was 2285 and the actual intake was 2241, a difference of 2%.
- 5.3 The Group noted that the actual intake numbers for 2013 were broadly in line with the numbers forecast, and acknowledged that the problems that arose in 2013 were as a result of the high sibling rate at two neighbouring schools in an area where demand for places was already high. As a result, the LA is reviewing its forecasting methodology and working with schools in order to identify future levels of sibling demand.
- 5.4 Forecast intakes for 2014 indicate an overall increase of 2.5% from the 2013 intake, however current data provided by the Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust indicates a gradual decrease in the population of 0-4 year olds, therefore whilst current primary forecasts show overall intakes peaking at 2015, numbers are starting to decline by 2016, with a decrease in the Reception intake of almost 6%.
- 5.5 Forecast intakes for the East Bury and Prestwich areas also begin to decrease by 2016, by 8% and 12% respectively.
- 5.6 The Group agreed that since current forecasts show a spike in numbers in 2015, in addressing the shortfall in capacity within these areas the LA needs to ensure that solutions should not only respond to the demand for places, but also provide a cost effective solution, long term sustainability for the area as a whole, and not be detrimental to other schools.

6.0 SECONDARY FORECASTS

- 6.1 A high number of extra district pupils have traditionally applied for places in Bury's secondary schools and a significant number of these pupils have secured places. With fewer resident pupils taking up places, the proportion of extra district pupils has risen significantly over recent years.
- 6.2 The increased pupil numbers from the primary sector are beginning to feed through into the secondary sector and intakes for 2014 are forecast to increase by 4.4%, from 2138 to 2232. The Group acknowledged that forecasts indicate that secondary intakes will begin to exceed admission capacity by 2016, although these forecasts do include current levels of demand from extra district residents. In practice, initial increase in demand from within the resident population can be met by displacing some of the extra district demand.
- 6.3 The Admissions Policy for Community secondary schools does give priority to Bury resident children through the use of catchment areas, however the Group noted that it is important for families to state realistic preferences when applying for secondary school places.

- 6.4 It was noted that a number of secondary schools have the physical capacity to accommodate additional pupil numbers should the need arise. If required, the LA will hold discussions with those schools about the possibility of increasing the number of places towards the number indicated by the net capacity in order to maximise capacity within the sector.

7.0 FACTORS AFFECTING SUPPLY FOR SCHOOL PLACES

- 7.1 The main factors affecting the supply of school places are the availability of capital funding, land and premises. Expansion of existing establishments can be constrained by the capacity of the premises, the size of their sites as well as wider considerations of their location. There is now a presumption that if a LA identifies the need for a new school, they must seek proposals for the establishment of an academy/free school. However, the LA can propose prescribed alterations to existing schools to enlarge the premises, or increase capacity at schools through the flexibility provided in the Admissions Code
- 7.2 Schools who are their own admission authorities can also create additional places by increasing their intake. In addition, the establishment of free schools may also receive approval by central government. There is currently no significant impact from these issues in Bury.
- 7.3 The LA has been able to provide sufficient school places to meet the current levels of demand through the creation of bulge classes and the flexing of admission numbers where there is sufficient capacity to do so. Should the need for additional school places arise, the LA will work with existing maintained schools to increase their capacity, either through capital investment to provide modest extensions, or through redesignation of community spaces and/or specialist areas such as libraries/ICT suites to provide core teaching accommodation.
- 7.4 Bury received £2.6m Basic Need funding between 2013 - 2015 and a further £4.4m has provisionally been allocated between 2015 – 2017. The LA has previously allocated Basic Need funding to fund projects addressing school building condition issues. However there is an expectation that allocations received from 2013/14 onwards will be used to fund the establishment of additional places.
- 7.5 The LA has therefore developed, through its Capital Strategy Group, a programme of investment to target projects that address the EFA's Basic Need criteria, whilst also addressing building condition and suitability issues. For example, Basic Need funding will be used to support schemes at St Luke's and St Thomas' in order to address these specific localised demand pressures.

8.0 FACTORS GENERALLY AFFECTING DEMAND FOR SCHOOL PLACES

8.1 The main factors affecting demand for school places are:

- Birth rates
- Inward & outward migration from the area
- Immigration into the UK
- Cross border movement
- Housing developments and changes in the housing market,
- Parental preference
- Changes in private education provision
- Establishment of academies and free schools
- The impact of welfare reforms

Many of these factors are subject to quite short-term uncertainty.

8.2 The Group noted that in Bury the rate of historical decline in pupil numbers and the subsequent increase in birth-rate has differed from one area of the Borough to another. Members recognised the potential impact on the demand for school places from inward migration, both from Eastern Europe, but increasingly from other parts of the UK.

8.3 The Group considered the merits of targeted strategies to address levels of demand/shortages in particular schools and the importance of forecasting whether these shortages were temporary in nature. Popularity of particular schools may result in high levels of oversubscription, however it was recognised that in considering whether additional places should be created on a permanent basis, the wider impact on the sustainability of other schools must be taken into account.

9.0 INWARD MIGRATION

9.1 With regards to inward migration, Members recognised the potential impact on wider Council Services and Community needs and highlighted the need for information on how the Council's Housing Strategy looks to respond to this issue. The Group examined data on inter authority moves provided by Marcus Connor, Head of Performance & Housing Strategy. It was recognised that inter-authority moves into social rented or affordable housing will be limited to relatively small numbers. The net inflow to Bury appears greatest from Salford, Manchester and Rochdale, with the net outflow from Bury being to Bolton and Rossendale.

10.0 SALFORD CITY COUNCIL

10.1 The Group also examined the experience of Salford Council over the last few years, including details of the factors that contributed to their problems around school places, the actions undertaken to respond to these

challenges, and the policy decisions which have driven the management of school places.

- 10.2 Since 2010, an additional 1700 additional places have been provided across Salford City Council, the majority of which have been reception places. The initial increase in demand had not been identified in pupil projections, however there was a significant shortfall in Reception places following admissions applications in 2010. This unanticipated demand was initially met through the creation of bulge classes at several schools, utilizing existing accommodation through the use of specialist spaces such as libraries, ICT suites and community rooms.
- 10.3 The increased demand in Salford is due to increased birth rate and high rates of migration from Europe and from the South of England. Salford has subsequently revised its pupil place forecasting methodology, which the Group noted was closely aligned to Bury's incumbent model.
- 10.4 Due to the scale of additional places required, Salford has developed a range of short, medium and long term strategies. Short term proposals have included increasing intakes in schools that have sufficient building capacity, and re-using community space and/or specialist areas to provide core teaching accommodation. Some options also require building projects in the form of extensions.
- 10.5 Medium and long term strategies focus on reviewing potential re-use of surplus buildings and sites, use of other educational-use accommodation (such as children's centres) and construction solutions to enable larger scale building extensions. The creation of additional capacity will be funded through the Basic Need programme and through Section 106 agreements with planners.
- 10.6 Salford has also developed a model of programme governance in order to review the development of proposals and consider which will be taken forward. A stakeholder steering group comprising Headteacher and diocesan representatives has also been established to ensure wider ownership of and engagement with the programme.

11.0 PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

11.1 Demand Pressures 2013

- 11.1.1 Despite the demand pressures experienced in 2013, the Group noted that overall levels of parental satisfaction remained high. All Bury resident children were offered a Reception school place for September 2013, with 87% receiving their first preference school and 94% receiving a school of preference.

- 11.1.2 In Bury East, whilst intake numbers were as forecast, demand for places at St Luke's & St Thomas' in particular was exacerbated by the high number of places allocated to siblings, resulting in only a small number of places being offered under the distance criterion. Siblings accounted for 44 of the 60 places offered at St Luke's and 29 of the 35 places at St Thomas'. This unprecedented level of sibling demand across two neighbouring schools was quite exceptional.
- 11.1.3 Since siblings enjoy priority under admission arrangements, this resulted in a number of other children living very close to St Luke's & St Thomas' being unable to obtain places, and subsequently being offered places at other schools some considerable distance away from their homes. This, in turn, lead to significant numbers of admission appeals for these two schools.
- 11.1.4 In order to address these levels of demand, Basic Need funding is supporting schemes at St Luke's and St Thomas' in order to create bulge classes for September 2013, each accommodating up to 15 additional children. Pupils are initially being accommodated in existing accommodation, whilst schemes have been developed to provide additional capacity and address condition and suitability issues at each of the schools. Each scheme will also enable admission of a further 15 children (in addition to the Published Admission Number in 2014) if required.
- 11.1.5 In the Prestwich area, the demand for places was focused around Butterstile, Heaton Park, St Margaret's and St Mary's.
- 11.1.6 Whilst some schools are limited by the physical capacity of their buildings, others do have some ability to accommodate additional numbers. Furthermore, the Admissions Code provides greater flexibility for schools to respond to demand for places, enabling admission numbers to be breached. Therefore, in collaboration with a number of schools, the LA agreed to admit a small number of children above the admission number, where this could be achieved without breaching infant class size legislation, and where there was sufficient capacity within the schools to do so.
- 11.1.7 Members acknowledged the levels of demand in particular hot spots within the Borough, particularly within Bury East and Prestwich, and considered the measures put in place to deal with these issues. The Group has considered the merits of targeted strategies to address shortages in particular schools and the importance of forecasting whether these shortages were temporary in nature.

11.2 September 2014 Intake

- 11.2.1 The application process for Reception places in September 2014 is currently ongoing. Offers will be sent out on 16 April 2014 and data exchanges with neighbouring Authorities are taking place throughout March. Initial analysis of applications received to date indicates that whilst the East Bury and

Prestwich areas continue to experience high levels of demand, there is sufficient capacity in these areas to meet the current applications received. The LA continues to work closely with schools in order to ensure that applications are received from all known families, including pupils with siblings or nursery children, and any that have not yet applied are being followed up.

11.2.2 The South of the Borough is also experiencing very high levels of demand from the Roman Catholic sector, with Our Lady of Grace, St Bernadette's and St Michael's all being heavily oversubscribed. Capacity within the sector was increased several years ago with an expansion of St Bernadette's to accommodate a 1½ form of entry intake in order to meet levels of demand. There are currently sufficient places in Community schools within the area to accommodate applicants, however further discussions are currently taking place with the Diocese in order to assess whether these levels of demand are expected to be sustained in future years.

11.2.3 Whilst several schools in the North and West of the Borough are oversubscribed, these areas are generally undersubscribed, with a number of schools having surplus capacity.

12.0 THE SECONDARY SECTOR

12.1 Whilst the main focus of this review was on primary school places, the Group also gave consideration to the issues affecting the secondary sector.

12.2 A high number of extra district pupils have traditionally applied for places in Bury's secondary schools and a significant number of these pupils have secured places. With fewer resident pupils taking up places, the proportion of extra district pupils has risen significantly over recent years. Of the 10,792 pupils currently attending maintained secondary schools, 13% of these reside in neighbouring authorities.

12.3 The Group noted that, whilst several schools continued to be heavily oversubscribed, levels of parental satisfaction remain high, with 88% of Bury residents being offered a place at their first preference school, and 97% being offered a place at a school of preference for the September 2013 intake.

12.4 September 2014 Intake

12.5 Secondary offers will be sent out on 3 March 2014. 90% of Bury residents will be offered a place at their first preference school and 97% will be offered a place at one of their preferred schools.

12.6 A number of schools continue to be heavily oversubscribed and it is anticipated that there will be a high number of appeals for places at The Elton, Parrenthorn and Woodhey High Schools.

- 12.7 Whilst Bury Church also continues to be oversubscribed, places have been offered to children without evidence of Church attendance. Within the R.C. sector, St. Monica's is extremely oversubscribed, whilst St. Gabriel's have been able to satisfy all their R.C. demand and have offered places to non R.C. children. Again, further discussions will take place with the Diocese regarding these issues.

13.0 MANAGING PARENTAL EXPECTATION

- 13.1 The Group received detailed information concerning the actual school admissions process together with the information provided to parents.
- 13.2 This included information regarding the timeframes involved, collation of cohort details from schools, other teams within Children's Services and the application process. The Group examined sample correspondence with parents and the information provided in the Information Guide. The Group gave consideration to the accessibility of online applications and the importance of providing an alternative method of application. However it was also noted that the promotion of and increase in online applications had resulted in improved efficiency of the process and contributed to wider e-government initiatives.
- 13.3 During the Groups consideration of this issue, Members highlighted the often complex nature of the information supplied to parents and queried the measures in place to support parents in the school applications process. It was stressed that parents should be fully informed and aware of the process, and the importance of making realistic preferences.
- 13.4 The Group highlighted the importance of managing parental expectations during the admissions process and considered how this could be communicated effectively to parents. The role of members was acknowledged as policy makers and in providing support to their constituents during the admissions and appeals process.

14.0 THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

- 14.1 The LA has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available to meet demand from within its resident population.
- 14.2 Whilst the Government is keen to support the expansion of popular and successful schools, the LA role is also to try and ensure that this is not at the expense of other neighbouring schools, and that all schools serving the area are successful and viable.
- 14.3 The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, and The School Organisation (Establishment And Discontinuance Of Schools) Regulations 2013 prescribe the revised

process to be followed for maintained schools and local authorities to propose and implement changes to the size and characteristics of their schools, and the establishment or discontinuance of schools.

- 14.4 An expansion without a physical enlargement to the premises of the school does not require a statutory proposal. Increases in pupil numbers may be achieved through an increase in the Published Admission Number under the School Admissions Code.

15.0 SEN FUNDING

- 15.1 The Group noted that the LA is currently undertaking a review of all SEN provision, which will set out proposals for the way in which educational provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and disabilities can be developed in order to meet future needs and demands.

- 15.2 The proposed aims of the review are:

- To increase inclusion by ensuring that more children with SEN have the opportunity to attend mainstream preschool settings and schools, if that is what their parents want
- To ensure that any funding and resources for special educational needs are used as effectively as possible
- To reduce the number of children and young people who have to go outside Bury to have their SEN met
- To more effectively meet the needs of excluded pupils, in the context of new statutory requirements

- 15.3 Whilst not within the remit of this Group, Members agreed that the implication of the review in terms of the impact on provision and SEN funding required further examination.

16.0 CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Local authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. They must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in their area, promote diversity and increase parental choice.

- 16.2 The LA must also balance the need to provide sufficient places, and meet parental preference, whilst ensuring that there is not too much capacity and that all schools serving the area are successful and viable.

- 16.3 The Group recognised the robust forecasting methods used by Children's Services and the accuracy with which future demand has been predicted for

the majority of schools. Whilst intakes have not deviated from LA forecasts, there was an unprecedented level of demand from siblings at St Luke's and St Thomas' for the September 2013 intake. As a result, the LA is reviewing its forecasting methodology and working with schools in order to identify future levels of sibling demand.

- 16.4 The Group recognised that some of the demands being seen nationally are as a result of inward migration in addition to an increased birthrate, and some of the demand pressures on neighbouring authorities are from migration from other parts of the UK because of a South to North shift. Therefore, should these factors begin to impact in Bury, it will not always be possible to predict the scale and timing of the impact accurately, therefore it is important to have contingency plans if pupil numbers begin to deviate from the LA's forecasts.
- 16.5 School place planning is a complex process, influenced by demographics, mobility and housing yield as well as parental preference, geography and transport. With rapid shifts in economic conditions and changing patterns of migration, planning requires a proactive approach in order to respond to both short and medium term demand for places.
- 16.6 The statutory framework for schools and academies has undergone much change in recent years and with increasing school autonomy, a planning mechanism with strong local knowledge is needed to ensure that funding to secure sufficient school places is allocated effectively and efficiently.

17.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) The Group acknowledges the complex nature of school place planning and supports the need for a proactive approach to develop strategies that respond to both short and medium term demands for places.
- (ii) Whilst acknowledging the difficulties in measuring migration into the borough, the Group highlight the need to regularly monitor patterns and developments through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; the Council's Core Strategy; and regular liaison with neighbouring boroughs.
- (iii) Targeted strategies employed to manage demand pressures continue to be monitored with regular consultations with local headteachers at affected schools.
- (iv) The Group acknowledges that the admissions system is complex but seems to be fair. Members, who are often asked for advice on applications by parents, should be offered an annual briefing from Children's Services on the process and any changes to the system.

- (v) Consideration be given to the development of a simplified summary of the school admissions paperwork provided to parents
- (vi) Consideration be given to the role of Elected members in the admissions and appeals process.

Background Documents:

- Demand for School Places – Capital Strategy Group
- Demand for School Places in East Bury
- Demand for School Places – Reception Intake September 2013
- School Admissions Overview Project Group - Briefing Paper October 2013

Contact Details: Leigh Webb, Democratic Services
Telephone number: 0161 253 5399
E-mail address: l.m.webb@bury.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Scrutiny Review Scoping Template

Review Topic (name of review)	School Admissions
<u>Councillor Involvement</u> (names of Cllr involved)	Councillors Fitzwalter; Caserta; Carter; Gunther; Tariq; Simpson; and O'Hanlon
<u>Officer Support</u> (names of Officer required)	Paul Cooke Rachael Stirk
<u>Rationale</u> (key issues and/or reason for doing the Review)	Group appointed to carry out the Review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
<u>Purpose of Review/Objective</u> (Specify exactly what the review should achieve)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members to be re-assured as to the robustness of the Forecasting Model • Examination of where problems exist, identification of potential solutions & development of strategy (short, medium and long term) • Manage expectations – parental/schools/members • Identify communication strategies – Officers/Members with clear roles & responsibilities
<u>Indicators of Success</u> (What factors would indicate that a Review has been successful)	Measures in place to provide solutions which look to ensure sufficient school places are available to meet the needs of local communities.
<u>Methodology/Approach</u> (what types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine Statistical Breakdown of School Places (including map of schools across the borough which identify hotspots) • Examination of forecasting methodology • Interview relevant people (as set out below)
<u>Specify Witnesses/Experts</u> (who to see)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Services Senior Officers • NHS Bury Representatives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic Housing (Bury Council)• Head Teachers• Ward Councillors (East ward/Prestwich)• Cabinet Member for Children and Families		
<u>Specify Evidence Sources For Documents</u> (which to look at – national and local)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Background information – supply of school places• Demand for School Places (East Bury) – Briefing note• Forecast intakes/rolls and surplus places data• Map of schools across the borough which identify hotspots• Breakdown of Multiple Deprivation Index (socio economic data) in relation to school admissions• GP registration data• Housing strategy		
<u>Specify Site Visits</u>			
<u>Publicity Requirements</u> (what is needed – press release, fliers, leaflets, radio broadcasts, etc)	Key findings and recommendations will be made public through Council Website /press release		
<u>Resource Requirements</u> (people, expenditure)	Officer time – preparation of reports/ attendance at meetings		
<u>Barriers/dangers/risks/etc</u> (identify any weaknesses and potential pitfalls)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any solutions in terms of additional places must be mindful of the need to maintain the sustainability of all schools in the Borough and of the potential impact upon capital investment• Recommendations need the “buy in” from local Schools/Head teachers• Information sharing from Health/Housing		
Projected start date	03.10.2013	Projected completion date	31.03.2014