

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 113

Subject: School Admission Arrangements 2026-27

Date of meeting: Thursday, 5 December 2024

Report of: Cabinet Member for Finance and City Regeneration

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Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions (wards).

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 The Council Plan 2023 to 2027, a better Brighton & Hove for all, outlines a vision of a healthy city where people thrive, for a better future for children and young people.
- 1.2 This report details the proposed school admission arrangements for the academic year 2026-27 for the schools in the city where the council is the admission authority. This does not include academies, free schools or Church Aided Schools.
- 1.3 When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on these new arrangements. Cabinet will be asked to approve a consultation based on the proposals being suggested. A further report will be published in February 2025 seeking the determination of those arrangements for 2026-27. If required under the Constitution, Full Council will determine the arrangements by the end of February 2025.
- 1.4 Local Authorities must also set out schemes for coordinated admissions, including key dates in the admission process and the arrangements for consultation with own admission authority schools in the city and with other local authorities. They also establish the area (the "relevant area") within which the admission consultation should take place.
- 1.5 To inform the proposals the Council undertook an engagement exercise between 2 October 2024 and 23 October 2024 when three illustrative models of secondary school catchment areas were published. 4 public meetings were held attended by more than 400 people and over 2600 responses were received that have informed these proposals.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet agrees to make no changes to the Council's admission arrangements other than the proposed changes listed below.
- 2.2 Cabinet agrees to consult upon a change to the Published Admission number (PAN) of Rudyard Kipling Primary School from 30 pupils to 45 pupils.
- 2.3 Cabinet agrees to consult on making a change to the admission priorities for secondary schools to include a change in the application of a criteria for pupils with Free School Meals and the introduction of a criteria for pupils outside the catchment area. The proposed admission arrangements are detailed below and in Appendix 5.
- 2.4 Cabinet agrees to consult upon a change to the PAN of Longhill High School from 270 pupils to 210 pupils, Blatchington Mill School from 330 pupils to 300 pupils and Dorothy Stringer School from 330 pupils to 300 pupils. The proposed PANs are detailed below and in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 Cabinet agrees to consult on making changes to the catchment area of Longhill High School and the catchment area of Dorothy Stringer and Varndean schools. The proposed admission arrangements are detailed below and in Appendix 5.
- 2.6 Cabinet agrees to consult on increasing the number of preferences that families can make from three to four.
- 2.7 Cabinet agrees to consult on the "relevant area" remaining the same. The "relevant area" is the area which describes the geographical area of consultation that any school proposing a change to admission arrangements must use. This is currently defined as the area within the city boundary.
- 2.8 Cabinet agrees to make the changes to the wording of the admission arrangements for 2026/27 as advised by the Schools Adjudicator in recent written decisions, namely how a pupil's main address is determined if they live at more than one address, how parents apply for admission out of the usual year group and updated notes and the definition of the random allocation process. These changes will ensure the requirements of the School Admissions Code are met. Admission arrangements are detailed in Appendix 5.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Admission Authorities are required to determine their admission arrangements annually. Where changes are proposed, the admission authority must first publicly consult on those proposed arrangements. The School Admissions Code sets out those groups and individuals who must be consulted. These include parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen, other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions, all other

admission authorities such as governing bodies and any adjoining neighbouring Local Authorities.

- 3.2 Consultation and determination of admission arrangements takes place approximately 18 months in advance of the academic year to which they apply. For the academic year 2026-27 the consultation process must take place between 1 October 2024 and 31 January 2025 and last for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 3.3 It is proposed to start the consultation on 6 December 2024 and for it to run for 8 weeks, concluding on 31 January 2025.
- 3.4 Following the consultation the Council must determine its admission arrangements by 28 February 2025 to conform to the requirements of the School Admissions Code.
- 3.5 A further report is expected to be presented to Cabinet on 13 February 2025 detailing the response to the consultation and making recommendations about the admission arrangements for 2026-27. If required under the Constitution, Full Council are expected to determine the arrangements by the end of February 2025.
- 3.6 The relevant proposed papers for the 2026-27 admission year for the city of Brighton & Hove are attached as appendices 4 - 6 to this report.
- 3.7 The proposals outlined in this report should be considered alongside the School Organisation Strategy which outlines four strands of work to implement the Council's commitment to develop a system that:
 - provides families with a good choice of schools in the city that meets their child's needs,
 - delivers schools which are sustainable and able to thrive,
 - ensures risk (budget) to the Council is manageable and proportionate,
 - delivers children's outcomes which are good and improving especially for those at risk of disadvantage,
 - facilitates schools working together and with the Council in an effective partnership model
- 3.8 In delivering the School Organisation Strategy, the Council is providing support and challenge on how schools are spending their money and undertaking school improvement and the council is working with school leaders and governors to explore what type of collaborative system in the city could benefit our schools, including federations or similar structures. The Council is providing support and guidance around the way schools support SEND learners in school and, as this report outlines, we continue to keep under review the organisation of our schools including the number of places available and the way school places are allocated.
- 3.9 The Council undertook a pre-consultation engagement activity to help to inform the school admission arrangements proposal set out in this paper.

Three illustrative models were presented for comment and the Council outlined objectives including:

- A school system where all pupils get access to a great education
- Improve the education offer for disadvantaged pupils by reducing some schools' barriers to success.
- Use all available options to maintain a broad curriculum and holistic school experience for all pupils.

In addition, the proposals put forward were designed to include:

- Better equality of outcomes – results not driven by economic advantage.
- Deliver a 'comprehensive' offer from our city schools as a more mixed pupil intake creates better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- To deliver change whilst ensuring a genuine alliance of city schools that considers the 'city child' (where the education system takes responsibility for all children) and works in effective partnership.
- Maintaining the geographic spread of secondary schools in the city.

- 3.10 The responses to the engagement exercise have informed the changes that the Council are proposing to implement to address the original intentions. None of the illustrative models received overwhelming support. Option A had the potential to deny those living close to specific schools a place in that catchment area and did not deliver on the wider aspirations of the Council, including the introduction of greater equity in the number of schools within a catchment area. Option B received criticism for the potential to increase journeys to school and introducing the need to travel greater distance for children with additional needs. In addition, concern was expressed about how the use of random allocation as a tie-break could mean families living reasonably close to a school being allocated a school a much further distance away. Option C was seen as reducing the option of choice to those living in dual school catchment areas and bring a lower equalization of entitlement for families living across the city which was against the stated intention of providing more access.
- 3.11 As a result, the Council concluded that none of those illustrative models should be taken forward to a formal consultation. The feedback received during the engagement exercise contributed to the development of the proposal the Council is seeking approval to consult upon in this paper. The proposal avoids large catchment areas which could introduce significant levels of cross city journeys, recognises the practicality of proximity to a school site and approaches the issue of greater access with a proposed new admission priority.
- 3.12 The Council continues to propose a reduction in PAN of some schools because of the direct need to reflect the reduction on pupil numbers forecast in future years and thereby addressing one of the stated ambitions to maintain all the current ten school sites in the city.

- 3.13 It is proposed to address education disadvantage in one distinct area of the city by putting forward a change of catchment area. It is proposed that the BN2 5 north area above Manor Way and Manor Hill is moved to within the Dorothy Stringer & Varndean catchment area, moving from the Longhill catchment area. This proposed change seeks to address some of the systemic inequality that can be compounded by the boundaries of a school's catchment area.
- 3.14 To ensure the geographic spread of secondary schools and continued alignment of pupil numbers and places, it is proposed that the Kemptown area BN2 1 and BN2 5 (south) is moved to the Longhill High School area.
- 3.15 The proposal around catchment areas seeks to take advantage of the existing transport routes. Due to the location of the city's schools, the Whitehawk and Kemptown areas require pupils to use transport to travel to all three receiving schools. As such, in either the existing catchment model, or the proposed future model, it is unlikely that pupils in either area would be walking to school.
- 3.16 Introducing an open admission priority in the arrangements creates a potential opportunity for families to have greater access to a range of schools, than they would do previously. Whilst a choice of school can never be guaranteed, the introduction of a new priority increases the chances of a pupil being able to secure a school place other than their catchment area school. It is proposed that the mechanism within the arrangements to do this is by stating that the new admission priority 6 is for children living outside the school's catchment area that they are applying for but living within the catchment area for BACA, PACA, Patcham High School or Longhill High School. Thereby giving families who live in those catchment areas a greater likelihood of securing an alternative school, if that is what they prefer. This proposal directly addresses the perceived unfairness by the fact that some catchment areas include two schools whilst others include only one. As a result, it is seeking to give more pupils access to the education offer their families feels meets their needs and as a consequence, deliver a 'comprehensive' offer from our city schools as a more mixed pupil intake creates better outcomes as outlined in academic research.
- 3.17 To further facilitate these proposed changes, the Council is proposing to increase the number of preferences that families can state from three to four so that there is greater opportunity for families to consider utilising the benefits of the new open admission criterion and last years' introduction of a free school meals criteria, whilst not creating concern that families will need to compromise on how they use their preferences. The proposal also seeks to address the perceived advantage of those who live in a dual school catchment area. A pupil will still only receive one offer of a school place but the number of schools a family has potential access to through the admission process will increase. This increase in preference will apply to any primary or secondary phase applications from September 2026.

3.18 When proposing change to a city-wide system such as school admission the Council must balance the fairness to communities across the city whether they be in relation to protected characteristics, geographical or social factors. It is not possible to propose a change without it having an impact on a group and when proposals are put forward to advantage one or more groups so that will have a comparative impact on others. The Council's role is to be aware of that and to have considered the balance of those actions. There are legal responsibilities in relation to those with protected characteristics but there are also broad principles of fairness that apply morally to a public sector organisation. Whilst much has been outlined about the Council's intentions to support disadvantaged families it means other socio-economic groups will be affected. The proposals to bring about change in the admission criteria of the Council's secondary schools intend to make improvements for all pupils. There is academic evidence to support this approach and has influenced the Council's proposals and informed its consideration of the positive and negative impacts that any change would have on those families who are impacted by school admission arrangements.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

3.19 As outlined in the Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix 8), consideration is required as to how families of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are able to provide responses to the proposals being put forward. It is acknowledged that the engagement exercise did not provide sufficient bespoke opportunities to guarantee that views of these families were heard. The council appreciates the response from the city's Parent and Carer Council who operate as the representative group in the city.

3.20 The council must consider the needs of pupils with additional needs within their overall duties to operate a fair city-wide school system for all children and young people. The proposed changes to the admission arrangements seeks to maintain the existing catchment area boundaries with change only affecting areas where pupils might ordinarily/typically travel to school using transport. In addition, the introduction of an open admission priority, although not prioritised to those whose have additional needs, does provide the potential of families obtaining a place at a school that they feel would best meet their child's needs.

3.21 In addition, the council continues to operate a compelling medical or other exceptional reasons category for pupils with a specific need that can only be met by one school rather than any other. In addition, the appeal process includes the ability for the independent appeal panel to consider the individual needs of a child in relation to why a place at the school is being sought.

3.22 Maintaining broadly the same catchment area boundaries means that some of the unpredictability of transition can be navigated better than in the illustrative models shared in the engagement exercise. There is minimal change to boundaries and areas in close proximity to the school site remain in those existing catchment areas. It is accepted that the use of random

allocation as a tie-break and the absence of a cast iron guarantee that all catchment area pupils will be offered a place at a catchment area school(s) does mean some children could be affected by not making the transition they would assume to make and possibly without the friendship group and support network built up during their primary school years. All children will continue to be supported in their transition to secondary schools in the city.

- 3.23 At this time, the Council's home to school transport policy is not proposed to change although it will be reviewed in early 2025. The Council's own policy reflects and adheres to the national requirements in relation to the thresholds that need to be met before assistance is provided. The statutory duty on the Council is to make free-of-charge travel arrangements to facilitate the attendance at school of eligible children and young people. Journey times for secondary school pupils are outlined in national guidance as being a maximum of 75 minutes each way. Pupils will qualify for assistance either because of the distance (beyond 3 miles) that they need to travel, the safety of the route (as considered by the Council) or because they could not reasonably be expected to walk there because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, even if they were accompanied by their parent. It is not anticipated that these proposals will significantly increase the number of pupils eligible for assistance under the requirements of the Council's policy. This will be kept under review and the option to review eligibility under the terms of the Council's policy remains possible at a later date.
- 3.24 Even under the current system it is recognised that pupils with SEND may not be able to easily access after school clubs and activities. This is also a factor for those families whose children rely on public transport services including those in receipt of a bus pass because of the distance or suitability of the route to school. The Council continues to seek to explore every opportunity to review the scheduling and routing of public transport to facilitate access to all the opportunities schools offer, despite barriers such as disadvantage and journeys.
- 3.25 To ensure that the views of families with children and young people with SEND can be gathered during the planned consultation it is proposed to work with PaCC on delivering targeted engagement sessions such as coffee mornings or evening meetings for working parents. .
- 3.26 The Council continues to develop its vision of a Sense of Belonging with the city's schools supported by the recently developed Principles of Belonging and the emerging work around the Ordinarily Available Provision guide. It is hoped that whilst parents may have a preference for a particular school, in reality, the outlook, expertise and culture in each school means all pupils and their families can be assured that all the city's mainstream schools can meet the needs of their children and young people. However, it is noted that families' lived experience currently does not afford the levels of confidence that the council would want to exist between families, schools and the pupils themselves. Therefore, potentially reducing the need for some to consider Education, Health and Care Plans to formalise the support to be delivered to a pupil and for the need to nominate a particular mainstream school.

Education Health and Care Plans will continue to be important documents to support pupils who require additional specialised support and/or provision.

- 3.27 The Council has an Accessible City Strategy, covering all services, designed to ensure the city is one where people with access requirements, who live, work, and visit the city have independent, inclusive, and barrier-free access to services and facilities. One area of priority action within the strategy is to identify, review and co-produce key policies and embed inclusive design principles. This will include how the Council addresses inequalities in within processes such as school admission arrangements and access for children and young people with SEND. Accessibility principles must also be considered when undertaking consultations to actively remove barriers which may prevent families from being able to take part and have their views heard. The proposal presented in this report has been altered from the illustrative models were shared in the engagement exercise in part due to the concerns expressed about each option. The proposal looks to provide greater access and opportunity through a new open admission priority and recognises the impact of distance on those with additional needs by minimising the amount of change to the existing catchment boundaries.

Future Pupil Numbers

- 3.28 The council updates its forecast of how many secondary school places are needed after it receives details of the annual October school census. Should there be no change to the current catchment areas, the forecast number of pupils in each catchment area are outlined in Appendix 3. The anticipated numbers of pupils in the revised catchment areas proposed in this consultation are outlined in Appendix 4.
- 3.29 The total number of pupils in future years for the existing admission arrangement and the proposals outlined in the report are outlined below . Currently, with no changes to our arrangements, there are 2560 secondary school places and therefore expected to be approximately 281 unfilled Year 7 places across all schools in September 2026.
- 3.30 Should all the proposals be implemented there would be 2440 secondary school places and there would be 156 unfilled Year 7 places in September 2026. The forecast numbers are not direct comparable because of the methodology used for the calculations and the impact of rounding of numbers.

Existing catchment areas and unchanged PAN's

Year of Secondary entry	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Number of surplus places	281	329	356	444	535	550
% of surplus places	11%	13%	14%	17%	21%	21%

Proposed new catchment areas and reduced PAN's

Year of Secondary entry	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Number of surplus places	156	206	234	323	412	431

% of surplus places	6%	8%	10%	13%	17%	18%
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Rudyard Kipling Primary School

- 3.31 In October 2024, a decision was made by the Schools Adjudicator to vary the school's PAN for September 2025 from the 60 pupils to 30 pupils due to the school's financial position.
- 3.32 The Governing Board of Rudyard Kipling Primary School have requested that the Council increase its PAN from 30 to 45 pupils. The Governing Board believes that a PAN of 45 is most aligned to the number of children wishing to join their school and it will mean the school will continue to enable an equality of opportunity with children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The proposed increase in PAN will facilitate the school's return to a balanced budget position within the agreed timescales. The governing board are confident that the school can make a success of a vertically grouped class model and maintain strong educational outcomes for all children.

Secondary School Admission Priorities

- 3.33 The Council is proposing to further amend its admission priorities for community secondary schools following changes introduced in September 2025. To tackle the inequalities that the existing arrangements have created over a number of years and that now remain entrenched by virtue of the existing priority admission arrangements used by the city's schools.
- 3.34 Last year the Council wanted to promote the opportunity for those pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) to be given a greater possibility of a place at their preferred school. For admission in September 2025 the Council determined criteria which provided a new priority for FSM eligible children living in the designated catchment and other children eligible for FSM up to the city average.
- 3.35 The Council is proposing to amend the secondary school admission criterion 4 that applies to children eligible for free school meals who live within a school's catchment area. This proposal is to raise the limit of the number of pupils considered under this criterion to 30% of places available, rather than the existing proportion that stipulates the city average. The city average for the Year 6 cohort due to start school in September 2025 is 30%, so the expectation is that future cohorts will also increase to 30% due to transitional protection (this is where children who have been eligible for free school meals at any time in their primary phase education, remain eligible until their circumstances are reassessed at secondary school phase – after secondary schools have been allocated). The change in measurement is designed to simplify the arrangement and ensure families can understand the likely impact on their chances of obtaining a place at a particular school.
- 3.36 The wording used in September 2025 is also proposed to be altered for September 2026 to mitigate against the possibility that a school in a dual

catchment area could receive, under this priority, more than the city average of pupils living within catchment area and eligible for free school meals.

- 3.37 It is noted that Cardinal Newman Catholic School is currently consulting to introduce a free school meal priority within its own admission priorities from September 2026. The Council's modelling of pupil numbers under these proposals do not take account of the arrangements currently being consulted upon by Cardinal Newman Catholic School.
- 3.38 In addition, the Council wants to introduce a new admission criterion for community secondary schools that allows open admission of pupils living within one of the single school catchment areas when applying for another catchment area school in the city up to 20% of the total number of places available each year.
- 3.39 This open admission category is termed Marginal Ballot by the Sutton Trust in their report entitled [School Places: A Fair Choice](#) and was an option referenced during the engagement exercise in October 2024.
- 3.40 The School Admission Code outlines that admission criteria must be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. Admission authorities must ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs. Admission authorities may give priority in their oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the early years pupil premium, the pupil premium and also children eligible for the service premium. Admission authorities should clearly define in their arrangements the categories of eligible premium recipients to be prioritised. Last year the FSM criteria was considered by some to be a blunt measure, it is expected that the introduction of a new 'open admission' criterion, with a random allocation tie-break, will provide greater opportunity for families living in a single school catchment area to obtain a place at a preferred school outside of their catchment area. The Council has balanced the reasonableness of these proposals with the impact on other groups and considers that it is reasonable to put them forward to a public consultation.
- 3.41 It is possible that those schools with high numbers of FSM eligible pupils and have families living in their catchment area who make preferences for non-catchment school(s) may have a reduced number of pupils attending their school in the future. Another potential consequence, in the event of oversubscription, is catchment area pupils might miss out on a place at their catchment school should the places available to Free School Meal pupils and 'open admission' from outside the catchment area be filled. Modelling of the figures used to inform this proposal can be found in Appendix 4.
- 3.42 In total this would mean that in September 2026 up to 50% of the available places in the school's Year 7 cohort could be made up of pupils who have received a place because they are entitled to Free School Meals or because they live outside of the catchment area, in a catchment area of just one school. It is recognised that for some schools there may be concerns about

how the potential change on pupil characteristics will need to be managed in addition to a concern that fewer children will be placed at the school from their existing catchment area or that lower numbers will be allocated places. However, the overall pupil numbers in the city has been outlined in paragraph 3.49 and the Council expects there to be approximately 281 unfilled spaces in September 2026.

3.43 The Council's modelling of the implementation of this proposed change is outlined in the table below. The Council has calculated the number of pupils in the catchment area requiring a school place, identified the number of places available to those living outside the catchment area using priority 5 (FSM) and then the number of places available using the open admission priority 6. In some instances there will not be places available under the categories due to the current profile of the pupils in the catchment area. Further details of the calculations are available in Appendix 4.

3.44 As under the current arrangements, it is possible that a pupil may not receive a place in a catchment area school. As it is subject to the pattern of preferences made across the city. The introduction of new priorities does not reduce the likelihood of this happening. It is most likely going to increase the potential of this happening in certain areas of the city over the coming years. The forecast data is given below.

September 2026	No. pupils in catchment area requiring a catchment area school	No. FSM places available for out of catchment pupils	No. of open admission places available	No. of pupils unable to be placed in catchment area schools(s)
PACA	221	0	0	5
Hove Pk & Blatch Mill	434	7	96	57
DS & Varndean	624	0	120	125
Longhill	175	0	42	0
Patcham	205	19	45	44
BACA	129	0	0	0

3.45 The introduction of new arrangements requires the council to make some assumptions to inform its modelling and these include:

- There is no dropout rate (e.g. moving on to private school) for FSM pupils (difference between primary and secondary uptake)
- The same % of FSM pupils from each catchment area attend CNCS & Kings as non-FSM pupils.
- That in-catchment area pupils in Patcham, Dorothy Stringer & Varndean and Blatchington Mill & Hove Park areas who are eligible for FSM want to attend one of their catchment area schools.

- FSM eligible pupils not offered under the FSM priority will still have opportunity to be allocated under “in” or “out” of catchment area criteria.

3.46 The Council is committed to work with all schools to better understand the allocation of pupils leading up to September 2026 and to work collectively to ensure staff are aware and skilled to meet the needs of what may be a changing profile of pupils.

Changes to Published Admission Numbers

3.47 It is proposed to reduce the Published Admission Number of Longhill High School, Dorothy Stringer School and Blatchington Mill School by a total of 120 places. This would be 60 places at Longhill, and 30 each at the other two schools.

3.48 Under the proposed model, the forecast number of places required for Year 7 entry in September 2026 is 2279. There are currently 2560 places available meaning 281 unfilled places. A reduction in PAN of 120 places would mean only 161 unfilled places in the city which is 6.6% of the amended total number of places (2440) proposed.

3.49 Schools are funded by the government, not the Council. The funding is largely provided on a per-pupil basis and nearly all of it covers staffing costs. If secondary schools don't have enough pupils attending or suffer from fluctuating numbers, they may not be able to operate in a financially efficient way or be able to offer a wide and balanced curriculum.

3.50 There is an additional impact of unfilled places on disadvantaged pupils; the largest percentage of these pupils attend the schools with the lowest pupil numbers and provides these schools with the greatest challenge to support the attainment of all pupils whilst offering a broad curriculum. If the number of surplus places in the city is not addressed some secondary schools could see fewer and fewer pupils admitted and therefore affecting their long-term financial viability.

3.51 Details of the proposed PAN changes can be found in Appendix 1.

Catchment Area Changes

3.52 It is proposed to adjust the boundaries of the Longhill High School and Dorothy Stringer and Varndean dual catchment areas to take effect from September 2026.

3.53 The change in catchment area boundaries seeks to both balance the number of pupils requiring school places with the proposed PANs outlined in 3.13 as well as seeking to address the profile of the catchment area from September 2026.

3.54 As outlined in the engagement exercise, the Council will commit to maintaining a sibling link for families who are affected by the proposed

changes in catchment area. The sibling link will continue to apply should there remain an elder sibling attending the school when the younger sibling starts. This includes elder siblings who were placed in the school under the sibling criteria prior to September 2026. In other words, if the first child was admitted in Sept 2020 and the next sibling started at the school in 2022, the second sibling will be in Year 11 in September 2026 allowing the third sibling to be placed under that admission criteria for September 2026.

- 3.55 As outlined in paragraph 3.30, the calculation of future pupil numbers in a catchment area will be affected by the methodology used. Therefore, when comparing forecast numbers of pupils in catchment areas that change the overall number of pupils may vary for statistical and rounding reasons. The table below outlines the forecast number of pupils in the two affected catchment areas and how this will vary if the proposed changes to the boundaries are implemented.

Year of entry	Total number of pupils						Number of pupils forecast to attend a school with a catchment area					
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
D Stringer & Varndean existing catchment area	700	677	674	650	642	645	598	576	573	550	542	545
D Stringer & Varndean proposed new catchment area	726	692	688	659	656	637	624	592	588	560	557	539
Longhill existing catchment area	327	305	317	289	284	266	197	180	189	168	164	150
Longhill proposed new catchment area	301	290	302	280	270	274	175	166	176	159	151	154

- 3.56 Postcodes included within the proposed catchment area changes are provided in proposed admission arrangement detailed in Appendix 5.

Change to the Number of Preferences

- 3.57 Currently families can state three preferences for the schools they wish their child or young person to attend. In the equal preference system that is operated in the city the first, second and third school preferences will be considered together alongside everyone else's preferences. A place will be offered at the highest-ranked preference available. If a place cannot be offered at any of the preferred schools, a place is given at the nearest school with places available.
- 3.58 The School Admissions Code states that parents must be allowed to express a preference for a minimum of three schools on the relevant application form. Local Authorities may allow parents to express a higher number of preferences if they wish. It is proposed that the number of

preferences available to families is increased to four preferences. For those applying for secondary school places in September 2026 this is designed to encourage families to utilise the proposed options proposed to be introduced that prioritise pupils eligible for free school meals and the 'open admission' category for pupils living outside the catchment area.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 These proposals have been informed by the recent engagement exercise undertaken between 2 October 2024 – 23 October 2024. The three illustrative models could have been refined and developed into full proposals however none of those options received strong support from those who responded to the exercise.
- 4.2 The engagement generated extensive and detailed feedback. While there was broad agreement about the importance of maintaining thriving schools and ensuring educational equity, significant concerns were raised about the proposed methods for achieving these goals. The feedback revealed a strong preference for improving existing schools rather than redistributing students, alongside deep concerns about potential impacts on community cohesion and student wellbeing. The council has provided further information about the responses to the engagement exercise on the Your Voice platform and areas impacted by the proposals, as raised by respondents, included travel and transportation, community and social cohesion, impact on pupils who are vulnerable or with additional needs, family implications, school improvement and equity.
- 4.3 There is an interplay between the admission priorities used to determine school places, the catchment areas used and the PAN of each secondary school. The Council is proposing changes to all three aspects of the admission arrangements but could have proposed changes to any combination, or taken each in isolation.
- 4.4 The Council could propose to make no change to its admission arrangements. As a consequence, the number of unfilled places in the city would remain at 281. There would be opportunity that pupils from outside of the catchment area would receive a place in schools depending on the outcome of tie-break, if that school was oversubscribed. This would take no account of the pupil's circumstances.
- 4.5 The Council could choose to wait to consider how the allocation process for September 2025 was impacted by the introduction of the FSM criteria. Then take proposals specifically informed by that proposal to consultation for a proposed change in admission arrangements at a later date. Due to the statutory requirements about consulting on admission arrangements it would not be possible to affect a change in admission arrangements, determined solely by the Council, until September 2027 at the earliest.
- 4.6 The Council could propose no change to catchment areas but that would mean the council would not be addressing any of the concerns expressed by

some residents regarding the inequalities felt by communities in relation to the current arrangements.

- 4.7 The Council could propose no change to the PAN of Rudyard Kipling Primary School, but this would go against the wishes of the Governing Board and their considered view about how the proposal could be implemented. The pattern of allocations to the school would indicate that making no change to the PAN of the school would frustrate parental preference. Community schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish and there is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to the PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection.
- 4.8 In addition, the Council, as the admission authority of the school, could simply allocate above the PAN but this would be undertaken with no formal right of appeal or scrutiny by stakeholders.
- 4.9 The Council has previously requested that Headteachers and Chairs of Governors inform it if a future reduction in PAN was a proposal that they would wish to undertake. No other schools have indicated a willingness to undertake such a reduction.
- 4.10 If recommended, it is proposed to start the consultation on the council's admission arrangements on 6 December 2024 and for it to be concluded on 31 January 2025.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The Council undertook an engagement exercise between 2 October 2024 and 23 October 2024 to engage the city in the issues confronting the Council and its schools, in regards to secondary school admissions.
- 5.2 The People Overview and Scrutiny committee undertook a review of the proposals on 9 October 2024. This committee will also scrutinise the specific proposals outlined in this report, in a meeting to be held in January 2025.
- 5.3 A summary of the responses to the engagement exercise and the feedback received can be found on [the Your Voice engagement portal](#). This informed the development of these proposals and additional discussions were had with various stakeholders to further explore the potential ways in which the points raised could be addressed in advance of publication of this report.
- 5.4 These proposals are subject to a public consultation and there will be a combination of public meetings and an online response form available to gather replies to the proposals.
- 5.5 The Council will hold public meetings in the areas where a change to catchment area boundaries is being proposed and where a change on PAN has been put forward. In addition, there will be citywide meetings to consider the proposals in their entirety. The Council will reach out to specific

community groups to ensure those whose voices are often less represented in Council consultation events can be heard. It is expected that this will include meetings in communities affected by these proposals and with representative groups such as PaCC, A Seat at the Table, Class Divide, the Youth Council, Hangleton & Knoll project as well as utilising the support of services such as Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, the youth participation team and Family Hubs.

- 5.6 A consultation response form will be available on the council's Your Voice portal.
- 5.7 Interested parties unable to submit a response to the consultation online will be able to call the school admissions team for someone to take down their response over the telephone. Alternatively an email address is available for comments, schoolorganisation@brighton-hove.gov.uk.
- 5.8 The Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix 8) details the considerations given to understand the impact of undertaking a public consultation on this topic.
- 5.9 The scheduling of public meetings will include:
- Monday 9 December – Online 18:00 – 19:30
 - Thursday 12 December – Online 10:00 – 11:30
 - Tuesday 7 January – In-person 18:00 – 19:30, Hove Town Hall (TBC)
 - Saturday 11 January – In-person 10:30 – 12:00, Jubilee Library (TBC)
- Further meetings will take place and the details for these will be available when the public consultation launches on 6 December 2024.
- 5.10 Should the council wish to determine a change in admission arrangements in February 2025, a further Equalities Impact Assessment will be provided using feedback and reflections gathered during the consultation.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 School budgets are determined in accordance with criteria set by the government and school funding regulations dictate that the vast majority (over 90% in 2024/25) of the delegated schools block of funding is allocated through pupil-led factors. This means schools with falling pupil numbers are likely to see reductions in annual budgets. This situation can be particularly challenging where pupil numbers in year groups fall well below the expected number, based on the PAN of a school.
- 6.2 Without planned reduction in PANs it is more challenging for schools to plan ahead for pupil and staff reductions and set balanced budgets. For the schools where reductions in PANs are proposed there will be direct implications and a need to plan future years' budgets to reflect lower pupil numbers in line with reduced PANs and the consequent impact this will have on budget allocations. However, planned reductions in PANs should mean

schools are more likely to be able to balance their budgets if operating with full, or close to full, forms of entry.

- 6.3 The proposal to decrease the PAN across a number of schools is intended to reduce the number of surplus school places to safeguard and benefit the wider provision across the city. By reducing the number of surplus places in the city in the longer term there is an expectation that school occupancy rates will increase meaning that school budgets are more sustainable.
- 6.4 The proposal to amend the secondary admission criteria linked to FSM eligibility and to introduce an open admission criteria may lead to changes in pupil numbers at individual school level. This could potentially introduce a high risk to less popular schools, resulting in rapidly declining pupil numbers and falling budgets which may result in uncertainty about future budget viability.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams Date consulted: 26/11/24

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Section 88C of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the School Admissions (Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) Regulations 2012 require admission authorities to determine their admission arrangements annually. Arrangements must be determined 18 months in advance of the academic year to which they apply.
- 7.2 Where changes such as a decrease in the PAN, or amendments to catchment areas, are proposed to admission arrangements the admission authority must first publicly consult on those proposed arrangements. The School Admissions Code 2021 states that consultation must be for a minimum of six weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January of the school year before those arrangements are to apply. Following consultation the admission arrangements must be determined by 28 February 2025.
- 7.3 The School Admissions Code 2021 (“the Code”) provides that oversubscription criteria must be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation including equalities legislation. Catchments areas must be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined.
- 7.4 The Code provides that Admission Authorities may give priority in their oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the pupil premium. The categories of eligible premium recipients to be prioritised should be clearly defined in the admission arrangements.
- 7.5 Community schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. Objections to admissions arrangements can also be made by any person or body who considers them

to be unlawful or not in compliance with the Code. Any objections must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May 2025.

- 7.6 The 1998 Act requires local authorities to establish a relevant area in which admission authorities must consult regarding their admission arrangements. The Education (Relevant Areas for Consultation on Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999 requires LAs to consult on these proposals every two years.
- 7.7 In order to comply with the public sector equality duty pursuant to the Equality Act 2010 the Committee should have due regard to the analysis of the impact upon those affected by the proposal who have protected characteristics under the Act. This is summarised within the EIA template and the body of the report. Recent government guidance indicates that the general duty requires decision-makers to have due regard to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in relation to activities such as providing a public service. As indicated in recent government guidance the duty does not dictate a particular outcome. The level of “due regard” considered sufficient in any particular context depends on the facts. The duty should always be applied in a proportionate way depending on the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the potential equality impacts on those with protected characteristics.

Name of lawyer consulted: Serena Kynaston Date consulted 27/11/24

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposals being recommended to cabinet. The assessment can be found at Appendix 8 and the results have been incorporated into the content of the report.
- 8.2 It is worth noting that the admission process is ‘blind’, by virtue of applications being considered in line with the published admission arrangements that do not take account of a person’s protected characteristics.
- 8.3 However, the availability of school places across the city could have an impact on certain groups due to their proximity to certain schools and the availability of places should families make a late application.
- 8.4 The consultation process needs to take account of:
- young parents who may be less likely to respond to the consultation
 - issues of accessibility and comprehension of the consultation process
 - the materials made available
 - ensuring that the decision-making process after the consultation is based on the content not just quantity of replies
- 8.5 When determining admission arrangements, the council needs to ensure that there are sufficient school places available within a reasonable distance for families who may contain members who have special educational needs, disabilities, speak English as an additional language and of various

ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. This will ensure that if families apply after the deadline date they will not be significantly disadvantaged and face the prospect of a lengthy journey to school.

- 8.6 It is recognised that to foster strong community cohesion school's intake should seek to reflect the city's diversity.
- 8.7 Consideration has been given to how the areas of disadvantage within the city are aligned to the existing catchment areas and as a result proposals are being put forward to seek to enhance the opportunities of those entitled to Free School Meals and those living outside of the catchment area, albeit with no priority being placed on those applications in relation to protected characteristics or a measure of disadvantage.

9. Sustainability implications

- 9.1 Wherever possible the council aims to reduce the number of journeys to school undertaken by car. A reduction in the availability of school places across the city and the alteration of some catchment boundaries could risk a rise in the number of journeys undertaken by car.
- 9.2 Schools are expected to have a School Travel Plan to:
- reduce the number of vehicles on the journey to school
 - improve safety on the journey to school
 - encourage more active and sustainable travel choices
- 9.3 Any change in PAN, catchment area or admission priority will require the school's travel plan to be re-written to take account of the change.
- 9.4 Changes to PAN and the impact of unfilled school places can impact on the efficient use of existing accommodation in a school and the use of energy.
- 9.5 The council monitors air quality across the city, throughout the year, at approximately 100 locations as part of its statutory duties. Figures are published annually to enable changes and trends to be identified, and current results show continuing gradual improvements. Travel patterns and choices of transport will not become apparent until after the proposed changes to catchments are established, although these are unlikely to have a significantly adverse effect on air quality in the city generally.
- 9.6 In the future a comprehensive data set about each pupil and staff member and their home addresses and method of travel could be interrogated in a variety of ways to provide insight on how journey distances and times have been affected by any adjustment to the catchment boundaries. It is not feasible to model this in advance of proposals being considered.
- 9.7 The Council currently supports some bus journeys in the city. These arrangements will be under review due to the impact of government funding for bus services and the council's own financial position. At this stage the supported bus routes and the average level of patronage daily, Sept 2023 – July 2024 was:

- Route 72 – 89 pupils – serving Longhill School
- Route 74 – 73 pupils – serving Patcham High School
- Route 75 - 111 pupils – serving Patcham High School
- Route 76 - 99 pupils – serving Longhill School
- Route 76A - 93 pupils – serving Longhill School
- Route 91 - 58 pupils – Serving Cardinal Newman
- Route 95 - 90 pupils – Serving Cardinal Newman
- Route 95A – 105 pupils – Serving Cardinal Newman

9.8 In the one-day snapshot undertaken by the city’s secondary schools the pattern of travel modes shows that approximately half of all pupils walk or scoot to school. The number of pupils who travel by car/van and/or park and then stride to school has increased in recent years to its highest level since 2018-19. Public transport use has dropped to its lowest level in the same time span.

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS						
Travel to school by mode (%) 2018-19 to 2023-24						
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Walking & Scooting	50.7	49.1	49.9	51.1	54.7	50.0
Cycling	2.3	1.6	2.7	2	2.9	1.3
Car/ Van & Park & Stride	18.3	21	20.6	21.2	18.0	26.2
Public Transport	28.3	27.7	26.3	25.3	22.8	21.4

9.9 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on Healthy Places stated that in 2023, 58% of primary school and 53% of secondary school pupils actively travel to school.

9.10 In the city’s Safe and Well at School Survey in 2023, pupils were asked whether they agreed with the statement, "I feel safe travelling to school and back alone or with friends". 90% of secondary school pupils said they strongly agreed or agreed that they feel safe travelling to school and back alone or with friends. Those that actively travelled to school were statistically significantly more likely to say they agreed (93%) than those who travelled by another method (88%).

10. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

10.1 The 2023 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Healthy Places outlined that both the built and natural environment make up part of the building blocks of health and influence people’s physical and mental health. The quality of the environment can influence many aspects of people’s lives, as does the cost and availability of housing and food, exposure to air and noise pollution and safe affordable transport including opportunities for active travel. Education has direct consequences on people’s long term health outcomes: whether through increasing someone’s likelihood of being able to get a good job, afford a good quality life, or through better managing or being less exposed to life’s challenges.

- 10.2. The City's Safe and Well at School Survey 2023 included the participation of 7802 young people aged 11 to 16 from the 10 secondary schools across the city (63% of pupils). In 2023 there has been a decrease in:
- children's enjoyment coming to school
 - enjoyment learning at school
 - feelings of safety at school
 - their sense of belonging in school
- 10.3. As such, the impact of these proposals and the work required to adjust to any agreed changes will need to be carefully considered in the context of these relevant findings. With no recent change to admission arrangements, it appears children's experience of schooling has already been negatively affected by factors and therefore consideration needs to be made as to whether these proposals impact on those further or do not have a statistically significant bearing on children and young people's experiences. It may be pertinent to include questions on the impact of any change in future surveys with schools and their communities.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The Cabinet is being asked to agree to undertake a public consultation on school admission arrangements from September 2026 between 6 December 2024 and 31 January 2025.
- 11.2 A further report will be published in February 2025 detailing the response to the consultation and making recommendations about the admission arrangements for 2026-27. If required under the Constitution, Full Council will determine the arrangements by the end of February 2025.
- 11.3 It is proposed that the PAN of Rudyard Kipling Primary School is raised from 30 to 45.
- 11.4 It is proposed that the catchment area boundary between Longhill High School and Dorothy Stringer and Varndean is changed with the BN2 5 north area above Manor Way and Manor Hill being located within the Dorothy Stringer & Varndean catchment area and the BN2 1 and BN2 5 (south) area located in the Longhill High School area.
- 11.5 It is proposed that an additional criterion is introduced to secondary school admission priorities that provides an opportunity for 'open admission' of pupils, up to 20% of the cohort, from outside the catchment area for children who live in other catchment areas in the city.
- 11.6 In addition, the existing definition of the Free School Meal criteria introduced for admissions in September 2025 is proposed to be altered to provide greater clarity as to how places are allocated in a dual catchment area and to put in place a standardised proportion of places set at 30% of the school's PAN.

- 11.7 The Council proposes increasing the number of preferences parents can use from three to four.
- 11.8 As a suite of proposed changes to secondary school admission arrangements it is intended to deliver opportunities for families who live in single school catchment areas in the city to have a greater opportunity to be allocated a place at an alternative school. Make changes to the areas of the city given priority to attend Dorothy Stringer and Varndean schools by virtue of being in the catchment area. Whilst also giving all families a higher number of preferences that can be stated thereby encouraging the use of the new priorities proposed for secondary school admissions.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Published Admission Numbers for Primary and Secondary schools.
2. Forecast of primary pupil numbers - please note that a revised version of this with more recent data should be available for the February 2025 reports
3. Forecast of secondary school pupil numbers – existing arrangements
4. Forecast of secondary school pupil numbers – proposed arrangements
5. Admission arrangements and priorities for community primary and secondary schools
6. Coordinated scheme of admissions – primary.
7. Coordinated scheme of admissions – secondary.
8. Equality Impact Assessment - Public consultation on School Admission Arrangements 2026-27