

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children & Enterprise

**PORTFOLIO:** Children, Young People and Families

**SUBJECT:** School Admission Arrangements 2014

**WARDS:** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report fulfils the Local Authority's statutory requirement to consult upon and then determine Halton's School Admissions Policy for Local Authority maintained community and voluntary controlled schools, and co-ordinated admission schemes for all primary and secondary schools, for the September 2014 intake.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approves the attached School Admissions Policy, Admission Arrangements and co-ordinated schemes for admission to primary and secondary schools for the 2014/15 academic year, which remain unchanged from the arrangements agreed by the Board for 2013/14.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 In January 2013 Halton Local Authority issued a statutorily required consultation paper on the proposed admission arrangements and co-ordinated admission schemes for the September 2014 intake (attached as Appendix 1). Details of the consultation were widely published and made available on the Council's website. The proposed arrangements were also issued via the Strategic Director's Spring Term 2013 Report to Governors, and sent to the four Diocesan Authorities responsible for voluntary aided schools in Halton, and to neighbouring authorities.

3.2 The consultation ran from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2013 until 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and proposed no changes to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to Local Authority maintained community and voluntary controlled primary schools, and no change to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to Local Authority maintained community secondary schools. Three responses to the consultation were received: One from The Bankfield supporting the arrangements, one from Wade Deacon High School requesting alternative admissions criteria be implemented, and one from Oakfield Primary School requesting an increase in their Published Admission Number from 40 to 45. The responses are attached as Appendix 3. The request from Wade Deacon was that the zoning arrangements for Widnes High

Schools (The Bankfield and Wade Deacon) be disbanded and replaced with the previously operated oversubscription criteria of criteria 1) Children in Public Care, Criteria 2) Siblings, Criteria 3) Distance.

- 3.3 Members will recall that the proposal to introduce zoning arrangements in Widnes arose from the extensive public consultation exercise undertaken by the Local Authority in regard to closing Fairfield High School and expanding Wade Deacon High School as part of the School Organisation process, thereby ensuring that those residents in the east of Widnes (previously served by Fairfield High School) did not have to pass two secondary schools to access educational provision in the west of Widnes (the zoning arrangements are attached as Appendix 2). The Local Authority would not wish to return to the previously operated system but the proposal by Wade Deacon is included for Members to consider.
- 3.4 The consultation advised that there would be no individual response to any submission made, but any responses submitted would be considered by the Council's Executive Board.
- 3.5 There are a number of points raised within the consultation response from Wade Deacon and the points raised are addressed below:
  - The concept of catchment zones does not go against the spirit of the School Admissions Code. Catchment zones are recognised within the Code as a fair and commonly used oversubscription criteria. When determining the zones, the Local Authority consulted widely upon the proposed arrangements and officers worked closely with elected members to ensure that the zones reflected the diversity of the community served by the schools.
  - The Local Authority sought confirmation from central government that operating catchment zones in Widnes and a different set of oversubscription criteria in Runcorn was permitted, and this was confirmed, providing that the admission authority consulted upon its proposals which Halton did extensively (and received commendation from the Department on its extensive consultation in this regard).
  - Parents across Halton have the opportunity to express up to three school preferences regardless of whether they live within or outside of a particular school's catchment zone. For clarification, parents/carers in any authority do not have the right to simply choose a school, what they do have is the choice to express a preference for a school, following which their preferences are assessed against the relevant criteria, and Halton's arrangements allow for this. The attached Co-ordinated Secondary Scheme confirms to parents that they are not guaranteed a place at the school within whose catchment

area they reside, and along with all other parents/carers in Halton they are required to complete a preference form which allows them to express up to three preferences.

- 3.6 With regard to the request from Oakfield Primary School to increase their Published Admission Number from 40 to 45, the Local Authority is the admission authority for this school and pupil numbers at the School do not indicate that an increase is required. The Local Authority will continue to monitor pupil numbers at the School and if an increase is required, this will be considered at that time.
- 3.7 The Local Authority as commissioner of school places must ensure that the admission arrangements are fair, clear and objective, and fully comply with all statutory requirements. The arrangements currently in operation and proposed for continuation for the 2014/15 academic year reflect those requirements.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Admissions Policy has been drawn up to maximize parental preference for Halton Local Authority maintained community and voluntary controlled schools, and responds to the parental representations made at the time of the initial School Organisation and Building Schools for the Future consultations. The oversubscription criteria contained within the Policy reflect the criteria which are considered good practice and acceptable by the Department for Education.
- 4.2 The continued use of catchment zones for Widnes secondary schools does not remove the right of parents/carers to express a preference for any school. Parents/carers must complete an application form regardless of which catchment zone they live in, which allows them 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 None.

#### **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 in the borough and 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 21<sup>st</sup> century provision is in place across both the primary and secondary sectors.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The admission arrangements and co-ordinated 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 Local Authority's School Organisation planning.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 The proposed admission arrangements reflect any requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## **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) as this method could be seen as arbitrary and random.

## **11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

11.1 The Policy applies for the September 2014 academic intake.

## **12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
<b>School Admissions Code</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>School Standards &amp; Framework Act 1998</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>Education Act 2002</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>
<b>Education &amp; Inspections Act 2006</b>	<b>Children &amp; Young People's Directorate</b>	<b>Martin West</b>