

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

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| TO: | ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDRENS SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 14 FEBRUARY 2019 | AGENDA ITEM: | 13 |
| TITLE: | SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS 2020/21 | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | ASHLEY PEARCE | PORTFOLIO: | EDUCATION |
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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report invites the Committee to determine;
- The admissions arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2020/21.
 - The co-ordinated scheme for primary and junior schools for the 2020/21 school year.
 - The co-ordinated scheme for secondary schools for the 2020/21 school year.
 - The Relevant Area.
 - Maps of the catchment areas.
- 1.2 These arrangements for 2020/21 comply with the School Admissions Code 2014.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the scheme attached at Annexes A, B and C as the admissions arrangements for 2020/21 for community schools in Reading and the local arrangements for complying with the national co-ordinated primary school admission procedures for the allocation of primary school places for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.
- 2.2 That the scheme attached at Annex D as the local arrangements for complying with the national coordinated secondary admissions procedure

for the allocation of secondary school places for 2020/21 for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.

- 2.3 That the relevant area as attached in Annex E which sets out the organisations that must be consulted for any admissions arrangements for schools in Reading be agreed.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 School admissions are the subject to detailed requirements, set out in law and particularly the School Admissions Code 2014, published by the Government and approved by Parliament. As part of those requirements, local authorities must draw up schemes for co-ordinating admissions to all maintained schools in their area. The purpose of co-ordinated schemes is to ensure that every parent/carer of a child living in Reading who has completed and submitted an on time application receives one offer of a school place at the conclusion of the normal admissions round. The schemes set out a process and timescale to enable the offer of a single school place. They do not affect the right of individual admission authorities to set and operate their own admission arrangements but they do include arrangements for resolving multiple offers, where a place can be offered at more than one school.
- 3.2 In addition, the Council is also required to determine the admission policy for community schools which includes the number of places to be made available at each school and the oversubscription criteria to be applied where there are more applicants than places available. Where the over-subscription criteria include catchment areas these must also be approved. The governing bodies of academies, free schools, voluntary aided and foundation schools are required to determine their own admission number and oversubscription criteria. Those schools also operate their own arrangements as part of the coordinated scheme - and where they are oversubscribed, continue to decide which applicants best meet their oversubscription criteria.
- 3.3 Reading Borough Council last consulted on the policy in 2015. Due to minor amendments and the fact that Admissions Authorities must consult at least every 7 years it was decided that Reading must consult on their 2020/2021 policy in order to comply with the Schools Admissions Code. The Council consulted as set out in the Relevant Area 2019 and the consultation took place during October through to December 2018 via an online consultation. In total there were 94 responses to the consultation. The School Admission Forum at their meeting on 16th January 2019 will consider all responses to the consultation. The policies as presented reflect the Forum's discussions and decisions.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Primary School Co-ordinated schemes

The policy has had some minor changes to it from the proposals for 2018/19, these are as follows:

Proposed change 1

Page 3 - School Admissions will validate the application (checking proof of address by reference to Council Tax Records).

85% agreed to this 6.4% did not agree and 8.5% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree felt that Council Tax was not necessarily the best way to validate the application, as sometimes details are not up to date. The decision was taken to include this in the policy. However, taking feedback into account, the policy now states that where it is not possible to validate through Council Tax records then proof of living at the property will be required.

Proposed change 2

Page 4 - After National Offer Day, subsequent offers will be made from waiting lists (including late applications) on the last working day of the month. Late applications must be received 5 working days before each further offer day, if they are to be considered.

84% agreed to this, 6.4% did not agree and 9.5% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that the time frame was too long. The decision was taken to include this in the policy as on whole it was felt it was fairer for all those applying late.

Proposed change 3

Page 4 - Change of address between 15th January and the 1st March 2020 will be considered as on time.

86% agreed 4.3% did not agree and 9.5% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that the current deadline of 2nd February was fairer. In view of the challenge involved with changing the date to the 1st March and also consulting with neighbouring local authorities, who mostly have the date as the 2nd February, the decision was taken to not to change the date and keep to the current date of the 2nd February as the cut off.

Proposed change 4

Page 7 - Disputes between parents. Procedure for admissions team to manage applications in this instance.

79.8% agreed to this, 11.7% did not agree and 8.5% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that they did not fully understand what the proposal was. It was decided to include this in the policy as it currently contains no guidance.

4.2 Secondary School Co-ordinated schemes

Proposed change 1

Page 3 - School Admissions will validate the application (checking proof of address by reference to Council Tax Records).

87% agreed to this. 6.4% did not agree and 6.4% did not answer the question. As before, those disagreeing believed that Council Tax was not necessarily the best way to validate the application, as sometimes details are not up to date. The decision was taken to include this in the policy. However, taking feedback into account, the policy now states that where it is not possible to validate through Council Tax records then proof of living at the property will be required.

Proposed change 2

Page 4 - After National Offer Day, subsequent offers will be made from waiting lists (including late applications) on the last working day of the month. Late applications must be received 5 working days before each further offer day to be considered.

84% agreed to this, 6.4% did not agree and 6.4% did not answer the question. As before those disagreeing believed that the time frame was too long. The decision was taken to include this in the policy as on whole it was believed to be fairer for all those applying late.

Proposed change 3

Page 4 - Change of address between 1st November and the 1st February 2020 will be considered as on time.

87% agreed 6.4% did not agree and 6.4% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that the current deadline of 31st December was fairer. On reflection of the workload involved with changing the date to the 1st February and also consulting with our neighbouring local Authorities, who mostly have the date as the 31st December, the decision was taken to not to change the date and keep to the current date of the 31st December as the cut off.

Proposed change 4

Page 7 - Disputes between Parents. Procedure indicating how the admissions team will manage applications in this instance.

80.8% agreed to this to this, 11.7% did not agree and 7.5% did not answer the question. As before, the feedback of those who did not agree was that they did not fully understand what the proposal was. It was decided to include this in the policy as it currently contains no guidance.

4.3 Admission Policy for Community Primary, Infant and Junior Schools 2020-2021.

Proposed change 1

Page 2 - Category 2 Children who were previously in state care outside England (children who were looked after or accommodated by a public or state authority or a religious organisation or any other provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society. The care may have been provided in an orphanage or other setting.)

This was a late addition to the consultation. Only 29 people responses to this were received: 25% were in agreement 5.3% did not agree and 69% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that priority should be given to other children over this but as it was a national proposal it was decided to add it into the policy.

Proposed change 2

Category 2 to be changed to families who have strong medical or social grounds for their child's admission to a particular school.

63.8 % agreed to this 21.3% did not agree and 14.8 did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was how it would be checked and what would be the criteria be. It was decided to add it into the policy, as with the Medical Social request currently all requests have to include supporting evidence. All requests then go in front of a social medical panel, which is made up of School Admissions, Early Years, SEND and Educational Psychologist. All requests also go to the relevant head teacher for their feedback and therefore the decision is considered by a panel and not one person solely.

Proposed change 3

Page 4 - Service Premium to be added priority within the over-subscription criteria.

60.6 % agreed to this 24.7% did not agree and 14.8% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that it was not fair to give them priority especially in Reading. As this is set out in the School Admissions Code as a reason why child could get priority it was decided to add it into the policy.

Proposed change 4

Page 5 - To add into Category 2 where social/medical needs can be met by more than one school definition.

72.3 % agreed to this 10.6% did not agree and 17% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was the same as proposed change 2 above. It was decided to add it into the policy.

Proposed change 5

Page 5 - Change to sibling protection where a parent does not list all schools in the catchment area for the home address at the time of application and a place would have been offered at a catchment area school had it been listed, they forfeit the right to sibling protection.

58.5 % agreed to this 26.6% did not agree and 14.8% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was a mixture of those who were unclear with the wording of the question and those who felt it was not fair. As the majority of people agreed to this it was decided to add it into the policy

Proposed change 6

Page 5 - Change to sibling protection where a space is allocated as part of an in-year admission at a school listed second preference or lower, if a school closer to the child's home address was available to parents and was refused, parents forfeit the right to this sibling protection for future admissions. Parents will be informed at the time of allocation if this right has been forfeited.

52.13 % agreed to this 32.9% did not agree and 14.8% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was the same as the proposed change 5. As the majority of people agreed to this it was decided to add it into the policy

Proposed change 7

Page 6 to 8 - Updated home address definition.

77.6 % agreed to this 5.3% did not agree and 17% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was around the homeless and those in temporary housing. The update on the home address was recommended to the School Admissions Team by an Independent Appeals Panel during a Primary School Reception place appeal and therefore it was decided to update it in the policy in light of that advice.

Proposed change 8

Page 8 - Added split living arrangements.

77.6 % agreed to this 6.4% did not agree and 15.9% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that they felt this was not taking the child's best interests into account. As the majority of people agreed it was decided to add it to the policy.

Proposed change 9

Page 11 - To change the admission number (PAN) for The Ridgeway from 90 to 60.

70% agreed to this 11.70% did not agree and 18% did not answer the question. The feedback of those who did not agree was that we need to ensure that there are enough school places in Reading for all children.

The proposal to consult to decrease the PAN at the Ridgeway was made due to the fact a new two-form entry primary school in Green Park Village was due to open in 2019/2020, increasing the sufficiency in the area. The Academy Trust that was due to open the school - together with the DFE - decided to delay the opening of the school. The new opening date is yet to be confirmed but it is hoped it will be 2020.

Reading School Place Planning shows that for 2020/2021 in the south planning area we will have a surplus of 37 places but this does not taking into account housing developments in the area. The Green Park development will be a substantial housing development. 146 homes have already been completed, with families moving into them, and a further 70 homes are due to complete in April 2019. 130 more are planned for completion in 2020 and another 137 homes are planned for 2021. This will total 346 new homes on the site.

Once the site is completely finished there will be a total of 1029 homes, made up of a mixture of flats and houses. The 346 homes are due to yield between 116 and 255 children, some of whom will need a reception place. The nearest primary school to Green Park, Whitley Park Primary, is over 1.2 miles away and Ridgeway Primary School is over 2 miles away. Without the opening of the Green Park School extra places will be needed in the south planning area. Consequently, the intention is not to reduce the PAN at the Ridgeway until we know when the new Green Park School will open.

4.4 Relevant Area

The Relevant area outlines the organisations that must be consulted by all schools in Reading when consulting on admissions policies. No amendments have been made to this.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The admission schemes contribute to the aims of establishing Reading as a Learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit and to promote equality and social inclusion.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 *An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this decision.*

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Compliance with School Admissions Code (2014)

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None.