

CHANGES TO THE ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS - COTEFORD INFANT SCHOOL

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Susan O'Brien
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
Officer Contact(s)	Vikram Hansrani – Executive Director of Education and SEND
Papers with report	None

HEADLINE INFORMATION

<p>Summary</p>	<p>Hillingdon Council has a statutory responsibility to secure sufficient early years and school places for children resident in Hillingdon. Over the last ten 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 October 2022, the Council has undertaken a consultation about the proposed changes relating to Coteford Infant School. 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 one Hillingdon Community school in the Borough. <p>Cabinet is therefore asked to consider implementing the proposed changes to the existing school admissions arrangements for this Community school to safeguard future access to school places.</p>
<p>Putting our Residents First</p> <p>Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026</p>	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: An efficient, well-run, digital-enabled council working with partners to deliver services to improve the lives of all our residents</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households</p>

Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, schools with excess places above the local demand can experience part-empty classes which are not financially viable, stretching school budgets to cover the staffing levels and limiting resources available to all pupils. This can lead to an overall deficit and the school seeking a loan from the council for the Dedicated Schools Grant for maintained schools (community, foundation, and VA) or to their Academy Trust.
Relevant Select Committee	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. **Note the outcome of the consultation findings, consider and give full regard to the outcome when making a decision on the proposal.**
2. **Consider the comments made by the Children, Families & Education Select Committee at their meeting on 4 January 2023 which considered the outcome of the consultation and endorsed the proposals.**
3. **Agree to implement the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number for Coteford Infant School from 81 to 60 from September 2024, which will also reduce the distance priority radius from 1000m to 750m in line with the Council's admissions arrangements and note that in accordance with the School Admissions Code, Admissions Authorities must determine their admissions criteria by 28 February 2023.**
4. **Note that the Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education, in consultation with the Executive Director of Education and SEND, supports the proposals submitted following formal consultation from the following non-community schools to reduce their Planned Admissions Numbers by 30 each as their consultations did not raise serious issues or objections:**
 - **Grange Park Infant and Nursery School from 120 to 90**
 - **Grange Park Junior School 120 to 90.**

Reasons for recommendation:

5. As part of the strategic education function of the Local Authority, Hillingdon Council has a statutory responsibility to secure sufficient early years and school places to meet the needs of children resident in the Borough. In October 2020 the School Placement and Admissions team consulted and made changes to the admissions criteria for community schools to take effect from 1 September 2021.
6. The Local Authority now recognise a need to reduce the published admission numbers in one community primary school, by 21 places. This is due to demographic changes leading to declining pupil rolls and Reception intakes. There would be no difference for current pupils after the proposed change takes effect from Reception 2024, and there would be sufficient places to meet future demand from their siblings and other local parents.
7. Following a consultation on the proposal, Officers seek Cabinet approval to determine the reduction in Published Admission Number for Coteford Infant School - from 81 to 60 from September 2024. All local residents will still be able to access places there. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from **1000m to 750m** in line with our admissions arrangements.

Alternative options considered / risk management

8. The proposals presented in this report are intended to be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation to mitigate the potential future risk that a small number of children living in Hillingdon may not be guaranteed a school place as close to home as possible. Options have been considered to address this risk, some of which are specific to a location in the Borough. Where alternative options have been considered therefore, these are set out in the body of the report.
9. The proposals for reductions in PAN are to improve schools' ability to efficiently plan their staffing and educational provision and not reducing could lead to schools suffering financial pressures leading to deficits, which in the community schools could then require a loan, further adding to the deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Select Committee comments

10. The Children, Families & Education Select Committee was held on Wednesday 4 January and considered all the proposals and the outcome of the consultation and provided the following comments:

'The Committee supports the proposed changes for the Admissions Criteria and the PAN at Coteford Infant School. With an increasing number of primary schools in Hillingdon experiencing a fall in pupil numbers, the committee recognises the challenges this creates to school organisation and school budgets. It is therefore important that we continue to provide fair placement to all our children and that we consider cost effective proposals that benefits all our residents'.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

11. 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'.
12. 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.
13. 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.

The review considered the following areas:

14. Ensure there are sufficient school places in Hillingdon and eliminate financial constraints where evidence shows a continued and sustained reduction in admissions.
15. Cabinet agreed in October 2022 for proposed changes to Hillingdon's community school admission arrangements relating to Coteford Infant School to be subject to consultation for an eight week period with the required consultees, including service users, stakeholders and the community.
16. In summary, the proposal was to ensure there are sufficient school places in Hillingdon and eliminate financial constraints where evidence shows a continued and sustained reduction in admissions.
17. 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.

18. 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, 11,911 (as per the October Census 2022) of which attend mainstream community schools. There were 55 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.

Consultations on non-community schools.

In respect of the final recommendation in the report, Cabinet will recall in October 2022 that there were separately two non-community schools that were intending to consult on a reduction of 1 Form Entry: Grange Park Infant and Nursery School and Grange Park Junior School, with Planned Admissions Numbers for both from 120 to 90.

Following consultation on these proposals by the schools, officers advise that no serious issues or objections were raised and they are satisfied that there are sufficient places in the area. This change in numbers can be approved by their governing body, however, they must formally consult with the local authority and Cabinet is asked to note that the Cabinet Member and Executive Director have indicated that they no objections and support the proposal as advised by officers.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

19. The proposal 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

20. The School Admissions 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 (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
- d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority;
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

21. The consultation document was available from 24 October 2022 until 19 December 2022 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 the proposal.

22. Information regarding the consultation was widely publicised to the following:

- 86 Hillingdon early years providers
- 68 Hillingdon primary schools
- 22 Hillingdon secondary schools
- 10 Academy Trusts

23. As Hillingdon Council also receives applications from residents who live outside of the Borough, the consultation was designed to be inclusive. Therefore, we 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
- Slough Borough Council

Consultation Responses

Two responses were received in total during the consultation period. Both were submitted via the online questionnaire. A summary of responses is detailed below:

1. Two 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.

1. Parent/carer/guardian - 2

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

- Riverside Nursery, Windsor - 1
 - Did not specify - 1
3. 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):
- Performance of the school - 2
4. Two respondents gave contact details, neither of these respondents had made comments to which required further explanation. All responses have been given due consideration and have assisted with a review of additional improvements which can be implemented. Below are the responses to specific questions on each individual change proposed:

Do you agree with the proposed admission arrangements for Hillingdon Community Schools?

- Agree: 1
- Disagree: 1

The Local Authority is consulting to reduce the PAN for Coteford Infant School from 81 to 60 from September 2024. Do you agree with this proposed change to the above admissions criteria?

- Agree: 1
- Disagree: 1*

**The respondent who disagreed with the changes stated:*

1) that the reduction in PAN may disadvantage residents to access a preferred school.

- Do you think this proposed change will disadvantage any residents in Hillingdon?
 - Yes: 1
 - Don't know: 1

Improvements following consultation:

1. 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 parents and residents.

Financial Implications

2. 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. Where delivery of school places requires investment on the part of the Council, this will be reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Forecast as appropriate.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above.

Legal

The School Admissions Code

The Schools Admissions Code 2021 ["the Code"] came into force from 1 September 2021, 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, which the Cabinet has been invited to consider, do not fall within any of the "exempt" criteria referred to above and therefore, it was lawful for the Council to commence a consultation exercise in relation to these proposals.

The Select Committee was given an opportunity to comment on the draft admission arrangements and their comments are reported to Cabinet.

In line with Public Sector Equality Duties officers have taken due regard to this duty in the context of revising its school admissions arrangements. It was not deemed necessary to complete an equality impact assessment as there are no material changes that impact on equality.

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 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

- [October 2022 Cabinet report to consult](#)
- [Community School's Proposed Admission Arrangements 2024-25](#)
- [Children, Families & Education Select Committee report, 4 January 2023](#)
- [School Admissions Code 2021](#)