

Jeremy Rodell - STATEMENT TO RICHMOND COUNCIL CABINET – 24 NOVEMBER 2011

The official report you have received on Secondary Schools is less detailed than the one submitted for the Scrutiny Committee on Monday, which included supporting data. But it reaches the same conclusion: that there will be adequate secondary school places at least until 2016.

The purpose of this statement is not to say that this forecast is wrong, but rather to suggest that it's only one, optimistic, scenario in an area of high uncertainty and high risk.

The official forecast assumes a big reduction of 200 by 2015 in out of borough demand.

Half of this demand is from Hounslow, which has seen a 40% increase in births in the last 10 years: nearly 500 more children will emerge from Hounslow primaries in 2015 than this year. Their only new secondary is a small Free School. Some of the community schools may be able to expand, but no-one knows how many or when. Yet the forecast assumes that pressure from Hounslow on Richmond places will go down. It could just as easily go up.

Kingston is the next most important source of out of borough children. They plan a new secondary school for 2015, and will hear next month whether their latest attempt to finance it has been successful. The paper assumes that it will immediately free up more than a third of the places at Grey Court. But Kingston's birth rate has gone up by 30% and they say they need the new capacity to cope with their own demand growth. And Grey Court is now a popular school. So there's a lot of uncertainty here.

While the paper you have received rightly says it would be "*imprudent*" to rely on Free Schools providing additional places, the data presented to the Scrutiny Committee assumed two Free Schools providing 100 extra places. Removing these from the borough's calculations takes away almost all the spare places forecast across the borough by 2013. And that's assuming a large drop in out of borough demand. That's very risky.

A disproportionate number of Richmond parents are currently going private at secondary level as they are unable to access places at good schools. Only 50% of borough primary children stay in the state system at secondary level, lower than in any other London borough. Even the ten most prosperous boroughs average 60%. The Council aims to improve the quality of all the secondaries to the level of the best. If this is achieved, as we all hope, demand will go up as these parents on the margin realise they can save school fees. This effect alone is big enough to fill a large secondary school.

There is massive uncertainty in both the scale and timing of demand. Under these circumstances, to give the only definitely available and financed secondary school site to the Catholic Diocese on a 125 year lease would be taking a significant and avoidable risk with the borough's secondary school provision.