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Meeting: Executive
Date: 5 November 2013
Subject: Consultation on Admission Arrangements 2015/16
Report of: Cllr Versallion , Executive Member for Children's Services
Summary: The report seeks Executive approval to commence consultation on Admission Arrangements for 2015/16, specifically the Council's co-ordinated admissions scheme and the Council's admission arrangements for Community and VC Schools.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Karen Oellermann, Assistant Director - Commissioning & Partnerships
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Council's admission arrangements and co-ordinated admissions scheme supports the Medium Term Plan priority to improve educational attainment.

Financial:

1. Not applicable.

Legal:

2. Regulations contained within the School Admissions Code set out the requirement for the Council to have a co-ordinated admissions scheme for the area. Admission Authorities must also determine their admissions arrangements by the 15th April each year, for implementation in September of the following year. If an Admissions Authority proposes to make amendments to their arrangements they must consult between the 1 November and the 1 March for a minimum of 8 weeks of the year before the arrangements apply.
3. For Community and Voluntary Controlled schools the admissions authority is the Council. Academies, Foundation, Trust and Voluntary Aided schools are their own admission authority and are therefore responsible for their admission arrangements.

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4. The Council will fulfil its statutory responsibilities by consulting within the timescales set out above and conducting a consultation with the relevant parties on changes to admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, inviting thoughts and comments from all consultees which will be reported to Executive in March when the admissions arrangements for September 2015 will be determined.

Risk Management:

5. This report sets out the statutory requirement for the Council to have a co-ordinated admissions scheme in place for the area. The risk of not having a co-ordinated scheme in place for Central Bedfordshire would entail the following key risks:
- Failure to discharge statutory duty
 - Failure to provide an admissions process which allows parents to state preferences and apply by the national closing dates.
 - Failure to allocate school places for the normal year of entry by the national offer dates.

All of the above would incur a negative perception of the Council which would be a reputational risk.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. 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.
8. 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 development of 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.

Public Health

9. Not applicable.

Community Safety:

10. Not applicable.

Sustainability:

11. Not applicable.

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Procurement:

12. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

13. The Admission Arrangements will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny on 13 December 2013.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to:

1. **Approve the commencement of consultation for Central Bedfordshire's co-ordinated admissions scheme.**
2. **Support the proposed admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools for the academic year 2015/16**
3. **Approve the commencement of the consultation for Central Bedfordshire's admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the academic year 2015/16.**

Reason for Recommendations: To enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations to consult on admission arrangements.

Executive Summary

14. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that admissions are co-ordinated for all admission authorities in their area for all children being admitted into the normal year of entry and only one offer of a school place is made. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the academic year 2015/16 fulfils this requirement, setting out the timeframes for processing admission applications, but must be the subject of consultation before approval by Executive in March.
15. 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 a number of proposed changes to existing admissions criteria for some Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.
16. In this report, a rationale is proposed for the following to be consulted upon:
 - Amending the existing catchment areas for Hawthorn Park Primary, Houghton Regis Primary, Tithe Farm Primary and Thornhill Primary following the implementation of a two tier structure from a three tier structure in the Houghton Regis area.
 - Giving priority to children attending the Nursery school at Hawthorn Park Primary and Tithe Farm Primary and inserting this as criterion five between other siblings and those to be prioritised on straight line

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distance.

- The implementation of a catchment area for Greenleas Lower School – Sandhills site from September 2015 and a change to the admissions criteria for the school to prioritise applicants within the catchment area from the current criteria of straight line distance.
- A change to the admission arrangements for St. Andrew's Lower School, in Biggleswade due to the proposed expansion of the school over two sites, with the new site due to open in September 2015. The school would have two catchment areas for each of the sites.
- Decreasing the published admission number at Watling Lower School from 45 to 30 from September 2015.

Central Bedfordshire Council's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Academic Year 2015-16

17. 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. 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 relevant bodies.
18. Central Bedfordshire's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the academic year 2015/16 sets out the scheme and timetable in 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.
19. 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.
20. Admissions for the normal year of entry for 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.
21. Admissions for the normal year of entry for Lower, Primary and Middle are subject to a national closing date of 15 January and a national offer date of 16 April.
22. The co-ordinated scheme is attached for Lower, Primary and Middle at Appendix 1 and the co-ordinated scheme is attached for Secondary, Upper and the University Technical College at Appendix 2.

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Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools Academic Year 2015/16

23. Regulations require Admission Authorities to consult on their admission arrangements annually if changes are proposed and they must do so for a period of 8 weeks, commencing no earlier than 1 November, with consultation concluding by 1 March. Arrangements then must be determined by 15 April.
24. Admission arrangements are the methods and procedures that determine how children will be admitted to any given school and include the 'admission criteria' which will be applied if more applications are received than there are places available.

Appendix 3 details the Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in the Central Bedfordshire Council area and the proposed admissions criteria and published admissions number and policy proposed for September 2015.

Amendment of catchment areas for Community Primary Schools in Houghton Regis and insertion of nursery criterion for Hawthorn Park and Tithe Farm Primary schools

25. The Houghton Regis area has seen a shift from a three tier model of education, (with the exception of St. Vincent's Primary which converted from a Lower to Primary a few years ago), to an exclusively two tier system of education with effect from September 2013.
26. The transformation of this area began in 2012 when Hawthorn Park, Tithe Farm and Thornhill Lower Schools, along with Thomas Whitehead Lower School had their change of age range applications approved in April 2012 to convert to Primary schools with affect from September 2013. All Saints Academy was then approved by the EFA to convert to a Secondary school in the Summer of 2012. Houghton Regis Lower was approved in December 2013 to convert to a Primary with affect from September 2013 and Houghton Regis Academy has recently had their change of age agreed to convert from a Middle school to a Secondary with effect from September 2013.
27. With this shift, the catchment areas currently in existence for a lower, middle and upper school for each road in Houghton Regis have become obsolete now that the area is made up of six primary and two secondary schools. The removal of catchment areas in the Houghton Regis area was considered by the Council in 2013. However with housing developments planned for north Houghton Regis, it is crucial to retain these catchments in order to ensure that local children can access their local school.
28. Therefore the current lower catchment areas in Houghton Regis for Hawthorn Park, Houghton Regis, Tithe Farm and Thornhill will be converted to Primary school catchment areas.

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29. In addition to this, Hawthorn Park Primary School and Tithe Farm Primary School will have the addition of a criterion to give priority to children in the nursery placed above the final criterion of straight line distance. This proposal provides parity for these two schools as the other Primary schools in Houghton Regis give priority to nursery children above the final criterion. The admissions criteria for these schools are detailed in Appendix 3, which lists the proposed admissions criteria for every Community and VC school in Central Bedfordshire.

Implementation of a catchment area for Greenleas School – Kestrel Way from September 2015.

30. From September 2013, Greenleas School in Leighton Buzzard is a two site school, with the main site on Derwent Road and the second site on Kestrel Way. The main site on Derwent Road operates an admissions policy based on a catchment area for the school. The second site on Kestrel Way opened in September 2013 and its admission policy is based on straight line distance.
31. The Kestrel Way site is currently placed within the Stanbridge Lower School catchment area. Therefore children local to the school who are living on the development that the new school serves are within the catchment area to a school over 2 miles away. This disparity is not, therefore, currently providing for the local community that it was built to serve.
32. Following discussions with Greenleas School and Stanbridge Lower School, it is proposed that a catchment area is implemented for Greenleas School, Kestrel Way which removes a portion of the catchment area from Stanbridge Lower School and provides a catchment area for Greenleas School, Kestrel Way, which serves the children in this area. A map of the proposed catchment area is attached at Appendix 4.
33. As it is proposed for Greenleas School, Kestrel Way to have a catchment area, the admissions criteria for the school will also need to reflect this. Currently the Kestrel Way site operates a policy which prioritises siblings and then offers places based on straight line distance. The proposed admission arrangements are now therefore for the school to prioritise applicants within the catchment area and these are detailed in Appendix 3.

Admission arrangements for the expansion of St. Andrew's Lower School in Biggleswade

34. St. Andrew's Lower School is one of three lower schools in the town of Biggleswade and is a Voluntary Controlled school. The school has recently been subject to statutory consultation to expand the school from a 90 to a 150 place Lower school spread over two sites from September 2015. As part of the statutory consultation, two public meetings were held on the 19 June and 1 July 2013, where the proposed admission arrangements were detailed.

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35. The arrangements proposed are for the admissions criteria to mirror those of the existing site and as such, a catchment area is defined for the second site which encompasses the new development for which the proposed expansion will provide. The creation of this catchment will necessitate a change to the current catchment areas of Lawnside and Southlands Lower Schools, both of which have supported this amendment in the initial consultation process. The precise catchment area proposed is detailed in Appendix 5. The proposed admission arrangements are subject to the outcome of the Council Executive on the 10 December 2013 which will consider and decide whether or not to expand St. Andrew's Lower School.

Published admission numbers

36. In line with the regulations contained within the School Admissions Code, any proposal to decrease a published admissions number is required to be consulted upon during the admissions consultation timeframe, before being determined on the 15 April for admissions in the academic year before they apply.
37. Watling Lower School in Dunstable currently operates one and a half forms of entry per year group and has a published admission number (PAN) of 45. The school would like to decrease the published admissions number to become a one form entry lower school with a PAN of 30 from September 2015. This will enable the school to organise classes more effectively without the inconsistency that is currently experienced as a result of fluctuations in the school's intake numbers. This decrease will not cause a negative impact on places in the area because there is no overall shortage of lower/primary school places.
38. Although an admission authority is not required to consult on any proposed increases to a school's PAN, the following are to be noted as changes to admissions arrangements from September 2015:
- Dunton VC Lower School – increase to PAN from 12 to 15.
 - Russell Lower School – increase to PAN from 54 to 90*
 - St. Andrew's Lower School – increase to PAN from 90 to 150 (over two school sites)*

*Subject to Executive approval for the schools to expand.

Method of Consultation

39. Admission authorities are required to consult on their admission arrangements if changes are proposed and to conduct this for a period of 8 weeks commencing no earlier than 1 November, with the consultation concluding by 1 March. It is proposed that the consultation period will commence from 11 November and conclude on 20 January, permitting over 8 weeks to allow for the Christmas school holiday break. This will provide time for analysis of the responses before Executive approve the admission arrangements on 18 March for the admission arrangements to be determined by 15 April.

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40. Central Bedfordshire Council is the admission authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and therefore must conduct its consultation in line with regulations, with the following parties:
- a) Parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen
 - b) Other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admissions authority have an interest in the proposed admissions
 - c) All other admission authorities within the relevant area
 - d) The Governing Bodies of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools
 - e) Adjoining neighbouring local authorities
 - f) The body or person representing religious denomination schools.
41. The Council will publish the Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme and the proposed admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools on the Central Bedfordshire Council website and advertise the consultation as widely as possible to gather the views of the relevant parties. The Council will contact the Governing Bodies of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, all other admission authorities in the area, neighbouring local authorities and the Church of England and Catholic diocese with details of the consultation and how they can contribute their opinion.

Conclusion and Next Steps

42. It is a necessary requirement for the Council to consult on its admission arrangements and to formulate a co-ordinated scheme for admission by 1 January in the determination year. The co-ordinated admissions scheme has been drawn up with regard to the national closing dates and the national offer dates for the academic year of 2015/16, taking into account the necessary timescales to process and allocate mass applications working with the schools and academies in Central Bedfordshire to meet the deadlines.
43. Many of the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in Central Bedfordshire remain unchanged from the previous year and changes are proposed for the following schools:
- Hawthorn Park and Tithe Farm Lower Schools in Houghton Regis
 - Greenleas Lower School, Kestrel Way, Leighton Buzzard
 - St. Andrew's Lower School, Biggleswade
 - Watling Lower School, Dunstable
44. 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 in particular the arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Lower, Primary and Middle 2015/16 co-ordinated admissions scheme

Appendix 2 – Secondary and Upper 2015/16 co-ordinated admissions scheme

Appendix 3 – Community and Voluntary Controlled schools proposed admissions policy 2015/16.

Appendix 4 – Greenleas School, Kestrel Way – proposed catchment area

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Appendix 5 – St. Andrew's Lower School, second site – proposed catchment area

Background Papers:

1. Equality Impact Assessment