

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Agenda Item 70

### Cabinet

**Subject:** School Admission Arrangements 2027-28

**Date of meeting:** 13 November 2025

**Report of:** Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Youth Services

**Contact Officer:** Corporate Director - Families Children & Wellbeing

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

### For general release

#### 1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report details the proposed school admission arrangements for the academic year 2027-28 for the schools in the city where the council is the admission authority.
- 1.2 When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on these new arrangements.
- 1.3 Cabinet will be asked to approve a consultation based on the proposals being suggested. Full Council will then receive a further report on 29 January 2026 seeking the determination of those arrangements for 2027-28.
- 1.4 Local Authorities must also set out schemes for coordinated admissions, including key dates in the admission process and 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.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet agree to make no changes to the council’s admission arrangements other than the changes listed below.
- 2.2 Cabinet agree to consult upon a change to the admission priorities for secondary schools to enable the sibling link to be applied regardless of the catchment area where families live.
- 2.3 Cabinet agree to consult upon a change to the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Rudyard Kipling Primary School from 45 to 30 pupils.
- 2.4 Cabinet agree to consult upon a change to the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Downs Junior School from 128 to 96 pupils to reflect changes previously made at Downs Infant School.

2.5 Cabinet agree to consult upon a change to the way waiting lists are operated.

2.6 Cabinet agree to consult on the Primary and Secondary coordinated schemes and to make no changes to the “relevant area”.

### **3. Context and background information**

3.1 Admission Authorities are required to determine their admission arrangements annually. Where changes such as a decrease in the PAN 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 within the relevant area 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 2027-28 the consultation process must take place between 1 October 2025 and 31 January 2026 and last for a minimum of 6 weeks.

3.3 It is proposed to start the consultation on 14 November 2025 and for it to run for 8 weeks, concluding on 9 January 2026.

3.4 Following the consultation the Council must determine its admission arrangements by 28 February 2026 to conform to the requirements of the School Admissions Code.

3.5 A further report will be presented to Full Council on 29 January 2026 detailing the response to the consultation and making recommendations about the admission arrangements for 2027-28.

3.6 The relevant proposed papers for the 2027-28 admission year for the City of Brighton & Hove are attached as appendices to this report.

#### **Published Admission Number**

3.7 Schools are funded by the government and not the council. The funding is largely done on a per-pupil basis and nearly all of it covers staffing costs. If schools don't have enough pupils attending or suffer from fluctuating numbers, they may not be able to operate in a financially efficient way and risk entering a budget deficit.

3.8 Pupil numbers starting Reception classes across the city have been falling and are not forecast to increase in the foreseeable future. Appendix 5 shows the current projection of primary pupil numbers until September 2028, pupil numbers are expected to be no more than 1900 pupils. The city currently

has 2445 primary places for Reception age pupils. The proportion of surplus places in September 2027 is 25%. The council's forecasts do not currently model an individual school's forecast as this can be affected by several variables however strong trends of parental preference provide an indication which schools can expect to fill all or a high proportion of places each year. Schools where this is not the case could be susceptible to low class numbers that will negatively impact on their finances.

- 3.9 Appendix 6 shows the current projection of secondary pupil numbers until September 2031. The proportion of surplus places in September 2027 is 11%.
- 3.10 It is expected that pupil forecasts will be updated by December 2025 with more recent data from the NHS that will allow forecast pupil numbers until September 2029 for the Reception year and September 2032 for secondary school entries. This will be available to Full Council prior to the determination of any admission arrangements for September 2027.
- 3.11 The School Admissions Code details that once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised downwards by the admission authority unless the admission authority consider such changes to be necessary in view of a "major change in circumstances". Such proposals must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval.
- 3.12 The Schools Adjudicator has provided challenge to the council's recent variation requests for both Coldean Primary School and Brunswick Primary School where pupil forecasts and past preference numbers have indicated the need for a PAN reduction that could have been made through the consultation process. This casts doubt on how successful any future requests for a variation would be in similar circumstances.
- 3.13 The School Adjudicator's concern is due to the absence of a formal consultation process for when a variation is requested and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. They also considered it would "have been obvious in enough time for what has been requested to have been dealt with through the consultation process".
- 3.14 When considering the request to vary the PAN at each school, the Governing Boards were asked to consider organising children into mixed-age classes and to explain their view on why this had not been employed as a method of structuring classes.
- 3.15 Through a schools' bulletin article on 13 October 2025, Governing Boards were asked to contact the council if they wished to include a reduction in PAN for September 2027 as part of the consultation. No school than those outlined below have made a request and the council has not proposed a reduction that does not have the support of the Governing Board.
- 3.16 The proposal to reduce the PAN at Rudyard Kipling Primary School from 45 to 30 pupils has been put forward due to the dropping pupil numbers in the

Deans planning area and particularly the Woodingdean area of the city. This will help to ensure the long-term financial viability of the school where the future number of school places across both schools in Woodingdean is unknown.

- 3.17 The PAN at Downs Infant School was reduced from 120 to 90 pupils in September 2024 and so there will be 90 pupils moving from the infant to junior school in September 2027.
- 3.18 The proposed changes to the PAN at Downs Junior School from 128 to 96 pupils will match the previous reduction at Downs Infant school. This proposal would see the same number of places available at Downs Junior School as required for pupils leaving the infant school.
- 3.19 There is a current consultation underway on the proposed amalgamation of Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior schools to take effect from September 2026. The proposed admission arrangements for September 2027 assume that the proposed amalgamation into an all through primary school has been determined. A final decision would need to be taken by Full Council in accord to the determination of admission arrangements for September 2027.

### **Secondary school arrangements**

- 3.20 Significant changes were made to the secondary school admission criteria in 2025-26 and again in 2026-27. In 2025-26 criteria were introduced to give priority to children eligible for Free School Meals (up to the city average). In 2026-27 among other changes an 'open admission' criterion was introduced to give priority for pupils living in a catchment area containing one school (up to 5% of the school's PAN). Both of these changes have helped to facilitate more children to secure places at schools outside their catchment area.
- 3.21 It is proposed to change to the sibling link priority so that it applies to all pupils regardless of the catchment area where they live. This will allow families who have obtained an out of catchment area place through the Free School Meals or the 'open admission' criteria to benefit from the continuity where younger siblings will be able to attend the same school as the older sibling, if they are still attending the school. This is currently only a benefit that applies to families who have an older sibling in the designated catchment school.
- 3.22 It is not possible to quantify the number of siblings who will be able to benefit from this policy as it will depend on several factors. However, in recent years there have been approximately 400 pupils placed at catchment schools under the sibling link criterion.
- 3.23 Should the proposal be determined, further consideration will need to be given to the council's home to school transport policy and how siblings of pupils offered places in non-catchment area schools are supported, if at all. At the time of writing this report, there continues to be active consideration to the potential of changes to the home to school transport policy with effect for September 2026.

## **Waiting lists and Reallocation pools**

- 3.24 Where the council hold waiting lists for primary schools and reallocation pools for secondary schools, pupils have automatically been added to the waiting list or reallocation pool for their first preference school. However, they have to request to be added to the waiting list or reallocation pool for any subsequent preferences.
- 3.25 This has led to delays in the reallocation process with places being offered from waiting lists that are no longer required, and in some cases multiple school offers being held for some time while parents confirm which school place they would prefer to accept.
- 3.26 It is proposed to change this process so that parents wanting their child to be considered for a reallocated place will need to actively make this request regardless of which preference the school is. It is also proposed that where a place is subsequently allocated from a waiting list or reallocation pool, any previous school offer will automatically be withdrawn.
- 3.27 It is understood that the removal of an automatic process could impact on families who must then be able to access the school admission team to advise them of their preference to be placed on the waiting list or reallocation pool. However, should this be determined, consideration will be given to how the process can be made as straightforward as possible and how families are reminded of the changes to the process that have been introduced.

## **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

- 4.1 The council could propose making further changes to its admission criteria through the consultation process; the arrangements are lawful and have been subject to a recent review by the School's Adjudicator in October 2025 following objections to the determined arrangements. Therefore, no other change is currently considered to be required.
- 4.2 The council could propose making no change to the secondary admission arrangements and not support families utilising the new admission criteria to assist younger siblings with attending the same secondary school.
- 4.3 The Council could seek to make no change to the PAN of any school. Whilst this would help the council to meet a greater level of parental preferences it will provide more uncertainty for schools in their planning and could place more schools at risk of financial difficulty.
- 4.4 The council could propose to change the PAN at other community schools in the city, however no other governing body has indicated a willingness to support proposals to reduce their PAN as part of this consultation.
- 4.5 All admission authorities must consult where they propose a change to their admission arrangements which includes decreases to the PAN. Community

schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. 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.

## **5. Community engagement and consultation**

5.1 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.

5.2 If recommended, it is proposed to start the consultation on the council's admission arrangements on 14 November 2025 and for it to be concluded on 9 January 2026.

5.3 It is proposed that there will be 4 engagement events. These follow the pattern of recent consultation events and will be a mix of online and in-person events.

5.4 Presently, it is expected that events will take place at the following times:

### Downs Junior School focused events

In-person Wednesday 26 November - morning

Online Wednesday 19 November - early evening

### Rudyard Kipling Primary School focused event

Online Tuesday 2 December - early evening

### General meeting

Online Wednesday 3 December - early evening

5.5 A consultation response form will be available on the council's Your Voice consultation portal.

5.6 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.

5.7 Attention will be given to engaging sections of the community who may not previously have participated with public consultations such as those with protected characteristics.

## **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 of the delegated schools block of funding must be allocated through pupil-led factors. This means school 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 a planned reduction in PAN it will be challenging for those schools to plan ahead for staff reductions and set a balanced budget. For the schools where reductions in PANs are proposed there will be direct implications and the need to plan future years' budgets to reflect lower pupil numbers and the consequent impact on budget allocations. However, planned reductions in PANs may mean schools are more likely to be able to balance their budgets if operating with full forms of entry.
- 6.3 The proposal to decrease the PANs is intended to reduce the number of surplus school places to safeguard and indirectly 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.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams  
Date consulted: 21.10.2025

## **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 are proposed 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. The admission arrangements must be determined by 28 February in the determination year. The arrangements for the admission year 2027/2028 must therefore be determined by 28 February 2026.
- 7.3 Community schools and other interested parties have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. The School Admissions Code provides that there is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to the PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering such an objection. For this determination year any objections to the arrangements must be referred to the Adjudicator by 15 May 2026.
- 7.4 Once admission arrangements have been determined Admission Authorities may propose variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for decision following consultation with the governing board of the affected school(s).

Name of lawyer consulted: Serena Kynaston     Date consulted: 21.10.2025

## **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on undertaking a public consultation has not been carried out. The council has carried out extensive public consultations on school admission arrangements in recent years and understands the public sector equality duties associated with such a consultation.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 An EIA will be prepared following the public consultation and prior to the recommendation of what school admission arrangements should be determined for September 2027.
- 8.4 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 races/ethnicities. 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.
- 8.5 It is recognised that to foster strong community cohesion school's intake should seek to reflect the city's diversity.

## **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 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 is expected to require the school's travel plan to be re-written to take account of the change.
- 9.4 Changes to PAN, which lead to a reduction in the number of classes the school has and the classrooms being used can lead to areas of a school being more efficiently managed in relation to energy use at a time of uncertain energy costs for schools.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 It is proposed to make no changes to admission arrangements (other than the ones outlined in the report) and to undertake a public consultation with the results and final recommendations coming back to Full Council on 29 January 2026.
- 10.2 It is proposed that the Published Admission Number for Downs Junior School is reduced from 128 places to 96 places to match the previous reduction at Downs Infant School.
- 10.3 It is proposed that the Published Admission Number for Rudyard Kipling Primary School is reduced from 45 places to 30 places.
- 10.4 It is proposed that the sibling link for secondary schools should be applied regardless of the catchment area where families live.
- 10.5 It is proposed that changes are made to the way the council operates waiting lists and reallocation pools.
- 10.6 Once the arrangements for September 2027 are determined it is possible for a variation to be requested of the Schools Adjudicator for other schools should there be a major change in circumstances. Any future decision will be informed by the pattern of parental preference for September 2026, changes of strategic direction by schools in the city and the results of future financial planning.

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **Appendices**

- 1. Published Admission Numbers for Primary and Secondary schools.
- 2. Admission arrangements and priorities for community primary and secondary schools.
- 3. Coordinated scheme of admissions – primary.
- 4. Coordinated scheme of admissions – secondary.
- 5. Primary school pupil forecast.
- 6. Secondary school pupil forecast

