

PROPOSED CHANGES TO ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor O'Brien
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
Officer Contact(s)	Abi Preston – Director of Education & SEND
Papers with report	None.

HEADLINES

<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 2023, the Council has undertaken a consultation about the proposed changes relating to Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior 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 two community schools in the Borough. <p>Cabinet is, therefore, asked to consider the proposed change to the PAN for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School, to address the findings of the review to provide continuing access for residents to their local school and improve stability of pupil numbers and budgets.</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 voluntary aided) 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 9 January 2024 which considered the outcome of the consultation and endorsed the proposals.**
3. **Agree to implement the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School from 120 to 90 September 2025, which will also reduce the distance priority radius from 1250m to 1000m 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 2024.**

Reasons for recommendation:

4. As an 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 2018, with some fluctuations, but the overall level of primary surplus places continues to be too high and is pooling in a few schools. Each year the Council reviews the number of places against pupils rolls and projections and considers changing Published Admission Numbers (PAN) in some schools. Across the borough, small annual changes are needed to meet parental demand, up and down. This ensures 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 PAN is the 'operating figure', and the physical building remains the same. Academy, Foundation and Voluntary Aided (VA) schools make their own decisions, and they must consult the Council and others on proposed reductions, but their Governors/Trusts can agree temporary or permanent increases. The review has included all primary and secondary schools. The Cabinet is the relevant authority for the community primary schools.
5. The Local Authority now recognise a need to reduce the published admission number in two of our community schools, each by 30 places. This is due to demographic changes leading to declining pupil rolls and Reception intakes, and into Year 3 into the Junior school, over the past few years which is projected to continue for another few years. There would be no difference for current pupils after the proposed change takes effect from Reception 2025, and there would be sufficient places to meet future demand from their siblings and other local parents.
6. Following a review of school places, it is proposed to consult to reduce the Published Admission Numbers for:
 - Whitehall Infant School - from 120 to 90 from 2025. All local residents will still be able to access places there. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from **1250m to 1000m** in line with our admissions arrangements.
 - Whitehall Junior School - from 120 to 90 from 2025. All local residents will still be able to access places there. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from **1250m to 1000m** in line with our admissions arrangements.
7. Both Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School fall within place planning area 6, where projections for the next 7 years across this planning area show overall decline in pupil numbers.

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 Tuesday 9th January 2024 and considered all the proposals and the outcome of the consultation and provided the following comments:

'The Committee supports the proposed changes to the Published Admissions Number (PAN) for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior 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 2023 for proposed changes to Hillingdon's community school admission arrangements relating to Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior 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.
 - 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 52,000 children attend Hillingdon schools, 11,724 (as per the October Census 2023) of which attend mainstream community schools. There were 80 page views for the dedicated consultation web page. As there were NIL responses received and the high number of potential consultees it is assumed that there is consensus to implement the proposals.

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 23 October 2023 until 18 December 2023 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, as set out above in para. 17, including to the following specific educational institutions:

- 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, 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
- Slough Borough Council

Consultation Responses

NIL responses were received in total during the consultation period.

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, noting there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

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 utmost importance that Cabinet ensures that the consultation is consciously taken into account in making its decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [School Admissions Code 2021](#)
- [Consultation on changes to School Admissions Arrangements 2025-26 \(Minutes & decision from 12 October Cabinet\)](#)
- [Community School's Proposed Admission Arrangements 2025-26](#)
- [October Cabinet Report Changes to Admissions Arrangements 2025-26](#)