

**Cabinet Meeting: Monday, 10 February 2025**

**Question from: Councillor Blagbrough**

**Question to: Councillor Wilkinson**

The justification for removing funding for the Primary Schools in the Woodhouse Garden Community and Thornhills Garden Community is completely inadequate. The justification is based on the Children and Young People's Service Directorate of Planning School Places 2023 Report, but this analysis acknowledges that it excludes the anticipated growing demand for School places from the Woodhouse Garden Community and Thornhills Garden Community. These two developments will add nearly 3,000 homes and according to the Master Plan, 60-80% of these will be two or three-bedroom properties. Department of Education guidelines state that 1,000 homes typically generate the need for 250 primary and 130 secondary school places. Given the scale of development in Rastrick (1,927 new homes), the projected surplus of 234 places from Children and Young People's Service Directorate of Planning School Places 2023 Report will be eliminated, and an additional 500 primary school places will be required across Rastrick and Brighthouse. Furthermore, Government guidance advises that new housing attracts young families which leads to an even greater demand for school places. Therefore, these developments could be fundamentally flawed and would potentially result in an even greater shortfall of school places. I also keep raising the issue of additional school places from new housing developments at the School Admissions Forum as the Chair of this committee. Would Cabinet please explain the rationale surrounding these cancellations and reconsider this inexplicable decision.

## **Response**

In 2026/27 it is projected that there would be 234 and 139 surplus primary school places in the Rastrick and Brighthouse areas respectively – a total of 373 surplus places across the Southeast Calderdale area. These figures are not isolated – the trendline for primary school surplus places has shown a consistent increase since 2019/20. This trend needs to be understood in the context of demographic datasets published by the ONS, that show falling working age and child populations, and reduced fertility rates in Calderdale. It cannot therefore be assumed that the 'without development' level of surplus places will stabilise or reduce from 2026/27 onwards. We are therefore considering this issue against a background of increasing surplus places.

Based on Councillor Blagbrough's figures, both Woodhouse and Thornhills Garden Communities generate a need for approximately 325 and 475 places respectively over their entire development lifetimes - 11 years for Woodhouse and 15 years for Thornhills from commencement (i.e., full build-out of both Garden Communities by the early 2040s). This clearly demonstrates that delivery of new primary schools in the short to medium terms is not viable.

However, as explained in the Cabinet report, there is justification for safeguarding the land identified for schools in the Masterplan SPDs. There is also a need to monitor the school place situation going forward, and if a requirement is identified in the future, Section 106 contributions could be sought in the usual way.