

**REPORT TO:** Children and Young People Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 7 September 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children & Young People

**SUBJECT:** School Admission Arrangements 2009/10 and In-Year Co-ordination 2010/11

**WARDS:** Boroughwide

## **1.0 PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update the Board on the 2009/10 admissions round to Primary and Secondary Schools.
- 1.2 To note the commencement of the consultation process with schools during the autumn term 2009 on the statutory requirement for the Local Authority to co-ordinate in-year admissions for all schools in the 2010 and subsequent admissions round.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That views are sought from the Policy and Performance Board regarding the statutory consultation on in-year admissions which must be undertaken with all schools during the autumn term 2009, and note that a report on the outcome of the consultation will subsequently be reported to the Board.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **2009/10 Admissions Round Update**

- 3.1 On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008 the Executive Board approved the Council's School Admissions Policy and Admission Arrangements for the September 2009 intake to all community and voluntary controlled primary schools in Halton. Halton's admission arrangements continue to reflect the requirements within the revised Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) School Admissions Code which advises that admission authorities must have children in care as first priority for school places, and recognises commonly used criteria including siblings and distance criteria, all of which are applied within Halton. The new Code also removed the right to give priority to children according to the order of schools named as preferences by their parents/carers, including "first preference first" arrangements, replacing this with the Equal Preference Scheme.
- 3.2 In an Equal Preference Scheme the parent/carer's first, second, and third preference are considered at the same time. If potentially a place can be offered at more than one of the schools (i.e. because they have

a high enough priority for an oversubscribed school, the school is undersubscribed, or because the school receives exactly the same number of applications as the number of places available) the single offer of the place will be for the school the parent/carer ranked the highest on the preference form.

- 3.3 Halton continues to meet above the national average percentage of first preference applications for secondary schools. For the 2009 admissions round Halton met 90% of first preferences for secondary schools (against a national average of 83%) and 92% of first preferences for primary schools. This compares with 90% of first preferences met for secondary schools in the 2008 academic year (against a national average of 82%) and 94% for primary schools in 2008. The DCSF do not provide a national comparison for primary admissions.
- 3.4 Details of the school allocations for the September 2009 intake are attached as Appendix A for secondary Schools and Appendix B for Primary Schools.
- 3.5 The Council is the admission authority for all community and voluntary controlled schools and voluntary aided schools are their own admission authority, determining, following consultation, their own admissions criteria and allocating places according to those criteria. All schools, community, voluntary controlled, and voluntary aided, have agreed to the Local Authority's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme and work to the requirements and timescales of that scheme.
- 3.6 Pupil numbers did increase slightly for the 2009 admissions round. 1448 pupils were admitted to primary schools in 2008 compared with 1469 in 2009, and 1438 pupils were admitted to secondary schools in 2008 compared with 1463 in 2009.
- 3.7 It is important to recognise that where a preference cannot be met, parents/carers have the right of appeal to an independent admission appeal panel. The panel may uphold or decline an appeal based upon the individual circumstances of the case presented by the parent/carer, and if the Panel decide that to admit a further pupil or pupils to the school will not prejudice the provision of efficient education and the efficient use of resources at the school they will uphold the appeal(s). The Local Authority as the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools, and governors and staff from voluntary aided schools as their own admission authority, are not involved in the decision making process undertaken by the independent admission appeal panel. The decisions made by independent admission appeal panels are legally binding on all parties: the Local Authority and School Governing Body as admission authorities, Schools, and Parents/Carers. The slight increase in pupil numbers from 2008 to 2009 also had an impact upon the number of appeals heard. 110 appeals were heard for the September 2008 intake across the primary

and secondary sector compared with 136 in 2009. 25 appeals were upheld for the 2009 intakes (7 for community and voluntary controlled schools and 18 for VA schools) compared with 19 for the 2008 intakes (13 for community and voluntary controlled schools and 6 for VA schools).

- 3.8 For those Halton resident pupils seeking admission to a secondary school in a neighbouring authority, 147 pupils were admitted to out-borough schools. 92 pupils were admitted from Runcorn to Warrington and Cheshire schools, (60 to Warrington, 32 to Cheshire) whilst 55 pupils from Widnes were admitted to other LA schools (37 pupils to Liverpool, 10 to Knowsley and 8 to St Helens). The number of pupils admitted to Halton secondary schools from out-borough is 51 (50 to Widnes schools, 1 to Runcorn).
- 3.9 Whilst Halton is currently a net exporter of pupils, members will be aware that key drivers for the Building Schools for the Future Programme include the introduction of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, the expansion of popular and successful schools, and the delivery of a diverse range of educational opportunity through community, joint faith, trust and academy schools, and these factors currently being introduced in Halton support the aims of retaining Halton pupils in Halton schools, and attracting, where possible, out-borough pupils to Halton.
- 3.10 As part of the Secondary School Organisation process, and linked to the BSF Programme, members will also be aware that from September 2010 Fairfield High School will close and re-open as part of an extended Wade Deacon High School operating on two sites, and that as a response to public consultation, the Executive Board approved at the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008 the introduction of catchment zones in Widnes for The Bankfield and Wade Deacon High School.

### **In-Year Co-ordinated Admissions 2010/11**

- 3.11 From the academic year 2010-11 onwards local authorities must co-ordinate all "in-year applications". In relation to academic year 2010-11 the arrangements for co-ordinating these applications must be formulated by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010. Regulations prescribe that parents/carers must complete a common application form allowing them to express at least 3 preferences which may be for schools within or outside their home local authority area, and to give reasons for their preferences.
- 3.12 It is estimated that between 300-350 pupils per term move between schools either moving between Runcorn and Widnes, within Runcorn, within Widnes, or move into the Borough. Whenever a parent/carer wishes to change schools, or seek admission to a Halton school for the first time, they will be required to complete a preference form and submit

the form to the Local Authority, following which the application will be considered. If a place can be allocated the admission will be agreed, normally from the beginning of the next term, and if a place cannot be allocated at the school of preference an alternative offer will be made and parents offered the right of appeal against the school they have been refused.

- 3.13 The In-Year Co-ordinated Scheme will also need links with the Fair Access Protocol. The Fair Access Protocol exists to ensure that access to education is secured quickly for children who have no school place but for whom a place at a mainstream school or alternative provision is appropriate, and to ensure that all schools in an area admit their fair share of children with challenging behaviour.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Halton's Admissions Policy has been drawn up to maximize parental preference for Halton LA maintained community and voluntary controlled schools, and reflects the recommendations contained within the revised DCSF Code of Practice on School Admissions and associated Acts of Parliament and Regulations. The Council's Executive Board at their meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009 have already agreed the admission arrangements for the September 2010 intake into primary and secondary schools, which sees two schools changing status from community schools to that of an Academy and a Trust School, together with the introduction of catchment zones for The Bankfield and Wade Deacon High Schools in Widnes. Statutorily required consultation will commence in Autumn 2009 on the arrangements for the 2011 admissions round and a decision paper will be submitted to Executive Board in April 2010 for ratification.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 As a result of the introduction nationally of the equal preference scheme, admissions authorities (the Local Authority for community and voluntary controlled schools and governing bodies for aided schools) have seen a significant increase in the volume of work undertaken in managing and administering the equal preference admissions process. In real terms the workload for admission authorities has trebled as all three preferences must now be considered equally against the relevant criteria for every application made. Previously only the first preference was initially assessed for each application and only if that could not be met would admission authorities then consider second and third preference applications.
- 5.2 Local Authority officers have worked collaboratively with school governors to ensure the admissions process and admissions criteria are compliant with the revised Department for Children, Schools & Families School Admissions Code of Practice, and supported those schools through the process. The introduction of Local Authority management of

in-year admissions will continue to see increased workloads within the area of school admissions.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The proposed policy complies with statutory requirements in ensuring that the admission arrangements are fair and do not disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with disability or special educational needs, thereby ensuring that the educational provision for children & young people in the borough is inclusive and accessible.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

Educational achievement is critical to the life chances of all children and is at the heart of the Government's Every Child Matters strategy. The School Admissions Policy detailing school admission arrangements in Halton underpins the requirement to promote fair access to educational opportunity.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

The School Admissions Policy is aligned to the Council's Sustainable School Travel Policy which promotes and supports measures that encourage local communities to use environmentally sustainable forms of travel, especially walking, cycling, and public transport.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

The alignment of the School Admissions Policy and the Sustainable School Travel Policy promotes the safe travel and transfer of pupils to school.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The Admissions Policy reflects the School Organisation programme intended to ensure that 21<sup>st</sup> century provision is in place across both the primary and secondary sectors.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The current admission arrangements and co-ordinated schemes are in place to maximise parental preference for Halton schools. Any amendment to the current arrangements at this time may reduce parental preference and lead to an increased number of admission appeals, adversely affecting the intake at some schools. Furthermore, any amendments may affect the LA's School Organisation programme currently being undertaken in both the primary and secondary sector.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The admission arrangements reflect the equality and diversity requirements of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race

Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, and the Equality Act 2006

**9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
<b>DCSF School Admissions Code</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>School Standards &amp; Framework Act 1998</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>Education Act 2002</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>Education &amp; Inspections Act 2006</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>