



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Council – 8 December 2020

Consideration of a Petition containing more than 500 signatures

**Petition Requesting Secondary School Admission Process Change -
September 2021 admission**

Petition organiser, Claire Beall introduced the following petition containing 547 signatures, which had been presented to the Council:

“We the undersigned petition the Council to allow parents to amend the order of secondary schools preferences for admission September 2021 once the results of the selection exams are known.

The delay of the secondary school selection exams due to government guidelines during the current covid crisis means that parents are having to make secondary school preference choices without knowing the outcome of these exams.

Other authorities such as Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Enfield and Barnet are all allowing changes to application forms once selective results have been published. Parents in Trafford should be afforded the same opportunity. At the moment parents are expected to choose schools without being fully informed.”

Addressing the Council, the lead petitioner summarised the reasons why action was called for and provided some examples of where children had been disadvantaged by not having the results of the exams when submitting their preferences.

Councillors Carter, Carey, Brophy and Coggins debated the petition on behalf of the political parties and made the following points:

Councillor Carter: The Department for Education (DfE) strongly advised that exams should have been delayed to late October and although the Council oversaw the admissions process it did not administer the tests. To ensure that children were not disadvantaged the DfE asked local authorities to allow at least one additional preference on the application form and to advise families to use those preferences for non-selective schools. To protect the interests of both schools and families, the Council decided to allow an additional three preferences, making eight preferences in total and 456 of the 3087 Trafford applicants made use of all eight preferences. Each year the statutory deadline for all local authorities to publish a scheme to coordinate admission arrangements for schools was 31 October. The Council also received applications from other local authorities and with applications received the previous year from over 35 different

authorities for Trafford schools, the Council had to co-ordinate its admissions in line with the national deadline. Acknowledging the petition's request and also that some other authorities had allowed amendment of secondary school preferences once results were known, it had not been possible to do so within Trafford's legally determined and published schemes with time critical processes having already commenced. With all the test results now known, the number of requests for a late change was eight to date and none in fact related to the circumstances cited in the petition. The Executive Member was satisfied that the guidance was clear and that virtually all parents had followed the process. Late applications for changes could be accommodated without disadvantaging another child and would always be done where possible, however, failing that there was the appeal process. In addition, waiting lists were maintained until the end of the autumn term and many schools, including the most popular do see movement with the allocations after 1 March. In conclusion, the arrangements were in co-ordination with Greater Manchester area and considered not to advantage or disadvantage any applicant over any other

Councillor Carey: Acknowledged the points made in the petition and also the response by Councillor Carter and supporting any move that would make the admission process simpler and easier to use, encouraged the Council to further engage with the petitioners in order to have an admission system that worked for them and all the young people across Trafford.

Councillor Brophy: Expressed support for the petition given the unprecedented pandemic and as a result of the unique challenges faced by families, believed the Council should be willing where possible to change timeframes to allow for fairness in the local school system.

Councillor Coggins: Recognised the complexities and that the Council had to work within the regulatory framework and understanding that very few families were now affected, was confident that the Council was committed to working with them to provide support as best it could and to consider any powers the Council had to help future exceptional circumstances within the legal constraints.

Following the debate and in response to a request from the Leader of the Council, the Council's Monitoring Officer outlined the legal framework in which the Council was operating, whereby applications received after 31 October had to be considered as late applications. It was recognised that the Council was constrained by its scheme and the need to work with other local authorities and the legal restrictions on what it could or could not do in terms of moving children.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Andrew Western was sympathetic to the stress and strain the issue had placed on families and acknowledging that there was no guarantee, was hopeful that the Council would be able to accommodate those children affected in the schools of their choice. The Council would continue to work with the families concerned and in terms of making people aware that the pass mark can differ by school, as a non-Covid issue, the Council would look to address to avoid any confusion in the system and any unfortunate consequences from that. The Leader appreciated that the matter was a very important issue that had come before the Council, however, it had now largely been reconciled as time had moved on but that was not to say there had been issues and difficulties and that the Council still did not have to do everything it could to work with the eight families affected. He considered it important to recognise that there were legal constraints which had prevented the Council from acting as the petitioners had requested.