
CONSULTATION 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 approve the commencement of the Council's consultation on admission arrangements to ensure the statutory requirement for admissions consultation is met. The Council is the admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.
2. Outline the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for two Community schools.

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 2018/19.**

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

- **Moving the designated measuring point for admission to Shefford Lower from the school site to the war memorial site in the town centre.**
- **Creation of priority areas within the catchment area of Fairfield Park Lower School and moving the designated measuring point for admission to the school from the main entrance of the Dickens Boulevard site to the halfway point between the school's 2 sites.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

3. The Council's proposed Admission Arrangements for the academic year 2018-19 will be considered by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2016 as a consultee to the process if the Executive approve the recommendations of this report.

Issues

4. 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.
5. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the academic year 2018/19 fulfils this requirement, setting out the timeframes for processing admission applications.
6. 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 2 Community schools admissions criteria.

Central Bedfordshire Council's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Academic Year 2018-19

7. 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.
8. The Council is required to co-ordinate the admissions for children in their area so that only 1 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. The proposed co-ordinated scheme for 2018/19 is attached for Lower, Primary and Middle at Appendix 1 and the proposed co-ordinated scheme is attached for Secondary and Upper at Appendix 2.
14. 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 2018/19. 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.

Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools

15. 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.
16. 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 6 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.
17. For admission arrangements determined in 2017 for entry in September 2018, consultation must be for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October 2016 and the 31 January 2017. The Admission Arrangements must then be determined by 28 February 2017. The Council will conduct its consultation between the 17 October 2016 and 2 December 2016 to gather the views of all consultees.

18. Admissions Authorities are required to consult with the following parties:
 - i. Parents of children between the ages of 2 and 18;
 - 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.

19. From 2018/19 changes are proposed to the admissions criteria of 2 Community schools in Central Bedfordshire, which are Shefford Lower School and Fairfield Park Lower School.

Shefford Lower School – proposed changes to the school’s designated measuring point

20. Shefford Lower School is a popular and successful 3 form entry school serving pupils from the ages of 4 to 9 in the town of Shefford. The school is located on the western edge of the town.

21. Currently all applications are measured using straight line distance from the pupil’s home address to the front door of the school. Places are allocated in accordance with the admissions criteria for the school, and within each criterion those living closest to the school get priority for a place over those who live further away.

22. The Governing Body of the school approached Central Bedfordshire Council with a request for the designated measuring point to be moved from the school’s front door to the war memorial in the centre of Shefford town. This proposal has been made as the school feel that the school’s admission arrangements currently disadvantage a large number of families in Shefford and in particular their most vulnerable families as the school is situated on the western edge of its catchment area.

23. On submitting their request the Governing Body have set out the pros and cons of the proposal:

Pros:

 - 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.
 - 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.

Cons:

- If the school is oversubscribed with catchment children then there may be some children living near to the school who may not get a place.
24. Appendix 4 shows the catchment area for Shefford Lower School as well as the current designated measuring point (front door of the school) and the proposed measuring point (war memorial in the centre of the town).
 25. It is therefore proposed to move the school's measuring point from the school's front door to the war memorial in the centre of the town to ensure all families living in the catchment area have a fair opportunity of gaining a place at the school.
 26. It is worth noting that as part of the admissions process any family who do not gain a place at their catchment or preferred schools and are allocated a place at an alternative school will be provided with transport if this is over 2 miles for a child under the age of 8 or over 3 miles for a child over 8, unless the distance is less than this and there are road safety grounds.

Fairfield Park Lower School

27. Fairfield Park Lower School is currently a 2 form entry school in the parish of Fairfield which is adjacent to Stotfold. The school is due to be expanded to 3 forms of entry, with the additional form of entry being accommodated in a temporary classroom on the school site before this transfers to the school's second site which will be built on a new housing development, opposite the current estate.
28. The current admission arrangements need amending to reflect the changes to the school with its expansion over 2 sites so that it serves the whole catchment area fairly and consistently.
29. The oversubscription criteria used to determine how places are offered at the school would remain, however there would be clarity on how places are to be offered at the 2 sites, see page 3 of Appendix 3.
30. The catchment area for the school would remain however within this there would be 2 priority areas to determine which site a catchment child would be allocated if their application is successful. The line defining the priority areas splits the catchment area fairly and has been devised following a modelling exercise using 2016 allocation data. The line should also protect families from the south west corner of the Dickens Boulevard site priority area in securing a place at that site rather than having to cross the catchment area to the new site.

31. The designated measuring site would also 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.
32. Appendices 5a and 5b show the proposed priority areas within the school's catchment area and the proposed location of the designated measuring site.
33. 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.

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

34. 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.
35. 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.
36. The Council consulted informally with schools and academies through the school pyramid meetings which are held to discuss school organisation and admissions issues. Academies and schools felt that children from all backgrounds were well catered for through the existing admission policies in place. The majority of academies and schools prioritise pupils by a defined catchment area, which is made up of a variety of dwellings from different socio-economic backgrounds.
37. It is therefore proposed that the standard admission criteria currently used for the majority of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools remains unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Reason for decision

38. 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 Shefford Lower School and Fairfield Park Lower School.

Council Priorities

39. 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

40. 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 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.
41. 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.
42. 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.
43. The Executive is asked to approve the commencement of consultation for the proposed changes to the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19.
44. 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.

45. 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.
46. 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.
47. 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 2016.
48. The changes proposed to Shefford Lower School and Fairfield Park Lower School are changes subject to consultation.
49. 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.
50. The Council will fulfil its statutory responsibilities above by consulting within the timescales set out. Feedback from all consultees will be reported in February 2017 to Executive to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19.
51. 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.
52. The Council must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on its website, displaying them for the whole offer year.

Financial Implications

53. Not applicable.

Equalities Implications

54. 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.
55. 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

56. 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.
57. The proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme has been drawn up with regard to the national closing and offer dates for the academic year of 2018/19, taking into account the necessary timescales to process and allocate places working with the schools and academies in Central Bedfordshire to meet the deadlines
58. 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.
59. Responses to the consultation will be reported in February 2017 to the Executive to determine the Council's admission arrangements for the academic year 2018/19. As a result, the Council's admission arrangements will be determined before 28 February 2017 as required by the regulations.

Appendices

The following Appendix is attached through an electronic link:

60. Appendix 1 – Lower, Primary and Middle 2018/19 co-ordinated admissions scheme.
61. Appendix 2 – Secondary and Upper 2018/19 co-ordinated admissions scheme.
62. Appendix 3 – Proposed Community and Voluntary Controlled schools Admissions Policy and PANs 2018/19.
63. Appendix 4 – Shefford Lower School – current and proposed measuring point.
64. Appendix 5a – Fairfield Park Lower School - proposed priority areas from September 2018.
65. Appendix 5b – Fairfield Park Lower School – current and proposed measuring point.
66. Appendix 6 – Confirmation of Religious Affiliation form.

Background Papers

67. 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.