

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 10th April 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People

SUBJECT: School Admission Arrangements 2009/10

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 2009 following statutory consultation. The LA also consulted on the admission arrangements to its maintained nursery schools for the September 2009 intake.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The Admissions Policy and co-ordinated schemes for nursery, primary and secondary admissions for the 2009/10 academic year be approved, and**
- (2) The percentage of first preference applications and on-line applications met be noted**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 In January 2008 Halton LA issued a statutorily required consultation paper (attached as appendix A) on the proposed admission arrangements and coordinated admission schemes for the September 2009 intake. The consultation paper was 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 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 2009/10 academic year along with the LA's proposed arrangements.

3.2 The consultation paper proposed no changes to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to LA maintained community

and voluntary controlled schools. The criteria follows the Department for Children Schools & Families (DCSF) recommendations contained within the revised School Admissions Code of Practice (i.e. priority should be given to Looked After Children, Siblings, and Distance). However, the revised School Admissions Code of Practice, which came into force on 28th February 2007, precludes the use of a first preference first system as previously operated in Halton, and requires all admission authorities (LA's for community and voluntary controlled schools, and governing bodies for voluntary aided schools) to operate an equal preference system. Within the equal preference scheme all preferences expressed by parents on the application form are considered against each school's published admission criteria. After all preferences have been considered, if only one school named on the preference form can offer a place the LA will send out an offer of a place. If more than one school can offer a place parents will be offered a place at whichever of those schools is ranked highest on the preference form.

- 3.3 No responses were received to the consultation which ended on 29th February 2008, and the Halton Admissions Forum at its meeting held on 18th March 2008 approved the Policy and arrangements for consideration and ratification by the Executive Board.
- 3.4 Actual preferences met for the September 2008 intake were 92% for primary admissions (compared to 92% for the 2007 intake) and 90% for secondary (compared to 95% for the 2007 intake).
- 3.5 On-Line Admissions: For applications to primary and secondary schools in September 2007 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister set targets for Local Authorities regarding the number of on-line applications. Halton's target for 2008 applications was 10% and the Authority achieved 10.5% (the 2007 target was 5% and 6.5% was achieved). The Children & Young People's Directorate continues to work collaboratively with the Corporate & Policy Directorate's ICT Services Department to further enhance the on-line application process which will include the integration of parental preferences directly into the main pupil database for the 2009/10 admissions round.

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 reflects the recommendations contained within the revised DCSF Code of Practice on School Admissions and associated Acts of Parliament and Regulations.

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 revised Department for Children, Schools & Families School Admissions Code of Practice, and that places are allocated in accordance with the published criteria, and supported those schools in applying their policy.

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 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 current admission arrangements and coordinated 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 Place Rationalisation Strategy currently being undertaken in both the primary and secondary sector.

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). The proposed criteria in this report, and associated documentation to parents on admission arrangements, ensures that parents have accurate historical information detailing how places were allocated in previous years, therefore enabling parents to express realistic preferences against empirical evidence on school place allocations. The lottery system does not allow for this and would not assist parents in expressing realistic school preferences.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 11.1 The Policy applies for the September 2009 academic intake.

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