



COUNCILLOR TONY SMITH

CABINET

Monday, 27 February 2017

**ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR
COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY
CONTROLLED PRIMARY AND
SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND CO-
ORDINATED SCHEME FOR 2018-2019**

Councillor Tony Smith Cabinet Member - Children and Family Services, said:

“Making sure your child gets into the right school is incredibly important for every family in the borough. It is important we have a fair, equitable policy to determine school admission arrangements.

“This report provides the borough with a policy for the 2018/19 academic year.”

REPORT SUMMARY

This report invites the Cabinet to determine the Authority’s admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the coordinated schemes for 2018-2019. This is a statutory requirement.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1. That Cabinet agree the proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools and the Wirral co-ordinated schemes for 2018-2019.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Authority is required to determine admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools. The New School Admissions (England) Regulations (2003) also require the Authority to have in place a coordinated scheme for admissions to all primary and secondary schools including Academy schools, in 2018-19. The proposed schemes are attached along with proposed admission numbers for community and controlled schools (Appendices 1 and 2).

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 None.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The consultation on the co-ordinated scheme for admissions took place according to guidance (see 8.0 below). No responses to the consultation were received.
- 3.2 Outside the consultation, an enquiry was made by a parent regarding the Council's policy relating to community and voluntary controlled primary schools, specifically expressing concerns about the policy giving priority to children living within the catchment zone (in priority order siblings, medical, distance) over those living out of the zone (siblings, medical, distance). The respondent suggested that this was different to other authorities and that priority should be given to all siblings ahead of those living within the zone.
- 3.3 The Wirral admission policy for community and voluntary controlled schools complies with all legal requirements. The Admissions Code 2014 and associated guidance allow for variations in the sequence of priority across authorities, as the policy is expected to reflect the local situation, geography, ease of movement etc. For example, many authorities measure home to school distance as straight line ("crow flies"). This is not used in Wirral due to the geography. As well as bisection by the motorway which can only be crossed at certain points, Wirral has water on three sides. In certain parts of Wirral, using straight line distance would enable pupils living in Wales and Liverpool to have a higher priority for Wirral schools than Wirral residents.
- 3.4 Within the Merseyside region, there is only one other Authority currently operating catchment zones for primary schools (Sefton). This Authority does indeed give priority to all siblings ahead of children living in the catchment zone, however only a small number of Sefton primary schools have a catchment zone (3 out of 40 community/controlled schools). Other Merseyside authorities do not operate catchment zones at all and are not comparable.
- 3.5 The purpose of giving priority to children living within a catchment zone in the Wirral policy was to ensure that children had a school close to home which was their "priority" school, if parents gave it as a preference and applied on-time. It cannot, however, be guaranteed that a place would be allocated at a catchment school. In the same way, faith schools will often have a priority criterion for children living within their parish area, as well as other criteria for baptismal status or church attendance.
- 3.6 The vast majority of out of zone siblings are able to be offered places at the preferred school under the current policy – the scenario where a place cannot be offered at the preferred school affected just 19 children in relation to September 2016 entry (less

than 1% of the total Wirral entry cohort). Older siblings may have been allocated a place in a prior year when the school in question was less over-subscribed; in some cases they may have originally lived near to the school and subsequently moved away but continued to attend. Parents are advised at the time of allocation that obtaining a place for one child, does not guarantee that a younger child would be allocated a place as the application would be considered under the arrangements in place at that time.

- 3.7 Giving priority to children within the catchment zone is important in Wirral, because in some parts of the borough, if children are not able to be accommodated at their catchment school, the geography and location of school buildings may mean that the nearest primary school with a place available may be some distance, possibly several miles from their home address which then has implications for travel to school; both in terms of cost to the Authority and environmental impact. It is not recommended to change the existing policy for community and voluntary controlled primary schools as this meets the needs and local requirements for Wirral residents.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 LEGAL

- 5.1 It should be noted that the relevant co-ordinated schemes and the Fair Access Protocol apply to all Wirral primary and secondary schools, including Academy schools. A Voluntary Aided primary school and a Community primary school have already made the conversion to Academy status. There is additional emphasis on the importance of school governing bodies to understand and apply the Admissions Code, Wirral co-ordinated scheme and FAP correctly and fairly, otherwise schools will be open to challenge both at parental appeal and by the School's Adjudicator and/or Secretary of State.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Fair Access Protocol requires a Local Authority Clerk to organise Fair Access Panels, prepare paperwork and disseminate Panel decisions to parents and schools. The cost of this is met from the Admissions budget which is part of the overall Schools budget.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 It should be noted that the relevant co-ordinated schemes and the Fair Access Protocol apply to all Wirral primary and secondary schools, including Academy schools. A Voluntary Aided primary school and a Community primary school have already made the conversion to Academy status. There is additional emphasis on the importance of school governing bodies to understand and apply the Admissions Code, Wirral co-ordinated scheme and FAP correctly and fairly, otherwise schools will be open to challenge both at parental appeal and by the School's Adjudicator and/or Secretary of State.
- 7.2 Failure to determine the admission arrangements by 28th February of the preceding year would contravene the 2014 Admissions Code and associated guidance.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation on the co-ordinated scheme has taken place with all Wirral schools, other relevant admission authorities and all statutory consultees.

- 8.2 The consultation period took place for 6 weeks between 2nd November and 9th December 2016, which complies with requirements set out in the School Admissions Code 2014.
- 8.3 The date by which the arrangements must be determined is 28th February. These admission arrangements must then be published on the Council's website by 15th March. The deadline for objections against the admission arrangements to the Schools Adjudicator is 15th May.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed and can be found at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-families-wellbeing>

REPORT AUTHOR: **Sally Gibbs**

Senior Manager, School Admissions and Place Planning
 telephone: (0151) 666 4487
 email: sallygibbs@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Delegated Authority	6th October 2016
Cabinet	22nd February 2016
Delegated Authority	8th October 2015
Cabinet	12th March 2015
Delegated Authority	6th November 2014
Cabinet	13th March 2014