



**CABINET – 9 FEBRUARY 2024**

**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 seek the Cabinet's approval for changes to school admission arrangements in Leicestershire that include increasing the number of school preferences from three to five on school application forms, moving to using a single criterion plus distance (as the tiebreaker) when determining school places, and amendments to clarify the School Admissions Policy, arrangements, and coordinated schemes from autumn 2025 (as set out in Appendix A to this report).
2. The Cabinet is also asked to approve a catchment area change for Little Bowden Primary School, Market Harborough, and the reduction in admission numbers at four Leicestershire primary schools - Foxton Primary School, Hallaton C of E Primary School, Newbold Verdon Primary School and St. Bartholomew's C of E, Primary School, Quorn, (as set out in Appendix B to this report).

**Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that the Cabinet agrees the following proposals:
  - a) That Leicestershire's Policy on Admissions to Mainstream Schools and associated arrangements and co-ordinated schemes are amended to
    - (i) offer five school preferences,
    - (ii) include a single tiebreaker criterion, plus distance,
    - (iii) remove ambiguity and improve clarity around the process;
  - b) That the catchment area of Little Bowden Primary School is expanded with effect for entry from 2025/26 onwards as illustrated in Appendix B to the report;

- c) That the Admissions Number at the following primary schools be reduced with effect from entry in 2025 as follows:
- (i) Foxton Primary School - from 17 to 15 (permanent change),
  - (ii) Hallaton C of E Primary School - from 18 to 15 (permanent change),
  - (iii) Newbold Verdon Primary School - from 45 to 30 (temporary change),
  - (iv) St. Bartholomew's C of E Primary School, Quorn - from 75 to 60 (temporary change).

### **Reason for Recommendations**

4. The corresponding rationale(s) for the above changes in summary are:
- (a) To ensure Leicestershire parents are not disadvantaged when there are more than three schools within a single shared catchment area.
  - (b) To make it easier for parents to understand how places are allocated and to allow them to gauge the likelihood of success when applying.
  - (c) To introduce simpler language which will improve understanding of Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes.
  - (d) To expand the catchment area for Little Bowden Primary School which will improve choice and diversity and will also address increased demand from future housing.
  - (e) To reduce admission numbers at the four schools to enable compliance with The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and protect the schools from an anticipated deficit budget position.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

5. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on 7 November 2023, and its comments are set out in Part B of this report.
6. The County Council is required to determine the admission arrangements for Community schools and Voluntary Controlled schools in Leicestershire from September 2025 by 28 February 2024 and make the arrangements available on the Council's website no later than 15 March 2024. This will then provide parents and carers with more than a year's notice to allow them to make informed preferences when applying for a school place for admission in the autumn 2025.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

7. The County Council's policy in this area is relevant to admissions to community schools, voluntary controlled schools, and those academies that wish to model their policy on the Local Authority's policy. The policy must contain clear criteria for parents' requests for school places, and all applications must be treated fairly, regardless of whether or not the applicants live in Leicestershire. To this end, the County Council must have regard to the Department for Education (DfE) School Admissions Code (September 2021) and School Admission Appeals Codes (October 2022). The County Council also has a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure the availability of sufficient school places in its area.
8. The changes planned align with the Council's Strategic Plan (2022/26) as they will improve the likelihood of local children securing local school places. This will in turn reduce the need for the Council to transport children to schools much further away. It will also ensure new future communities will have access to local schools, building positive local relationships.
9. The current School Admissions policy was approved by the Cabinet on 10 February 2023.

### **Resource Implications**

10. There are no resource implications arising from this report. The cost of administering the admission arrangements is borne from within existing budgets.
11. There would be a financial risk if admission numbers were not reduced at the four primary schools as the financial burden to rectify a class size breach falls on the Council. Schools would be required to appoint additional teaching staff without appropriate funding.
12. 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**

13. All Elected Members will be advised once the Policy has been published on the County Council's website. Elected Members for the divisions affected by the catchment change and reduction in the admission number have been directly advised regarding the proposals and will be sent this report.

Mr Barry Champion CC – Market Harborough East  
 Mr Phil King CC – Market Harborough West and Foxton  
 Mr Ross Hills CC – Mallory

Mrs Hilary Fryer CC – Quorn and Barrow  
Mr Simon Galton CC – Launde

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

14. The School Admissions Policy sets out the Council's admission arrangements for the purposes of allocating school places at community and voluntary controlled schools within Leicestershire, for which the Council is the admission authority. The Policy does not apply to other schools, including those within other local authority areas (including Leicester City), voluntary aided schools, free schools, independent schools, academies, studio schools or admission to post-16 education.
15. Leicestershire's current Admissions Policy was approved by the Cabinet in February 2023. Since then, several issues have developed that need to be addressed to ensure parents continue to receive a positive experience when seeking a school place.

### **Proposed Changes**

#### **School Preferences**

16. The policy recommendations focus on increasing the number of preferences on the Local Authority's application form from three to five. This will support parents where there are up to five schools within a single catchment; by maximising opportunities for parents to secure a local school place. It will also help promote family and community relationships, enabling children to walk to and from local schools. This will also have the positive impact on the local and wider environment and benefit the Council's transport budget, by reducing the need to transport children to schools further away.

#### **Simplifying the system**

17. It is proposed to move to a model of using a single criterion plus distance. The current model uses a combination of criteria and then distance as a separate and final criterion. This will give a far simpler model and enable parents to understand better the likelihood of success when applying for a school place. It will also assist Independent Appeal Members in understanding how places are determined.
18. The change will affect all children equally, except those who are or have been Looked After Children who will still be given the highest priority.
19. There are already several academies and other Local Authorities that operate this model with success when determining school places, offering confidence that this approach is practical. This model would make the determination of places easier to understand.

### Removing ambiguity and improving clarity

20. Amending and clarifying the current Admissions Policy and co-ordinated schemes will assist in eliminating confusion and better define the process. Parents and appeal panel members have in the past misunderstood some of the Policy wording, because complex or technical terminology. Simpler language will improve understanding of the Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes.

### Catchment change

21. The catchment change is partly in response to Meadowdale Primary School having expanded its catchment area, to come into force from 2024. In order to ensure that Little Bowden Primary School will not be negatively affected by that change the Council is seeking to expand its catchment area as well.
22. The change would result in parents having two schools within this catchment area, improving choice and diversity for parents at both schools (as detailed at Appendix B). In addition, it will allow and encourage children to walk to and from school, building positive relationships in the community; it will also encourage confidence and independence in children and foster safer communities.

### Reducing admission numbers

23. Leicestershire is experiencing low birth rates. As a consequence, at the national offer date this year the Authority had over 1,400 surplus school places. This is the second year that there has been a surplus. The changes will help avoid schools falling into a negative budget position and ensure the school does not breach The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012. It is proposed to reduce the admission numbers at four Leicestershire primary schools:
- At Foxton Primary School and Hallaton CE Primary School the reductions would be permanent to ensure Code compliance.
  - At Newbold Verdon Primary School and St. Bartholomew's Primary School, the reductions would be temporary, until such time as birth rates increase or as occupancy of new housing drives up the demand for school places.
24. There is no requirement to consult if the desire is to increase a school's admissions number (except if it is a significant enlargement) but the Council was required to consult on the proposed reductions, further details of which are given below.
25. There would be a significant financial risk to the Council if admission numbers were not reduced as the financial burden to rectify an infant class size breach falls on the local authority. It is in the interest of good financial management to

address such matters and take appropriate remedial steps. By acting now schools are less likely to fall into a deficit budget position that the Council would have to absorb.

## **Consultation**

### **School Admission Consultation**

26. The School Admission consultation process as defined by the National School Admissions Code 2021 requires all admitting authorities to hold a public consultation exercise for a minimum of six calendar-weeks between 1 October to 31 January each year. All changes must then be ratified by the Cabinet (as the Admissions Authority) by 28 February. Leicestershire's consultation was launched on 23 October 2023 and closed on 5 December 2023. The process requires that the following individuals and groups be 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 (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
  - d) Whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority;
  - e) Any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority.
  - f) In the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.
27. All schools in Leicestershire, all Early Years' providers, neighbouring authorities and the Church of England and Catholic Dioceses were emailed directly to inform them of the online consultation. In addition, the Council ran a media campaign to raise awareness and included information about the consultation in newsletters.
28. The consultation sought feedback on each of the five proposals listed above, namely:
- i. To offer five school preferences on Leicestershire's school application form.
  - ii. To adopt a simpler system when determining school places.
  - iii. To remove ambiguity and offer greater clarity of process in Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes.
  - iv. To expand Little Bowden Primary School's catchment area.
  - v. To reduce the admissions numbers at the four primary schools.

29. By the close of the consultation, the Council had received a total of 49 responses. The response rate was relatively low, in all likelihood because the changes being sought to the Policy, and catchment changes were not considered significant, and the responses received were largely positive or neutral:

<b>Proposal 1</b>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to increase the number of school preferences from 3 to 5 on the school application form, for entry 2025?	8(16%)	13(27%)	6(12%)	8(16%)	7(14%)	7(14%)

<b>Proposal 2</b>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to change and adopt a less complex criteria ranking system when determining school places, for entry 2025?	7(15%)	8(17%)	16(35%)	5(11%)	2(4%)	8(17%)

<b>Proposal 3</b>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to amend and clarify the Leicestershire School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes, for entry 2025?	6(13%)	11(24%)	14(31%)	1(2%)	1(2%)	12(27%)

<b>Proposal 4</b>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to change the catchment boundary area for Little Bowden Primary School, for entry 2025?	0	2(4%)	22(47%)	3(6%)	4(9%)	16(34%)



<b>Proposal 5:</b> To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to reduce the admission number for entry to the following schools, for entry 2025?	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Foxton Primary School from 17 to 15	12(33%)	4(11%)	13(36%)	3(8%)	0	4(11%)
Hallaton CofE Primary School from 18 to 15	10(29%)	4(11%)	13(37%)	3(9%)	0	5(14%)
Newbold Verdon Primary School from 45 to 30 (temporary reduction)	9(27%)	4(12%)	11(32%)	4(12%)	1(3%)	5(15%)
St. Bartholomew's C of E Primary School from 75 to 60 (temporary reduction)	15(33%)	4(9%)	7(16%)	7(16%)	8(18%)	4(9%)

### **Views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

30. The Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 November 2023 considered a report on the School Admissions Service's performance for Autumn 2023 which also provided an overview of recent service improvements and outlined the consultation concerning proposed changes to the School Admissions Policy and associated arrangements.
31. Members noted that parents were encouraged to use all three admissions preferences currently available and if the maximum number was increased to five the principle of using all available options would remain. The application form included instructions for completing it correctly and the Service would continue to monitor errors and omissions.
32. The Director acknowledged that in some instances children had been placed in schools which were a significant distance from their home, but this would usually have occurred where a mid-term application had been received and the closest school did not have places. Any application received after the national deadline of 31 October would be treated as a mid-term application. In these cases, the Department would allocate a child with a place at the closest school with available places, which in some cases, could be some distance from the child's home. Members noted that the Council had a statutory obligation to ensure that children in Leicestershire had access to education and members were assured that it had enough places to facilitate this. The Council could provide transport assistance to support children travelling more than two miles to a primary school or more than three miles to a secondary school, subject to an eligibility assessment. Members were assured that the Service worked closely with schools on admissions and negotiated with academies on school places. However, it was acknowledged academies were responsible for deciding their own number of places.

33. Members noted that parents could contact the Council's School Admissions Service for advice on waiting list options for phased rounds, support with the right to appeal, and to discuss the option for elective home education.
34. The Council had a positive relationship with the Admissions Service at Leicester City Council. Members noted that there were popular schools in the County which attracted applications from families who lived in the city area. Where a child was allocated with a place at a County school, the child's siblings would then also be likely to be offered a place at that school, as sibling groups were a high criterion within admissions criteria. The Council was prohibited from discriminating or prejudicing children from outside of catchment areas and would continue to deal with applications on a case-by-case basis.

### **Conclusion**

35. It is important that the admissions policy and co-ordinated schemes are applied fairly and consistently, and appropriately that reflect the legal obligations placed on the Local Authority. In terms of the reduction in admission numbers it is either to ensure legal compliance or to prevent schools falling into a deficit budget.
36. It is hoped by making the proposed changes set out above and detailed within the attached appendices it will help ensure that Local Authority policy and arrangements are compliant with the National School admissions Code 2021 and offer best choice and access to Leicestershire schools for children and young people.

### **Equality Implications**

37. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken, and it shows the benefits would only be positive because the policy is applied in a fair and transparent manner, and, where necessary, specific protected characteristics are prioritised.

### **Human Rights Implications**

38. There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

### **Background Papers**

National School Admissions Code 2021

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1001050/School\\_admissions\\_code\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001050/School_admissions_code_2021.pdf)

Report to the Cabinet – 10 February 2023 - Leicestershire's Policy on Admission to Mainstream Schools: Determination of Admission Arrangements

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/g7073/Public%20reports%20pack%20Friday%2010-Feb-2023%2011.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 November 2023 - "Update on Admissions Service" - and minutes of that meeting  
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7194>

### **Appendices**

- Appendix A - Revised School Admissions Policy and Co-ordinated Schemes for entry from 2025 (that now state 5 preferences, simplified process when determining allocations and clarifications)
- Appendix B - Catchment Map change for Little Bowden Primary, Schools named that are reducing their Admissions Number and Infant Class Size definition
- Appendix C - Consultation Responses
- Appendix D - Equality Impact Assessment

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