

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

18 March 2014

Subject: School Admissions 2015/16

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes, Children's Services

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

This report has been produced as part of the statutory process for the determination of admission arrangements to maintained schools.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to formulate and operate schemes to co-ordinate the admissions to all maintained schools and Academies within its area. We are proposing two co-ordinated schemes; one covers primary schools (including infants and juniors) and the other is for secondary schools. The co-ordination of admissions has been successful in past years and the schemes proposed for 2015/16 are substantially the same as those operating for the current academic year.

The Local Authority is the statutory admission authority for the Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools in its area. As such it is required to formulate admission arrangements which outline how it will admit children to those schools. There are two proposed schemes one for secondary and one for primary (including infant and junior schools).

The schemes and arrangements were submitted for approval to the School Admissions Forum on 27 February 2014 following a period of consultation with schools, parents, neighbouring authorities and Senior Officers at Wiltshire Council. The consultation period ended on Friday 21 February 2014.

Following approval by the School Admissions Forum, Cabinet will now be required to approve the four documents which are appended to this report which then will become the determined admission policy for Wiltshire for 2015/16.

The admissions process for the intakes in September 2015 begins in September 2014.

Proposal

That Cabinet approves and determines:

- a) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admission to secondary schools for 2015/16.

- b) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admissions to primary schools for 2015/16.
- c) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community secondary schools for 2015/16.
- d) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community primary schools for 2015/16.

Reason for Proposal

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to have a determined admission policy for 2015/16 in place on or before 15 April 2014.

Carolyn Godfrey
Corporate Director, Children's Services

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

18 March 2014

Subject: School Admissions 2015/16

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes, Children's Services

Key Decision: Yes

Purpose of Report

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to act in accordance with the School Admissions Code and has a statutory duty to formulate and operate schemes to co-ordinate the admissions to all maintained schools and Academies within its area. We are proposing two co-ordinated schemes; one covers primary schools (including infants and juniors) and the other is for secondary schools.

There is a requirement to have in place schemes for the co-ordination of admissions to the schools within Wiltshire.

The Local Authority is also the statutory admission authority for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools in its area. As such, it is required to formulate admission arrangements which outline how it will admit children to those schools. There are two proposed schemes one for secondary and one for primary (including infant and junior schools).

The report presents the four elements of the admissions policy which have been recommended for approval by The School Admissions Forum. Following this meeting which took place on 27 February 2014, they now have to be determined by Cabinet.

Background

1. The purpose of co-ordinated arrangements is to make the application process simpler for parents by ensuring that each child gets one offer for one school place. This requires the School Admissions team to work with colleagues in Academies, Foundation and Aided schools in Wiltshire and other local authorities.
2. The co-ordinated process is accepted by schools and the scheme does not need substantial revision at this time. The proposed schemes are substantially the same as those currently being used with the exception of a new process being introduced for parents wishing to accept the school place they have been offered. All four schemes have been drafted in line with The School Admissions Code.
3. The LA is the admissions authority for all Community and Voluntary Controlled (C&VC) schools in the county. The governing bodies of Academies, Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools are their own admissions authority.

4. Each admission authority has to determine the arrangements which are used when allocating school places. These proposed arrangements will be used solely for admissions to Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. They incorporate the criteria used to prioritise applications in situations when a school is oversubscribed (i.e. when more applications are received than the school's admission number allows) as well as showing how all admissions will be processed.

Main Considerations for the Council

5. The proposed co-ordinated schemes and admission arrangements have been sent out to all maintained schools and other neighbouring admission authorities for consultation. They have also been placed on the Wiltshire Council website. The documents were sent out in December 2013 which invited comments to be received up until 21 February 2014.
6. From consultation responses received it is clear that the general issue of co-ordinating arrangements is not questioned. There is confidence that with suitable communication systems being in place, the co-operation between the admissions team and the Foundation, Voluntary Aided schools and Academies which is essential for the smooth operation of a co-ordinated scheme, will be forthcoming.
7. The proposed timetable for the primary and secondary co-ordinated schemes are based on that used in previous years and so they are familiar to schools and the admissions team in Wiltshire Council.
8. The statutory regulations give clear deadlines to which the co-ordinated admissions schemes have to adhere.
 - Secondary Deadline 31 October 2014
 - Primary Deadline 15 January 2015
 - Secondary Notification Date 2 March 2015
 - Primary Notification Date 16 April 2015
9. The co-ordinated schemes include the provision to co-ordinate all admissions to all schools for the main years of entry. From September 2014 and in line with the School Admissions Code, there is no longer the requirement for In Year applications to be co-ordinated cross border. It is proposed however in the attached schemes that all In Year applications continue to be made directly to Wiltshire Council for places at Wiltshire schools so that we can monitor which children are potentially out of the school system for safeguarding purposes.
10. The co-ordinated scheme for main round applications (i.e. reception and year 7 intake) for places at primary schools mirrors that which operates for secondary schools. Wiltshire residents may apply for an out of county school on a Wiltshire form. Out of county residents can apply for a Wiltshire school through their own local authority.
11. This year the Local Authority has consulted on a change to the Co-ordinated Primary and Secondary Schemes 2015/16. The proposed change relates to the

way in which parents accept the place that they have been offered. Whilst the current process in place works well, the Local Authority is keen to support our schools to ensure they have information about parents who have accepted their place at the school as quickly as possible and therefore we have consulted on all acceptance slips being returned to the preferred school and no longer to the Local Authority.

12. The proposed change would mean that all parents who are offered a place at a Wiltshire Primary or Secondary School and wish to accept the place they have been offered would accept the place directly via the school and no longer the Local Authority. This will enable the school to have direct contact with prospective parents and inform them about when they are likely to receive further information about taster days and information about school uniform etc. This will also benefit the school as this will enable to have an idea of numbers for the prospective intake as well as help with class organisation.
13. The Local Authority will continue to receive acceptances for places at out of county schools so that they can advise other LA's of parents who have accepted a place at one of their schools. Parents who wish to decline the place that they have been offered should also do this to the Local Authority and not to the school.
14. This proposed change was discussed at The Admissions Forum in November 2013 prior to consultation, and this change was welcomed. The Forum did however feel that before any change was implemented that extensive consultation with all of our schools would be required.
15. The Local Authority has consulted with all schools in Wiltshire on the proposed change, from responses received comments are extremely positive and in favour of the change. From the 96 schools that responded to the consultation, 92 schools were in favour of the change. Four schools felt that the current process works well and there was no need for change, they also felt that the new process could be confusing for parents. The responses were discussed at the Admissions Forum on 27 February 2014 and it was recommended that the proposed changes should be implemented for 2015/16 entry.
16. From consultations responses so far, it is also clear that there is widespread agreement with the proposed admission arrangements for VC&C schools which are considered to be fair and objective as required by the School Admissions Code.
17. This year the Local Authority has also consulted on an amendment to the over-subscription criteria for these schools. The change has been made in order to support military families with their relocation to Wiltshire.
18. There have been no objections at all received to the proposed oversubscription criteria. These give priority to children in care as required by the School Admissions Code.
19. Currently children living within a school's designated area are given priority over children from outside that area. This will still be the case, however a further criteria has now been added above the final criterion which declares a special planning area. This criterion has been put in place to ensure that Wiltshire

Council is providing as much support as possible to military families relocating to Wiltshire. We are also in discussions with all Voluntary Aided, Foundation and Academies in the special planning area to see if they are willing to introduce the same criterion to their oversubscription criteria for entry into September 2016. The tie break used if a school is oversubscribed within any criterion above is that of distance from the school.

20. All returns from the consultation period were presented to the Admission Forum on 27 February 2014. After full consideration the Local Authority recommended to the Forum that these schemes and admission arrangements be agreed.
21. The proposed co-ordinated schemes and admission arrangements are in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code which came in to force on 1 February 2012.
22. The admission arrangements for VC & C schools will be operated within the appropriate co-ordinated scheme for admissions within Wiltshire and are compatible with the timetables laid down by the co-ordinated schemes.
23. Once determined by Cabinet, the schemes and admission arrangements will be circulated to all schools in Wiltshire and to our nine neighbouring local authorities. They will be implemented from September 2014 when the process of admitting children to the intake year in 2015 starts.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

24. The admission policy of the local authority is to give local children priority when applying for their local school. This policy of 'local schools for local children' has been maintained for many years and is a way of encouraging parents to consider the environmental impact of long journeys to school.

Should the Admissions Team not be able to offer a place at a child's designated school and the child's lives further than the statutory safe walking distance for the child's age, then free transport would be provided to the next nearest school with available places. The percentage of children this currently applies to in Wiltshire is 0.7%.

Equality Impact of the Proposal

25. Although not part of the proposed co-ordinated schemes or admission arrangements, it should be noted that all application forms can be and are produced in different languages on request.
26. The online system for applications to be made has developed since it was introduced in 2006. Over 50% of applications for September 2014 intakes were received electronically.

Risk Assessment

27. Were the Local Authority not to determine co-ordinated schemes for its maintained schools, the Secretary of State would impose a scheme on us.

28. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator has a monitoring role to play in regard to admission arrangements and it is a statutory duty to have these in place by 15 April 2014 for admissions to schools in 2015.

Financial Implications

29. There have been additional costs associated with co-ordinated admission arrangements. These have been recognised by the Cabinet on a previous occasion. Additional staffing and software has been provided for the school admissions team.

30. There will also be increased printing costs since the required forms will be produced and printed by Wiltshire Council rather than by individual admission authorities. These costs will be managed within existing resources.

31. Academies receive funding from the Government to enable them to be part of the co-ordinated arrangements and therefore appropriate charging mechanisms have been put in to place.

32. The budget to support admission arrangements is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) received by the Council. Under the new arrangements for school funding, following the implementation of the government's school funding reform proposals, many budgets previously held centrally by the local authority must now be delegated to schools. The budget for the Admissions Service has been confirmed as a budget which can continue to be centrally retained but no new commitments or increases in expenditure are allowable from 2013-14. This means that ongoing costs of the admissions process will need to be met from within the current level of resources.

Legal Implications

33. The School Admissions Code, issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, imposes mandatory requirements in relation to the discharge of functions relating to admissions to maintained schools. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to act in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Code. This includes a statutory duty to determine schemes for the co-ordination of admissions and admission arrangements for voluntary controlled and community schools. Should the Local Authority fail to do so the Secretary of State may impose schemes upon us. The proposed schemes and scheme changes have been drafted to comply with the requirements of the Schools Admissions Code.

Options Considered

34. It is a legal requirement to have these policies in place and therefore no alternative has been considered.

35. The schemes and arrangements as presented have been sent out to all schools for consultation and no alternative suggestions have been received to date.

Conclusion

36. Subject to agreement by the School Admissions Forum, Cabinet is asked to approve the appended schemes which will become the determined admission policy for Wiltshire for 2015/16.

Carolyn Godfrey
Corporate Director, Children's Services

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Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

- A. Proposed Scheme for the Co-Ordination of Secondary Admissions 2015/16
- B. Proposed Scheme for the Co-Ordination of Primary Admissions 2015/16
- C. Proposed Admission Arrangements for VC&C Secondary Schools 2015/16
- D. Proposed Admission Arrangements for VC&C Primary Schools 2015/16
- E. Types of Schools - Background Information
- F. Map of Schools within the Special Planning Area.