

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Susan O'Brien
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Families, Education and Wellbeing <i>Designate</i>
Officer Contact(s)	Dan Kennedy, Director, Housing, Environment, Education, Performance, Health & Wellbeing
Papers with report	Appendices 1- 4 – Analysis of Consultation Findings

1. HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	<p>Hillingdon Council has a statutory responsibility to secure sufficient early years and school places for children resident in Hillingdon. Over the last nine years the Council has worked closely with schools in Hillingdon to successfully deliver an ambitious programme of school expansion to ensure every child living in Hillingdon can be offered a school place as close to home as possible.</p> <p>Further to the Cabinet's agreement to consult on changes to Hillingdon Community school admission arrangements in September 2020, the Council has undertaken a consultation about the proposed changes. This Cabinet report includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The outcome of the period of consultation with the relevant consultees.• Recommendations for determining admissions arrangements for Hillingdon Community schools in the Borough. <p>Cabinet is therefore asked to consider implementing the proposed changes to the existing school admissions arrangements for Community schools to safeguard future access to school places.</p>
Putting our Residents First	<p>This report supports the council objectives of: <i>Our People and Strong financial management</i>. The recommended changes to the school admissions criteria contained in this report will support the aim that all children in Hillingdon can be offered a local school place as close to home as possible and ensure effective, and best use of the investment the council has made to expand primary schools across the Borough.</p>
Financial Cost	<p>There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report.</p>

**Relevant Policy
Overview Committee**

Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy
Overview Committee.

Ward(s) affected

All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1. Note the outcome of the consultation about proposed changes to the school admissions criteria (appendices 1-4).**
- 2. Consider and give full regard to the outcome of the consultation findings and when making a decision on the proposals to amend the school admissions criteria.**
- 3. Agree to implement the amended admission arrangements for all Hillingdon Community schools from September 2022, noting that in accordance with the School Admissions Code, Admissions Authorities must determine their admissions criteria by 28 February 2021.**
- 4. Agree for a reduction to the Planned Admission Number for Ruislip Gardens Community School from 90 to 60.**

Reasons for recommendation

A review of admissions to reception school places at Hillingdon schools over the last four years evidences that there is a residual risk that our current admissions criteria may no longer serve the purpose of reducing the likelihood of risk of applicants not receiving a school placement. The proposed changes to the order of the school admissions criteria and removal of a nodal point at one school, Deanesfield Primary School, contained in this report, is to ensure fair placement and review the impact to ensure priority is given to children to access places at schools as close to their home as possible.

As a local education authority, the Council must plan for a sufficiency of places and efficient use of resources. There has been a slight decline in demand across the primary sector since 2012, with some fluctuations, but there is now a level of surplus primary places pooling in a few schools. There is the opportunity to review the number of primary places and potentially reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) in some schools to ensure schools and the authority best meet the needs of all pupils across the Borough, and make effective use of resources in schools and between them.

The recommendations in this report support the strategic education function of the Local Authority to ensure the Council continues to meet the statutory responsibility to secure sufficient education places of children resident in the Borough.

Should the proposals in this report be agreed, Hillingdon Council can ensure that priority is given to children to access places at schools as close to their home as possible.

The consultation received a total of 12 responses. The findings are presented in appendices 1-4.

The consultation findings indicate that there is clear support for all proposals A-D set out in the consultation documents (please see appendices 1-4).

Further reasons for the recommendations are detailed within the appendices.

Alternative options considered / risk management

Cabinet could decide to reject or amend the proposals including (but not limited to) the following alternative options:

a) Retain the current admission arrangements by not approving the proposed changes to Hillingdon community schools admissions arrangements.

b) Amend the proposals by approving partial changes to the admissions arrangement proposal, A-D.

- A. Nodal Points
- B. Children of Staff Working at a Community School
- C. Medical Criteria
- D. Reduction of Published Admissions Numbers

Policy Overview Committee comments

The Resident, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee considered this report, as part of the consultation, at its meeting on 3 November 2020. Members noted the report and also sought clarification on aspects of the proposals which officers responded to at the meeting. The minutes of the Committee can be viewed using the link in the background papers at the end of this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

1. The purpose of the statutory School Admissions Code is to ensure that all school places for maintained schools (excluding maintained special schools) and academies are allocated in an open and fair way. The Code contains mandatory requirements. The admission arrangements to community schools are determined by the Local Authority as the 'admission authority'.
2. In drawing up the admission arrangements to schools, 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 for that school will be allocated. All schools must have

admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted. The admission authority for the school must also set out in the arrangements the oversubscription criteria against which places will be allocated at the school when there are more applications than places and the order in which the criteria will be applied.

3. To ensure that the criteria applied in prioritising access to community schools which are oversubscribed remains procedurally fair, objective and clear, a review of the criteria has been undertaken using four years of Hillingdon admissions data to primary school reception places. The focus of the review sought to identify any residual risk that the Council would not fulfil its statutory duty to ensure every child is offered a school place.
4. The review considered the following areas:
 - The use of 'nodal' points to ensure that schools serve not only pupils living close to a school but other children who live further away from a school where there is little or no priority access to alternative local schools.
 - The existing medical criteria to inform the priority for offering school places.
 - Priority for children of staff where the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skills shortage.
 - Ensure there are sufficient school places in Hillingdon and eliminate financial constraints where evidence shows a continued and sustained reduction in admissions.
5. Cabinet agreed in September 2020 for proposed changes to Hillingdon's community school admission arrangements to be subject to consultation for an eight week period with the required consultees, including service users, stakeholders and the community.
6. In summary, the proposals were:
 - Proposal A – removal of the nodal point as an additional measuring point for Deanesfield Primary School.
 - Proposal B – children of staff to be awarded a higher priority than pupils living nearest the school within the priority distance radius.
 - Proposal C – to remove 'psychological' from the medical criterion and replace it with 'social'.
 - Proposal D - To reduce the Published Admission Number for Ruislip Gardens Primary School from 90 to 60, effective from 2022. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from 1000m to 750m in line with admissions arrangements
7. An inclusive consultation programme has subsequently been delivered, including the following elements:
 - 'Have your say' via the Council website.
 - All Hillingdon schools were asked to include within their communications to parents i.e. newsletters and websites.
 - Social media posts.
 - All adjoining neighbouring local authorities were consulted
 - A questionnaire available on-line and in paper form (on request), with the additional option to contact the team to discuss.
 - Invitations to submit a written response.

8. The consultation was widely advertised and had the potential to receive in excess of thousands of responses given the high number of children attending a school in Hillingdon. In excess of 50,000 children attend Hillingdon schools, 14,987 of which attend mainstream community schools. There were 502 page views for the dedicated consultation web page. Given the relatively small number of responses and the high number of potential consultees it is assumed that there is consensus to implement the proposals.
9. The School Placement and Admissions Team created social media adverts which received 84 clicks for Twitter and 232 via Facebook.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon residents, service users and communities?

10. The proposals set out in the consultation will help to mitigate the residual risk of Hillingdon children not securing access to a place at a local school close to where they live. This is in line with the Council's vision to put residents first.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

11. The Schools Admission Code requires a minimum of a 6 week consultation period. Hillingdon's proposed changes were subject to consultation for 8 weeks. The consultation was designed to ensure that the following received notification of the consultation, in line with the Admissions Code:
 - a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
 - b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
 - c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area;
 - d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;
 - e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority
12. The consultation document was available from 5 October 2020 until 30 November 2020 on the Hillingdon Council website on the consultation page and the School Admissions Arrangements page. This included the Cabinet report, a brief outline of the proposed change and a questionnaire was also provided to obtain feedback in direct response to each proposal.
13. Information regarding the consultation was widely publicised to the following:
 - 107 Hillingdon early years providers
 - 70 Hillingdon primary schools
 - 22 Hillingdon secondary schools
 - 10 Academy Trusts

14. As Hillingdon Council also receives applications from residents who live outside of the Borough, the consultation was designed to be inclusive. Therefore, officers contacted the following surrounding Local Authorities:

London Borough of Ealing
London Borough of Hounslow
London Borough of Brent
London Borough of Harrow
Hertfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Surrey County Council
Slough Borough Council

Direct contact was made with schools and children's centres in surrounding Boroughs which included:

66 in Ealing
12 in Harrow
6 in Hounslow
3 in Hertfordshire
5 in Surrey
2 in Slough
3 in Buckinghamshire

15. Nine respondents stated that they had children under the age of 18 living in their household. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide information on their interest in the proposals. The following responses clearly evidence the wide spread of respondents accessing notification of the consultation:

- Parent/carer/guardian - 9
- An Early Years Professional - 1
- Local resident and parent of a former pupil of a Hillingdon school - 1
- Member of Community - 1

16. Respondents were invited to state which school(s) their child(ren) currently attend and the responses were as follows:

- Hillingdon community primary/infant/junior school - 4

17. Respondents were invited to state why they had chosen their child(ren)'s current school(s) and the responses were as follows (where a response was received):

- Close to home - 4
- Performance of school - 1
- Not 1st preference school - 2

18. Two respondents gave contact details, neither of these respondents had made comments to which required further explanation and engagement. All responses have

been given due consideration and have assisted with a review of additional improvements which can be implemented. To conclude the consultation findings do not indicate any particular group will be disproportionately affected by the proposed changes.

Improvements following consultation:

19. Subject to agreement from Cabinet to the proposed changes, an implementation plan will be prepared to ensure a smooth transition to the revised admissions criteria. This will include clear communications for residents.

Financial Implications

20. The financial impacts of this report have been reviewed with confirmation that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommended amendments to the school admissions criteria. Broader financial implications associated with the Council's strategic education function are managed through the wider Medium Term Financial Forecast.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed the report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting that there are no financial implications arising from the report recommendations.

Legal

The School Admissions Code

The Schools Admissions Code ["the Code"] came into force on 19 December 2014, having been issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. It applies to all maintained schools in England. It is the responsibility of all admission authorities to ensure that admission arrangements are fully compliant with the Code.

The purpose of the Code, which has the force of law, is to ensure that all school places are allocated and offered in an open and fair way. In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective. The intention is that parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.

Admissions authorities must set out in their arrangements the criteria against which places will be allocated at the school where there are more applications than places and the order in which the criteria will be applied. Over subscription criteria, as it is known, must be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation, including human rights and equalities legislation.

Paragraph 1.9 of the Code provides that it is for admission authorities to formulate their own admission arrangements, but they must not take into account the 15 criteria which are listed in this paragraph.

The proposals for changes to the Council's admissions criteria do not fall within any of the "exempt" criteria referred to above.

Consultation

Where changes are proposed to admission arrangements, admission authorities must first publicly consult on those arrangements. The council have duly carried out a consultation exercise, the outcome of which is set out in appendices 1-4 of the report.

It is with the upmost importance that cabinet ensures that the consultation responses are consciously taken into account in making its decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee on 3 November 2020: [London Borough of Hillingdon - Agenda for Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee on Tuesday, 3rd November, 2020, 7.00 pm](#)