

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

19 March 2013

Subject: School Admissions 2014/15

Cabinet member: Councillor Lionel Grundy – Children’s Services

Key Decision: No

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 (or state schools) 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 2014/15 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 have been approved by the School Admissions Forum following a period of consultation with schools, parents, neighbouring authorities and Senior Officers at Wiltshire Council. The consultation period ended on Thursday 08 February 2013.

Cabinet is required to approve the four documents which are appended to this report which then will become the determined admission policy for Wiltshire for 2014/15.

The admissions process for the intakes in September 2014 begins in September 2013.

Proposal

That Cabinet approves and determines:

- a) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admission to secondary schools for 2014/15.

- b) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admissions to primary schools for 2014/15.
- c) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community secondary schools for 2014/15.
- d) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community primary schools for 2014/15.

Reason for Proposal

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to have a determined admission policy for 2014/15 in place on or before 15 April 2013.

Carolyn Godfrey
Director for Children and Education

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

19 March 2013

Subject: School Admissions 2014/15

Cabinet member: Councillor Lionel Grundy – Children’s Services

Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to act in accordance with the School Admissions Code. There is a requirement to have in place schemes for the co-ordination of admissions to the schools within Wiltshire.
The Local Authority is the Admissions Authority for all Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools within Wiltshire and as such is required to determine a set of admission arrangements for those schools.
The report presents the four elements of the admissions policy which have to be determined by Cabinet.

Background

2. 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 and in other local authorities.
3. 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. In line with the School Admissions Code, all four schemes have been revised as the requirement for Local Authorities to co-ordinate In Year Admissions has now been removed.
4. The LA is the admissions authority for all Community and Voluntary Controlled (C&VC) schools in the county. The governing bodies of academies, aided and foundation schools are their own admissions authority.
5. 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

6. The proposed co-ordinated schemes and admission arrangements have been sent out to all maintained schools and other neighbouring admission authorities for consultation. The documents were sent out in December 2012 which invited comments to be received up until 08 February 2013.
7. From consultations responses received to date 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, aided schools and academies which is essential for the smooth operation of a co-ordinated scheme, will be forthcoming.
8. The proposed timetable for the secondary co-ordinated scheme is based on that used in previous years and so is familiar to schools and the admissions team in DCE.
9. The statutory regulations give clear deadlines to which the co-ordinated admissions schemes have to adhere.
 - Secondary Deadline 31st October 2013
 - Primary Deadline 15th January 2014
 - Secondary Notification Date 1st March 2014
 - Primary Notification Date 16th April 2014

Consequential adjustments have been made to the proposed timetables for the co-ordination of admissions.

10. The co-ordinated schemes include the provision to co-ordinate all admissions to all schools for the main years of entry. From September 2013 and in line with the New 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 so that we can monitor which children are potentially out of the school system for safeguarding purposes.
11. The co-ordinated scheme for 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.
12. From consultations responses so far, it is 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.
13. There have been no objections at all received to date to the proposed oversubscription criteria which have worked well for many years. These give priority to children in care as required by the School Admissions Code. Children living within a school's designated area are given priority over children from outside that area. The tie break used if a school is oversubscribed within any criterion is that of distance from the school.

14. The returns from the consultation period were presented to the Admission Forum on 27 February 2013. After full consideration the Forum recommend that these schemes and admission arrangements be agreed.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. Once determined 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 2013 when the process of admitting children to the intake year in 2014 starts.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

18. 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 number of children this currently applies to in Wiltshire is 0.7%.

Equality Impact of the Proposal

19. 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.
20. The online system for applications to be made has developed since it was introduced in 2006. Over 50% of applications for September 2013 intakes were received electronically.

Risk Assessment

21. Were the Local Authority not to determine co-ordinated schemes for its maintained schools, the Secretary of State would impose a scheme on us.
22. 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 2013 for admissions to schools in 2014.

Financial Implications

23. 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.
24. 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.
25. Academies receive funding from the Government to enable them to be part of the co-ordinated arrangements and therefore appropriate charging mechanism will be put in to place.
26. The budget to support admission arrangements if 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 2012-13. This means that ongoing costs of the admissions process will need to be met from within the current level of resources.

Legal Implications

27. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to determine schemes for the co-ordination of admissions and admission arrangements for voluntary controlled and community schools. If it fails to do so the Secretary of State would impose schemes on us.

Options Considered

28. It is a legal requirement to have these policies in place and so no alternative has been considered.
29. The schemes and arrangements as presented have been sent out to all schools for consultation and no alternative suggestions to date have been received.

Conclusion

30. Cabinet is asked to approve the appended schemes which will become the determined admission policy for Wiltshire for 2014/15.

Carolyn Godfrey
Director, Department for Children and Education

Report Author

Debbie Clare – Admissions Coordinator - School Buildings and Places

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 2014/15
- b) Proposed Scheme for the Co-Ordination of Primary Admissions 2014/15
- c) Proposed Admission Arrangements for VC&C Secondary Schools 2014/15
- d) Proposed Admission Arrangements for VC&C Primary Schools 2014/15
- e) Types of Schools - Background Information