

'This council is failing my child'

Councillor quits cabinet over school place fury

Eight-month battle: Councillor Virginia Morris is taking the council to the High Court



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A cabinet member has stood down and is taking Richmond Council to the High Court over failures to find her daughter a suitable school place.

Councillor Virginia Morris said she had battled with the council for the past eight months for a preferred school for her four-year-old, who was offered a school place, but made no progress.

She said: "We are not satisfied that they have dealt with our application in the correct manner so we are now challenging them on this issue."

"As a result the leader of the council has asked me to stand down as a cabinet member."

The news comes a week after the council defended its admissions

policies after calls from parents and fair admissions campaigners to address the growing demand for school places.

Coun Morris said her case was not driven by the "black hole" situation some families face, but said another 100 children may be affected by her problem, which is down to admissions criteria.

Coun Morris said she was asked to submit extra evidence to prove their application for a school place, but would not go into further detail at this stage.

She said: "Since we have pursued court action we have discovered that what has happened to us has also affected many families within the borough."

"Maybe this way we can not only get answers for our daughter, but also enable those other families who have been affected to understand what happened to them."

The mother-of-two described her experience as horrific and said she was driven to legal action as a last resort.

Conservative Coun Morris was elected in 2002, 2006 and 2010 and will remain as ward councillor for East Sheen.

Since 2010 she has been cabinet member for environment, planning, parks and highways, a role

that will be taken over by Councillor Pamela Fleming.

Leader of the opposition Councillor Stephen Knight said it was a huge blow for the cabinet and said it was extraordinary for her to take to court the council she helped to run.

Leader of the council Lord True said he was sorry to see Coun Morris leave the cabinet, but he believed it was appropriate given her intended lawsuit.

He said: "Virginia must be free to pursue the remedies that she believes to be right, but under the principle of collective responsibility a member of the cabinet is responsible for upholding the established policies and actions of council officers."

"Virginia has played a very significant part in making major improvements to Richmond's planning and environmental policies and has led the important Uplift projects across the borough, for which I thank her sincerely."

The news comes two months after Twickenham Riverside councillor Scott Naylor left the Tories to join UKIP because of what he described as the "melt-down of the association and total disconnect between local issues and any interests on local issues".

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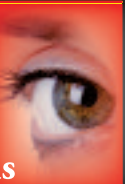


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