

13 PUPIL ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS

Report By: School Services Manager

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To consider the preparations for implementing the new, co-ordinated admissions arrangements for high schools for admissions in September 2004.

Financial Implications

2. The costs involved in meeting the new requirements have been provided for within the approved budget for Education.

Report

Background

3. The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, as amended by The Education Act 2002, requires all Admissions Authorities (including LEAs) to review their admissions policies by consulting all other admission authorities and surrounding LEAs. The Council then has to seek the views of a new statutory body known as the Local Admissions Forum, and have regard to any relevant advice that the Forum give. It is an **annual** requirement.
4. The statutory Local Admissions Forum comprises all the main groups with an interest in admissions – the Council, the two diocesan education authorities, headteachers of primary and secondary schools, school governors, parent governors and community groups. The Forum's role is to review the policies, practices and procedures relating to pupil admissions to maintained schools in Herefordshire. The statutory instrument under which the Forum operates provides for all interested groups to be represented so that they can each examine (and challenge) all the arrangements openly, to bring about greater consistency and fairness for parents and schools. The expectation is that their decisions will be on the basis of consensus. The Forum's recommendations are not legally binding on admissions authorities, but they cannot be lightly disregarded. There are procedures for appeal to the National Adjudicator in the event of sustained disagreement.
5. In accordance with the legal requirements, the Council has engaged in all the necessary consultations in the period since October 2002, and has approved the **general criteria for admission of pupils** to community high schools in September 2004, as recommended by the Local Admissions Forum (**see Appendix 1**).

For further information on the subject of this report is available from
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6. Under the Education Act 2002, local education authorities will also be required to co-ordinate admissions to maintained schools within their area, on the basis of arrangements agreed through the Admissions Forum and approved by the Secretary of State. The co-ordination duty must apply to high schools for admissions from September 2005, but it can alternatively be introduced one year earlier, which a number of other LEAs have done, including Shropshire.
7. Co-ordination provides strong advantages for the parents, including the opportunity to express three preferences without losing the priority for their local school. Herefordshire is well placed to meet the new requirements because it already has successful co-ordination, and has only 14 high schools in total, half of which can be expected to recruit largely from their own catchment areas.
6. After consultation with all high schools in the County, including detailed discussions with the governing bodies of the two voluntary aided high schools, the Local Admissions Forum supported the conclusion that the new co-ordinated arrangements should be introduced for admissions for the school year beginning September 2004, and the Cabinet accepted that recommendation in April.

Progress with Implementation

Booklet of Information for Parents

7. All the new arrangements have been set out in the annual information to be provided to parents whose children are due to start school or transfer between schools in the school year beginning September 2004. The Booklet of Information, which runs to more than 200 pages, was approved by the Local Admissions Forum on 30th June, and is now being printed. A copy of the draft Booklet was included with the Local Admissions Forum papers, and is available in the Members' Room or from the Education Directorate.

Leaflet for Parents

8. A short leaflet, containing the key messages for parents, has also been agreed by the Forum. A copy, as amended at the Forum meeting, is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Circulation of Information and Application Forms for Parents

9. Early in September 2003, parents of children in the new Year 6 will be sent the Booklet of Information, the Leaflet and an application form, with a covering letter that identifies the catchment area high school for where they live. The information will be sent to parents via Herefordshire primary schools. It will also be available from high schools, the Pupil Admissions Service, Info in Herefordshire, and the Council's Education Website. Parents are asked to return their application to the school by 7th November, via the school or direct to the School Admissions Service.

The Co-ordination Scheme for 3-preferences

10. Following the Cabinet's outline approval of the new arrangements, a detailed co-ordination scheme for Herefordshire has been submitted to and approved by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The scheme, which is underpinned by agreements reached with neighbouring LEAs and voluntary aided schools, is set out at **Appendix 3**. The information for parents, including the application form, have been

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adapted to take account of the new provision for parents to be able to express and explain their preferences for up to 3 high schools.

Allocating places after applications have been received

11. The new co-ordinated system for 3-preferences adds considerably to the complexity of the allocation process after the applications have been received in November. The required steps in the allocation process are set out in paragraph 10 of the information leaflet at Appendix 2. In order to handle the work effectively, new software has been installed and tested during the last 2 months. The testing suggests that analysis of 3-preferences for each parent can be dealt with speedily and accurately, so that all the other work required can be handled.
12. The testing indicates that the 3-preferences from 2,000 application forms for high schools could be analysed and sorted quickly and accurately into priority listings for each of the 14 schools. There should, therefore, be ample time for all the other tasks required to be completed in the period between the closing date for applications of 7th November 2003 and the national 'offer date' of 1st March 2004, including with late applications received between 7th November and 1st March. Late applications will be accepted for the initial analysis **if** there are good reasons for delay.

Dealing with late applications and appeals

13. Once initial offers have been made to parents, it will be necessary to deal with quickly with late applications as they come in on 1st March 2004. It will also be necessary to arrange appeals for parents who have not received an offer for any of their 3-preferences (likely to be a small number) or wish to appeal for a 1st of 2nd preference that could not be met.
14. There is no experience to date to indicate the proportion of parents who will appeal for a higher preference if their first or second preference cannot be granted. It seems likely, however, that the total number of appeals will be greater under the new arrangements. The Pupil Admissions Section has anticipated that possibility by increasing the number of staff capable of presenting information to the independent appeal panel. The County Secretary and Solicitor is also taking action to secure a higher level of recruitment to the panel's membership, so that the frequency with which appeals can be heard can be improved.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee identify any area of preparation that needs to be improved in the arrangements for high school admissions in September 2004.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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