

Central Bedfordshire Council

EXECUTIVE

7 February 2017

Determination on the Council's Admission Arrangements for the Academic Year 2018/19

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This report relates to a Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. To seek Executive approval to determine the Admission Arrangements for 2018/19 for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools for which the Council is responsible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **approve the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Schools for the academic year 2018/19 including the authority's co-ordinated scheme and religious affiliation supplementary information form.**

Summary

2. 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 1 offer of a school place is made.
3. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the academic year 2018/19 fulfils this requirement, setting out the timeframes for processing admission applications.

4. In addition, the Council as the admission authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, must also undertake consultation on the admission arrangements where changes are proposed. The admission policies for these schools sets out the criteria in which applications will be considered if the school is oversubscribed.
5. The admission policies for 2 Community schools were consulted upon, with consultation taking place from 17 October to 2 December 2016 to meet the statutory requirement of the minimum of 6 weeks.
6. This report sets out the key findings from the consultation and the rationale for the recommendation to the Executive to approve the admission arrangements for the Council to determine these by the 28 February 2017 as required by the School Admission Code.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

7. The Council's proposed Admission Arrangements for the academic year 2018-19 was considered by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2016 as a consultee to the process and no concerns or objections were raised in relation to the proposed arrangements.

Consultation process

8. The School Admission Code 2014 requires the Council to consult on its co-ordinated scheme and to consult on admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools where changes are proposed. The consultation must be conducted for a period of 6 weeks, commencing no earlier than 1 October and concluding by the 31 January. Arrangements must then be determined by the 28 February each year.
9. The Council's Executive approved a recommendation on the 11 October 2016 to commence a consultation on the Council's admission arrangements as changes were proposed for 2 Community schools.
10. Consultation on the Council's co-ordinated scheme for Lower, Primary and Middle admissions and co-ordinated scheme for Secondary and Upper admissions was not required as no changes were proposed and the scheme was updated with the relevant dates for the 2018/19 academic year. However the document was included in the consultation process so all relevant parties could review this for information.

11. In addition, the Council's Religious Affiliation form for Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools was also included for information as admission arrangements including any supplementary information form must be consulted upon. The Council co-ordinates this for all voluntary controlled and Voluntary Aided schools as part of the Common Application Form process, however it was included within the consultation documents for information to all parties. No changes have been made to this document since 2009.
12. The Council's consultation on its admission arrangements commenced on the 17 October and concluded on the 2 December 2016, which allowed 6 weeks for all interested parties to respond.
13. The interested parties that Admissions Authorities must consult with are detailed below:
 - a. Parents of children between the ages of 2 and 18;
 - b. Other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
 - c. All other admission authorities within the relevant area;
 - d. The Governing Body of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools;
 - e. Adjoining neighbouring local authorities
 - f. The body or person representing religious denomination schools.
14. The consultation was publicised via the following methods:

A letter was sent to:

- Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in Central Bedfordshire.
- Headteachers/Principals of Academies, Foundation, Trust and Voluntary Aided schools in Central Bedfordshire.

The consultation was also publicised through the academies and schools newsletter; Central Essentials.

A copy of the consultation document was also sent to:

- Admissions representatives for the Diocese of St. Albans, representing Church of England schools and to the Diocese of Northampton representing Roman Catholic Schools in the Council area.

15. Posters to publicise the consultation, detailing the website address to access the information and response form were sent to:
 - Schools and academies in Central Bedfordshire.
 - Nurseries, pre-schools and children's centres.
 - Town and Parish Councils.
 - Libraries, Leisure and Community Centres.

16. An email was sent to School Admission Teams in neighbouring local authorities to inform them of the Consultation with a link to the relevant webpage and a press release was also sent to local newspapers.
17. Central Bedfordshire Council therefore consulted with all the relevant parties using a variety of communication methods to capture people's views on the changes proposed.

Responses to the Council's consultation on Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools 2018/19

18. 17 responses were received in total from interested parties to the Council's consultation on admission arrangements. Responses to the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for Shefford Lower School and Fairfield Park Lower School are detailed below.

Shefford Lower School: Consultation responses to moving the measuring point of the school

19. The Council consulted on moving the measuring point of Shefford Lower School which is currently the school's front door to the war memorial in the town centre. This was as a result of a request from the school's governing body.
20. The change was proposed by the school's governing body for the following reasons:
 - (a) There would be fair and equal access for children as places would be determined from a measuring point central to the catchment area and not from the current western edge.
 - (b) The school's most vulnerable children would no longer be most disadvantaged in terms of school places because of where they live within the catchment area.
21. The majority of responses from interested parties on the proposal to move the measuring point for Shefford Lower School were from the neither agreeing nor disagreeing category at 43.75%. The second highest response was from the 37.5% that agreed with the proposal whilst 18.75% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
22. Where respondents had expressed disagreement, comments included that the proposal was unnecessary and may cause an increase in the number of applications for the school, as well as a concern for the need of additional school places in the town to meet local demand.

23. The School Organisation and Capital Planning Team regularly review the provision of school places across the area, particularly in areas of housing development, and where necessary commissions additional school places.
24. The level of subscription at a school can vary year on year and any number of factors can affect this, although the location of the school's measuring point unlikely to have any impact. It is therefore recommended that the measuring point of the school is moved from the school's main entrance to the War Memorial in the town centre so that families across the town have fair and equitable access to places at the school.

Consultation responses to the creation of priority areas within the catchment area for Fairfield Park Lower School and moving the school's measuring point

25. The Council consulted on creating priority areas within the current catchment boundary for Fairfield Park Lower School, to determine at which school site successful catchment applicants would be offered a place at. Also included was a proposal that the designated measuring site be moved from the main entrance on the Dickens Boulevard (original school site) which is currently used to a point which is equidistant from both the Dickens Boulevard school site and the new school site.
26. Of the responses on the proposal to create priority areas within the catchment boundary for Fairfield Park Lower;
 - 41.2% neither agreed or disagreed
 - 23.6% agreed or strongly agreed
 - 35.2% disagreed or strongly disagreeing.
27. Of those who objected the main concerns were surrounding road safety issues for children walking to the new site. As part of the approval for the new site conditions included measures that will be put in place to mitigate traffic and road safety issues.
28. Others noted concerns that catchment sibling applicants would potentially be offered a place at a different site to where their elder sibling attended which would cause issues for these parents.
29. In light of the objections regarding the site priority for catchment siblings and discussions with the school and Governing Body, the catchment sibling criterion has been amended. The arrangements now states that catchment sibling children are prioritised for the site at which their sibling attends, in line with the sibling criterion, rather than the original proposal that they would be prioritised based on the priority area they reside in.

30. As the proposed change to include priority areas within the catchment boundary and moving the measuring point at Fairfield Park Lower was more positive than negative; and the purpose was for the admission arrangements to provide equity to all those residents in this development, it is recommended that the admission arrangements to create priority areas within the catchment area is approved.

Method of Determination

31. Central Bedfordshire Council, as the local authority and admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools is required by the School Admissions Code (2014) to determine its admission arrangements. The arrangements include the co-ordinated scheme for the local authority area, the admissions policies for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and the Religious Affiliation Form which forms part of the Common Application Form process. The appropriate bodies must therefore be notified upon determination which are:
- a. Parents of children between the ages of 2 and 18;
 - b. Other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
 - c. All other admission authorities within the relevant area;
 - d. The Governing Body of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools;
 - e. Adjoining neighbouring local authorities;
 - f. The body or person representing religious denomination schools.

Reason for decision

32. The reason for the decision to be made on approving the recommendations made in this report and the appendices detailing the Council's admission arrangements is to enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations to determine its admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19. The Council is required to determine these by the 28 February 2017.

Council Priorities

33. 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

34. The School Admission Code (2014) set out the requirement for the Council to formulate and determine a co-ordinated admissions scheme for the area. Admission authorities must also determine their admission arrangements by the 28 February 2017, for admissions in September 2018. If an admissions authority proposes to make amendments to their arrangements they must consult between the 1 October and the 31 January for a minimum of 6 weeks of the year before the arrangements apply.
35. 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.
36. The Executive is asked to approve the recommendations for the changes to the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19, for the Council to determine these.
37. The 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.
38. With regard to the proposed change to the designated measuring point of Shefford Lower School, admission authorities must also clearly set out how distance from home to school will be measured, making clear how the 'home' address will be determined and the point in the school from which all distances are measured.
39. The proposed change for Fairfield Park Lower School relates 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. Admission authorities must also clearly set out how distance from home to school will be measured, making clear how the 'home' address will be determined and the point in the school from which all distances are measured.

40. The Council has fulfilled its statutory responsibilities above by consulting within the timescales set out. Feedback from all consultees has been considered and is outlined in this report for Executive to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19.
41. 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.
42. The Council must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on its website, displaying them for the whole offer year.

Financial Implications

43. Not applicable.

Equalities Implications

44. 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.
45. 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 process on the Admissions Arrangements the Council updated the equality impact assessment to check that the proposed changes did not have a disproportionate or negative impact on vulnerable groups.

Conclusion and next Steps

46. The Council, acting as the Local Authority, has conducted a consultation on the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools according to legislation.
47. The Council has sought and considered responses from all consultees and it is recommended that the coordinated scheme and admission arrangements are approved by Executive in order for the Council to determine its admission arrangements by 28 February 2017 as required by legislation.

Appendices

The following Appendices are attached:

48. Appendix 1 – Lower, Primary and Middle 2018/19 co-ordinated admissions scheme
49. Appendix 2 – Secondary and Upper 2018/19 co-ordinated admissions scheme
50. Appendix 3 – Community and Voluntary Controlled schools Admissions Policy and PANs 2018/19
51. Appendix 4 – Shefford Lower School - determined measuring point from September 2018
52. Appendix 5a – Fairfield Park Lower School – determined priority areas for catchment area from September 2018
53. Appendix 5b – Fairfield Park Lower School – determined measuring point from September 2018
54. Appendix 6 – Confirmation of Religious Affiliation form

Background Papers

Equality Impact Assessment.