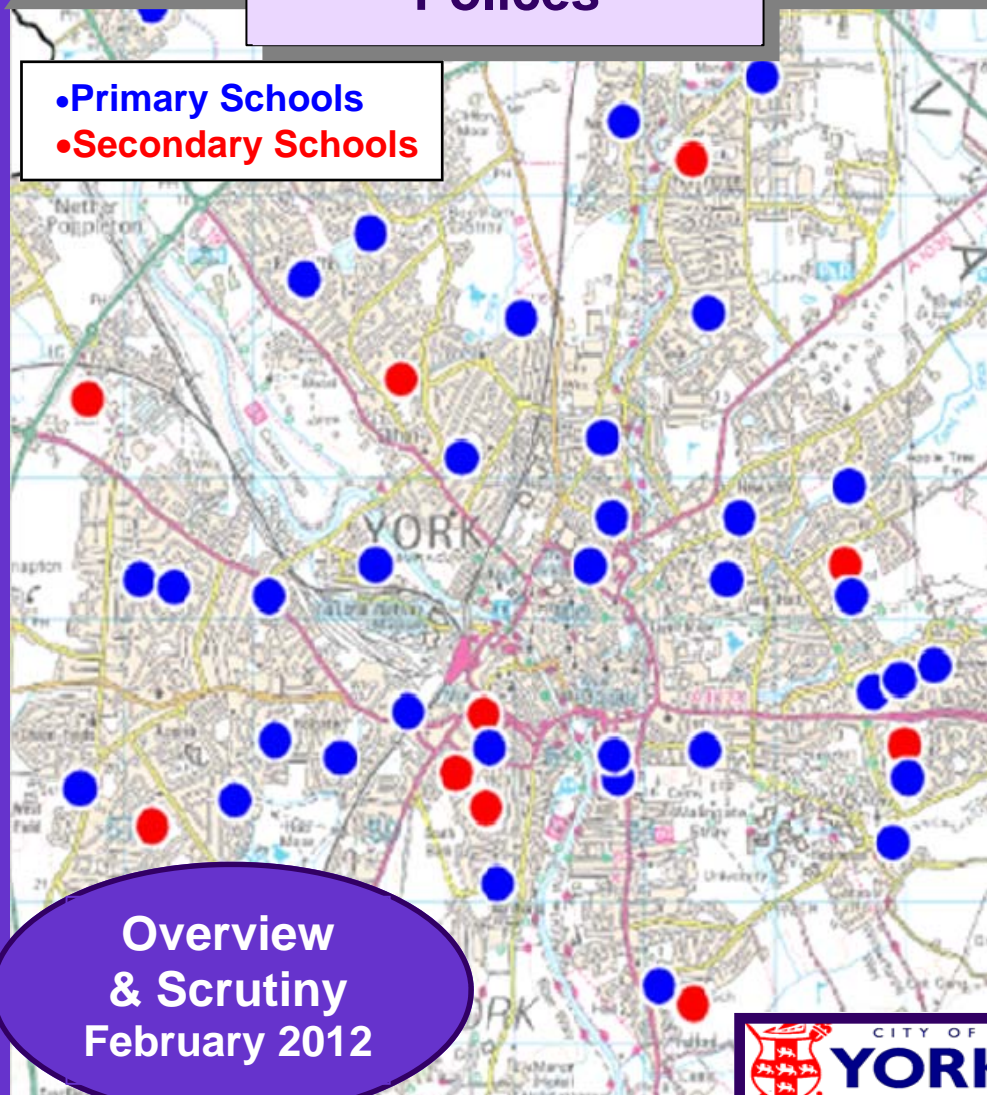


Scrutiny Review of Admission Arrangements & School Travel Policies

- Primary Schools
- Secondary Schools



Overview
& Scrutiny
February 2012



CHAIR'S FOREWARD

I am pleased to present this report on our review of Demographics in York School, and would like to thank all those who contributed.

Choosing the right school for a child is a very emotive decision for parents and, with the birth rate rising, the Committee felt the need to ensure that the City of York Council's school admissions policy was meeting the needs of parents, children and schools.

We were pleased to find that it is, and therefore agreed no changes were needed. We also endorsed the innovative ways that schools are regaining classroom space and reorganising classes to ensure that the maximum number of children get a place at their preferred school.

Having looked at the issue of providing free transport for children attending faith schools, we concluded that it was unfair that some children receive free transport and others attending the same school do not and we recommended changes to the Local Authority's policy.

We sought an approach to this which would have the least impact on the parents of those children currently receiving free transport to a faith school.

Councillor Ann Reid
Chair



COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee carried out this review between September 2011 and January 2012.

The Committee was made up the following members :

Councillor Ann Reid (Chair)
Councillor Lindsay Cunningham-Cross
Councillor Jenny Brooks
Councillor Fiona Fitzpatrick
Councillor Lynne Jeffries
Councillor David Levene
Councillor David Taylor
Councillor Brian Watson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee would like to thank the Head teacher from both Hempland Primary School and Scarcroft Primary School for their contribution to this review.

Also, the Committee would like to thank the following council officers who supported the work on this Review:

- Mark Ellis, Head of School Services & Directorate Support
- Tom Chamberlain, School Admissions, Directorate Support and Community Transport Manager

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Learning & Overview Scrutiny Committee proposed the following recommendations:

Recommendation One:

That no changes be made to the Local Authority's (LA) current oversubscription criteria.

The oversubscription criteria in York are as follows:

First priority: ('Looked After') Pupils looked after by a local authority – this applies to all pupils who are in the care of a

local authority or are provided with accommodation by the authority (see section 22 of the Children Act 1989);

Second priority: ('Catchment') Pupils who live within the catchment area normally served by the school – catchment areas are designated by the City of York Local Authority and are made available to parents via the annual Guide for Parents or from the School Services team;

Third priority: ('Exceptional') Pupils considered by the Local Authority to have exceptional social or medical needs which relate to the preferred school – the Local Authority may consult with other medical /educational professionals for a further opinion as to whether a pupil should be allocated a place to an individual school due to a particular medical condition or social need;

Fourth priority: ('Siblings') Pupils with siblings at the school in September 2011 – siblings are defined as brothers or sisters living in the same house, as their primary place of residence, including half and step-brothers or sisters;

Fifth priority: ('Distance') Pupils who live closest to the school using the nearest available safe walking route - distances are measured by a GIS mapping system from the child's home address to the entrance of the school.

Recommendation Two:

That a phased withdrawal of free denominational transport be commenced as from 1 September 2013 in line with Option 3 in Annex G of the full final Report.

The Committee carefully considered the alternative approaches to withdrawing the transport detailed in the options shown within Annex G, together with the savings each option may potentially realise.

Recommendation Three:

That as from 1 September 2013, the Local Authority to introduce concessionary fares on transport provided by the Local Authority, whilst that provision exists, for new pupils taking up denominational places.

The Committee agreed the fairest option was Option 3 i.e. the withdrawal of all free denominational transport and the introduction of concessionary fares.

Recommendation Four:

That the Local Authority works with those schools offering denominational places to support the implementation of this change in policy.

The Committee recognised that the change in policy would affect the families of those pupils currently receiving free transport on a denominational basis. Also, that the schools affected may wish to offer alternative arrangements to those pupils, and therefore agreed the LA should offer support in the transition period.

The full final report from the review can be viewed online at: <http://democracy.york.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13029&path=13028>

COUNCIL PLAN 2011-15



The review supports the Council Plan 2011-15 in that the provision of appropriate and improved local infrastructure (including schools) will help to build strong communities.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Between September and November 2011, two meetings were held to gather information in support of the review topic:

Meeting 1

To receive a presentation on demographics in schools across the city, and consider and agree a remit and workplan for the review

Meeting 2

To receive an report presenting information on:

- Data on September 2011 intake
- Comparison data for Oversubscription Criteria
- National Adjudicator Determination September 2009
- CYC Denominational Transport Numbers & Costs for 2010/11

The Committee also met with two Head Teachers to discuss the issues they had faced around their 2011-12 oversubscription, and the impact on parents of the order of priorities within the LA's oversubscription criteria.

Issues Affecting Demographics in Primary Schools

Admissions oversubscription criteria:

- Does the catchment system work for parents and the LA?
- Is it fair?

Increase in number of primary pupils due to new housing:

- Germany Beck, Fulford (175 pupils)
- Derwenthorpe, Osbaldwick (135)
- British Sugar (250+)
- York Central (?)

New school provision:

- Changing role of LA
- Academies
- Schools' partnership

Implications for school travel:

- Are school travel policies fair and appropriate given changing demographics?

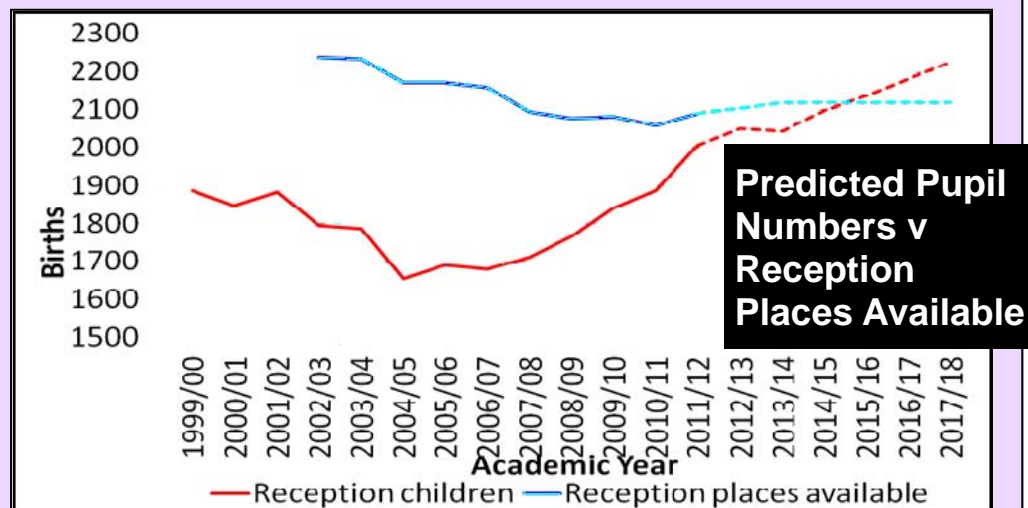
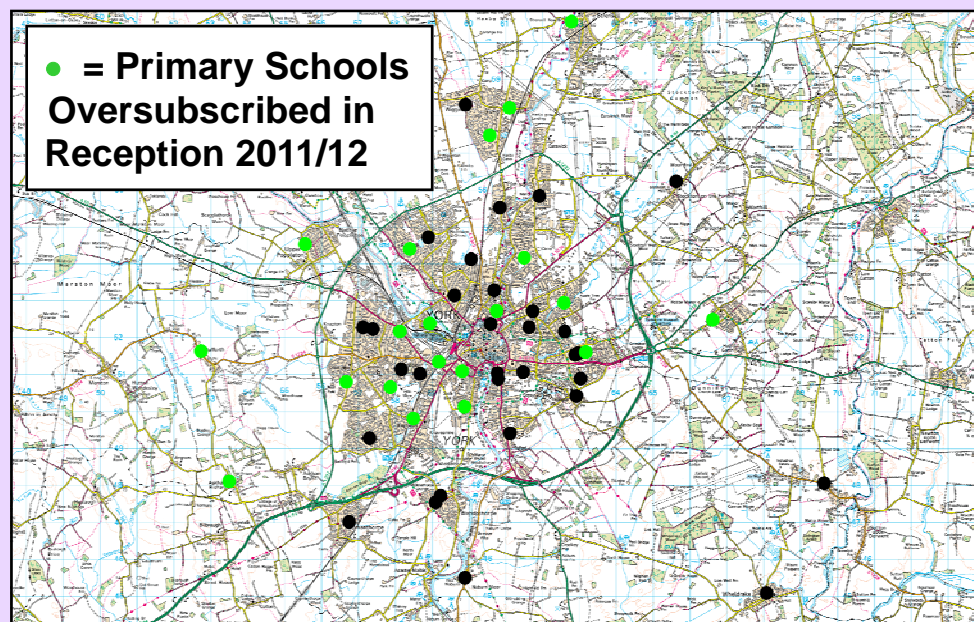
OBJECTIVES

At their second meeting, having considered all of the information presented in support of the review topic, the Committee agreed to focus their review on;

- a) The oversubscription criteria in use in York's Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and whether it was made up of the right priorities, and in the right order?
- b) The current School Travel Policies - were they fair and appropriate given the changing demographics?

OBJECTIVE (I) - THE OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA

Where there are more applications for places than places available at any given school, applications are ordered according to the oversubscription criteria within a Local Authority's Admissions Policy. The criteria apply to both Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.



LA Actions Taken In Response to Oversubscription In Primary Schools For 2011-12 Intake

There were 23 oversubscribed primary schools in 2011-12. The LA had to increase the admission limit for 12 of those schools, some of which had some places available, but would have been oversubscribed if action had not been taken. In many cases, that was achieved by working closely with neighbouring schools.

The LA also took the following steps:

- Changing the Guide for Parents and Admissions letters to include specific guidance on the potential for siblings being unsuccessful in future years.
- Longer term place planning, including increasing the size of the intake, where this is possible – often from 30 to 45, particularly in areas currently short of places.
- Increasing the number of preferences from 3 to 5 to increase parental preference and reduce ‘unplaced’ (un-preferenced) allocations.

Comparison With Other LAs

The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the LA were already working with schools across the city to identify space in existing buildings currently being used for other purposes e.g. Art Rooms, Afterschool Clubs, and Integrated Children’s Centres etc.

Regaining Classroom Space

The Committee looked at the oversubscription criteria in use by other neighbouring / similar sized LAs and found that like York, half gave a higher priority to children living in a school’s catchment area over those with siblings already in a school.

OBJECTIVE (II) - SCHOOL TRAVEL POLICIES

The Committee held two further meetings to progress the review.

Meeting 3

To consider additional information in support of the agreed Objectives for the review, including:

- CYC Home to School Transport Policy
- Comparison Data for Home to Denominational School Transport
- Breakdown of the costs for the provision of free transport e.g. for those children with denominational places, special needs and for geographical distance reasons



National Policy

The national policy on the provision of free school transport specifies that children from low income families will qualify for free transport if they live more than 2 miles and less than 15 miles from the school.

In regard to **free school transport for denominational places**, the national policy states its provision is discretionary and therefore LAs do not have to provide it, they only have to give its provision due consideration.

The Committee learnt that in York, the LA had previously agreed to provide free transport to those children with denominational places to those living more than 3 miles & less than 15 miles from a qualifying school.

The Committee carefully considered the numbers and costs involved with providing free transport, and noted that it was not provided just for geographical distance reasons and for those with special needs, but also for the those children with denominational places.

Consideration of Free School Transport For Denominational Places

Whilst respecting parent's choice, the Committee

agreed that the current arrangements for the provision of free school transport on a denominational basis were unfair and inequitable to all pupils across the city i.e. pupils receiving a denominational place and therefore receiving free transport were at an advantage over other pupils attending the same school.

Taking account of the need to still provide transport for those pupils living in rural areas, on the basis of distance from school, Members considered information on the cost of a phased withdrawal of the free transport currently being provided by the LA on a denominational basis.

The Committee also received feedback from East Riding of Yorkshire Council on their experience of withdrawing the same provision in 2005.

Officers provided information on a number of options, detailing a range of potential savings broken down into primary and secondary school and by transport type, on a year by year basis. These provided a range of potential savings particularly with school buses. Members noted that for Private Hire and Buses the cost would step down over time as fewer vehicles (or smaller vehicles) were required.

Options considered for a phased withdrawal of all free denominational transport up to 2019 & Potential Savings

Option 1 - Withdraw but still transport to catchment school	£105,160.00
Option 2 - Withdraw but children still choose to attend denominational school	£137,745.00
Option 3 - Withdraw but charge a concessionary fare	£137,745.00

Members noted that any decision to withdraw the provision would need to be followed by a consultation period in the 2012 spring term, to allow for any approved changes to be reflected in the relevant documentation, & in time for it to be sent out in summer 2012 to parents of those pupils due to transfer to secondary school in September 2013.

At a meeting in January 2012, the Committee agreed their final report & recommendations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on this review or for a copy of the full final report, please contact:

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