

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: November 24 2009	Meeting Name: Executive
Report title:		Primary School Places in Dulwich and East Dulwich – Scrutiny Report	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Overview & Scrutiny Committee	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the executive considers the comments of the strategic director of children’s services in response to the recommendations of overview & scrutiny committee (summarised in section 6 of the scrutiny report attached as appendix 1) and agrees to provide a written response to the committee within two months.

BACKGROUND

2. The overview & scrutiny committee undertook a review of the number of primary school places in the Dulwich/East Dulwich area and perceived failures in the admissions process at a meeting on October 12 2009 attended by local parents and residents, head teachers and school governors, ward councillors, council officers and the leader of the council. Its report was finalised at its meeting on November 16 2009.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3. The response from the strategic director of children’s services to scrutiny’s recommendations is set out below:

Recommendation	Officer response
1 That all head teachers in the borough be thanked for engaging positively with discussions as to how to meet the demand for additional primary school places and particularly the heads at Crampton, Goodrich and Lyndhurst who took bulge classes for this year at such short notice.	The comments are noted and head teachers will be formally thanked.
2 That central government be urged to make funding available in addition to the £200 million capital funds already offered and with a revised set of criteria in order to address the national bulge in the primary school population.	Agreed - London Councils have recently put in a further request to the DCSF for additional capital support for authorities.
3 That the executive scrutinises the GLA projection figures in depth, particularly in terms of fully understanding the information supporting the projections and assumptions made, before formally accepting the forecast for Southwark	Executive is considering these issues in a report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
4 That the executive put in place mechanisms to ensure that projections remain under regular review.	Executive will receive annual reports on this issue.

5	If it is satisfied that the projections can be relied upon, that the executive accept the proposals from officers to meet the bulge in demand via permanent expansions and temporary bulge classes rather than seeking to open a new school.	Noted; considered further in report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
6	That ongoing negotiations with some schools in the Dulwich area regarding bulge classes be noted.	Noted; considered further in report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
7	That the experience of schools such as Bessemer Grange, where there are fewer children than anticipated, be noted with concern.	The authority will review the situation closely and support schools in these circumstances.
8	That action be taken to publicise the rising reputations of previously less popular schools.	Noted for future communications campaign.
9	That any increase in the intake of specific schools be matched as closely as possible to the areas experiencing a population bulge.	Noted; considered further in report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
10	That any increase in numbers of classes should make use of space within existing school buildings and not encroach on play space.	Noted; considered further in report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
11	In future that consideration of any increase in number of forms of entry be made as soon as possible to avoid excessive pressure being placed on local head teachers, but that this should be decided after all applications have been received and analysed in order to identify and respond to local need and to avoid other schools being undersubscribed.	Noted; considered further in report reviewing primary school places on this agenda.
12	That the expansion of the admissions team by three officers be welcomed, together with proposals to provide a more personal and responsive service to parents to take them through the admissions process.	Noted. Recruitment of new officers is underway. Proposals to improve communication with parents and support are being implemented.
13	That in September 2010 officers report back to the children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee regarding the implementation and operation of these changes.	Noted, for inclusion in the first appropriate report to children's services and education scrutiny sub committee in 2010.
14	That difficulties in the admissions system caused by some parents retaining multiple offers of places be recognised as an ongoing problem.	Noted, officers will take steps to actively reduce retention of multiple offers through contact with parents from two weeks after 2010 offer date.

15 That the introduction in the year after next of a single admissions application form, covering all London boroughs, be welcomed together with increased informal co-operation across South East London boroughs for next year's admissions process.	Noted.
16 That the council's policy of ensuring offers within one mile of residence, rather than the government's guidance of two miles, be welcomed and that the government be asked to reflect this in its guidance by differentiating between urban and rural areas and providing funding to meet this.	All efforts will continue to be made to allocate places close to the family home where parent preferences cannot be met.
17 That the admissions forum be requested to review the unintended consequences of the distance criteria whereby failure to get into the nearest school (because of its small catchment area) may work against getting into the second and other nearest schools.	Will be referred to chair of admissions forum for consideration at next appropriate meeting.
18 That the council develop an action plan to tackle the increased number of late applications, including publicity around parental responsibility if a child is at a nursery school attached to a primary school or has a sibling at a primary school and any issues around English language literacy levels in the borough.	A comprehensive action plan to address these issues has been implemented.
19 That new publicity include area based school fairs at which the heads and senior staff of multiple schools can host stalls and meet parents. This will bring more parents into contact with staff from successful schools which are currently undersubscribed. One aim of the fairs should be to overcome the "reputational lag" from which some schools suffer.	Noted for implementation.
20 In addition, that existing social networks such as community and faith groups and on-line forums are accessed.	Noted for implementation.
21 That Southwark's website be comprehensively overhauled – to enhance the information provided about the admissions process, to provide up to date information about schools and to achieve a step-change improvement in the numbers of on-line applications.	Noted, this is in place and subject to continuous improvement and support to parents each year.
22 That the admissions system be altered so that changes to applications are recorded as changes and not as late applications.	Changes made to on-time application forms including requests for alternative schools of preference to be added to their application forms are considered 'late' (unless there are exceptional circumstances for doing so). Separately there were approximately 400

	<p>applicants who did not submit an on-time application form, only a late one.</p> <p>A questionnaire aimed at late only applicants was produced to better understand why so many missed the deadline. Unfortunately, a small number of parents who submitted their application on-time and subsequently made late changes to their form received the questionnaire in error. This group will not be counted as 'lates' is 2010.</p>
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REASONS FOR LATENESS

4. The overview and scrutiny committee considered the final scrutiny report at its meeting on November 16 2009 which was the same day as the executive agenda despatch.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

5. Contained elsewhere on the executive agenda is a report on primary school places in the borough. It is desirable that the scrutiny report is considered at the same meeting as both reports deal with the issue of primary school places.

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Overview & Scrutiny Committee - minutes and reports	Scrutiny Team Tooley Street London SE1 2TZ	Peter Roberts Scrutiny project manager Tel: 020 7525 4350

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Primary School Places in Dulwich and East Dulwich – Report of Overview & Scrutiny Committee November 2009

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny	
Report Author	Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	November 17 2009	
Key Decision?	No	
Consultation with other officers / directorates / Executive member		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	No	No
Finance Director	No	No
Strategic Director of Children's Services	Yes	Yes