

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee

The Cabinet

Date of Committee

8 September 2005

Report Title

Review of School Admission Arrangements

Summary

This paper sets out the changes which have taken place in the arrangements for school admissions and the impact of those changes, and proposes changes for the future in light of the experience of the first year of operation.

For further information please contact:

Mark Gore
Assistant County Education Officer (Strategy)
Tel: 01926 412887
markgore@warwickshire.gov.uk

Nick Williams
Education Officer (Pupil and Student Services)
Tel: 01926 412956
nickwilliams@warwickshire.gov.uk

Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? [please identify relevant plan/budget provision]

No

Background papers

None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members
- Cabinet Member Cllr John Burton
- Chief Executive
- Legal Jane Pollard / Richard Freeth – “fine”

- Finance David Clarke, County Treasurer – “fine”
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals School Admissions Forum 6th July 2005

FINAL DECISION **YES**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

The Cabinet – 8 September 2005

Review of School Admission Arrangements

Report of the County Education Officer

Recommendation:

That Cabinet consider and comment on the review of school admission arrangements for 2005.

1. Background

- 1.1 In order to comply with the requirements of the Admissions Code of Practice, the LEA has introduced new arrangements for admissions to primary and secondary schools in September 2005.
- 1.2 This paper sets out the changes which have taken place in the arrangements, the impact of those changes to the process for admissions, and proposes changes for the future in light of the experience of the first year of operation.

2. Admission to secondary school – Role of LEAs

- 2.1 LEAs are required to act as 'clearing houses' for all schools in their area including Aided and Foundation schools which are their own admission authorities.
- 2.2 With effect from September 2005 LEAs are required to operate a published inter-LEA scheme.
- 2.3 Under this scheme, parents are asked to submit a preference form, allowing at least three preferences, to their home LEA. Parents may give reasons for their preferences and rank them in order of preference. Liaison then takes place with the LEA in whose area the preferred school is situated. That LEA will consider the request against the published admission policy of the school (for Community and Controlled schools) or forward to Aided and Foundation schools for them to apply their own admission criteria. The LEA will then advise the home LEA if a place can be offered.

- 2.4 The co-ordinated scheme requires electronic transfer of information between LEAs in accordance with specifications laid down by the DfES.
- 2.5 The scheme sets down a 'national offer day' of 1st March for all children transferring from primary to secondary school to receive the offer of a place. On that date the home LEA sends out the offer letter to the parent.

3. Admission to primary schools – Role of LEAs

- 3.1 LEAs are obliged to operate a co-ordinated scheme within their own authority from September 2006. Originally this was to be a requirement from 2005 but the DfES relaxed the date twelve months ago. Warwickshire carried out a pilot scheme in South Warwickshire in 2004; thereafter Members agreed that a countywide scheme would be introduced in 2005.
- 3.2 As with secondary schools, parents complete a preference form enabling them to set out the preferred schools for their child. The LEA then considers which preference can be met using the published admission arrangements for the schools concerned.
- 3.3 There is no set national offer date as with secondary schools. Places should be offered on a date specified in the LEA's published scheme.

4. Admission to secondary schools – Warwickshire 2005

- 4.1 Prior to the start of the inter-LEA co-ordinated process, meetings were held with neighbouring authorities. This enabled some common agreement regarding dates of transfer of information, last date for exchange, etc. Some issues, including closing date for applications, were not assimilated but each LEA agreed to accept applications made by the closing date of their home authority.
- 4.2 The DfES set requirements for the electronic transfer of information but each LEA operated their own system. These included Capita, Arete and various 'in house' systems. Unfortunately this caused major problems at the time when information was due to be transferred. LEAs using Capita were unable to transfer information for much of the period between November and February as had previously been arranged.
- 4.3 Although in Warwickshire we were able to send information to all neighbouring LEAs, Coventry, Birmingham, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Northamptonshire were unable to send information out. Much of the detail of parental requests was therefore dealt with by telephone, reducing written records and taking up valuable staff time.
- 4.4 Solihull LEA sent out their offers on Friday, 25th February. This caused some difficulty as parents living in Solihull who had been unsuccessful in obtaining

places in Warwickshire telephoned the Admissions Service on Monday, the 28th when staff were preparing over 6,000 letters to be issued the next day.

- 4.5 Places were offered on 1st March to all Warwickshire residents. As of the end of July very few children did not have a place (having declined the place offered, considering independent options, etc.).
- 4.6 In September 2005, around 6,000 pupils were allocated places in Year 7 in Warwickshire secondary schools.
- 4.7 There have been 269 appeals for places in Year 7 at Warwickshire secondary schools (Community, Foundation and Aided). A list of the schools and the number of appeals for each is included at **Appendix A**.

5. Admission to primary school – Warwickshire 2005

- 5.1 The introduction of a centralised process for primary admissions was a significant change to past practice whereby parents applied direct to schools: the schools, following advice from the LEA, considered applications against the published admission criteria and offered places at their school.
- 5.2 The new arrangements introduced a system similar to that used for secondary admissions with an offer date in Warwickshire of 18th February.
- 5.3 In order to publicise the new arrangements the following actions were carried out:
 - Press release in local newspapers and free newspapers
 - Item on local radio in North and East Warwickshire
 - Pre-admission lists requested from schools in May/June 2004
 - Posters sent to infant and primary schools and nurseries
 - Advertisements in Health Visitors Newsletter
 - Advertisement in Early Years Newsletter.
- 5.4 While many parents received the information sent, or became aware of the changed arrangements, not all did. Some pre-school establishments did not appear to receive information sent and, in some parts of the County, initial response from parents was lower than anticipated.
- 5.5 The published arrangements set a return date of 22nd October and not all parents met this. Because many schools were not oversubscribed this was not a problem in most areas. However, in around 20 cases this resulted in children living in the priority area of a school not being offered a place there. This caused considerable distress to those families and great concern to the schools.
- 5.6 Responses to the new arrangements from schools have been mixed. Some schools were disappointed with what they perceived to be lack of information from the Admissions Service; they felt that the information was not user-friendly

and that the timetable gave insufficient time to parents. The deadline, and impact of holding to it, caused considerable concern. Many schools were, however, supportive of the arrangements which took away part of the administrative burden from them.

- 5.7 It should be noted that some schools gave little publicity to the new arrangements. A particular problem was the late applications received by parents with children already attending a school when no item seemed to have been included in newsletters reminding parents of the need to apply, as the Authority had requested.
- 5.8 With regard to the children within a school's priority area who did not obtain a place the number affected is now less than five. Children have been offered places either from the waiting list or through appeal.
- 5.9 Offers were made on 18th February which gave only six working days for parents to respond before secondary school offers were made. This caused some delay in dealing with queries regarding primary school admissions.
- 5.10 The primary admissions process involved 7,600 children entering reception or Year 3.
- 5.11 There have been 84 appeals during the summer term for children whose parents required places in Reception or Year 3 (where a child is transferring from infant to junior school). A list of schools and the number of appeals held is included at Appendix A.

6. Proposed Actions for September 2006

- 6.1 Having operated an inter-LEA arrangement for secondary schools and a countywide centralised process for primary schools, officers have carried out a review of processes. In addition a survey has been sent to 550 parents, 174 of whom have responded. Comments from the survey are mainly positive.
- 6.2 In order to address some of the issues experienced the following changes are to be introduced:
 - (1) The offer date for primary schools to be earlier to allow parental responses to be dealt with before secondary school offers are made. In 2006 places will be offered for primary schools on 3rd February and for secondary schools on 1st March. This will enable more time to deal with parental queries.
 - (2) Primary headteachers have been asked to submit information about children who have expressed an interest at their school for 2006. They have also been asked to include items in parents' newsletters and to liaise with on-site nurseries/pre-schools to assist in publicising the centralised process.

- (3) Officers to meet with headteachers as appropriate to seek ideas as to how the system may work more efficiently.
- (4) Officers are considering attending secondary school open evenings (with the agreement of the school) to respond to parental enquiries.
- (5) Officers to liaise with neighbouring LEAs to review operation of co-ordinated scheme and address problems which arose.
- (6) Concerns to be raised with the DfES regarding specifications for electronic transfer of information.

7. Admissions Forum

- 7.1 Members of the Admissions Forum have considered this information at their meeting on 6th July.
- 7.2 One concern raised was that parents who registered direct with the County Council missed out on personal contact with the schools. Parents should be advised to register an interest with any number of schools, and then having visited the schools, state their preferences.
- 7.3 It was acknowledged that there were some parents who had not registered their children at any school. The need to publicise and promote the County Council's central waiting list, through the schools, was highlighted.

8. Recommendation

Members are asked to consider and comment on this report.

ERIC WOOD
County Education Officer

22 Northgate Street
Warwick

24th August 2005

Summer Term Appeals

Appeals heard between 27.04.05 and 12.08.05

Reception, Year 3 and Year 7 transfer

School	Year	Amount	In	Out
Alcester Grammar	7	5	0	5
Alderman Smith	7	8	4	4
Ashlawn	7	4	1	3
Ashlawn Grammar	7	1	0	1
Avon Valley	7	25	21	4
Bishops Itchington Primary	R	1	0	1
Bridge Town Primary	3	1	1	0
Burton Green C of E Primary	R	3	2	1
Cawston Grange Primary	3	2	2	0
Claverdon Primary	R	4	2	2
Clifton-upon-Dunsmore C of E Primary	R	7	3	4
Coleshill	7	25	7	18
Coughton C of E Primary	R	2	0	2
Etone	7	47	9	38
Ettington C of E Primary	R	2	1	1
Higham Lane	7	25	12	13
Kenilworth	7	11	6	5
King Edward VI	7	5	2	3
Lawrence Sheriff	7	14	12	2
Mappleborough Green C of E Primary	R	6	0	6
Michael Drayton Junior	3	5	3	2
Myton	7	36	4	32
Newbold & Tredington C of E Primary	R	1	1	0
Newbold Riverside Primary	R	1	0	1
Nicholas Chamberlaine	7	10	7	3
Northlands Primary	R	4	0	4
Paddox Primary	R	4	0	4
Polesworth High	7	28	24	4
Race Leys Junior	3	10	5	5
Stratford Girls' Grammar	7	4	1	3
Shustoke C of E Primary	3	1	1	0
St. James C of E Junior	3	4	2	2
St. Margaret's C of E Junior	3	9	3	6
St. Matthew's Bloxam C of E Primary	R	2	1	1
St. Oswald's C of E Primary	R	4	1	3
St. Oswald's C of E Primary	3	1	1	0
Stratford High	7	21	9	12
Stratford Primary	R	4	0	4
Studley Community Infant	R	3	2	1

School	Year	Amount	In	Out
Warton Nethersole's C of E Primary	R	1	1	0
Welford-on-Avon Primary	R	1	0	1
Wellesbourne C of E Primary	R	1	1	0
TOTAL		353	152	201

Total sessions – 55

Day = 25
Half day = 4
Evening = 26

Other Appeals – summer term

Casual appeals heard during the same period above = 201

TOTAL APPEALS HEARD – 554