

<b>TITLE</b>	School Admissions Process Improvements
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<b>FOR INFORMATION</b>	Schools Forum
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## SUMMARY

Improvements and efficiencies made within School Admissions, over the previous 12 months.

As Wokingham continues to be rated one of the best places to live in Britain there will always be a demand for school places.

The School Admissions Team is responsible for validating and processing all applications. The team adheres to strict deadlines, documented within the Wokingham Borough Council published admission arrangements, set in line with the statutory governance of the School Admissions Code. This includes in year applications from parents from outside the Borough and validation of data from other authorities in respect of main cyclical processes.

Admission authorities must set their admission arrangements annually following public consultation, and once determined publish them. These enforce the guidelines that the team must adhere to. This includes the main cyclical processes for Entry to Primary, Infant to Junior and Primary to Secondary Schools, as well as in year applications and where any application is refused, the subsequent appeals.

Admissions decisions must comply with the School Admissions Code and the team is trained to provide advice and guidance in respect of current Government legislation to parents, schools and Council colleagues who provide support.

## OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

Over the last 12 months a review of all school admissions processes, workload, technology and resources have taken place – including benchmarking exercises with other local authorities. Improvements across all areas have been implemented and as a result, the function is more efficient. The Admissions Team now structurally sits within Customer and Locality Services. This enables the team to maximise support from the Customer Service Centre, who deal with initial customer interactions, with the aim of resolving as many questions and queries at first point of contact as possible. They can be contacted via the telephone, web chat, face to face or email, with support provided from the Admissions Team for more complex enquiries. This has redirected approx. 15,000 calls per year, which has significantly increased the team's ability to deal with applications and make allocations within the prescribed timelines. Further improvements and efficiencies include:

- Upgraded technology allowing customers to apply online, at a time and place that suits them

- Auto acknowledgement emails sent to families confirming receipt of applications
- Reduction in print costs, signposting families to online information wherever possible i.e. parent guides
- Emailing correspondence, such as offers - reducing the number of paper responses to 12.4% for E2P, 11.2% for I2J and 8.1% for P2S.
- Some automated checking, saving time for the team
- Process efficiency has led to a reduction in team members, leading to cost savings

Summary information continues to be sent to all parents (through schools for I2J and P2S where possible) whilst encouraging them to use our on-line service and access the documentation available on the website. Families having difficulty are still supported by the team who provide paper copies of applications forms as and when required. Good working relationships with Education Welfare, Special Educational Needs Team, Fair Access Panel and our Virtual Head for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children, as well as our schools, allow us to support the most vulnerable students in the Borough.

## **VOLUMES**

2017 Primary Cyclical Allocation	Places Allocated	2,155 (+ 19 diverts)
2017 Primary Cyclical Allocation	Preferences Validated	5,830
2017 Secondary Cyclical Allocation	Places Allocated	1,945 (+ 48 diverts)
2017 Secondary Cyclical Allocation	Preferences Validated	5,195
2017 Junior Cyclical Allocation	Places Allocated	575
2017 Junior Cyclical Allocation	Preferences Validated	756
Bulk Appeals 2017	Secondary Appeals	40
Bulk Appeals 2017	Primary Appeals	27
In Year Applications Processed (20 school days)	Primary + Secondary	1,555
In Year Appeals (within prescribed timescales)	Primary + Secondary	175
Allocations from Wait Lists	Primary + Secondary	54
E-mails answered by team (most within 48 hours -excludes direct e-mails)		13,425
E-mails relating to wait lists answered by team within 1 month		545
Vulnerable Pupil Allocations	(3 since September 2017)	8
2018 Primary Information Sent (WBC residents only)		1,865
2018 Junior Information Sent (WBC residents only)		489
2018 Secondary Applications currently processing		2,954

Checks, balances and validation are required to ensure that all requests are dealt with fairly and effectively, with any misleading applications identified promptly. Four senior officers are trained to present at appeals. These are becoming more complex and time consuming in view of limited place availability in some areas/year groups.

## **STRATEGIC INPUT**

Senior Specialists within the Councils strategy and commissioning team, set direction, lead on admissions arrangements, provide direction on admission policies, respond to Government Agency information requests and undertake place planning. School admissions work closely with this team, sharing knowledge and seeking advice and guidance when necessary.

Both senior specialists within strategy and commissioning and governor services also support in the co-creation of parents guides.

## **TRADED SERVICES AND APPEALS**

Whilst the School Admissions Team fulfils a statutory admissions service for parents and all schools in accordance with the School Admissions and School Admissions Appeals Codes, own admission authority schools (academies/free schools) may participate (as determined in school admission policies) in elements of the admissions process as part of the Traded Services Agreement. This includes:

- Acting on behalf of the school at appeal
- Advice and guidance on admission arrangements
- Allocation services (transfer group and in-year)
- Monitoring of wait lists and subsequent allocations
- Distance routines/validation checks/council tax checks

In providing this service, we liaise closely with schools to ensure we provide a timely and quality driven service, delivering a process that is fair whilst using specialist admissions software. This saves school staff time and ensures that the school is compliant with the School Admissions Code. The traded services fees generated for 2017 amount to £16,051.35, which is above the figure of £14,170 forecast for the year. With new multi academy trusts evolving in the future, it is anticipated that with staff and systems to support, this figure will increase.

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