



CABINET – 7 FEBRUARY 2020

LEICESTERSHIRE'S POLICY ON ADMISSIONS TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS: DETERMINATION OF ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the consultation on the revised Leicestershire School Admissions Policy and changes to several primary school catchment areas and to seek approval for the refreshed Leicestershire School Admissions Policy (Appendix A), Leicestershire Oversubscription Criteria (Appendix A, Section 10), the associated coordinated admissions schemes for first-time admissions, secondary transfers and mid-term transfers (Appendix A) and amendments to catchment areas in Whetstone, Countesthorpe and Ashby de la Zouch (Appendix B). The proposed changes set out above will apply to all applications for entry from September 2021.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The outcome of the public consultation on the revised Leicestershire School Admissions Policy and changes to primary school catchment areas in Whetstone, Countesthorpe and Ashby be noted;
 - (b) The Leicestershire School Admissions Policy for entry from September 2021, the revised Leicestershire Oversubscription Criteria, and the three co-ordinated admission schemes, as detailed in Appendix A to this report be approved;
 - (c) The changes to the school catchment areas in Whetstone, Countesthorpe and Ashby de la Zouch, as detailed in Appendix B to this report, be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The School Standards and Framework Act 1988 places an obligation on the County Council to determine the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools in Leicestershire. As the admitting authority the Council is required to determine the admission arrangements for schools in Leicestershire from September 2021 by 28 February 2020.
4. The School Admissions Policy requires updating, for example, to align with the approach taken by other admitting authorities and to remove obsolete wording.
5. The revised primary school catchment areas in Whetstone, Countesthorpe and Ashby will better align schools to new communities as result of recent housing development. The changes will help improve diversity and choice for parents. They will also ensure schools do not become overburdened and keep the number of applications likely to be refused low.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. The Admissions Policy must be determined by 28 February 2020 and be made available on the Council's website no later than 15 March 2020. A summary of the Admissions Policy will appear in the annual publication "Your Guide" for parents and carers, which is made available early in September of each year.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. The Council's policy in this area is relevant to admissions to community schools, voluntary controlled schools, and those Academies (including Free Schools) that have adopted the Local Authority's Admissions Policy. The Policy must contain clear criteria for parents' requests for school places and all applications must be treated equally, regardless of whether or not the parents live in Leicestershire. To this end, the Council must have regard to the Department for Education (DfE) School Admissions Code (December 2014) and School Admission Appeals Codes (February 2012). The County Council also has a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure the availability of sufficient school places.
8. Leicestershire's Schools Admissions Policy (for entry from September 2020), its oversubscription criteria and three co-ordinated schemes for the normal round of transfers, remained unchanged from the version for September 2019 which was approved by the Cabinet on 10 February 2017.

Resource Implications

9. There are no resource implications arising from this report. The cost of administering the admission arrangements is borne from within existing budgets.

10. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. A copy of this report has been circulated to the Elected Members, whose divisions will be affected by the proposed changes to the catchment areas -
Mr. J. G. Coxon CC - Ashby de la Zouch
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC - Narborough and Whetstone
Mr. L. Phillimore CC - Cosby and Countesthorpe
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC - Valley.
12. All Elected Members will be advised once the refreshed School Admissions Policy is published on the County Council's Website.

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PART B

Background

13. Leicestershire's current Admissions Policy was agreed by the Cabinet in February 2017. It was at the time indicated by the DfE that a new National Schools Admissions Code was imminent as the current Code has not been revised since 2014. Had this happened Leicestershire's Admissions policy would have been revised accordingly. Instead, steps have been taken to tidy-up disjointed aspects of the policy and to revise the oversubscription criteria to ensure the Policy remains as up-to-date as possible and relevant to schools under the Local Authority's control.
14. It is also proposed to amend several primary catchment areas, in response to new housing developments. If the changes are not made to the primary catchment boundaries there is high likelihood of overburdening some school whilst adjacent schools remain significantly under-subscribed.

Proposed Policy Changes

15. The only significant change proposed to the current Admissions Policy relates to the oversubscription criteria which are used to rank and allocate school places. The Local Authority is seeking to remove the current criterion no. 7 from the oversubscription criteria that relates to pupils basing their application on religious belief to Voluntary Controlled schools. This in response to a formal request from the Church of England diocese for its removal in order to fall into line with the diocese national position and changes subsequently made by other local authorities. Part of the reasoning cited by the Church of England diocese is a desire to become more inclusive to children of all faiths as well as those of no faith. Should the removal be agreed it is likely to increase choice and diversity of applications to Church of England schools that could otherwise remain undersubscribed. It should be noted however this change will not affect either the Catholic or Voluntary Aided schools.
16. In addition, it is proposed that wording under criterion no. 6 is revised to reflect that the Local Authority is no longer an admitting authority of high or upper schools in Leicestershire, as the only remaining high and upper schools in Ashby are academies. It should be noted that all other schools in Leicestershire have progressed age range change and have 'all through' status.
17. The Council undertook a consultation exercise on the proposed changes to the Admissions Policy and catchment areas, the results of which are set out in paragraphs 24 to 29 below.

Proposed Catchment Area Changes

18. The proposed amendments to certain primary catchment areas are illustrated in Appendix B to this report and summarised below;

Whetstone

19. It is proposed that the current catchment area for Badgerbrook Primary School in Whetstone is amended to exclude the future Whittle housing development in order to ensure that the school is not overburdened. The area being relinquished will instead form part of the Whetstone St. Peter Church of England (CE) Primary School's catchment. The school as an academy has run its own successful consultation to absorb the area being relinquished by Badgerbrook.

Countesthorpe

20. The Gillam Butts Lane housing development that lies between Thistley Meadow Primary School and Greenfield Primary School has been granted additional planning permission. It is proposed that the whole development has equal catchment rights, which will ease the pressure at Thistly Meadow Primary School and offer an alternative choice at Greenfield.

Ashby de la Zouch

21. It is proposed to dissolve the catchment lines between all the primary schools in Ashby de la Zouch. This is in response to the new Holywell Farm housing development to north west of the town centre and the proposal for a new primary school to open in 2021 to meet the demand from the housing development.
22. To avoid confusion of overlapping catchment areas, all respective governing bodies have agreed to dissolve adjacent catchment lines between their schools. This means that in Ashby town there will be a single catchment area with five primary schools (Ashby Hill Top Primary School, Woodcote Primary School, Ashby de la Zouch CE Primary School, Ashby Willesley Primary School and the New School on Holywell housing development). Both Hill Top Primary School and Willesley Primary School, as academies, are required to run their own consultations to amend their catchments which they have successfully completed.

Consultation on Changes to School Admissions Policy

23. The School Admission consultation process is defined by the National School Admissions Code. Leicestershire's consultation was launched on the Council's website on 10 October 2019 and closed on 29 November 2019. All schools were advised of the consultation via electronic Head's briefings, and those parents with children attending schools where catchment amendments are

proposed were written to. All Early Years settings were directly emailed via the Early Years and Childcare Service to make parents aware of the consultation, whilst other agencies such the Church of England and Catholic diocese, district councils and neighbouring authorities were also contacted. This is in keeping with the National Code which requires that the following are consulted:

- a) Parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
- b) Other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
- c) All other admission authorities within the relevant area (noting that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
- d) Whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;
- e) Any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority.

24. The Council received a total of 60 responses, the majority of which were supportive of the proposed changes. The relatively small response was attributed to the proposed changes to the Policy and the catchment areas being considered minor. It is important to understand that every parent or carer was contacted who attends a school where a catchment change is being proposed. A summary of the responses is included below. A more detailed overview can be found at Appendix C to this report.

Proposal 1:

25. Consultees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the removal of the belief criterion. A total of 43 responses (71.5%) indicated support for its removal, with 14 responses (23%) objecting, and 3 (5%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Comments included -

- *Religious belief is not a valid reason to prioritise applications;*
- *Religious belief should have no place in decisions on school places;*
- *I do not believe that faith has anything to do with the education of a child;*
- *Decisions based on faith only lead to division and segregation and especially now, in the current political climate, people need to be brought together and integrated for a stronger future.*

Officer Comment -

Last year only one application was received citing the belief criterion, the comments above appear to by and large reflect the diocese wishes for its removal.

Proposal 2:

26. Consultees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the revised Leicestershire School Admissions Policy and associated schemes. A total of 37 responses (62%) indicated support for the revisions, with 6 responses (10%) objecting, 16 (26.5%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 1 person did not respond (1.5%).

Comments included -

- *If it needs to be revised to tidy it up then so be it;*
- *Siblings should be above catchment criterion. As a parent who already has a child in a school, that could be a logistical nightmare which causes issues in the environment and with traffic etc.*
- *It appears more fair;*
- *All the changes appear reasonable and keep the authority up to date with guidance;*
- *Very small changes to the wording, so I can't see it having a huge impact.*

Officer Comment -

The changes made are in general nominal, the key aim was for the policy to read in a more logical style to allow parents to understand how places are allocated.

Proposal 3:Badgerbrook Primary School Catchment Amendment

27. Consultees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the amended catchment boundary changes to Badgerbrook Primary School. A total of 12 responses (20%) indicated support for the amendment, with 3 responses (5%) objecting, 17 (28.3%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 28 persons did not respond (46.6%).

Comments included -

- *There will not otherwise be enough room in the school to hold all these pupils if houses are being built;*
- *From what I understand if those in the joint catchment get priority to both schools then I think this is a common sense;*
- *I moved to the area and purchased this home (Strata Estate, Henson Close) as it was in the Badgerbrook catchment area, my eldest son started at the school in September this year and is getting on wonderfully. I have another son due to start in September 2021 and with the proposed*

changes we are now in the catchment for St Peters. My own opinion is that more schools In Leicestershire require their catchment areas to be considered;

- *As a resident of the new Linden estate, the new boundary for the catchment of Badgerbrook Primary means I could potentially have one child at one school and one at a different school.*

Officer Comment -

The reason for amendment is ensure sufficient school places., If the change is not made Badgerbrook Primary School will be overburdened in the future. In terms of the responses above, the Local Authority has been very mindful to make amendments before most of the houses are built to avoid split siblings in the future. In terms of those who already have siblings in Badgerbrook Primary School, it can be confirmed that all siblings have secured places at Badgerbrook Primary Schools over the last five years, therefore this trend is expected to continue regardless of the proposed change.

Greenfield and Thistley Meadow Primary Schools Amendment

28. Consultees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the amended catchment boundary changes to Badgerbrook Primary School. A total of 13 responses (22%) indicated support for the amendment, with 7 responses (11.5%) objecting, 13 (21.5%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 27 persons did not respond (45%).

Comments included -

- *The children who live within walking distance of Greenfield should be in the catchment. It is better for the environment and their health.*
- *I approve of the Greenfield/Thistly Meadow suggestion;*
- *As a parent of a child who is already at Greenfield, and as we live in the affected area, I am concerned that with a shared catchment area this will mean that it is harder for us to get our daughter into Greenfield (her current catchment school) in the autumn of 2021.*

Officer comment -

Those children with siblings at either Greenfield and Thistley Meadow Primary Schools will not be disadvantaged, rather the change proposed should ensure siblings have a high likelihood of attending the same school.

Ashby Primary Schools

29. Consultees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the amended catchment boundary changes to Badgerbrook Primary School. A total of 16 responses (27%) indicated support for the amendment, with 6 responses (10%)

objecting, 17 (28%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 21 persons did not respond (35%).

Comments included -

- *Blending all four would alleviate the burden on some popular Ashby schools;*
- *Catchment should be broadened, and revisions made sensibly;*
- *With the growth in the area this seems to be the fairest way forward.*

Officer comment -

The Local Authority's experience of having a single catchment with multiple schools (i.e. Braunstone and Melton) has shown a positive impact to parents as they have several catchment schools rather than just one. If the amendment is not made now it will mean that the new school on the Holywell Farm development would have overlapping catchment boundaries and dual catchment rights; this could cause significant confusion amongst parents and the potential for challenge.

Conclusion

30. In order to manage admission applications, it is important that the Council's admissions policies are coherent, that parents understand how they are applied, and that they remain fair and are applied consistently. Making the proposed changes set out above and detailed within the attached appendices will help ensure that Local Authority policy is compliant with the National School admissions Code and offers best choice and access to Leicestershire schools for children and young people.
31. In terms of the catchment amendments, if they are not approved demand for school places at already oversubscribed schools will increase, whilst neighbour schools might remain undersubscribed. The proposed amendments will help offer greater choice and diversity whilst ensuring siblings will have a high success in securing the same school.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

32. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) screening questionnaire was completed to ensure the variation applied equally to all children, that no local children would be disadvantaged by expanding three primary schools and that the catchment mergers would only be benefitting the local communities. The screening exercise identified that a full EHRIA was not required.

Appendices

Appendix A - School Admissions Policy for entry from September 2021 and Leicestershire's Co-ordinated Admission Schemes for:

- First Time Admissions Infant to Junior transfers
- Secondary School transfers
- Mid-Term transfers during the 2021-22 Academic Year

Appendix B - Proposed Primary Catchment area changes for Whetstone, Countesthorpe and Ashby de la Zouch

Appendix C - Consultation Responses

Background Papers

National School Admissions Code December 2014

<http://ow.ly/Waxbl>

Report to the Cabinet on 10 February 2017 - Leicestershire's Policy on Admission to Mainstream Schools: Determination of Admission Arrangements

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4858&Ver=4>