

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee

The Cabinet

Date of Committee

6th October 2005

Report Title

**Admissions to Stratford Grammar
Schools**

Summary

The Governing bodies of the two grammar schools in Stratford have requested that the admissions process for the schools be reviewed in light of two years experience of following the arrangements put in place by the Schools Adjudicator. This report sets out the views of the governors and a suggested way forward.

*For further information
please contact:*

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

Nick Williams
Education Officer (Pupil &
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

Cabinet reports 26-06-03, 11-07-03, 28-08-03, 08-01-04, 11-03-04 and 03-06-04

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members

Cllr Richard Hyde, Stratford South – *"We should consult on the proposed changes, which I consider have a good deal of merit."*
Cllr Mike Perry, Stratford South

Cabinet Member

Cllr John Burton – *"Agreed"*
Cllr Izzi Seccombe – *"Approved for Cabinet"*
Cllr Peter Fowler

- Chief Executive
- Legal Jane Pollard / Richard Freeth
- Finance David Clarke, County Treasurer
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

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 – 6th October 2005

Admissions to Stratford Grammar Schools

Report of the County Education Officer

Recommendation:

- (1) That the proposed changes to the arrangements for admissions to the Stratford Grammar Schools in paragraph 3.1 (i and ii) of the report be agreed and that the proposal in 3.1 (iii) be included in the Authority's consultation process for admissions in September 2007, and that officers enter into discussions with the Governors of King Edward VI School to ensure the same consultation takes place.
- (2) That the County Education Officer is / is not authorised to consult on proposals for the changes to these arrangements proposed by the Governors of Stratford Girls Grammar School in paragraph 3.3 of the report and ask the Governors of King Edward VI School to consult on similar arrangements.

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the re-assessment of school capacities and a decision by the Adjudicator in 2003 the capacity of Stratford Girls Grammar School and King Edward VI School were increased from 60 to 75. The Adjudicator's decision was binding for entry in 2004 and has been followed since by the Admission Authority for the schools, (Warwickshire County Council for Stratford Girls Grammar School and the Governing Body for King Edward VI School).
- 1.2 The Adjudicator determined that the admission number for both schools should be 75 and made changes to the way the places were to be allocated to seek to ensure that the standard for admission to the grammar schools did not fall below the standard in previous years. This means that the schools may not necessarily fill to 75 unless there are sufficient applicants of the requisite standard.
- 1.3 Officers were of the view that there was no basis for legal challenge to the Adjudicator's decision. The Cabinet asked the Chief Executive to review this advice and authorised him to decide whether any action should be taken. Following that review, he confirmed the view of officers that there was no basis for a successful challenge to the Adjudicator's decision.
- 1.4 Other local headteachers raised concerns with the Adjudicator and, in discussion with officers in relation to the current proposals, expressed great

concern about any increase in admissions to the grammar schools and the potential effect on the ethos of their own schools of losing even a small number of more able pupils.

- 1.5 In reaching his decision the Adjudicator sought to balance those concerns with the principle that where schools have places they should be filled to meet parental preference, as long as there were sufficient pupils of the requisite standard.
- 1.6 Members will be aware that, as applications stand at present, the admission number for the Girls' Grammar School must be the same as for the boys' school for equal opportunities reasons.
- 1.7 In his decision, the Adjudicator sought to maintain the standard for admission to the grammar schools by fixing the 'automatic score' for entry by reference to the average score over the last two years, and by similarly limiting the number of offers which could be made in the 'second round' (after initial refusals) to fill up any available places.
- 1.8 The effect of the decision is that:
 - 1.8.1 75 places are offered at each of the two schools.
 - 1.8.2 The test score for automatic qualification for places is set at a level no lower than the average automatic test scores in the verbal reasoning tests which automatically qualified pupils for admission in 2002 and 2003, i.e. 260.
 - 1.8.3 There is a limit on the number of boys and girls scoring below the automatic standard who could be offered selective places. The Adjudicator used the average number in 2002 and 2003, which is 22, as a maximum number of places offered to boys and girls scoring below the automatic standard. The Adjudicator noted that this could mean that the two grammar schools do not fill to their admission number.
- 1.9 The system in place prior to the judgement of the Adjudicator fixed the automatic score for entry in order to fill all the available places, and offered more places than there were available in the certain knowledge that not all of them would be taken up as parents also applied for places in other areas and sometimes in the independent sector. Places were then offered at both schools from a waiting list of pupils agreed by a Committee of Reference until the admission number was reached. This system had the advantage of filling places earlier in the process, thus giving more parents and pupils an earlier decision and avoiding to a greater extent the situation of pupils being offered places in one school and then subsequently being offered a place at a grammar school.
- 1.10 In line with the Adjudicator's decision the process of offering more places than were available has been discontinued. The introduction of a co-ordinated admissions system has meant that Authorities have a clearer knowledge of

parental preferences across other Authorities although the loss of pupils to the independent sector is still a factor.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 Places have been offered using the process set by the Adjudicator's decision for admissions in 2004 and 2005.
- 2.2 The impact of the arrangements for the two grammar schools is set out below:

School	2004 Admissions	2005 Admissions
Stratford Girls Grammar	71	70
King Edward VI	75	70

- 2.3 The grammar schools serve the whole of South Warwickshire. Places at High Schools in Stratford town are limited. Stratford High School is oversubscribed in Years 7, 9, 10 and 11 with housing development ongoing. Other high schools in Alcester, Henley, Kineton and Studley have vacancies.
- 2.4 The governing bodies of both Stratford Girls Grammar School and King Edward VI School have expressed their concern about the current position. They are concerned that holding vacancies impacts on their budget and their ability to plan and manage staffing and accommodation. The governors also feel that the current arrangements deprive some children of a grammar school place as the schools have vacancies which could be taken up.

3. Governing Bodies' proposals for Change

- 3.1 The governors have discussed their concerns with officers and have asked that Members consider the following issues regarding admissions to the two grammar schools.
- (i) Governors have suggested that parents who also seek a place at an independent school should be asked to advise the Authority immediately they make a final choice to pursue that option. Children whose parents have taken this decision would not then receive an offer of a grammar school place although they would be advised of their child's performance in the 11+ test. This would reduce the number of places to be re-offered. While the Authority understands the reasons for this suggestion it is doubtful that it is legally or practically possible. The legal issue is that the Authority are under a statutory duty to make arrangements for parents to express a preference for the school of their choice. Parents could advise that they have a place at an independent school and no longer wish to be considered for Stratford Girls Grammar School but there is no obligation for them to do so and there is no right for the Authority to withdraw their application just because they are aware that an Independent School place has been offered and accepted. It is solely a right for parents and to interfere with that right may well be seen as cutting across parental preference. It is proposed however to remind parents who also seek a

place at an independent school to advise the Authority if they have taken up a place elsewhere, as soon as possible.

- (ii) Governors feel that there is a perception among parents that naming a grammar school as first preference may discriminate against their child obtaining a place at their preferred high school if they are unsuccessful in obtaining a grammar school place. This is clearly not the case in Community and Controlled Schools as Warwickshire offers an 'equal preference' system. Officers agreed when meeting with the Governors that they would review the wording of documents and seek to ensure that parents are advised clearly of the admissions process and reassured that making a preference for a grammar school has no impact upon any preference for a non selective school. It should be noted that currently only St Benedicts Catholic School, Alcester in the southern area operate a first preference system.
- (iii) The governors ask that 75 places be offered at the outset. Currently those qualifying automatically receive an offer on 1st March. Vacancies are then offered in a second round to 'out of area' qualifiers and those 'borderline' candidates to a maximum of 22. Officers accept that the current arrangement, not offering 75 places in the first instance, causes considerable movement after the initial offers: pupils with places at a high school are then contacted with an alternative placement setting off a further chain of offers from reserve lists. However by limiting the number of places offered initially, vacancies offered at the second round go first to pupils living outside the priority circle and then those in the 'borderline' category of non-qualifiers. The impact of this is a higher number of non-Warwickshire pupils obtaining a place at the schools. Offering 75 places initially would cause less disruption, and, if limited to a maximum of 22 places for those falling below the automatic standard, would not be contrary to the arrangements put in place following the Adjudicator's decision. Adopting this approach would seem to provide better arrangements for parents and pupils within the constraints of the Adjudicator's decision.

3.2 Implementing those suggestions would improve the operation of the arrangements for selection for parents and the schools and go some way to meeting the concerns of the Governors, and would not go against the letter or spirit of the Adjudicator's judgement. It is recommended that these proposed administrative changes be agreed, subject to comments as part of the annual consultation on admissions arrangements.

3.3 The Governors made three further proposals which would impact on the arrangements put in place by the Adjudicator as follows:

- (iv) The governors feel that it is unrealistic to hold the automatic pass mark as a constant score. Previously the automatic score was adjusted to ensure that the schools offered all places; the current arrangements are working against this. The governors ask that the ability to adjust the automatic score by one or two marks, as appropriate for the number of applicants, be reinstated to maintain the standards of the grammar schools and

reduce pressure on the non-selective schools while recognising the need to maintain the ethos of the High Schools.

- (v) The governors are concerned that the Adjudicator has placed a numerical limit on the number of pupils admitted at the second round of offers. They feel that the limit of 22 is inappropriate as this was based on an overall admission number of 60. The governors consider that, as the admission number for both schools is now 75, the number of pupils admitted at the second round should be proportionately higher, eg.27.
- (vi) The governors have asked that the Authority writes to parents of 'near miss' candidates advising them of their child's performance in the 11+ test and of their right of appeal.

3.4 To implement these proposals would change the arrangements put in place by the Adjudicator and the balance he sought to strike between meeting parental preference and setting a standard for admissions to the grammar schools in order not to affect adversely the high schools. They would therefore need to be the subject of consultation and are unlikely to find favour with the high schools. Members are asked therefore to consider if they wish to initiate consultation on these proposed changes and to ask the Governors of King Edward VI School to consult on similar arrangements. Members may wish to wait until the effect of the changes proposed in 3.1 are evaluated.

4. Summary

- 4.1 The Cabinet are asked:
- (a) to agree the administrative changes outlined in Paragraph 3.1 of the report and that the proposal in 3.1 (iii) be included in the Authority's consultation process for admissions in September 2007.
 - (b) to consider if they wish to initiate consultation on the changes by the Governors of Stratford Girls Grammar School outlined in paragraph 3.3 and to ask the Governors of King Edward VI School to consult on similar arrangements for admissions in September 2007.

ERIC WOOD
County Education Officer

22 Northgate Street
Warwick

22 September 2005