

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 2.00PM**

<u>Agenda Item</u> <u>No.</u> 6
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**PROPOSED CONSULTATION ON HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2019/20**

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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Executive Member:- Terry Douris, Education, Libraries and Localism

Local Member/s:- Ken Crofton, Hertford Rural (in relation to the
reduction of the Published Admission Number at
Watton-At-Stone Primary and Nursery School)

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To seek Cabinet's agreement to consult on proposals to amend the Council's admission arrangements and to reduce the published admission number at Watton-At-Stone Primary and Nursery School.

2. Summary

2.1 The Council must determine on an annual basis the admission arrangements and published admission number for all community and voluntary schools in Hertfordshire; and the coordinated schemes of admission to all maintained schools and academies in the county.

2.2 The School Admission Code, paragraph 1.42, requires consultation before the published admission number of any school is reduced.

2.3 A minimum of 6 weeks formal consultation is required, between 1 October 2017 and 31 January 2018 to amend admission arrangements for 2019/20.

3. Recommendation/s

3.1 The Education, Libraries & Localism Cabinet Panel will consider a report on this item of business at its meeting on 7 November 2017. The

Panel will be invited to note and comment upon the Report and recommend to Cabinet that consultation is undertaken proposing that:

- i. the definition of “nearest school” for use in rule 5 of the county council’s primary oversubscription criteria is amended;
 - ii. reference to the Shared Anti-Fraud Service is added to the definitions section in the cases of fraudulent address verification
 - iii. the published admission number at Watton-at-Stone Primary and Nursery School is reduced to 30
 - iv. the remainder of the county council’s admission arrangements and schemes of coordination are retained for 2019/20
- 3.2 The Cabinet Panel’s recommendation/s to Cabinet will be reported orally at the Cabinet meeting and circulated to Members in the Order of Business sheet.

4. Background

- 4.1 The School Admissions Code requires all admission authorities to consult on their admission arrangements (if there have been no changes) every 7 years. When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, there must be consultation on the proposed changes that will apply for admission applications for the following year.
- 4.2 The Council is the admission authority for 242 primary, infant and first schools and 2 secondary schools. When any of these schools are oversubscribed the Council’s published admission arrangements (Appendix Ai- Aiii) are used to determine which children should be offered places.
- 4.3 The Council’s existing admission arrangements work well with, in 2017, nearly 95% of children allocated a ranked primary school and 94% a ranked secondary school. Maintaining existing arrangements, with minor amendments to definitions, will minimise parental anxiety around school places and maximise the benefits of existing knowledge of the allocation process.

The Definition of Nearest School

- 4.4 It is proposed to amend the current definition of “nearest school” for primary schools. The proposal is directly linked to the rapid increase in the number of own admission authority primary schools, especially academies, and aims to increase clarity and transparency for parents.
- 4.5 The current rule 5 states “*Children for whom it is their nearest community or voluntary controlled school or an own admitting school or academy using Hertfordshire county council’s admission rules*”. The rule goes on to clarify that “*A list of schools and academies included in the definition of “nearest” is available in the “definition” section below.*”

- 4.6 This definition requires parents/carers to understand the difference between the different statuses of various schools and also requires annual updating to take into account new academies. Many own admission primary schools in Hertfordshire (including most converter academies) have adopted the county council's admission arrangements, including oversubscription criteria and definitions, and therefore their arrangements also need annually updating.
- 4.7 It is proposed that the definition of "nearest school" (Appendix Ai) is amended to read *"Children for whom it is their nearest school or academy. All schools, except those schools which admit pupils on the basis of faith, are included."*
- 4.8 Modelling has been undertaken, replicating data from the 2017 primary application round, to assess the impact of this change. Seven primary schools in Hertfordshire were included in the proposed definition of "nearest school" that weren't previously :
- Brookmans Park School
 - Cuffley School
 - Harpenden Academy
 - Little Heath Primary School
 - St Bartholomew's C of E VA Primary School (Wiggington)
 - St Nicholas C of E Primary School & Nursery (Stevenage)
 - The Wroxham School (Potters Bar)

These schools admit pupils under a variety of oversubscription criteria including: within a defined local area or local parish(es), distance and random allocation local to the school. The two voluntary-aided schools prioritise pupils on the basis of residence within the ecclesiastical parish and not membership of the Church of England.

- 4.9 The modelling showed minimal impact upon allocation outcomes, overall :
- One less child was allocated a ranked school
 - Five more children were allocated their first ranked school
 - Seven fewer children were allocated their 2nd preference school
 - Two more children were allocated their 3rd preference school
 - One more child was offered a non-ranked school

Full information on modelling outcomes, including allocation outcomes by parish, is attached at Appendix B

Definition of Children Previously Looked After

- 4.10 The virtual school for looked after children has been approached with a request that that the Council amends its definition of "children previously looked after" to include children adopted from overseas. Hertfordshire's current definition of "children previously looked after",

as outlined in the School Admissions Code 2014, includes children looked after and previously looked after (including children adopted from care) by local authorities in England and Wales.

- 4.11 Whilst the issue has been debated in Parliament, advice from the DfE (provided to the London Inter Authority Admissions Group), is clear that there had been “no commitment to amend the School Admissions Code to offer priority admission to internationally adopted children. Lord Nash made a commitment during Lords Report of the Children and Social Work Bill to consider extending the entitlements to children adopted from an equivalent form of care outside England when they are next reviewed. School admission authorities may choose to include internationally adopted children within their oversubscription criteria but there is requirement for them to do so”.
- 4.12 The virtual school has been unable to provide guidance on the number of children adopted from overseas that may, in the future, apply for school places under such a rule. The County Council’s current admission criteria includes the category of “exceptional social and medical reasons” which officers believe would allow children adopted from abroad to be given a high priority for admission to any community or voluntary controlled school without the need to amend the current definition of “previously looked after child”

Fraudulent Address Notification

- 4.13 Every year the Admissions service investigates many cases of the use possible fraudulent addresses on school applications. As both a future deterrent, and to increase the investigative focus in complex cases where address evidence is in dispute, it is proposed that referrals from the Admissions Team will be made to the Shared Anti-Fraud Service. It is therefore proposed that the county council’s admission arrangements should be amended (Appendix Aiii) to make this clear to parents and carers.

Published Admission Numbers (PANs)

- 4.14 It is proposed that Published Admission Numbers are retained for all schools (Appendix C) except Watton-at-Stone Primary & Nursery School where a decrease is proposed to ensure the future financial viability stability of the school.
- 4.15 The proposed PAN reduction has been requested by the Headteacher and Governing Body of the School and is supported by the Council’s Education School Place planning officers. The school argues that a reduction in the PAN from 34 to 30 places (to 1fe) would allow it to organise classes in straight year groups, in line with Key Stage 1 legislation (which legally limits infant classes to no more than 30 pupils). They consider being able to organise classes in straight year groups will positively impact on the school’s finances, which in turn

helps to support teaching and learning.

- 4.16 The current pupil forecast for the ‘Watton District North’ area, which includes the current number of reception places available at two schools which serve their villages (Watton-At-Stone and Little Munden), is set out below

WATTON DISTRICT NORTH				
8.1				
Summer Term 2017/18 Forecast	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of reception places available	49	49	49	49
Demand	39	40	42	37
Surplus/Shortage	10	9	7	12
% Surplus/Shortage	19.9%	17.4%	14.0%	23.5%
No of FE	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.4

- 4.17 The forecast indicates that there will be sufficient places to meet local demand in September 2019 and beyond, which would continue to be the case should the proposal to remove 4 places at Watton-At-Stone Primary & Nursery School be agreed, albeit with a small margin in September 2019. However, the school attracts children from a wider area where places are available and the pattern of admissions and subsequent forecasts will therefore adjust over time. Given the important benefits to the school the proposal is supported by School Place Planning, Finance and HFL.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There is no budgetary impact to the Council. The reduction in PAN at Watton-At-Stone Primary and Nursery School will improve the school's long term financial viability and reduce the risk of the school setting a negative budget

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the Equality Implications of the decision that they are making.
- 6.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.
- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination,

harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and
(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation

- 6.4. An EQIA has been undertaken (Appendix D) following the primary modelling and it is highly unlikely that the proposals will have an adverse impact upon any particular group with a protected characteristic. An EQIA outlining the potential impact of the decrease in PAN at Watton-At-Stone Primary and Nursery School is attached at Appendix E.

Background Papers
Appendices A-E