

Central Bedfordshire Council

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny

21 November 2017

Consultation On The Council's Admission Arrangements For The Academic Year 2019/20

Report of Cllr Steven Dixon Executive Member for Education and Skills
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This report relates to a Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. To outline the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for seventeen Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and seek the views of the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Support the Council's proposed Admission Arrangements for the Academic Year 2019/20
2. Provide a response for the consultation to help shape strategy

Council Priorities

2. 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

3. 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.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. The Executive was asked to approve the commencement of consultation for the proposed changes to the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2019/20 at the meeting on 10 October 2017. As a result the consultation was launched on 13 October and will run for seven weeks.
7. 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.
8. With regard to the proposal to include children of staff priority within the oversubscription criteria for Leighton Middle School, the School Admissions Code permits this in either or both of the following circumstances; where the member of staff has been employed at the school for two or more years at the time at which the application for the school is made and/or where they are recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.
9. With regard to the proposed change of the catchment boundary for Lawnside Lower and St. Andrew's Lower (East), legislation requires that they are reasonable and clearly defined. Catchment areas do not prevent a parent who live outside of the catchment from expressing a preference for the school.
10. The proposal to include four named feeder schools to Edward Peake Middle's oversubscription criteria is permissible by the School Admissions Code, as the selection of schools has been transparent and made on reasonable grounds.
11. 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. The School Admissions Code states that the overall principles behind setting arrangements; "In drawing up

admission arrangements, the admission authority must ensure that the practices and criteria used to decide the allocation of school places is fair, clear and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.”

12. If an Admission 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 2017.
13. The changes proposed to the seventeen schools are changes subject to consultation.
14. Consultation must include the parties listed in paragraph 18 of the Executive report. 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 from this list, inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.
15. The Council will fulfil its statutory responsibilities above by consulting within the timescales set out. Feedback from all consultees will be reported in February 2018 to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2019/20.
16. 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.
17. The Council must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on its website, displaying them for the whole offer year.

Financial Implications

18. Not applicable.

Equalities Implications

19. 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.

20. 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.

Appendices

The following Appendices are provided through an electronic link:

21. Appendix A – Executive report of 10 October 2017; Consultation on the admission arrangements for the academic year 2019/20
22. Appendix 1 – Lower, Primary and Middle 2019/20 co-ordinated admissions scheme.
23. Appendix 2 – Secondary and Upper 2019/20 co-ordinated admissions scheme.
24. Appendix 3 – Proposed Community and Voluntary Controlled schools Admissions Policy and PANs 2019/20.
25. Appendix 4 – Lawnside Lower and St. Andrew's Lower (East) – current and proposed catchment boundary.
26. Appendix 5 – Confirmation of Religious Affiliation form.

Background Papers

27. The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:
None
(i) Equality Impact Assessment.