

School Place Planning and Admissions workshop – Notes

19th December 2016

Introduction

- The workshop aimed to provide information and challenge some pre-conceptions about the school admission arrangements in Bristol (myth-busting).
- The work shop was designed by Bristol City Council (BCC) Officers and all Councillors were invited to attend as the issue covered the whole City.
- Councillors were encouraged to ask questions through the workshop. Officers recognised the different levels of knowledge in the room – all questions were welcomed.

Presentations and Key Points

Quiz and School Place Planning

- Paul Jacobs (PJ), Service Director for Education and Skills led a quiz to provide facts, figures and context:

Questions for 19th December

1. How many on-time applications did BCC process for the 2016 year 7 admission round?

4,439 - 1st preferences on-time (inc Bristol children for Bristol and other LA schools and other LA for Bristol schools)

2. How many late applications were received for year 7 in September 2016?

938

3. Which school was the most oversubscribed for September 2016?

Bristol Cathedral Choir School

4. How many children were in Y6 in Jan 2016 and how many started in Year 7 in Bristol schools?

4,316 - January 2016 Year 6

3,812 - October 2016 Year 7

5. How many places were unfilled on the October census day in Year 7?

350

6. Is there a legal limit to the number of children in a year group?

No. The Published Admission Number (PAN) is the minimum that can be admitted (if there are sufficient applications). Schools then can breach the PAN to take more children or appeals can put children in over PAN.

7. Is there a legal limit to the number of children in a class?

Yes, but only for Infant classes (Reception, Years 1 & 2). Not for junior classes or secondary.

8. Which school has the highest number of Children in Care?

Bristol Metropolitan Academy

9. Which school has the highest percentage of children entitled to Free School Meals

Bridge Learning Campus

10. How many phone calls were answered by the admissions team between 1 March and 1st September 2016 **(9,000)** and how many phone calls are received by SAT each the days following national offer day? **(more than 600 and also hundreds of emails each day)**
11. How much does Bristol spend on home to school travel?

In 2015/2016 we spent £4,948,957 on Home To School Travel.

- PJ provided an overview of the approach to school place planning. An update report would be presented to the People Scrutiny Commission in Spring 2017 about the overall capital programme and place planning. The main focus of the workshop was school admission but information on place planning was also required to provide context on the funding and challenges.
- All planning was based on projections and Bristol City Council (BCC) worked with the government using the available funding. Good work had taken place with primary level funding but work was more challenging with secondary as much less money was available from central government.
- Projections were based on schemes that had planning permission approved as these are much more likely to deliver – this was a nationally accepted practice.
- Following a Member query about new homes, PJ confirmed that collaboration with the Development Control team took place to anticipate big developments.

Overview of the Legal Framework – including how schools set their admission criteria

Ian Bell, Place planning manager presented an overview of the Legal Framework.

- Education Act 1996 – The core act outlines the legal requirement for Local Authority to provide sufficient school places. Recent changes have seen a shift towards school powers but retention of that power is key for central coordination.
- Free school presumption means power to decide new school places in a different place – odd situation. There is an increased complexity with individual schools setting their own methods for admissions.
- One offer per child system- coordination role for the LA as well as policing role for admissions authority complying with the School Admissions Code.
- When lots of parents want to appeal for a certain school the school would need to demonstrate that the prejudice the educational provision by going over the admission number and the outcome depends on the strength of individual cases made.
- Cllr Asher Craig (Cabinet member for Neighbourhoods) felt some people were excluded by the process. Concerns raised on negative impact of the appeals process on certain communities with less social capacity or the ability to navigate the process. Further information was requested on the representation on the panels.
- Officers confirmed

- The appeal panel can consider all reasons for preference and are not restricted by the admission criteria.
 - the panel were provided with extensive training, included receiving information even if parents/carers were emotional or had reduced linguistic skills etc. Interpreters were booked for people when English was a second language.
 - the panel were not necessarily representative and Democratic Services, the team who administered the appeals, were pro-actively working to address this during the recruitment process.
- Officers agreed that work was needed to level the field and to encourage people to come forward to sit on the Appeal Panels. Cllrs can be proactive and supportive with this.
 - When schools use Democratic Services to support their appeals / clerking the DS team were responsible for the constitution of the panels. Officers would like current panel members to mentor new candidates. It was acknowledged that currently panel members were heavily represented by a certain ethnicity and socio-economic background.
 - To become a panel member was a lengthy process that was a barrier to participation. Panel members received out of pocket expenses and lunch to balance out these concerns over commitment.

Action: Cllrs requested information to be circulated information to advertise and to encourage new members.

- Members suggested BCC could be more proactive in challenging schools where odd/wrong decisions are made by the more controversial policies, despite the fragmented and challenging system.
- Officers highlighted that BCC would prefer to negotiate with schools rather than referring to the adjudicator. BCC would not have the resources to analyse each admission policy in detail but use the admissions system to ensure high standards. No big concerns the majority of the time.
- BCC issues guidance to schools to ensure they stay up to date with the code- over subscription and challenges to practice have only recently become an issue. BCC generally had a strong relations with most of the schools in the city – sometimes could challenge more but found negotiation better given lack of resource.
- Members discussed anecdotal evidence that academy providers are more reluctant to give provision to SEN pupils and queried if there is enough city wide. Ian Bell highlighted the complexity of the issues – it is very challenging to project SEN places.
- Officers agreed there is an imbalance that contributes to spend on supported transport– with lots in the north, none in the East, some in the south. Lots of children bussed around (e.g. east and south to the north which means north children bussed south) – lots of work to be done on looking at this strategy to address special school places. Officers stressed the difference between main stream school places for SEN. The real challenge is around students whom have additional needs but no formal support.

- The role of the Schools adjudicator clarified. There were grey areas in the legislation and a view only taken when challenged. Chair asked for other Qs to be put on flip chart.

The process in Bristol

- The Application process was outlined in a presentation. Councillors were provided with a demonstration of the online application process. 98% + of applicants used the web page.
- The data base has been provided by an external provider and there is limited influence on the wording used on the web page.
- Cllrs received information on the outreach work undertaken by the admission team from Hayley Leman including the programme of visits and activity done to reach parents via a variety of mediums.
- The admissions team deal with 6000 primary age and 4000 secondary age children plus in year admission and free meals – the service is very busy and only a small team of Officers. The team are very happy to do more where possible and welcome suggestions for outreach work.
- The presentation included information on common mistakes. The benefits of a local fall back school and making use of all three preference choices was highlighted. Councillors were encouraged to highlight this to parents / carers through ward contact.
- It was noted that all applications were processed after deadline and it was not first come first serve. All places allocated up to admissions number none held back for late deadlines.
- PJ asked Cllrs to consider the advantages and disadvantages of community schools versus schools with a wider catchment area – summarised below:

Positive and negative issues - Community schools and schools with a wider catchment area

Issues	Wider catchment area	Smaller catchment area, i.e. community school
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be spread evenly across the City • A more even spread of Free School Meal entitlement across the City 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social capital would be concentrated in one area • Attendance at schools would be influenced by the house prices in the area
Travel to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased travel time • Reduced independence – parents / carers would have to take children to school • Increased travel costs • Increased travel congestion • Possible reduced attendance due to distance • Children could be lost in the transition from primary to secondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced travel time • Children can travel to school independently or with neighbours as they get older • Less travel cost • Positive affect on health if children can walk to school

School boundaries / catchment areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be challenging when schools have unusual catchment areas – i.e. some families are eligible and some families living close by would not
Social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced support as families could be spread across the City • The transition from primary to secondary could be more challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from neighbours / community • Children would grow up with other children in their community • Negative issues, such as bullying, could follow children from primary to secondary school

- Issues around the allocations of places and the advantages of the different models were discussed, including how BCC encourages people to make good choices.
- Councillors could assist by challenging lingering reputational misconceptions which affect the three preferences parents /carers choose. Residents should be encouraged to be more open minded and to choose the local school to maintain community links.
- Councillor suggested data was required to demonstrate the fairness of the system. Is there a problem with consistency or a lack thereof?
- Every area has a school that has transitioned from community school to academy which has created multi layered complexity. There are very few children who are not allocated a local school place when one is identified as a preference. Residents should be encouraged to use their preferences wisely in order to ensure allocation of a local school.
- Cllrs can take a role to promote community schools, surgeries for applications etc. Challenge perceptions around certain schools. The schools in Bristol have improved – Councillors need to champion the schools to residents.
- Councillors are permitted to assist with online forms if the person is present. An email address is needed so a Councillor would only be able to help one family if using their email address.
- Councillor surgeries could provide information and advice rather than complete applications.
- Officers confirmed that discussions with Colston Girls School and Cathedral Choir school were ongoing. Both schools were keen to accept children from further afield and increase the proportion of Bristol children being offered places. The schools want to be seen as part of the Bristol family of school but have their individual reasons for not having Bristol as their boundaries; traditionally set up for some other areas outside as natural catchments. Greenwich judgement also means legally can't use LA boundary as your catchment area.
- The catchment area for Redland Green could be altered but could not be increased.
- Some schools require supplementary information and testing is required.

- Waiting lists run until 31st December to September. Advice to parents is to stay on waiting list until then
- Cllrs commented that some schools were not perceived as community schools due to the catchment area. For example - areas like BS9. BCC cannot make people go somewhere that a map has decided is a community school.
- Reference was made to the challenge of the sibling rule – some families live close to the school but no places available due to the sibling rule.
- Question - Two schools with overlapping areas - due to high number of reception admissions you see a gap between the two – a slight redefinition of catchment areas may have solved this – can we make these adjustments to maximise community attendance? Ian Bell referred to the strategy to increase primary school places - arrangements set two years in advance so cannot always predict the numbers in the future. BCC can necessitate temporary arrangements and short term decisions to accommodate bulges etc as per our legal duties.

Planning for the Inquiry Day

Councillors were asked for suggestions:

- Data on ethnicity. i.e Who gets their first preference choice / equality impact assessment. ***Provided in the inquiry day information pack.***
- Parents who find the application process challenging – what support is given to them.
- Is BCC / South Glouc info good enough? Is it accessible? Are boundaries clear?
- Info from other LA's? Alternative approaches?
- What are the perceived issues? Live examples
- Further information about travel
- Invite heads from community schools and ask them for info on the impact of the school on the community
- Live case studies

Consensus was for an Inquiry Day in February (1/2 day, 09:30 -13:00).

- Cllrs were asked to highlight specific issues ahead of the Inquiry Day: to pinpoint any areas of unfairness so they can be addressed.
- Councillor Hiscott highlighted the Mayors request - What are the issues? what are the challenges in the system, i.e. is it difficulties filling forms, unfair criteria etc want to know what the perceived problems are so we can start solving them.
- Head teachers from a variety of school should be invited to attend.
- The background information provided was very useful for the scene setting – next stage is to ensure BCC is not disadvantaging residents from certain backgrounds. Information from other LAs would be required.
- Councillors discussed the complexities of using fairness as a metric.
- The Inquiry Day would be open to all Councillors.