

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 2nd April 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People

SUBJECT: School Admission Arrangements 2010

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 2010 following statutory consultation. The LA also consulted on the admission arrangements to its maintained nursery schools for the September 2010 intake.

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 including the adoption of catchment zones for admission to Widnes community high schools, and admission arrangements to Nursery schools and LA Maintained Nursery classes. All of which apply to the 2010/11 academic year**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 In January 2009 Halton LA issued a statutorily required consultation paper on the proposed admission arrangements and coordinated admission schemes for the September 2010 intake (attached as Appendix 1). 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 2010 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 primary schools, and no change to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to LA maintained community schools in Runcorn. However, changes were proposed to the allocation of places at LA maintained community secondary schools in Widnes through the introduction of catchment zones as detailed in Appendix 1 paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2.
- 3.3 The proposal to introduce catchment zones in Widnes (Wade Deacon High School serving the East, The Bankfield serving the West, and Saints Peter and Paul Catholic College continuing to serve Catholic pupils and those who wish to seek a Catholic education), arose following statutory consultation during 2007 and 2008 regarding the Building Schools for the Future Programme which, at the initial stages, indicated that some pupils in the East of Widnes would be required to circumvent two high schools to access educational provision. The LA agreed that alternative solutions should be considered and agreed to consult on the implementation of catchment zones to alleviate this issue. The LA options proposed by the LA are attached as Appendices 2 and 3.
- 3.4 The consultation commenced on the 5th January 2009 and closed on 28th February 2009. 22 responses were received to the consultation. A summary of the responses is attached as Appendix 4. The Halton Admissions Forum met on 3rd March 2009 to consider the Admissions Policy, co-ordinated schemes, proposed catchment zones and the responses to the consultation. The Admissions Forum approved the Policy and co-ordinated primary and secondary schemes, considered the catchment zone options proposed by the LA and considered the responses received to the consultation, including the responses from the Governing Body at Wade Deacon High School who made representations about the LA's proposals. The consensus from the Admissions Forum was that both Options 1 and 2 proposed by the LA should be put to the Executive Board for consideration.
- 3.5 The LA as commissioner of school places must ensure that the admission arrangements are fair, not complex, and fully comply with all statutory requirements. In considering the introduction of catchment zones the LA wishes to reflect the diversity of the community served by both The Bankfield School and Wade Deacon High School, and does not wish to exclude particular housing estates or addresses in a way that might disadvantage particular social groups. In the LA's view Option 2 best meets those needs.

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 parental representations from the initial

Building Schools for the Future consultation. The oversubscription criteria contained within the Policy reflect the criteria which are considered good practice and acceptable by the Department for Children Schools and Families.

- 4.2 The proposal to implement catchment zones does not remove the right of parents to express a preference for any school. Parents 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 revised Department for Children, Schools & Families 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 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 admission arrangements and coordinated 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 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 As detailed in paragraph 3.3, if the LA remained with the current oversubscription criteria for admission to Widnes community high schools i.e. Children in Care, Siblings, and then straight line distance measurement, some pupils living on the East of Widnes would be

required to circumvent two high schools to access educational provision, therefore this option was rejected. The representations submitted by the Governing Body at Wade Deacon High School were considered by the Halton Admissions Forum and rejected, and the LA would support that view. 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 2010 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