

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 31st March 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children and Young People

SUBJECT: School Admission Arrangements 2012

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report fulfils the requirement under the School Standards & Framework Act 1998, the Education Act 2002, The Education & Inspections Act 2006, and associated regulations, to determine Halton Local Authority's (LA's) School Admissions Policy for LA maintained community and voluntary controlled schools, and coordinated admission schemes for all primary and secondary schools for September 2012 following statutory consultation.
- 1.2 In addition to managing the admission of children to reception class in primary school and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school, the Government also requires Local Authorities to manage the In-Year Admissions process for children moving between schools during the academic year. This commenced in September 2010 and a consultation paper was issued alongside the above consultation paper seeking views on an appropriate model.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

(1) The Board approves the School Admissions Policy, Admission Arrangements and co-ordinated schemes for admission to primary and secondary schools for the 2012/13 academic year; and

(2) The Board approves the continuation of the current In-Year Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme as statutorily required.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In January 2011 Halton LA issued a statutorily required consultation paper on the proposed admission arrangements and coordinated admission schemes for the September 2012 intake (attached as Appendix 1), and its proposal to continue with the current In-Year Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme (attached as Appendix 2). Details of the consultation were published in the local press, made available on the Council's website, and issued to the head teachers and governing bodies of all nursery, infant, junior, primary and secondary schools, the four Diocesan Authorities responsible for voluntary aided schools in

Halton, and neighbouring authorities. Following prior consultation and agreement with the four Diocesan Authorities, the LA also facilitated an on-line admissions consultation process for all Church of England and Catholic Voluntary Aided Schools, enabling them to consult on their proposed admission arrangements for the 2012 academic year along with the LA's proposed arrangements.

- 3.2 The consultation ran from 4th January 2011 until 28th February 2011 and proposed no changes to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to LA maintained community and voluntary controlled primary schools, and no change to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to LA maintained community schools. One response to the consultation was received from the Governing Body and Senior Leadership of Wade Deacon High School (attached as Appendix 3) requesting that the zoning arrangements for Widnes High Schools (The Bankfield and Wade Deacon) be disbanded and replaced with the previously operated oversubscription criteria of criteria 1) Children in Public Care, Criteria 2) Siblings, Criteria 3) Distance.
- 3.3 Members will recall that the proposal to introduce zoning arrangements in Widnes arose from the extensive public consultation exercise undertaken by the LA in regard to closing Fairfield High School and expanding Wade Deacon High School as part of the School Organisation process, thereby ensuring that those residents in the east of Widnes (previously served by Fairfield High School) did not have to pass two secondary schools to access educational provision in the west of Widnes (the zoning arrangements are attached as Appendix 4). The LA would not wish to return to the previously operated system but the proposal by Wade Deacon is included for Members to consider.
- 3.4 The consultation advised that there would be no individual response to any submission made, but any responses submitted would be considered by the Halton Admissions Forum, and subsequently by the Council's Executive Board.
- 3.5 There are a number of points raised within the consultation response from Wade Deacon and the points raised are addressed below:
 - The concept of zoning does not go against the spirit of the School Admissions Code. Zoning is recognised within the Code as a fair oversubscription criteria. In determining the zones, the LA consulted widely upon the proposed arrangements and officers worked closely with elected members to ensure that the zones reflected the diversity of the community served by the schools.
 - The LA sought confirmation from central government that operating catchment zones in Widnes and a different set of oversubscription criteria in Runcorn was permitted, and this was confirmed, providing that the admission authority consulted upon

its proposals which Halton did extensively (and received commendation from the Department on its extensive consultation in this regard).

- Parents across Halton have the opportunity to express up to three school preferences regardless of whether they live within or outside of a particular school's catchment zone. For clarification, parents/carers in any authority do not have the right to simply choose a school, what they do have is the choice to express a preference for a school, following which their preferences are assessed against the relevant criteria, and Halton's arrangements allow for this. The attached Co-ordinated Secondary Scheme confirms to parents that they are not guaranteed a place at the school within whose catchment area they reside, and along with all other parents/carers in Halton they are required to complete a preference form which allows them to express up to three preferences.

3.6 The Halton Admissions Forum met on 1st March 2011 to consider the Admissions Policy, and Primary, Secondary and In-Year co-ordinated schemes, and agreed that Halton's current arrangements comply with the Code, and reflect the diversity of the community served by the schools.

3.7 The LA as commissioner of school places must ensure that the admission arrangements are fair, not complex, and fully comply with all statutory requirements. The arrangements currently in operation and proposed for continuation for the 2012/13 academic year reflect those requirements.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Admissions Policy has been drawn up to maximize parental preference for Halton LA maintained community and voluntary controlled schools, and responds to the parental representations made at the time of the initial School Organisation and Building Schools for the Future consultations. The oversubscription criteria contained within the Policy reflect the criteria which are considered good practice and acceptable by the Department for Education.

4.2 The continued use of catchment zones for Widnes secondary schools does not remove the right of parents/carers to express a preference for any school. Parents/carers must complete an application form regardless of which catchment zone they live in, where they will have the opportunity to express a preference for any school. If the school of preference is undersubscribed then all applications will be successful. If the school is oversubscribed then the oversubscription criteria will be applied and places allocated in accordance with the criteria.

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. Local Authority officers have worked collaboratively with school governors to ensure the admissions process and admissions criteria are compliant with the Department for Education School Admissions Code of Practice, and that places are allocated in accordance with the published criteria.

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 in the borough and 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 proposed admissions policy reflects the school reorganisation programme intended to ensure that 21st century provision is in place across both the primary and secondary sectors.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The admission arrangements and co-ordinated schemes are proposed 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 planning.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The proposed 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 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

- 9.1 The decision is statutorily required and any revision to the proposed arrangements may adversely affect school place planning as detailed in 7.1 above.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 10.1 Other options considered and rejected include the allocation of places through random allocation (lottery) as this method could be seen as arbitrary and random.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 11.1 The Policy applies for the September 2012 academic intake and will apply for 3 years unless further central or local government changes are required.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
School Admissions Code of Practice	Children & Young People's Directorate	Martin West
School Standards & Framework Act 1998	Children & Young People's Directorate	Martin West
Education Act 2002	Children & Young People's Directorate	Martin West
Education & Inspections Act 2006	Children & Young People's Directorate	Martin West