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| TITLE | Wokingham Borough School Admissions Arrangements 2019/20 |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | The Executive on 22 February 2018 |
| WARD | None Specific; |
| DIRECTOR | Interim Director of People Services - Paul Senior |
| LEAD MEMBER | Executive Member for Children's Services - Mark Ashwell |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The school admissions arrangements address the local authority's statutory duty to ensure that all school places for maintained schools and Academies (excluding special schools) are allocated and offered in an open and fair way and comply with the School Admissions Code and relevant regulations and legislation and support the council's key priorities.

The School Admissions Code (14) requires that in drawing up admissions arrangements, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places will be allocated.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive determines the 2019/20 admissions arrangements for Wokingham Borough Council community and controlled schools. To include the variations:

- 1) The changes to designated areas;
- 2) A tightening of the definition of "residency" ;
- 3) The parents' choice of full or part time attendance of reception classes;

These comprising the co-ordinated admissions scheme and admission policy 2019-20, the local in year co-ordinated scheme 2019-20, the sixth form policy 2019-20 and the amended Designated Areas of Loddon and Whiteknights Primary Schools.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report concerns the proposed admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in Wokingham and the Council's arrangements for co-ordinating school admissions in the 2019/20 academic year. The arrangements incorporate changes to the designated areas of two Earley primary schools that were part of the arrangements determined by Executive in 2017 for the 2018/19 year that were removed following an adverse School Adjudicator decision in July 2017. These changes are to ensure that Earley resident children are more likely to secure a local school place.

The main co-ordinated admission schemes apply to all state funded schools within the Borough (including free schools and academies), and include the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools. These schemes deal with applications for entry to primary (F2 reception), junior (year 3) and secondary (year 7) schools. It also allows for co-ordination for middle schools within the primary scheme and upper school entry specifically to year 9 and year 10 (e.g. university technology colleges, The Forest School and some selective schools) within the secondary scheme.

The proposals do not include the admissions arrangements for Foundation Stage 1 (Nursery classes at community schools) as these will be the subject of further review following concerns expressed during consultation that these do not adequately consider the impact of the new 30 hours free entitlement. These arrangements fall outside the statutory arrangements so are not subject to the 28th February 2018 determination deadline that applies to the statutory arrangements.

There is no longer a legal requirement to co-ordinate in-year admissions except to community and voluntary controlled schools. The local authority has prepared an in-year co-ordinated admissions scheme, which if adopted would apply to all community and voluntary controlled schools; the participation of voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies is subject to agreement by the individual trust/governing body.

Admission matters are reviewed and determined annually, subject to consultation unless no changes are proposed. A number of changes are proposed which required consultation and are detailed later in this report. The full set of admissions arrangements has been published on the Council's website as part of the consultation process, and continues to be available there.

Consultation on the proposed changes opened on December 20, 2017 and closed on January 31, 2018. The consultation was available to view on the council's website and notified to neighbouring local authorities; The Dioceses of Oxford and Portsmouth; all schools and early years settings with a request to notify parents of the consultation.

Four responses to the consultation were received, with two disagreements to proposals (set out in more detail in an Appendix A). These are not considered to require amended proposals and therefore no changes will be considered to the original proposed arrangements prior to determination.

The proposals contained in the report do not have any direct implications for the Council's capital or revenue budgets.

Background

The Council is the admissions authority and as such is responsible for setting the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools. Under the School Admissions Regulations 2012, admission authorities must consult annually on their admission arrangements (or at least every seven years where no changes are proposed). Individual governing bodies are responsible for setting the admission arrangements for the nine voluntary aided schools and nine academy/free schools in the Borough. Consultation took place between 20th December 2017 and 31st January 2018.

The Council must also agree co-ordinated schemes for school admissions in the Wokingham area. These enable Wokingham Borough resident parents to apply to the Council for admission to any state-funded school, including schools in other authorities, and receive a single offer of a place. This applies to the main admission rounds for entry to primary; transfer from infant to junior, and transfer from primary to secondary education. Applications are also co-ordinated for middle and upper schools within the primary and secondary co-ordinated schemes. In addition the Council operates a co-ordinated scheme for in-year applications for school places within its area. Whilst this scheme is no longer a statutory requirement; clarification has been received from the Department for Education that local authorities are required to co-ordinate for community and voluntary controlled schools, and to those voluntary aided and academy/free schools which agree to participate in the scheme. A number of schools either have recently converted to Academy status or are in the process of converting and may decide to manage their own in-year admissions processes. Currently Earley St Peter's and Bohunt Wokingham Schools have chosen to be outside the scheme and St Crispins secondary and Nine Mile Ride Primary Schools are expected to operate outside the in-year co-ordinated arrangements on conversion to Academy status . These schools are still required to notify the local authority when an application is received and the outcome of that application.

The value of the in-year co-ordinated scheme is that it ensures that children who arrive in the borough or whose parents wish to change school mid-year are swiftly allocated school places, where possible in line with parental preference. Where a place cannot be offered in line with parental preference, parents are notified of their statutory right to appeal and allocated the most accessible school with places available. It further ensures that multiple place offers are not held for one child, so maximising the potential supply of places for all children. Without the in-year co-ordinated scheme alternative arrangements would be required to monitor outcomes and to consider applications for places at those schools where the Council administers admissions on behalf of the school.

Admission arrangements for each school year must be decided by 28th February in the previous year. Therefore the 2019/2020 arrangements must be decided by 28th February 2018. Once decided, there is a statutory duty to administer admissions strictly in accordance with the determined arrangements, without variation except in prescribed circumstances to meet a change in school organisation, a change in law, or to comply with a decision by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

Determination of the co-ordinated admission schemes must be notified to the Secretary of State for Education by 15th March in the previous year, failure to do so can mean that a scheme is imposed on the local authority.

All determined admission arrangements for schools within its area must be sent to the local authority to enable it to publish the details on its website and notify how objections can be made by 15th March of the determination year

Analysis of Issues

Following an adverse Adjudicator decision (see below) the 2018/19 arrangements reverted to the 2017/18 arrangements, as amended to comply with statutory requirements but retaining matters that fell outside the Adjudicator's scope (in particular the extension of on-line management of the admission process). The proposals here seek to reinstate the changes proposed for the 2018/19 year.

1) The changes to designated areas proposed are:

- That the designated area of Loddon Primary School be extended to include that of Aldryngton Primary School. The designated area of Aldryngton Primary School would remain unchanged from that established in the original 2017/18 and amended 2018/19 arrangements.
- That the designated area of Whiteknights Primary School be extended to include that of Radstock Primary School. The designated area of Radstock Primary School would remain unchanged from that established in the original 2017/18 and amended 2018/19 arrangements.

Two further changes from the 2017/18 arrangements are highlighted

- **2) The tightening of the definition of "residency"** to minimise "gaming" of the admission system to secure places by short term moves from permanent homes and;
- To make it clear that when a child (who has not yet reached the age of statutory education) starts a **3) Reception class the parents can decide if that child should attend on a full or part time basis.**

The Schools Adjudicator determined on 21st July 2017 that the 2018/17 admissions arrangements were deficient due to inadequate consultation and highlighted a number of other areas of concern. These related to parents rights to defer entry to primary and to determine if their children should attend part time (the adjudicator determined that the original wording did not make it clear this was purely at parental discretion) and lack of clarity around the amended Earley primary school designated areas. The proposed arrangements for 2019/20 are those originally determined for 2018/19, modified to improve clarity and to comply with statutory requirements, and after fuller consultation, in line with the adjudicator's comments.

The admissions arrangements for 2017/18 had proved generally robust and there have been no changes in national guidance over the period since these arrangements were determined, so it is not proposed to make further changes (other than those listed in this report) to the arrangements.

The Earley primary school designated area changes (see Appendix B) reflect the specific challenges in that area. Historically the Council has been unable to offer places at Radstock and Aldryngton Primary Schools to some children living in the designated areas of those schools. Amending the designated areas as proposed would give families living in the current Radstock and Aldryngton designated areas additional priority for another school. The arrangements for Radstock and Aldryngton schools would remain unchanged, so those oversubscription criteria based on the schools' Designated Areas will continue to apply to the historic designated areas only.

The proposed arrangements include some tightening of the definition of residency, from the wording used in 2017/18, to combat the “gaming” of the admission system by families making short term residential arrangements to secure places at popular schools. The general principle remains that a temporary address cannot be used to obtain a school place. Temporary addresses will only be considered where evidence is provided of a genuine reason for the move e.g. flooding or subsidence. Further details are set out in Appendix B.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES 2019/2020

| Date | Action |
|-----------------------|---|
| July 9, 2018 | State-funded schools to provide school information to enable composite prospectus to be compiled |
| By September 11, 2018 | Application packs for secondary transfer to be distributed via primary schools and on request |
| By September 12, 2018 | Composite prospectus published on council’s website |
| September 11, 2018 | Online admissions open for applications for transfer to secondary school |
| October 31, 2018* | National closing date for secondary transfer applications |
| November 23, 2018 | Secondary transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for consideration |
| Nov-18 | Application packs to be posted for entry to primary to parents who are either attending Wokingham borough early years’ settings or who have registered with the school admissions team or who are transferring to junior school to be distributed via infant schools or on request. |
| November 12, 2018 | Online admissions open for applications for entry to primary and transfer to junior school |
| January 15, 2019* | National closing date for evidence to be provided to meet Wokingham Borough Council criteria for those transferring to secondary school; transferring to junior school; or starting school. |
| January 15, 2019 | Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for secondary transfer |

| Date | Action |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| February 11, 2019 | Entry to primary and junior transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for consideration |
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| February 15, 2019 | SEN Team to inform parents of pupils transferring to secondary school or to junior school with statements of special education need of their allocated school |
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| Date | Action |
| By February 28, 2019 | Appeals timetable published to website (own admission authority schools will publish details on the school's website) |
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| March 1, 2019 | National secondary offer day – letters posted by first class post |
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| March 15, 2019 | Secondary transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available |
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| March 15, 2019 | Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for the entry to primary and junior transfer |
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| March 29, 2019 | Closing date for notification of a secondary appeal to be heard together |
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| March 29, 2019 | Final co-ordination with other local authorities for entry to primary and junior school transfer |
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| April 18, 2019 (next working day) | National offer day for primary applications for those starting school and transfer to junior school offer day – letters posted by first class post |
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| May 3, 2019 | Entry to primary and junior transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available |
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| May 17, 2019 | Closing date for notification of an entry to primary or junior transfer appeal to be heard together |
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| End May/early June 2019 | Local authority to advise schools of final allocation details |
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| Date | Action |
|----------------|--|
| May/June 2019 | Secondary appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable |
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| June/July 2019 | Starting school and junior transfer appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable |

Appendices

Appendix A – Consultation responses.

Appendix B – Proposed amendments to the Designated Areas of Loddon and Whiteknights Primary Schools and residential criteria.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | Nil | Yes | N/A |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | Nil | Yes | N/A |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | Nil | Yes | N/A |

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The proposals contained in the report do not have any direct implications for the Council's capital or revenue budgets.

Cross-Council Implications

The School Admissions Code expects admission arrangements to promote sustainable travel and equal access to educational opportunities, in providing a fair system of school admissions that allows families to express school preferences and to access places at local schools.

Robust and fair admission arrangements mitigate the risk of unforeseen additional revenue and capital costs to the local authority and individual schools arising as a consequence of successful admission appeals.

List of Background Papers

Proposed admission arrangements
School Admissions Code 2014 and School Admissions Appeals Codes (2012) and School Admissions Regulations 2012

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