

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

1 February 2022

**Subject: Admission Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme
2023/244**

**Cabinet Member: Cllr Laura Mayes – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Children’s Services, Education and Skills**

Key Decision: Non Key

Proposal(s)

To approve the following: -

- a) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admission to secondary schools for 2023/24.
- b) the proposed scheme for the co-ordination of admissions to primary schools for 2023/24.
- c) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community Secondary Schools for 2023/24.
- d) the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community Primary Schools for 2023/24.

Reason for Proposal(s)

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to have a determined admission policy for 2023/24 in place on or before 28 February 2022.

**Terence Herbert
Chief Executive**

Wiltshire Council

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1. 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 that covers primary schools (including infants and juniors) and the other is for secondary schools.

There is a legal requirement to have schemes in place for the co-ordination of admission 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, following consultation, are required to be determined by Cabinet.

2. Relevance to the Council’s Business Plan

The Local Authority has a continued statutory responsibility to provide a school place for all children living in Wiltshire. The four documents have been put in place to ensure that all places are allocated in an open, fair and transparent way.

One of Wiltshire Council’s Business Plan outcomes is to achieve inclusive communities where everyone can achieve their potential. Key to this is that everyone has access to high quality education. A functioning, fair admissions policy is required to achieve this.

3. Background

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.

The co-ordinated process is accepted by schools and the scheme does not need substantial revision. The proposed schemes are substantially the same as those currently being used. All four schemes have been drafted in line with The School Admissions Code which came into force on 1 September 2021.

The LA is the admissions authority for all Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in the county. The governing bodies or Trusts of Academies, Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools are each their own admissions authority.

Each admission authority must determine the arrangements to be used when allocating school places. These proposed arrangements will be used solely for admissions to Wiltshire 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 places available) as well as showing how all admissions will be processed.

4. Main Considerations for the Council

The proposed co-ordinated schemes and admission arrangements have been sent out for consultation to all relevant stakeholders including pre-schools / nurseries, schools, and Dioceses; they have also been placed on the Council's website for parents and the public to view as well as being sent to neighbouring authorities. The consultation began in December 2021 and ended on the 21 January 2022.

The LA received one comment from a member of the public on 6 December 2021 in respect of the proposed schemes which was around the parental responsibly section. We sought clarification on 10 December 2021 as to which part of this section the respondent was referring. However, no response was received. Therefore, no changes have been made to this section and it will remain the same for the 2023/24 academic year. Should a further response be received then it will be considered with regard to the proposed policies for the 2024/25 academic year.

Therefore, as in previous years, it is clear that there is confidence and 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.

The proposed timetables for the primary and secondary co-ordinated schemes are based on those used in previous years and so they are familiar to schools and the Admissions Team at Wiltshire Council.

The statutory regulations give clear deadlines for admissions applications, to which the co-ordinated admissions schemes must adhere.

- Secondary Deadline 31 October 2022
- Primary Deadline 15 January 2023
- Secondary Notification Date 1 March 2023

- Primary Notification Date 17 April 2023

The co-ordinated schemes include the provision to co-ordinate all admissions to all schools for the main years of entry. The main years of entry are Reception, Year 3 (Junior) and Year 7. In line with the School Admissions Code, there is no longer the requirement for In Year applications to be co-ordinated within county or cross border. In the attached schemes, however, it is proposed that all In Year applications continue to be made directly to Wiltshire Council for places at Wiltshire schools. This is so that we can monitor which children are potentially out of the school system for safeguarding purposes. We do however currently have 13 schools which have opted out of In Year Co-ordination for this academic year as it is not a legal requirement to co-ordinate in year applications. These schools are still required to inform the LA of all applications that are received as well as the outcome. Should the school not be able to offer a place and if the child is a Wiltshire resident, the LA will make an alternative offer to ensure that the child is not without a school place.

The co-ordinated scheme for main round applications for places at primary schools (Reception intake) mirrors that which operates for secondary schools (Year 7 intake). 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.

It is clear from previous years, that there is widespread agreement with the proposed admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled and Community schools which are also considered to be fair and objective as required by the School Admissions Code.

Currently 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 (straight line) from the school.

The Local Authority is proposing one change to the policies for both Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools which is in regard to the waiting list. In previous years we have automatically placed all children who have been refused a place at their preferred Voluntary Controlled or Community school on the waiting list. However, in the 2023/24 scheme, any parent who has been refused a place at one of these schools will now need to opt to go on the waiting list. This will help us ensure that when places become available that they are offered to children who wish to still attend that school rather than those who are happy with the alternative place that has been offered.

The proposed co-ordinated schemes and admission arrangements have all been drafted in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code which came in to force on 1 September 2021.

The admission arrangements for Voluntary Controlled and Community 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.

Following the period of consultation and once determined by Cabinet, the schemes and admission arrangements will be circulated to all schools in Wiltshire and to our nine neighbouring local authorities and published on the Council website. They will be implemented from September 2022 when the process of admitting children to the intake year in 2023 begins.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

Not applicable

7. Safeguarding Implications

In the interest of safeguarding, the Local Authority continues to co-ordinate all in year applications for children to the majority of Wiltshire schools, this ensures that the School Admissions Team can monitor which children are potentially out of the school system. If a parent is unable to secure a place at their preferred school, the School Admissions Team will ensure that a place is allocated at a reasonable alternative.

As above, we do have some schools which have opted out of in year co-ordination due to there being no legal requirement to co-ordinate in year applications. These schools are still required to inform the LA of all applications that are received as well as the outcome. Should the school not be able to offer a place and if the child is a Wiltshire resident, the LA will make an alternative offer to ensure that the child is not without a school place.

8. Public Health Implications

There are no public health issues arising directly from this report.

9. Procurement Implications

There are no procurement implications directly arising from this report.

10. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

The Admissions Policy and Coordinated Admissions Schemes are put in place to ensure all applications for a school place are treated in fair, open and transparent way. Although not part of the proposed co-ordinated schemes or admission arrangements, it should be noted that all application forms can be produced in different languages on request.

The online system for applications to be made has developed since it was introduced in 2006. Over 95% of applications for September 2021 intakes were received electronically.

Paper copies of the application forms are also still available for parents/carers who do not have online access.

11. Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

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 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 1%.

12. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

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

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator has a monitoring role to play in regards to admission arrangements. It is the statutory responsibility of admission authorities to ensure that these are in place by 28 February 2022.

13. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

There is a small risk that confusion or challenge may occur over the 2023/24 proposed arrangements, however, this is mitigated as the changes in the proposed 2023/24 schemes have been kept to a minimum.

14. Financial Implications

The budget to support the staffing and the co-ordination of admissions is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) received by the Local Authority. In line with current school funding arrangements, the funding for admission arrangements will form part of the Central Schools Services Block of the DSG from 2022-23 and is therefore determined by Schools Forum as part of the consideration of the overall central schools block. This is finalised at the January 2022 meeting of the Forum and ratified by Council at their February 2022 meeting. There are no plans currently to increase or, decrease the Admissions budget.

15. Legal Implications

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. The proposed schemes and scheme changes have been drafted to comply with the requirements of the Schools Admissions Code which came into force on the 1st September 2021.

16. Workforce Implications

There are no workforce implications

17. Options Considered

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

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

Conclusions

Cabinet is asked to approve the appended schemes which will become the determined Admissions Policy for Wiltshire for 2023/24.

Helean Hughes (Director - Education and Skills)

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Appendices

- a) Appendix A - Proposed Scheme for the Co-ordination of Secondary Admissions 2023/24
- b) Appendix B - Proposed Scheme for the Co-ordination of Primary Admissions 2023/24
- c) Appendix C - Proposed Admission Arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community Secondary Schools 2023/24
- d) Appendix D - Proposed Admission Arrangements for Voluntary Controlled & Community Primary Schools 2023/24