

TITLE	School Admissions Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Schools Forum on 18th December 2019
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Clear understanding of the new organisational arrangements for School Admissions and the development of task and finish group activity to inform co-produced improvement.

RECOMMENDATION

To note and support the content of the report and the actions identified.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report updates members of Schools Forum on the recent developments in respect of the School Admissions arrangements within the Local Authority.

The School Admissions team was transferred out of Children's Services into Customer and Localities as part of the Twenty First Century Council developments in 2016/17, and as part of these changes the nature of the roles within the team were merged with more generic roles within Customer & Localities establishments and a number of operational efficiencies were identified and implemented.

Over the course of the last two years it has become evident that whilst appropriate at the time, these changes have not delivered the intended benefits to the process of school admissions. Therefore we are currently working to transition the team back into Children's Services, (Learning, Achievement & Partnerships).

In tandem with this work we will be establishing a Task & Finish group, made up of local authority officers, head teachers, elected members and where appropriate representation from the parent & carers forum and others. It is envisioned that the Task & Finish group will assist in the detailed understanding of the current challenges faced within the process of school admissions; and co-produce solutions to these challenges.

Background

The School Admissions team was transferred out of Children's Services into Customer and Localities as part of the Twenty First Century Council developments in 2016/17, and as part of these changes the nature of the roles within the team were merged with more generic roles within Customer & Localities establishments and a number of operational efficiencies were identified and implemented.

Over the course of the last two years it has become evident that whilst appropriate at the time, these changes have not delivered the intended benefits to the process of school admissions. Therefore a decision has been made to transition the team back into Children's Services, (Learning, Achievement & Partnerships).

Demand on admissions has increased and is planned to increase further due to the continuing housing developments and expansions within the Borough. This also includes in-year transfers as people/families move into the area.

The relationship with schools and academies has suffered as a result of the capacity and process changes, and it is imperative that this is addressed. Relationship with the SEN team will also need to be re-established as the arrangements for SEND placements is confusing for schools/academies and also parents and carers.

It is understood that the resource within the team is no longer appropriate to meet the volume and needs of the service.

In addition, the School Admissions Forum of the Council, (a formal meeting of the council with representation from schools and the local authority) has not met for approximately two years which has caused further consternation. However, it should be noted that anecdotally the Forum was not felt to be particularly effective in that it received reports, commented on the content but did not have any authority to make recommendations or actions.

All of the above has combined to make the School Admissions service vulnerable to significant criticism, potential legal challenge and has seen an increase in parents seeking appeals in respect of school placements.

Analysis of Issues

In order to move things forward it has been decided to transition the team back into Children's Services, Learning, Achievement & Partnerships (LAP). A consultation is required due to the need to relocate staff to Aldergrove, as per the determination for all other LAP staff and has now commenced. This consultation will conclude on the 31st Dec 2019.

As the team come into Children's Services in January, it is intended that initially they will be managed by the AD CS LAP, but in order for this to happen a temporary acting up arrangement be put in place for the grade 6 practitioner (as management will not be transferring from Customer & Localities).

A review of final staffing needs is being undertaken within the Children's Improvement Programme and changes to the staffing structure and resource will be made at some point in the future when requirements are finalised.

In respect of the School Admissions Forum it is proposed that a Task and Finish Group is established to review the school admissions arrangements in some key areas to feed into co-produced solutions. At this time it is envisioned that the scope will include:

- Current perception/practice review
- SEND Admissions
- Fair Access and Managed Moves Protocols
- Data and forecasting

RECOMMENDATION

To note and support the content of the report and the actions identified.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £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)	Additional c£5k	Not funded	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Additional £60k	Not funded – needed in growth.	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications

These changes and the outcomes from the proposed task & finish group will also have further beneficial impact on our SEND Admissions arrangements

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken at this point as the change has no direct impact on members of the public. In respect of staff any issues relating to equality and diversity resultant from the proposed change of location will be addressed as part of that consultation exercise.

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Sal Thirlway	Service Learning Achievement and Partnerships
Telephone No Tel: 01189 088238	Email sal.thirlway@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank