
Consultation on the Council's Admission Arrangements for the Academic Year 2017/18

Report of Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Education and Skills
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This report relates to a Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. To approve the commencement of the Council's consultation on admission arrangements as it is the admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools to ensure the statutory requirements for admissions consultation is met.
2. Outline the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for two Community schools.
3. To delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Education and Skills, to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18 at the outcome of the Council's consultation period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **approve the commencement of consultation for the proposed changes to the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18.**

The proposed changes to the Council's admission arrangements include:

- **the removal of the feeder school criteria in the admissions policy for Leighton (Community) Middle School; and**

- **an amendment to the catchment area at Houghton Regis (Community) Primary School to include all housing in a recent local housing development known as Tilia Park.**

- 2. delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Education and Skills, to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18 at the outcome of the Council's consultation period.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

4. The Council's proposed Admission Arrangements for the academic year 2017-18 will be considered by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 October 2015 as a consultee to the process if the Executive approve the recommendations of this report.

Issues

5. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that admissions are co-ordinated for all admission authorities in the local authority's area for all children being admitted into the normal year of entry and only one offer of a school place is made.
6. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the academic year 2017/18 fulfils this requirement, setting out the timeframes for processing admission applications.
7. In addition, as the Council is the admission authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, it must also undertake consultation on its own admission arrangements where changes are proposed. The admission policy for these schools sets out the criteria in which applications will be considered if the school is oversubscribed. This report explains the rationale for the proposed changes for two Community schools admissions criteria.

Central Bedfordshire Council's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Academic Year 2017-18

8. Legislation contained within the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires Local Authorities to have a co-ordinated admissions scheme for their area where parents can apply on a common application form for a place in the normal year of entry at a school or an academy.

9. The Council is required to co-ordinate the admissions for children in their area so that only one offer of a school place is made per prospective pupil. The co-ordinated admissions scheme must be formulated by 1 January in the relevant determination year and must be consulted on with the admission authorities in the area if it is substantially different from the previous year.
10. Central Bedfordshire's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme sets out the arrangements and timetable by which applications will be processed. The scheme details the processes and procedures that the Council and other admissions authorities need to work to in order to process the applications by the offer date for the normal year of entry at a school or academy.
11. The Council acting as the local authority must have a co-ordinated admissions scheme in place for all maintained schools and academies in the area.
12. Admissions for the normal year of entry for Secondary schools (which in Central Bedfordshire includes Upper and Secondary schools) are subject to a national closing date of 31 October for receipt of applications and a national offer date of 1 March.
13. Admissions for the normal year of entry for Primary schools (which in Central Bedfordshire include Lower, Primary and Middle schools) are subject to a national closing date of 15 January and a national offer date of 16 April.
14. The proposed co-ordinated scheme for 2017/18 is attached for Lower, Primary and Middle at Appendix 1 and the proposed co-ordinated scheme is attached for Secondary, Upper and the University Technical College at Appendix 2.
15. The proposed co-ordinated scheme is not substantially different from the previous year's and has been updated with the relevant dates for the academic year 2017/18. This scheme therefore is not subject to formal consultation as per the requirements of the School Admissions Code but will be circulated for information to all relevant parties and is attached at Appendix 1 and 2.

Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools

16. Admission arrangements are the procedures and processes that determine how children will be admitted to a school and include the admission criteria which will be applied if more applications are received than there are places available.

17. The School Admissions Regulations 2012 require Admission Authorities to consult where changes are proposed on their admission arrangements, including any supplementary information form that will apply for admission applications for the following academic year. The confirmation of Religious Affiliation form is a supplementary form to the Council's common application form for point of entry admissions and is attached at Appendix 5 for information. The Religious Affiliation form is for all Central Bedfordshire schools who prioritise applicants on faith grounds for both Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools.
18. For admission arrangements determined in 2016 for entry in September 2017, consultation must be for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October 2015 and the 31 January 2016. The Admission Arrangements must then be determined by 28 February 2016. The Council will conduct its consultation between the 12 October 2015 and 23 November 2015 to gather the views of all consultees.
19. Admissions Authorities are required to consult with the following parties:
 - i. parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
 - ii. other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admissions authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
 - iii. all other admission authorities within the relevant area;
 - iv. the Governing Bodies of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools;
 - v. adjoining neighbouring local authorities;
 - vi. the body or person representing religious denomination schools.
20. From 2017/18 changes are proposed to the admissions criteria of two Community schools in Central Bedfordshire, which are Leighton Middle School and Houghton Regis Primary.

Leighton Middle School – proposed changes to the schools admission criteria

21. Leighton Middle School is a four form entry school serving pupils from the ages of 9 -13 in the centre of Leighton Buzzard. It is a popular and successful school and has been subject to a recent consultation to expand by increasing its capacity by a form of entry in order to meet the growing demands from its catchment area due to housing development in the south Leighton area.
22. Leighton Middle School's admissions criteria currently deviates from the standard admissions policy in operation for most of Central Bedfordshire's Community and Voluntary controlled schools and includes a criterion that gives priority to children who have previously attended a number of named local Lower Schools for a period of 3 years or more.

23. The admissions criteria for Leighton Middle School is detailed below:
1. All 'looked after' children or children who were previously 'looked after'.
 2. Children living in the catchment area with siblings at the school.
 3. Children living in the catchment area.
 4. Other children with siblings at the school.
 5. Children who have spent a significant time (3 years or more) in a Leighton Buzzard/Linslade/Hockliffe school, i.e. Beaudesert, Clipstone Brook, Doverly Down, Greenleas, Heathwood, Leedon, Linslade, Mary Bassett, Pulfords, Southcott, St. George's, St. Leonard's, Stanbridge and Hockliffe Lower Schools.
 6. Children who live nearest to the school determined by straight line distance from the school site to the child's home address.
24. This criterion has been in existence for many years. The south Leighton catchment area for the school has seen significant housing development which is due to continue until around 2020. As such, families that move to the area may be disadvantaged in applying for a middle school place if they are out of catchment. Removing this criterion therefore would address the current inconsistency for out of catchment applicants and would also align the school's admission criteria with the majority of the Council's admission arrangements in its schools.
25. It is therefore proposed to remove criterion 5 which prioritises children based on their feeder school and length of attendance in order to standardise the policy and make it fairer and more equitable, which Leighton Middle School are also in support of.
26. As the admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, the Council continually monitors the effectiveness of its admission arrangements and will review school catchments in areas of significant demographic change to ensure they remain reflective of the school's local community. If alterations to existing catchment areas are required the Council must consult on proposed changes within the required admissions consultation timeframes, as set out in paragraph 19 each year.
27. The trajectory of housing development in the south of Leighton Buzzard requires the existing catchment areas for the Council's schools, including Leighton Middle School to be reviewed. This is a complex process of demographic analysis that requires consideration of the arrangements of other admission authorities in the area (i.e. Academies, Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools) and of the possible school transport implications for pupils. The outcome of this review will be undertaken to inform potential changes from 2018/19.

Houghton Regis Primary School

28. Houghton Regis Primary School, is a one and a half form entry primary school serving pupils between the ages of 4 and 11 in the south Houghton Regis area.
29. The school's catchment area includes a recent housing development, Tilia Park. The majority of this development falls into the catchment area for Houghton Regis Primary although a small proportion of this falls into the catchment area for Beecroft Primary.
30. The catchment lines were drawn prior to the construction of the housing development and in order to extend equity to all those living within this new development it is propose to amend the catchment line to include the area within the catchment of Houghton Regis Primary School, which the school are in support of. The proposed catchment area is attached at Appendix 4.

Future considerations: Prioritising children in receipt of Early Years, Pupil and Service Premium

31. The School Admissions Code was revised in December 2014 and gave all admission authorities the freedom to give priority within their admission arrangements to children eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium, Pupil Premium and Service Premium. Previously this option was only available to academies.
32. Primary phase state funded schools can also now give priority to those eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Pupil Premium (PP) or Service Premium (SP), who are in a nursery class which is part of the school or are attending a nursery which is established and run by the school.
33. In order to fully explore and debate the potential for use of these new freedoms within its admission arrangements the Council will consult informally with its own schools and all other admission authorities in Central Bedfordshire during the course of the next academic year through school pyramid and other meetings already arranged to discuss school organisation and admissions issues.
34. The outcome will enable the Council to consider whether it wishes to prioritise pupils eligible for one of the three premiums within its admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools from 2018/19.

Reason for Decision

35. As outlined above, the Council is required to consult on changes to its admission arrangements where these are proposed and is required to consult within the statutory timescales set out in the School Admissions Code. A decision is therefore required from the Executive to approve the commencement of the Council's consultation on the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for Leighton Middle School and Houghton Regis Primary School.

Council Priorities

36. The Council's co-ordinated admissions scheme and admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary schools supports the Council's priority to improve educational attainment.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

37. The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admissions Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirement for Local Authorities to have co-ordinated admissions schemes for their areas. Where the scheme is substantially different from the scheme adopted for the previous academic year, the local authority must consult the other admission authorities in the area and any other local authorities it determines. Where the scheme has not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that the local authority must consult on the scheme at least once every seven years, even if there have been no changes during that period.
38. As the scheme proposed is not substantially different from the previous year's scheme, it is appropriate for this not to be subject to consultation.
39. The Council as an Admission Authority must also determine its admissions arrangements annually by the 28 February each year, for implementation in September of the following year.
40. The Executive is asked to approve the commencement of consultation for the proposed changes to the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18.
41. The proposed changes relate to oversubscription criteria. Oversubscription criteria must be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. Admission authorities must ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs.

42. With regard to the proposed change to the catchment area of Houghton Regis Primary School, catchment areas must be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined.
43. With regard to feeder schools, the selection (and following this, the deselection) of a feeder school or schools as an oversubscription criterion must be transparent and made on reasonable grounds.
44. With regard to oversubscription criteria in general, it is for the Council to decide which criteria would be most suitable to the school according to the local circumstances.
45. If an Admissions Authority proposes to make amendments to its arrangements (with the exception of certain changes to Published Admissions Numbers), it must consult with interested parties between the 1 October and the 31 January for a minimum of 6 weeks of the year before the arrangements apply. With regard to the changes proposed, consultation should commence from 1 October 2015.
46. The changes proposed to Leighton Middle School and Houghton Regis Primary School are changes subject to consultation.
47. Consultation must include the parties listed in paragraph 16 above. For the duration of the consultation period, the Council must publish a copy of its full proposed admission arrangements on its website together with details of the person within the Council to whom comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought. The Council must also send upon request a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed at paragraph 20 above, inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.
48. The Council will fulfil its statutory responsibilities above by consulting within the timescales set out. Feedback from all consultees will be reported in January 2016 to the Director of Children's Services to whom delegated authority is recommended, in consultation with the Executive Member for Education and Skills, to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18.
49. Once the Council has determined its admission arrangements, it must notify the appropriate bodies, that is, all other admission authorities within the relevant area, the governing body where it is not the admission authority and the religious representative of schools with a religious character.
50. The Council must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on its website, displaying them for the whole offer year.

Financial Implications

51. Not applicable.

Equalities Implications

52. The School Admissions Code sets out the duty on Local Authorities and Admission Authorities to produce admission arrangements which are fair, clear and objective, which can be easily understood by parents. Admission arrangements must comply with regulations and legislation including the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.
53. Public authorities have a statutory duty to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. As part of the consultation on the Admissions Arrangements the Council will carry out an equality impact assessment to check that the proposed changes do not have a disproportionate or negative impact on vulnerable groups.

Conclusion and next Steps

54. It is a necessary requirement for the Council to consult on its admission arrangements where changes are proposed and to formulate a co-ordinated scheme for admission by 1 January in the determination year.
55. The proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme has been drawn up with regard to the national closing and offer dates for the academic year of 2017/18, taking into account the necessary timescales to process and allocate places working with the schools and academies in Central Bedfordshire to meet the deadlines
56. The next steps are for the Council to undertake the consultation within the statutory timeframes engaging with all the relevant parties to ascertain views on the proposed admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools of which the Council is the admissions authority for.
57. Responses to the consultation will be reported in January 2016 to the Director of Children's Services to whom delegated authority is recommended, in consultation with the Executive Member for Education and Skills, to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2017/18. As a result, the Council's admission arrangements will be determined before 28 February 2016 as required by the regulations.

Appendices

The following Appendix is attached through an electronic link:

Appendix 1 – Lower, Primary and Middle 2017/18 co-ordinated admissions scheme.

Appendix 2 – Secondary and Upper 2017/18 co-ordinated admissions scheme.

Appendix 3 – Proposed Community and Voluntary Controlled schools Admissions Policy and PANs 2017/18.

Appendix 4 – Houghton Regis Primary School - proposed catchment area from September 2017.

Appendix 5 – Confirmation of Religious Affiliation form.

Background Papers

The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:

- (i) Equality Impact Assessment.