

TITLE School Admissions Task & Finish Group Update

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Schools Forum on 14 October 2020

WARD (All Wards);

LEAD OFFICER Director, 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.
- To note and comment on the Draft Terms of Reference for the Wokingham School Admissions Task & Finish Group.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report updates members of School Forum on the development of the Wokingham School Admissions Task & Finish Group as a sub-group of Wokingham Schools Forum.

In January 2020 it was proposed to establish 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 was 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, and would replace the School Admissions Forum.

In February 2020, Wokingham experienced its first case of coronavirus in one of its schools, and was followed in March by national 'lockdown' and 1st wave planning and response to the Coronavirus Pandemic. As a result progress towards convening the initial group of the Wokingham School Admissions Task & Finish Group has been delayed significantly.

A draft terms of reference for this group has now been produced, and has been circulated to members of the previous School Admissions Forum and those who have expressed an interest in becoming part of a Task & Finish Group for comment.

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 was made to transition the team back into Children's Services, (Learning, Achievement & Partnerships). This was completed in January 2020.

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.

In addition, the School Admissions Forum of the Council, (a formal meeting of the council with representation from schools and the local authority) had not met for approximately two years which has caused some consternation.

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.

In respect of the School Admissions Forum it was proposed that this should be replaced with a Task and Finish Group to review the school admissions arrangements in some key areas to feed into co-produced solutions.

At the time it was envisioned that the scope will include:

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

It is anticipated that the Task & Finish group will continue to operate in order to respond to the continuous improvement agenda for Children's Services. It is also envisioned that by virtue of being a Task & Finish group, the membership shall have greater influence over service changes and will be engaged in co-production activity related to School Admissions.

Analysis of Issues

The Assistant Director, Children's Services (Learning, Achievement & Partnerships), was tasked to develop a Draft Terms of Reference for consideration at the first meeting of the new Task & Finish Group.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
These changes and the outcomes from the proposed task & finish group will also have further beneficial impact on our Home to School Transport and SEND Admissions arrangements

Public Sector Equality Duty
An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken at this point as the change to hold a Task & Finish Group has no direct impact on members of the public. In respect of any issues relating to equality and diversity resultant from the proposed changes emerging from the Task & Finish Group will be addressed as part of that exercise.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers
Draft Terms of Reference for the Wokingham School Admissions Task & Finish Group



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