



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet Report

Report of: Jayne Ludlam

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 18th March 2015

Subject: Primary School Places in Southwest Sheffield

Author of Report: Joel Hardwick (2735476)

Key Decision: NO

Reason Key Decision: n/a

Summary: Consultation on a proposal to increase pupil places at Dobcroft Infant and Dobcroft Junior schools finished on 11th February 2015. This report outlines the issue and details the response to the consultation. The report recommends a pause while the Council takes more time to explore all possible alternatives, as well as continuing to explore the implications of expansion at Dobcroft. This is to ensure we have enough local school places from September 2016 onwards in the South West of the city.

Reasons for Recommendations:

The level of concern in response to the proposal to permanently expand Dobcroft Infant and Junior schools from Dobcroft parents and local residents has clearly been high. The City Council needs further time to explore in more depth all options for providing extra primary school places in this part of the city.

A number of concerns have come forward during the consultation from the Dobcroft school community about the potential implications of expansion. There were also several alternative proposals for the expansion of school places across the area and beyond. At present a viable and positive alternative option to Dobcroft remains unconfirmed. Some parents asked the Council to extend the consultation period. Under the statutory process the Council is not able to do this

and so a pause is the way to allow a further period to explore the options in more detail. This will help shape the right long term solution for the area.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Note that a single extra Reception class is being offered at Dobcroft Infant School in September 2015 and that an extra class will be provided at Dobcroft Junior when this year group transfers to Year 3 in September 2018.
 - (ii) Agree that the proposals to permanently expand Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools from 2016 should be put on hold by formally withdrawing them allowing officers time to review and explore all options for future school places expansion in the South West of the City, including the Dobcroft plans and others suggested in the consultation process. Following this process a further consultation will take place.
 - (iii) Anticipate a further report (to Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member) on the expansion of primary school places in the southwest of the city by May to propose a further 4-week consultation on providing places by September 2016.
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Background Papers:

Category of Report: **OPEN**

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES Cleared by: Paul Schofield
Legal Implications
YES Cleared by: Nadine Wynter
Equality of Opportunity Implications
NO Cleared by:
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO Cleared by:
Human Rights Implications
NO Cleared by:
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO Cleared by:
Economic Impact
NO Cleared by:
Community Safety Implications
NO Cleared by:
Human Resources Implications
NO Cleared by:
Property Implications
NO Cleared by:
Area(s) Affected
Ecclesall
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Lead
Cllr Jackie Drayton
Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Children & Young People
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press Release
NO

REPORT TO THE CABINET

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN SOUTHWEST SHEFFIELD

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Consultation on a proposal to increase pupil places at Dobcroft Infant and Dobcroft Junior schools finished on 11th February 2015. This report outlines the issue and details the response to the consultation. The report recommends a pause while the Council takes more time to explore all possible alternatives, as well as continuing to explore the implications of expansion at Dobcroft. This is to ensure we have enough local school places from September 2016 onwards in the South West of the city.

2.0 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE

- 2.1 Providing enough school places is essential to the Council's focus on enabling children to have a great start in life, achieve their full potential, and contribute to the success of the city. At the heart of the vision for increasing primary school places in Sheffield is the council's role in guaranteeing excellent education outcomes and equitable access for all.

3.0 OUTCOME AND SUSTAINABILITY

- 3.1 The outcome would be to ensure consultation with parents and local residents on proposals to provide enough primary school places in the areas described to meet demand in 2016 and beyond. This includes an assessment of whether the solution is sustainable in the long-term.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Pressure on the southwest primary schools has risen over the last two years. In the 2014 Reception application round this resulted in 29 children who could not get a place at their catchment school (Dobcroft 8, Dore 6, Greystones 8, Totley 7). This led to a high number of admission appeals. Only 6 other primary schools in the city turned away catchment applicants in that year and all have related plans to create more local places.
- 4.2 The Council is putting in place one extra class at Dobcroft Infants in September 2015 in order to relieve pressure on the local schools in the short-term. This allows time for the permanent expansion to be explored in more detail and, as a small-scale change, can be implemented without statutory consultation processes.
- 4.3 The expected pressure on places in the medium-term is complicated by two key factors:
- (i) No single catchment area demand is expected to increase by 30 pupils per year. The pressure is anticipated in small numbers across a wide area from Greystones, Ecclesall, Dobcroft out to Dore and Totley.

- (ii) Forecast demand is normally based on the current pre-school populations matched to trends in parental preference from each primary school catchment area. In this area of the city there is a significant additional factor that makes the forecasting less reliable and therefore more open to interpretation. Over the last few years there has been a trend of young families moving into the local catchment areas with pre-school children. This has meant that cohorts of children have grown by 14% each year in the Dobcroft catchment area as they move towards school age. The picture is similar in neighbouring catchments, with Ecclesall and Totley growing by an average 13%, and Dore by 10%.

4.3 This in turn leads to two issues to consider when looking at potential solutions:

- (i) Addressing the issue through small expansions of up to 15 places in two or more schools would require those schools to operate mixed-age classes and/or classes above 30. The starting point has been to try to accommodate the growth through additional classes of 30.
- (ii) If this trend of young families moving into the area does not continue or reduces significantly then additional places may not be required in the medium to long term. Equally, if the trend of growth were to continue at the recent rate then, based on the current pre-school cohorts, it is likely that more than 30 places would be needed across this area.

4.4 The starting point for consultation, based on the variability of the forecast model and the wide area of pressure, was that Dobcroft provided a central location, with a history of 2nd and 3rd preferences from the Ecclesall and Dore areas, and with sufficient space on site to accommodate additional building.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 A consultation newsletter was distributed to Dobcroft families through the schools, residents neighbouring the site by post, and copies made available at neighbouring schools and local nurseries. A more detailed document, advertised in the newsletter, was made available on the Council website. A notice was published in the Sheffield Telegraph and at the school gates. Following the first week of responses a Frequently Asked Questions document was made available on the Council website and this was kept up to date during the process as more questions came through (see appendix 2). Four well-attended drop-in sessions were held at the Dobcroft schools week commencing 26th January. In addition, meetings were held with Governing Bodies of the Dobcroft schools and neighbouring schools by request. A document on the complex data behind the proposal was put together independently by the Dobcroft Infant Governing Body data and evidence lead. This document was appended to the Frequently Asked Questions document in order to share this publically during consultation.

- 5.2 In all around 180 emails and letters were received and the vast majority of these were from Dobcroft parents or residents raising concerns or directly opposing the proposal. A petition against the proposal set up by a local person on www.change.org had 359 signatures. A further petition on the same website supporting an increase at the Ecclesall/Clifford schools had 378 signatures. The responses to consultation are included at appendix 1.

Issues Raised During Consultation

Traffic around Dobcroft Schools

- 5.3 The infant and junior schools share an entrance at the top of a residential cul-de-sac with St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary nearby. The concerns raised were around drop-off and pick-up times with the volume of traffic and inconsiderate parking already said to be a major problem for local residents. There have also been concerns raised around the health and safety of families, local residents, and access for emergency service vehicles at busy times.
- 5.4 Any agreement to proceed following consultation would be "subject to the proposal receiving planning permission". The following phase of design work would therefore consider any mitigation proposals. Ultimately these issues around the wider impact of the development would be considered through the planning permission process. This would follow the same pattern as previous proposals such as the expansion of Hallam Primary School where traffic was raised as a significant issue. Following the decision in principle to expand Hallam Primary, further work was undertaken with local residents to consider how issues might be eased. As a result action is being taken to provide a new drop-off/pick-up point in a position that is aimed at reducing traffic around the residential streets near the school entrance. During the consultation some residents and parents have suggested ideas for how the issue could be managed or reduced in relation to Dobcroft and these would need to be picked up and considered in more detail were the proposal to proceed.

The need for places

- 5.5 Responses ranged from there being no evidence of growth and therefore no need for places, all the way to there being the need for more than just expansion at Dobcroft. A number of responses highlighted the growth in Ecclesall, particularly in 2015, and a number of people were supportive of providing extra places in other parts of the southwest to meet that local demand. Many people highlighted concerns about meeting demand across a number of catchment areas at one school and expressed doubt that a single proposal at Dobcroft would or should meet needs across the wider area. Most responses who considered the issue appeared to understand the general principle behind trying to provide places in batches of 30 and there was little, if any, support for smaller expansions at two or more schools in the area.
- 5.6 The data behind this is complex and can therefore be used to support a number of different conclusions. There are two key issues as outlined above, (i) the forecast that shows a need for extra places is based on the

current trend for young families moving into the area and this is inherently variable, (ii) that forecast, and the pressure in 2014, shows a small deficit in places across a number of catchments that does not lend itself to a simple solution.

- 5.7 In order to support understanding of the complex data behind the proposal, the data and evidence lead from Dobcroft Infant School governors undertook a piece of work to give a view of the information independent from the Council. This was then shared with the wider parent body during consultation through the Frequently Asked Questions document on the Council website. The FAQs, including this document can be found at appendix 2.

Buildings, design, & sites

- 5.8 A number of concerns were raised around the impact of expansion on the Dobcroft buildings and site. These are wide-ranging and cover both potential issues around expansion and a view that the current site and buildings are less than ideal. The issues raised include any reduction in extra-curricular space, the potential reduction in playspace, provision of sufficient toilets, difficulty of existing dining arrangements including the current use of classrooms for dining, sufficient hall space for assemblies and performances, as well as the overall concern that any new building is high quality and supports good outcomes. There was also concern around accommodation for the after-school club and a number of responses were keen to ensure that this remained or increased as part of any proposal.
- 5.9 The work to bring forward designs for a school expansion is a labour-intensive process that often starts with a list of concerns from heads and governors. The key for the consultation on a proposal such as this is to listen carefully to the wider concerns of families and then, if proceeding, to begin working positively with the school leadership through the concerns as part of the overall design process. Following the process for previous projects, the intention would then be to engage further with parents and local residents with the initial designs prior to submitting any designs for the planning permission process.

Temporary extra class in September 2015

- 5.10 The consultation was around a permanent increase from September 2016 onwards. The Council has commissioned an extra class at Dobcroft Infants in September 2015 as a temporary measure to alleviate pressure in advance of a permanent arrangement. As a single extra class there is no requirement for consultation on the September 2015 additional class and the lack of consultation has been criticised by some. This has been done in a number of schools in the recent past without significant difficulty and without adversely impacting everyday school life. There is no legal requirement to consult on a change of this scale and the most important effort goes into ensuring that the extra class can be accommodated and resourced properly – this is an ongoing discussion with the school leadership and governors who are being rightly challenging to make sure the result is right for everyone.

Impact on the school and children's outcomes

- 5.11 Many of the concerns and issues raised ultimately come back to the potential impact on children's outcomes. This covers many different aspects, amongst them is a perception that 120 places per year is too big and 'impersonal' and that this along with impacts on the building and site will ultimately lead to a reduction in children's outcomes. There is also a view that Dobcroft is currently underfunded compared to other Sheffield schools. Some responses suggest that the school is unfairly funded based on the current mechanism and that this is magnified by a higher than expected proportion of pupils with special educational needs. The contention has been that issues such as these would be exacerbated by expansion. Most responses are supportive of the schools in their current form and many very positive comments have been received about the education currently offered.
- 5.12 In terms of the overall size, whilst the Dobcroft schools share a site, the schools are separate infant and junior schools. This means that 120 per year would mean the infant school has capacity for 360 pupils and the junior for 480, each with their own Head and leadership team. For comparison, a standard 2 form entry (60 places per year) 'through' primary school with a nursery would have around 480 pupils. The Lydgate schools are a local example of split infant and junior schools that operate successfully with 120 per year. In terms of the funding, the formula is designed to match the relative challenge and need of a school's intake. Additional pupils through any school expansion proposal would be funded on the same basis as all Sheffield pupils and therefore should not adversely impact the school.

Decision-making process & consultation

- 5.13 Many of the responses were critical of the process. Mainly this related to the length of the process and the information available. As described above, efforts were made throughout the process to make more information generally available, including an overview of the questions that were coming through the consultation. The volume and level of detail of responses suggests some parts of the process worked well. The key issue that came up towards the end of the consultation process was a request to extend the consultation period to incorporate a more detailed consideration of alternative options.
- 5.14 The 4-week consultation period is laid down in the statutory guidance around changes to schools such as the expansion proposed at Dobcroft. The legal process requires that a final decision is made within 2 months of the end of that 4-week period. Therefore a final decision is required by 11th April 2015. The Council was not therefore in a position to simply extend the consultation by any significant period as some respondents suggested and must therefore formally decide next steps as outlined in this report, following the end of the statutory 4-week consultation period.

Alternative options

- 5.15 During consultation a number of options for adding places have been put

forward. These have been expressed both as alternatives to the proposal at Dobcroft and in addition, where the respondent considered the need for places goes beyond the extra 30 places proposed. There were a variety of options that were discussed during consultation, including the proposal to expand the Dobcroft schools, alternative ways of creating additional places at one or more of the neighbouring schools, and some people asked about creating a new school for the wider area.

- 5.16 In terms of the consultation response, there has been a view from some members of the Clifford and Ecclesall school communities that these schools should be expanded instead or as well as Dobcroft. This has then been picked up by some of the Dobcroft parents who have seen this as their preferred option given the apparent support in the Ecclesall area and the opposition around Dobcroft. Part of the support revolves around providing places local to the growth within the Ecclesall catchment. It has also come from Clifford Infants who are very positive about the idea of adding a junior phase as part of an expansion proposal. A number of responses raised the option of a new school for the wider area, particularly as an alternative to expansion at Dobcroft where the perception for some is an already overcrowded site.
- 5.17 Overall, the rationale for additional places in this area is complex and any solution is therefore unlikely to meet all potential needs equally well. The addition of 10-15 places at two or more schools has not received any support during the consultation process. Whilst an addition of 30 places per year at two schools may offer more certainty in meeting individual catchment needs and may indeed be required in the near future, the basis for this around young families moving into the area remains an unstable variable. This has consequences for both the Council's overall targeting of education capital and the potential negative aspects of overproviding places on the schools that may end up carrying surplus places. The addition of 30 places per year could therefore be seen as a more cautious response to the issue and this would need to be tested as part of a further exploration of the options.

Conclusion & next steps

- 5.18 Whilst the consultation has brought forward many concerns, particularly around protecting the current educational experience and outcomes, providing additional places at Dobcroft remains a viable option. The alternatives put forward would need further development to test whether these offer a viable solution to the places needs of the area. Having listened carefully to all of the responses and the discussions that have been held it is clear that a continued period of development work would be helpful in making sure that all alternative options can be fully assessed and that any solution is the best option for children, families, residents, and schools across the area.
- 5.19 The next steps would be to continue exploring all the existing options, plus any others that come forward. This would include a discussion with the Church of England Diocese about their future plans for their two local

school sites, Clifford Infants and Ecclesall Junior. There would be further discussions with the local school communities in the area before any further decision.

- 5.20 If the recommendation to explore all options further is accepted, any proposal brought forward to add places would require a fresh statutory process. This would mean a further 4-week period of consultation on the proposal. The aim would be to complete that process and take a final decision in principle before the end of the current academic year in order to allow time for the additional places to be created for September 2016.

Legal Implications

- 5.21 Local Authorities have a duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to secure sufficient primary schools are available for their area. The proposals to reorganise school provision to meet this requirement, such as expansion and closure, are governed by the procedures set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 (“Prescribed Alterations Regulations”), and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 (“Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations”) and relevant statutory guidance.
- 5.22 The recommendation of a pause to the Dobcroft proposal requires formally withdrawing the proposal in line with the procedures laid out in the Prescribed Alterations Regulations and statutory guidance described above. This would mean that any further plan to add school places, including at Dobcroft, would require a further publication of proposals and further attendant 4-week consultation period prior to a final decision in due course.

Financial Implications

- 5.23 The costs related to this are the costs of continuing design work around the Dobcroft schools and the costs of further exploration of the alternatives prior to any further formal decision to proceed with one of the options. This would be estimated at a maximum of £14k further costs around Dobcroft and a maximum of £10k costs of continued exploration of alternatives. These would be met within the CYPF capital programme as part of the overall scheme to add primary school places in this part of the city.
- 5.24 By continuing the design work in the next phase, the overall scheme budget or ability to deliver the project should not be affected by the recommendation to further explore options. Any alternative proposal that came forward would need to be considered in relation to the overall cost and value for money of the related scheme.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The recommendation is to allow a further consideration of the alternative options to add places. We believe that extra places remain a requirement from September 2016 and that doing nothing is not therefore a viable option.

7.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The level of concern in response to the proposal to permanently expand Dobcroft Infant and Junior schools from Dobcroft parents and local residents has clearly been high. The City Council needs further time to explore in more depth all options for providing extra primary school places in this part of the city.
- 7.2 A number of concerns have come forward during the consultation from the Dobcroft school community about the potential implications of expansion. There were also several alternative proposals for the expansion of school places across the area and beyond. At present a viable and positive alternative option to Dobcroft remains unconfirmed. Some parents asked the Council to extend the consultation period to consider such options in more detail. Under the statutory process the Council is not able to do this and so a pause is the way to allow a further period to explore all options further. This will help shape the right long term solution for the area.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to:
- (i) Note that a single extra Reception class is being offered at Dobcroft Infant School in September 2015 and that an extra class will be provided at Dobcroft Junior when this year group transfers to Year 3 in September 2018.
 - (ii) Agree that the proposals to permanently expand Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools from 2016 should be put on hold by formally withdrawing them allowing officers time to review and explore all options for future school places expansion in the South West of the City, including the Dobcroft plans and others suggested in the consultation process. Following this process a further consultation will take place.
 - (iii) Anticipate a further report (to Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member) on the expansion of primary school places in the southwest of the city by May to propose a further 4-week consultation on providing places by September 2016.

Joel Hardwick
School Organisation Manager
March 2015

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