

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 7th November 2012

Subject: Annual Admissions Round 2012

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Secondary school offers of places were made on the national offer day of 1st March 2012. This year there were 7,568 offers, 84% of which received their first preference. 5,234 parents applied online for secondary places.
2. Primary school offers were made on 20th April and this year the number of offers for reception places increased by over 400 to 9,154. This is due to the increasing birth rate as well as the work to encourage parents to apply on time. 84% of parents were offered their first preference school which is equal to last year but equates to 300 more children in total.
3. During the academic year 2011/12 there were 8,710 in year requests for school places. This is due to both new arrivals into the city and transfers between schools. The Local Authority currently has a responsibility to co-ordinate these requests but this will change in September 2013.
4. In the last annual admission round for places in September 2012 over 11,800 applications were made on line which is over 70% of the total. During the round a survey was undertaken to obtain parents views about the choice of schools available and the number of responses increased significantly to over 1200 although not all answered all of the questions. There was a range of questions to find out more about why parents choose the schools that they do and whether they believe that the range of schools available is appropriate. This will assist the Authority in its duty to promote choice and diversity.

5. Although the number of appeals for secondary places fell this year there was a relatively larger increase in the number of appeals for primary places,

Recommendations

6. That Executive Board note the statistical information on school admissions in 2011/12 and the annual admission round for September 2012 including:
 - The percentage of applications for places in September 2012 where the first preference was offered was 84.1%, with 95.2% being offered one of their first three preferences
 - The reducing number of appeals for secondary school places and in year applications with an increase in the number of primary appeals.
 - The continuing success of the online application system

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides statistical information on Admissions into Reception and year 7 for September 2012, as well as entry into Junior school. The government introduced coordination of in year transfers from September 2010, however, this will change in 2013 as a result of the new Admissions Code that came into affect in February 2012. The report considers how this will be implemented.
- 1.2 The local authority has a duty to promote choice and diversity in schools. In order to gather information on parental views a survey was undertaken on why parents choose particular schools, and their views on the choices available to them. The findings of that survey are also summarised in this report.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Admissions Team are responsible for allocating children to primary, infant, junior and secondary schools and defending admission appeals for community and voluntary controlled schools, including co-ordinating admissions between the voluntary-aided and foundation schools, the four neighbouring LEAs and the Academies. However, in-year co-ordination will come to an end with affect from the academic year 2013/14 and parents will apply directly to schools and academies.
- 2.2 The birth rate is continuing to remain very high and for the third year running live births numbered 10,000 or more in Leeds. The numbers entering secondary school are still relatively low but this will increase significantly over the next 3 years as the larger cohorts that are already in primary schools begin to feed through. The team continue to explore more ways to let parents know about the need to apply for a primary school place and this will now include the Early Years Development Officers that have joined the team. They will use their knowledge of and access to all early years settings to promote the message about applying on time and including your local school as a preference. Parents who apply on time have a much greater chance of gaining one of their preferences, or a local school.
- 2.3 The online application system for the annual round has been well used again. This year just over 11,800 parents applied online which represents 70% of total applications. It was during the application period that we hosted the survey on school choice on the same area of the website to attract as much interest as possible from parents. A summary of the survey findings is presented later in the report.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Secondary school place offers were made on the national offer day of the 1st March. 5,234 parents applied on line and received their email offer on 1 March. There were 7,568 offers made of which 84% received their first preference (appendices 1 and 3), this compares with 86% last year. A number of these offers are to children living in another local authority applying for Leeds schools. The percentage of Leeds parents who received their first preference was over 90%. There were slightly fewer applications this year and the cohort entering secondary

school is still relatively small. There will be a year on year increase as larger cohorts begin to feed through from primary schools.

- 3.2 Primary school place offers were made on the 20th April but in future there will be a national offer day on 16th April. The high birth rate and the work to encourage parents to apply on time resulted in offers rising by over 400 from last year. On 20 April 9,154 offers were made for reception places with over 84% of parents offered their first preference school (appendices 1 and 4). This is equal to last year's figure but represents 7,699 children which is 300 more than last year. There are 9446 places available in the City as a whole and on offer day there were only 292 reception places unfilled.
- 3.3 The relatively low number of reception places remaining on offer day has been insufficient to cope with the ongoing demand as late applications have been submitted and new arrivals into the City have applied for places. The Authority has negotiated with schools to create temporary cohorts in some areas and for schools to exceed their admission numbers in others to meet the immediate need. Further negotiations are ongoing to generate more capacity in the short term for 2013. Initial consultation has recently concluded on four proposals for 2014, and work ongoing to identify further proposals for 2015-2016.
- 3.4 Work is also ongoing with the City Development directorate to identify potential properties and sites for use, and secure their use for educational purpose through the appropriate channels. Long term planning is critically affected by new housing, and have worked with the core housing strategy on the implications for educational provision, and continue to develop this work.
- 3.5 The total number of appeals for both primary and secondary schools has increased slightly this year. The number of secondary appeals fell, although this is partly due to the non-availability of figures for three schools that converted to Academy status, but there was a relatively larger increase in primary appeals. Most primary school appeals are defended on the basis of Infant Class Size Regulations and as a consequence only a small number are successful. For the first time this year schools do not need to take qualifying measures to reduce the pupil teacher ratio if the class size is exceeded as the result of an appeal panel decision. This change to qualifying measures applies to all children that are exceptions to the Infant Class Size Regulations not just those that are successful at appeal. The overall number of secondary appeals is increasingly difficult to monitor as schools become academies and foundation schools. This change of status places governing bodies in the position of admitting authority for the school or academy, and as such, responsible for defending their own appeals. The table in appendix 2 therefore does not contain information for academies or aided schools, unless they have recently converted and we have handled their appeals centrally. The number of in year appeals continue to fall and the success of the local authority in defending those appeals continues to improve. Much of this is due to the success of the Fair Access Protocol in Leeds which deals not only with children with challenging behaviour, but also those who have moved into an area where there is a shortage of places.
- 3.6 Since September 2010 the local authority has been required to coordinate all in year transfer requests for all schools and academies, and with other local

authorities. Parents must apply to the local authority in which they live for a school place, and the local authority must check availability of places before offering the parent the highest preference possible. The team have received 8,710 transfer requests during the last academic year which compares with 8555 for the year before.

- 3.7 There is no requirement for local authorities to co-ordinate in year applications for the offer year 2013/14 and all subsequent years. They must still produce the composite prospectus and provide information to parents about the places still available in all schools along with a suitable form to use for applying for places. This effectively returns to the position that existed prior to 2010 for Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools where parents applied directly to schools for places outside the annual round. However, this will now apply to all schools. To prepare for the introduction of the new arrangements in 2013 the authority began a pathfinder project during the Summer term 2012 in one area of the City to test out new ways of working, obtain feedback from colleagues in schools and resolve any issues that arise prior to full implementation. This has proved very successful and popular with schools and the opportunity to become involved with the pathfinder and implement the new procedure prior to September 2013 has been offered to all schools. A significant number have asked to meet officers to consider the detail of putting this into practice and these meetings will take place over the first half of the Autumn term. It is possible that given the level of interest it may be worthwhile to allow all schools to operate this way as soon as practically possible.
- 3.8 All schools that begin to operate the new procedures must always, on receipt of an in-year application, notify the local authority of both the application and its outcome. The authority will keep up to date figures on the availability of places in all areas. The admission authority will inform parents of their right to appeal against the refusal of a school place. At the moment the pathfinder schools are also notifying the authority that a place is available to be offered and a family has come forward to ask for that place. The authority is making the formal offer of the school place as the current Admissions Code defines that the Local Authority must make the offers for all schools. This will change from September 2013 for those schools and Academies that are their Own Admission Authorities. For the new procedure to operate most successfully and have maximum impact for families making applications it is possible to delegate to community schools the power to make the offer of the school place on behalf of the authority. This proposal will be included in the consultation that will take place towards the end of the Autumn term to seek further views from schools and stakeholders. It will be reported to Executive Board in March 2013.
- 3.9 The Fair Access Protocol continues to prove very successful in Leeds and a revised Protocol has been adopted this year. Any child who may face difficulty in gaining a school place is covered by the Protocol and all children who are without a school place are made an offer through this process. The Protocol covers about 20% of all transfer requests and every child is made an offer of a school place, whilst ensuring that no school has to take more than their fair share of children with challenging behaviour.

- 3.10 During the admissions application round for 2012 when 11,800 parents applied online, and many more visited the website, we hosted a questionnaire about the choice of schools available in Leeds. There was a total of 1201 respondents this year compared with 175 last year, although not all went on to answer all of the questions available to them. We asked a range of questions to find out more about why parents choose, or do not choose, from the range of schools available, and whether that range of schools is appropriate.
- 3.11 In terms of families applying for primary school places this year parents told us that their top priority when making a preference for a school was the academic performance of the school (25%) with ease of location and reputation being the other two main factors. This is in line with last years results even though there is a much larger sample of respondents. Good behaviour also featured highly. Parents applying for secondary schools told us that academic performance was the highest priority with location of the school and reputation scoring as second and third priorities. This is in line with primary school respondents but slightly different to last year when discipline and behaviour scored more highly.
- 3.12 The majority of parents felt there was a good range of schools available. Almost 54% of parents who responded to this question stated that they held a religious belief but only 34% would apply only for a school of their own faith. Of those parents who have no religious belief 55% would still preference a faith school.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The Admission Policy is consulted on each year, usually between 1 December and early February although it is proposed to commence earlier this year to allow more time to consider the outcomes. During the last consultation there were 22 responses compared to 105 the year before and 11 the year before that. They were made up of 13 from schools, 4 from local members, 4 from governors and 1 from a Children's Services Officer. The figure is lower than last year and it is thought that this is mainly due to the fact that there were very few school specific proposals in last years consultation in comparison to a significant number the year before. This year it is planned to use the Early Years Development Officers to promote responses to the consultation through their contact with all early years settings.
- 4.1.2 It is proposed that we continue to host the survey on school choice during the application round when so many parents are accessing the website. This survey can help to inform the local authority's statutory duty to promote choice and diversity.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The admissions policy has had an equality impact assessment carried out (See Appendix 5). The policy allows for priorities to be given to children with exceptional mobility or physical difficulties. The transport policy ensures that children with disabled parents are appropriately supported. The admission policy is based on local schools for local children

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The admission policy is based on priority for local schools supporting community cohesion, sustainable travel, attendance and health and wellbeing. Children are provided with priority for schools that they are able to access within a reasonable distance, or provided with zero fare transport if there are no places available within an appropriate distance. Children in Public Care are the highest priority in all admission policies.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The Admissions Team is funded from the Direct Schools Grant and the cost of the service is monitored by the Schools Forum. In line with all services funded from the DSG the cost has been frozen in the current year at 2011/12 levels in advance of the new schools funding formula taking effect next year. The cost of the service includes an amount that is paid to Corporate Services for the Call Centre that receives all of the telephone calls from parents and carers.
- 4.4.2 The online application process is proving popular with parents and allows a streamlining of the process for handling admissions. A summary booklet is provided for all parents outlining the essential information necessary to apply for a school place. The full booklet is provided on the website, along with a range of other information, and in hard copy only on request.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 All admission authorities must consult by 1st March on their admission arrangements that will apply for the following academic year. Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult subject to a requirement to consult at least once every 7 years. Consultation must take place for a minimum of 8 weeks between 1 November and 1 March in the determination year. Admission arrangements must be determined by 15 April each year and a copy published on the website for the whole offer year. Following determination of arrangements any objections must be made to the Schools Adjudicator by 30th June.
- 4.5.2 Local authorities must publish a composite prospectus online, with hard copies available for those who do not have access to the internet, by 12 September in the offer year.
- 4.5.3 Local Authorities were placed under a duty to promote diversity and increase parental choice in planning and securing the provision of school places in the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This built on the existing requirement that local authorities seek to maximise parental preference for school places. The government agenda is to actively promote choice for parents, supported by the choice advisers, and extended transport arrangements for many families, encouraging parents to be aspirational in their requests. The School Choice survey is a means of collecting information from parents to support this duty.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The increasing birth rate in the City is leading to a slight fall in the percentage of parents being offered their first preference school. There is the potential for children to be offered places some significant distance from their home, particularly if they apply after the deadlines given. It will be necessary to continue to increase the number of places available to enable parents to access a local school.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The number of applications dealt with in the primary and junior rounds continues to increase and this year the number of secondary applications has fallen very slightly. Overall the Admissions team have dealt with 25,432 applications for starting school or in year transfers. The number of appeals being successfully defended for secondary and for in year transfers continues to improve. Those held for primary schools have increased. As more schools adopt academy and foundation status fewer appeals are defended by the local authority
- 5.2 The survey carried out on parents views of the choices of schools available indicates that they particularly want a school with good academic standards, that is easily accessible, and has a good reputation. Parents indicated that they were most influenced on school choice by friends and relatives, the school's open day and the Ofsted report.
- 5.3 The admissions policy is fully compliant with all legislation. All allocations processes are carried out in line with the published policy. The volume of in year transfers continues to rise as it has done since the introduction of co-ordination.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Executive Board note the information on the annual admission round 2012 including:
- The percentage of applications for places in September 2012 where the first preference was offered was 84.1%, with 95.2% being offered one of their first three preferences
 - The reducing number of appeals for secondary school places and in year applications with an increase in the number of primary appeals
 - The continuing success of the online application system

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 There are no background documents to this report.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.