

**Meeting:** Schools Forum  
**Date:** January 2016  
**Subject:** Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Admissions

**Report of:** Director of Children's Services

**Summary:** This report sets out the need to increase the staffing structure of the School Admissions Team due to increased workload and the need to improve resilience within the team which is a front line, customer facing service with statutory timescales and deadlines to adhere to. The report seeks the Forum's approval for an increase in the annual DSG allocation to the team, subject to an application to the Secretary of State.

**Contact Officers:** Rob Parsons, Head of School Organisation, Admissions and Capital Planning

Lydia Braisher, Admissions Manager

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All

**Function of:** Council

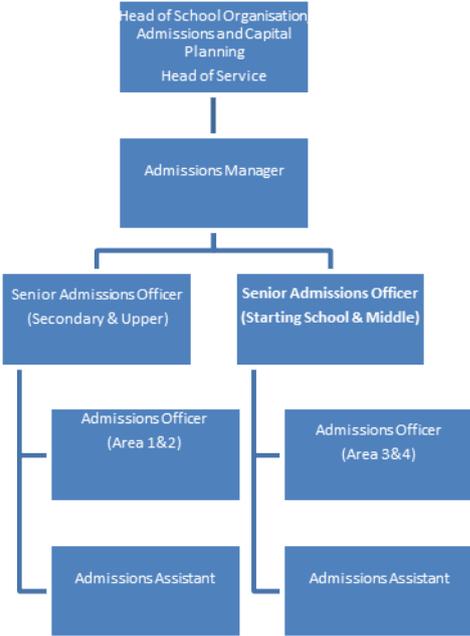
#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. To note and comment on the content of the report.**
- 2. To approve an increase of £52,514 in DSG funding from 2016/17 for the School Admissions Team, subject to an application to the Secretary of State for the disapplication of The School and Early Years Finance Regulations.**

#### **Background**

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| 1. | The School Admissions Team is part of the School Organisation, Admissions and Capital Planning Service, which also includes the Council's School Organisation and Capital Planning teams. The Service is responsible for all school organisation matters, including the planning and delivery of new school places across the area where forecasts of demographic growth require the Council to commission them. |
| 2. | The teams within the School Organisation, Admissions and Capital Planning Service work together to provide a coordinated approach to school organisation and admissions arrangements to ensure effective support for parents, schools and other stakeholders in a very technical and complex service area.   |
| 3. | The Admissions Team is comprised of 7 full time members of staff who support and co-ordinate the admissions process for the 129 Academies and Schools within Central Bedfordshire. The Team is responsible for the delivery of a range of statutory duties.  |

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| 4. | <p>These duties include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing and co-ordinating the admissions process for all academies and schools in the area and co-ordinating with other local authorities as required for starting school, middle transfer and secondary and upper transfer.</li> <li>• Processing in-year applications for Community and VC schools (and processing in-year applications for other maintained schools and academies who wish to opt in to this service).</li> <li>• Consulting on admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.</li> <li>• Monitoring the admission arrangements of own admission authorities in the area.</li> <li>• Preparing and presenting appeals for community and voluntary schools.</li> <li>• Administering and clerking appeals for maintained schools.</li> <li>• Providing information to parents via the Admissions Booklet, information leaflets, application forms and advertising of the starting school, middle, secondary and upper transfer rounds and letters to parents to inform them of the outcome of their application.</li> </ul> |
| 5. | <p>The School Admissions Team is funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, centrally retained from the Schools Block unit of funding. This has been set at the 2013/14 level of £260,490, in line with the School and Early Years Finance Regulations which is subject to a limitation of no new commitments or increases in expenditure.</p>   |
| 6. | <p>The School Admissions Team also offers a range of buy back services to academies and own admission authority schools for the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point of entry: all admission authorities are responsible for checking and assessing which criteria an application meets and ranking these before allocations are made. The School Admissions Team offers this as a service for those academies and own admission authority schools who wish to buy this service back.</li> <li>• School Admissions Appeals: Where an applicant is refused a place at any of their preferred schools, they are offered the right of appeal in line with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Local Authority is responsible for preparing and presenting the case at an appeal hearing for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and academies and own admission authority schools can buy this service back if they wish to purchase for a senior member of the team to undertake this duty for them.</li> </ul>   |
| 7. | <p>The level of income received from these traded services funds the salary costs and associated overheads of staff undertaking the various elements of the buy back services offered. This is approximately £35,000 per year.</p>   |

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| 8.                                       | <p>The current staff structure is shown below:</p>  <pre> graph TD     A[Head of School Organisation<br/>Admissions and Capital<br/>Planning<br/>Head of Service] --&gt; B[Admissions Manager]     B --&gt; C[Senior Admissions Officer<br/>(Secondary &amp; Upper)]     B --&gt; D[Senior Admissions Officer<br/>(Starting School &amp; Middle)]     C --&gt; E[Admissions Officer<br/>(Area 1&amp;2)]     C --&gt; F[Admissions Assistant]     D --&gt; G[Admissions Officer<br/>(Area 3&amp;4)]     D --&gt; H[Admissions Assistant] </pre> |
| 9.                                       | <p>The School Admissions Team has undergone review and restructuring since 2013 to ensure that it can continue to provide an efficient service, within the budget available. As a result of review an additional Admissions Assistant post was added to the team to assist with the high volume of calls the School Admissions helpline receives and to undertake administration duties the team requires in terms of inputting application forms and handling all incoming mail. The additional cost of this post is offset by the income from the Traded Services set out above.</p>   |
| <p><b>Service and Team pressures</b></p> |  |
| 10.                                      | <p>The Council's School Organisation Plan provides the pupil place planning forecasts which support the Council's new school places programme of capital investment required to maintain the optimum number of school places within Central Bedfordshire. Many of these new places are provided through expansions of schools on existing or new sites, adding to the complexity of admission arrangements in the area.</p>  |
| 11.                                      | <p>Since 2013 the pupil population in Central Bedfordshire has increased by just over 2.5% from 37,749 in January 2013 to 38,757 in January 2015. Total pupil numbers are expected to rise further by approximately 6,757 to 45,457 pupils in 2020. This comprises a 20% increase in school population in Central Bedfordshire since 2013 when the School Admissions Team budget was originally fixed.</p>   |
| 12.                                      | <p>Naturally the size of cohorts for admissions have increased in line with the increasing population, which has resulted in a year on year increase seen for the starting school admissions round of nearly 15% from 2917 applications in 2013, 3178 applications in 2014 and 3429 applications in 2015. For the 2016 admissions round, the team is expecting to process 3452 applications for CBC children.</p>  |
| 13.                                      | <p>As a result of the commissioning of new school places the team now has additional academies/schools to co-ordinate and liaise with and admission arrangements which can often change year on year. Growing communities also lead to an enhanced focus on the team to provide absolute clarity and transparency of admission arrangements to inform parental demand as families move into the area and understandably want their child to attend their local or preferred school.</p>  |

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| 14.                              | Notwithstanding the population increase, the School Admissions Team has experienced further demand due to the increased number of schools who have become their own admissions authority, mainly through the academy route.  |
| 15.                              | The ambition of the Government for schools to convert to Academy status in the new style of converter academies saw a huge increase of schools in Central Bedfordshire going through the conversion process and since May 2010, 51 schools in Central Bedfordshire have converted to Academy status. 10 of these have converted since 2013. 57% of all pupils in Central Bedfordshire schools are now accommodated in an Academy.  |
| 16.                              | Although academies are independent from the Council, the School Admissions Team is still responsible for co-ordinating the admissions process for these and all admission authorities in the area, including Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools and provides advice and guidance on a wide range of admission issues. The monitoring of admission arrangements of all own admission authorities, is also one of the Council's statutory admission duties and this has to be overseen on an annual basis.   |
| 17.                              | Section 3.2 of the School Admissions Code places a requirement for Local Authorities to refer arrangements which it views or suspects as unlawful to the Schools Adjudicator. As a result the increase in own admission authorities in Central Bedfordshire has also brought a greater focus to this specific duty which it had to comply with recently resulting in the Office of the Schools Adjudicator upheld the Council's objections.  |
| 18.                              | In addition to being reactive to national developments and embracing new ways of working, the School Admissions Team has had to be responsive to very local demands such as academies and schools who wish to change their age range. The Dunstable and Houghton Regis area has seen the majority of schools change their age to be within a two tier system. This has increased complexity within the admissions process and impacted on the team's work providing additional support to parents and to academies and schools to ensure the admissions process is effective and transition arrangements are robust. |
| <b>Revised service structure</b> |  |
| 19.                              | As illustrated in this report, this increase in complexity and in population growth has placed additional pressure on the School Admissions Team which was originally configured and budgeted to manage service demand at 2013 levels.   |
| 20.                              | The School Admissions Team is committed to continuing to provide a good quality service to parents and to academies and schools and being responsive to national and local demands. The service pressures can no longer be mitigated through review and restructuring within the budget available and in order to maintain the service the team needs to expand its staffing structure by 2 additional staff.  |
| 21.                              | An increase of £52,514 in the Admissions DSG budget would fund 2 additional staff and provide the additional capacity required to deal with the number of applications received for both the annual admissions rounds and in-year admissions. The team would be able to respond to the demands of an increasing population, the complexity of the admissions system and maintain its high standards of customer care for parents, carers, academies and schools.   |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                |  |

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| 22. | The LA proposes, with the School Forum's agreement, to apply to the Secretary of State for a disapplication of the School and Early Years Finance regulations to allow an increase of £52,514 in the annual amount held centrally for the School Admission team. This would allow an increase in staff capacity to provide the team with 2 more Admission Officers to deal with the increasing workload from the team's statutory responsibilities. This would equate to approximately £1.46 per pupil of school block funding based on October 2014 census, however this will reduce and be based on a higher pupil number as at October 2015 census. |
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**Appendices:**

None