

Report to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools
Report submitted by: Interim Executive Director for Children and Young People

Date: 9 October 2014

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
Chorley East; Chorley North; Chorley Rural East; Chorley Rural North; Chorley Rural West; Chorley South; Chorley West;

Provision of Additional Secondary School Places in Chorley

(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

This report provides information on projected future pupil numbers in Chorley District secondary schools and the actions taken to secure additional places in order to meet future demand. The report seeks approval to expand one school with effect from 2015 and to enter into further negotiations with the remaining secondary schools to provide future additional places.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and Standing Order 25 has been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools is recommended to:

- (i) note the complexities of commissioning additional places in the secondary sector as set out in the report;
- (ii) approve the expansion of Southlands High School by 30 places per year group on a permanent basis with effect from September 2015, taking the published admission number from 190 to 220;
- (iii) authorise officers to conduct further negotiations with secondary schools in the Chorley District to secure more additional places to deal with longer term demand; and.
- (iv) note the initial estimate of cost for delivering the 1FE expansion project at Chorley Southlands.

Background and Advice

Since 2010, the local authority has commissioned around 2,500 additional school places, mainly in the primary sector to deal with rising birth rates. This increase in births, coupled with large scale housing in some parts of the County, will shortly begin to impact on the secondary sector across most Districts to varying extents and according to varying timescales. The Chorley District is the first District where the demand for places is expected to outstrip supply and, therefore, requires remedial action to secure sufficient school places in the future.

The local authority has a significantly reduced scope to effectively commission additional secondary school places compared to its commissioning ability in the primary sector. The reasons for this are as follows:

- there are relatively few schools in scope within areas of demand compared to those in the primary sector;
- of the reduced number of schools, a significant proportion will be voluntary aided, foundation or academy, which are not subject to the local authority's commissioning powers;
- the practical obstacles to expanding secondary schools are significant due to the siting of subject areas; core facilities that are not capable of dealing with a much increased pupil roll; and the costs of remodelling (which may be prohibitive) to address these issues; in addition
- a number of secondary schools are on small sites that will not receive approval under section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to expand; and
- the ability to commission new schools is restricted due to the size secondary schools need to be in order to operate successfully and offer a broad and balanced curriculum.

With regard to the last point, the local authority could, for instance, commission a one form entry primary school if this was considered to be the best solution locally to providing additional places. However, secondary schools generally need to be much larger to ensure their future viability and competitiveness. The local authority has not established a policy around the minimum size of secondary schools for commissioning purposes, however, it is suggested that new schools would ideally be 6 forms of entry or above (admission number 180) in order to have flexibility to manage annual peaks and troughs in pupil numbers in the longer term. The need for additional secondary school places on this scale is only likely where there is housing development on the scale of the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal. In all other instances, the local authority will be reliant on existing schools to provide the additional places.

Chorley District

The projections for the Chorley District secondary schools indicate that between one and two additional forms of entry will be required in Year 7 in September 2015. This is followed by a year when the current provision is sufficient. From 2017, it is predicted that two additional forms of entry will be needed in Year 7 on a permanent basis. These additional two forms of entry will be sufficient until September 2020 when a further 2 forms of entry will be needed. It is not possible to predict with any degree of accuracy beyond this date as pupils are not yet in the primary school system. However, current projections indicate that a total of an additional four forms of entry will be sufficient in Chorley District secondary schools for the foreseeable future. Clearly, this will need close monitoring due to the amount of housing development occurring in the area.

In order to deal with the need for places in the medium term, officers asked for an additional two forms of entry to be provided across the Chorley District secondary schools, made up from one or more of the existing schools expanding. Two schools came forward with expressions of interest, one of which is the only community school in the area – Southlands High School – and one of which is an Academy. Officers spent time with both schools to understand their curriculum model and how additional pupils would impact on accommodation needs. At the end of the process, both schools were offered a project that would address deficits in teaching areas and the schools took the proposal to their full governing body.

Southlands High School governing body met on 7th July and agreed to a permanent increase in the school's admission number from 190 to 220 with effect from September 2015. Additional accommodation will be provided at the school to enable it to accommodate the additional pupils. Confirmation of the approval of the governors is provided in Appendix 'A'. Southlands has a current Ofsted rating of 'Good' and the site and premises are capable of accommodating an expansion.

After initially being positive about a one from entry permanent expansion, when it met on 14th July the governing body of the Academy, however, decided not to proceed with an expansion. The reasons for this decision included:

- concerns around the inability of the core facilities of the school to cope with the increased numbers of pupils, including pupil movement around the school, catering facilities, hall sizes, parking facilities and traffic congestion outside school;
- risks around pupil numbers not materialising, including the financial risk around growing the staffing establishment; and
- a change in the ethos of the school.

These reasons are all perfectly valid and illustrative of the challenges involved in secondary school expansions outlined earlier in the report.

Proposed Solution

It is proposed that the local authority proceeds with the one form entry expansion of Southlands, thus providing some of the additional places required for the future. With regard to the need for further additional places in Chorley, the following mitigating factors need to be considered:

- just 91% of children in Chorley primary schools go on to attend secondary schools in Chorley;
- whilst the migration rate has been factored into the projections, it is clear that there is an established pattern of Chorley children attending secondary schools outside of the District, in particular the South Ribble schools;
- it is predicted that the South Ribble secondary schools, particularly those located along the Chorley border, will continue to have available places in Year 7 for the foreseeable future; and
- pupils will appeal for places at the most popular Chorley secondary schools and it is highly likely that some schools will need to take pupils in excess of their admission numbers through this process.

It is, therefore, proposed that the local authority takes no further action at this stage in commissioning any further additional secondary school places in Chorley District and that it reassess the position following the 2015 allocation in March 2015.

It is also proposed that officers meet with the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of the Chorley District secondary schools to open up a debate as to how the longer term need for places will be met, which at this stage is assessed as a further three forms of entry. There are six secondary schools in Chorley: one community school; one voluntary aided catholic school and four academies, therefore a negotiated and agreed solution to providing the additional places is needed due to the local authority's restricted commissioning powers in the District.

Consultations

Expressions of interest were requested from all Chorley District secondary schools and lengthy consultations were held with the two schools that came forward through this process.

Statutory consultation is not required in order to expand Southlands High School by 30 places per year. Statutory consultation is only required where a school is to expand by 25% or more of its original size, and the proposed expansion of Southlands represents a 16% expansion. Typically in these situations, the school in question may run an informal consultation with parents and interested parties but this is a matter for the school to consider.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Legal

The local authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure the provision of sufficient high quality school places. Projections indicate that there will be a need for additional secondary school places in the Chorley District in the foreseeable future and the proposed expansion of Southlands High School is the first step in providing for this need.

Financial

The estimated costs of a two form secondary school expansion have been factored into the local authority's current basic need programme, which runs until 2016/17. Clearly the cost of a one form entry expansion can be met from within the current schools capital programme and this leaves funds remaining to either provide a further one form entry secondary school expansion within timeframes or proposed expenditure will be reprogrammed and allocated toward other priority projects as identified in the report on the Capital Strategy for Schools 2014/15 – 2016/17 approved by the Cabinet Member on 5 June 2014.

Officers have had some initial meetings with staff at Southlands and an outline brief has been developed to meet the 1FE accommodation requirements. The costs associated with these initial proposals is estimated at £3m.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
Report to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - 'Capital Strategy for Schools 2014/15 to 2016/17'	5 June 2014	Joanne Mills, Office of the Chief Executive, 534284

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A