

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 78

Subject: School Admission Arrangements 2027-28

Date of meeting: 29 January 2026

Report of: 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 The report details the outcome of the consultation undertaken between November 2025 and January 2026 on the proposed changes to the Published Admission Number of two schools, a change to the sibling criterion for secondary schools and a change to how waiting lists are managed.
- 1.3 The council will be asked to approve the recommendations in this report and determine the admission arrangements, including the scheme for coordinated admissions and the “relevant area” for the academic year 2027-28.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Full Council agrees to make no changes to the council’s admission arrangements other than the proposed changes listed below in recommendations 2.2 to 2.6. The full admission arrangements are set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.2 That Full Council agree a change to the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Rudyard Kipling Primary School from 45 to 30 pupils.
- 2.3 That Full Council agree a change to the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Downs Junior School from 128 to 96 pupils, to reflect changes previously made to the PAN at Downs Infant School.
- 2.4 That Full Council agree to change to the admission priorities for secondary schools so that the sibling link can be applied regardless of the catchment area where families live.
- 2.5 That Full Council agree to a change to the way waiting lists are operated.

- 2.6 That Full Council agree to 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 had to take place between 1 October 2025 and 31 January 2026 and was required to last for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 3.3 Following the consultation the council is required to determine its admission arrangements by 28 February 2026 to conform to the requirements of the School Admissions Code.
- 3.4 The relevant papers for the 2027-28 admission year for the City of Brighton & Hove are attached as appendices to this report.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Pupil numbers starting Reception classes across the city have been falling and are not forecast to increase in the foreseeable future. Appendix 6 shows the current projection of primary pupil numbers until September 2029, pupil numbers are expected to be no more than 1900 pupils. The city currently has 2415 primary places for Reception age pupils in 2026. The proportion of surplus places in September 2027 is 25%. The council's forecasts do not currently model an individual school's estimate of pupil numbers as this can be affected by a number of 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.
- 3.7 Appendix 7 shows the current projection of secondary pupil numbers until September 2031. The proportion of surplus places in September 2027 is 11%.

- 3.8 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.

The Consultation Process

- 3.9 On the 13 November 2025, Cabinet agreed to undertake a public consultation on the council's proposed admission arrangements for September 2027.
- 3.10 The public consultation ran between 14 November 2025 – 9 January 2026, there were 5 public meetings and 344 responses to the online consultation were received. Three meetings were arranged to focus on the schools featured in the proposals, one during the daytime and two in the early evening. There were also two general meetings to discuss all other aspects of the proposals.
- 3.11 38 people attended meetings held during the consultation period. The Council also publicised the consultation by issuing press releases and advertising on social media.
- 3.12 There were 8 direct responses to the council's School Organisation and School Admissions email accounts about the admissions arrangement proposals and a petition of 201 names supporting the proposed changes to the sibling priority.
- 3.13 Signatories to the petition, organised by Equity in Education, were asked to support one aspect of the consultation namely the proposed sibling link. These responses have been included as positive responses to the relevant question in the consultation. The statement that signatories have signed up to support is as follows:

Signatories to this petition support the proposed change to the sibling link priority for secondary school admission in Brighton and Hove community schools from 2027/28. Making the sibling link priority apply equally to all families across the city regardless of where they live.

- 3.14 An offer was made for parents to contact the council to discuss the proposals and provide a verbal response to the consultation that could be recorded by officers; however, this offer was not taken up by any respondents.
- 3.15 Additionally, the Council endeavored to encourage responses to the consultation from groups in the city who might not usually participate in consultations on school admissions. PACC and Amaze issued information to parents in their community about the proposals and consultation and EALTS (English as an Additional Language and Traveler Service) provided information, advice and assistance to complete the consultation to families through their Home/School Liaison workers.
- 3.16 Nurseries and childcare providers in the city were also advised of the

consultation and asked to encourage families to participate.

Published Admission Numbers

- 3.17 There were 314 responses to the consultation through YourVoice, about reducing the PAN for Downs Junior School, with a slight majority in favour of the proposal. The percentage of responses are given in the table below.

Strongly disagree	12%
Disagree	11%
Neither agree or disagree	49%
Agree	21%
Strongly agree	7%

- 3.18 Responders were given the option to provide comments. There were 29 comments given of which most expressed support for aligning the admission numbers between the infant and junior schools.
- 3.19 Two members of the public attended one of the public meetings and the Governing Board did not make a formal representation to the council but had previously outlined its support for the proposed change in PAN.
- 3.20 There were 311 responses to the consultation through YourVoice, about reducing the PAN for Rudyard Kipling Primary School, with no overall majority agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal. The percentage of responses are given in the table below.

Strongly disagree	9%
Disagree	9%
Neither agree or disagree	65%
Agree	12%
Strongly agree	5%

- 3.21 Responders were given the option to provide comments. There were 15 comments given which raised concern about the viability of one form entry schools and questioned the local demand for school places and whether reducing the PAN would negatively impact on the schools funding and support for vulnerable children. Views were expressed that the PAN for Woodingdean Primary School should also be reduced so that there is equality across both schools in the area.
- 3.22 During the consultation period the Schools Adjudicator determined that, following a request by the Governing Board which was actioned by the Council, the PAN of Woodingdean Primary School would be reduced in September 2026 from 60 to 30 places. This decision is for one year only. The school is expected to join the Eko Trust in Spring 2026 and as an academy its admission arrangements will no longer remain the responsibility of the council.
- 3.23 No members of the public attended the public meeting and the school did not make a formal representation to the council but had previously outlined its support for the proposed change in PAN.
- 3.24 Consultees were then asked if they agree or disagree with the proposed

admission numbers for other community schools as given in Appendix 1. There were 299 responses to this question with the percentage of responses are given in the table below.

Strongly disagree	17%
Disagree	9%
Neither agree or disagree	56%
Agree	14%
Strongly agree	4%

- 3.25 There was the option to add comments on this question to which many respondents expressed concerns about the Published Admission Number (PAN) at both primary and secondary schools, with a recurring theme that PANs at larger or more popular schools are too high and should be reduced to support the viability of smaller or less popular schools. There was also a contrary view raised suggesting that the PANs at less popular schools should be reduced and PANs at more popular schools increased.

Sibling Link

- 3.26 Significant changes were made to the secondary school admission criteria with effect in 2025-26 and again 2026-27. For 2025-26 criteria were introduced to give priority to children eligible for Free School Meals (up to the city average). For 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 will help to facilitate more children to secure places at schools outside their catchment area.
- 3.27 It is proposed to change the sibling link priority for 2027-28 so that it applies to all pupils regardless of the catchment area where they live. This was put forward in order to allow families who have obtained an out of catchment area place through either the Free School Meals or the open admission priority criteria to benefit from the continuity where younger siblings will be able to attend the same school. This is currently only a benefit that applies to families who have an older sibling in the designated catchment school.
- 3.28 Consultees were asked whether they agreed with this proposed change. The majority of respondents replying via the YourVoice portal strongly disagreed with this proposal. There were 332 responses to this question via the portal with the percentage of responses given in the table below.

Strongly disagree	61%
Disagree	5%
Neither agree or disagree	4%
Agree	7%
Strongly agree	23%

- 3.29 There were 199 comments, via the Yourvoice portal, provided on this part of the proposal with the majority expressing strong concerns that the proposed changes to sibling priority and out-of-catchment admissions will further reduce the opportunity for children living within catchment areas to secure places at their local schools. Concerns were raised highlighting the risk of increased movement of local children, particularly in the central

Brighton dual catchment area.

- 3.30 When the 201 responses to the petition, seeking support for the proposed change to the sibling link priority, are taken into account the percentage of responses is altered, as outlined in the table below. This summary combines strongly disagree and disagree, as well as combining strongly agrees and agree with the petition responses.

Disagree	41%
Neither agree or disagree	2%
Agree	57%

- 3.31 During the consultation it was proposed that the arrangements could be adjusted to achieve a balance between the intention to create a sibling link priority for all pupils with the acknowledgment of the potential impact that this might have on those living in a specific catchment area. In order to achieve this it was proposed that there could be two separate criteria creating a distinction between younger siblings of pupils who live in the catchment area and those living outside. Those in the latter group would also be placed in a separate priority order and would be considered as part of the 5% of open admission places.
- 3.32 Modelling of pupil numbers with the expanded sibling link definition have indicated that a small number of pupils in 2027 living in the catchment areas for Patcham High School (32 pupils) and the catchment area for Dorothy Stringer & Varndean (20 pupils) may not be able to secure a place at their catchment area school on National Offer Day. Although the operation of the reallocation pool and waiting lists has meant, historically, that places will often become available for pupils after the initial allocation and before the start of the new academic year.
- 3.33 The Schools Adjudicator, in a recent report relating to the council's admission arrangements, made it clear that there is no requirement for catchment areas to accommodate all pupils residing in them and stated that "the Code requires that admission arrangements set out how places will be allocated in situations where there is oversubscription. Admission arrangements do not have to tell parents whether or not their child will get a place at a school, or even how likely this will be."
- 3.34 Other responses to the consultation strongly supported this proposal, citing benefits for families, community cohesion, and practicalities such as uniform reuse and reduced travel. As outlined previously, a petition of 201 names was also received in support of the proposed changes to the sibling link.
- 3.35 It is therefore felt that on balance, providing families with greater clarity about the school that younger siblings might attend and minimising the barriers to families taking up the opportunity afforded by the free school meals and open admission criteria outweighed the potential impact on those who as a result of the change in policy might not be able to gain a place at their catchment area school.

Waiting lists and Reallocation pools

- 3.36 It is proposed to change the operation of waiting lists and reallocation pools so that parents wanting their child to be considered for a reallocated place will need to actively make a request to be added to a waiting list or reallocation pool. 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.
- 3.37 Consultees were asked whether they agreed with this proposed change. The majority of respondents strongly disagreed with the way in which the proposal could operate but some respondents understood the rationale for putting forward a change. There were 326 responses to this question with the percentage of responses are given in the table below.

Strongly disagree	43%
Disagree	17%
Neither agree or disagree	17%
Agree	16%
Strongly agree	6%

- 3.38 Comments provided on this part of the proposal suggested it would increase stress and administrative burden for families, particularly those already under pressure, and could lead to some missing out due to missed communications or deadlines. Some responses suggested parents should be automatically added to waiting lists if they do not get their first preference, rather than having to opt in.
- 3.39 There were concerns raised about the proposal to automatically withdraw a previous offer when a new one is made. It was suggested that families need time to make decisions, especially as circumstances can change or social factors such as where friends are going may influence choices. Respondents also indicated that parents may initially want to be added to a waiting list but would be less likely to want to change the allocated school once transition arrangements have been participated in and, for example, uniform bought.
- 3.40 The School Admissions Code states that only one offer per child should be made by the Local Authority so the proposal is in line with the code and a similar process of automatically withdrawing a previous offer is successfully operated by other local authorities such as East Sussex, Reading and Medway councils.
- 3.41 However, in response to the concerns raised about automatically withdrawing the previous offer, it is proposed to amend the arrangements so that parents are given 5 days, following a waiting list offer, to request that the previous school place is reinstated if this is their preferred school. This proposed amendment seeks to address the predominant concern about parents being able to make an informed decision and introduces a short period of reflection for families without maintaining a level of uncertainty for schools about pupil numbers and transition arrangements.
- 3.42 Many responses to the consultation highlighted the need for clear,

accessible, and well-timed communication, with reminders and deadlines, to ensure all parents understand the process and are not disadvantaged by a lack of information. The council commits to ensuring any changes in process will be clearly outlined to parents who will be applying for school places for September 2027 and onwards.

The coordinated admission schemes for 2027-28

- 3.43 Many of the responses to this question provided comments on the Council's approach to the consultation process. Some responders indicated that this part of the consultation was unclear. There were no specific responses that have led to changes in the proposed schemes and therefore, it is recommended that no change is made to these schemes.

The 'relevant area' for consultation

- 3.44 Responses to this question suggested it should remain unchanged or that it could include schools in Lewes as these are increasingly popular with Brighton & Hove residents. The 'relevant area' is the area for a school within which the admission authority for that school must consult all other prescribed schools on its admission arrangements. It is recommended that no change is made to the 'relevant area' as currently stated.

General comments on the council's admission arrangements

- 3.45 General comments on the consultation proposals highlighted dissatisfaction with the ongoing and frequent changes to school admission arrangements, and a lack of clear data and impact modelling to justify the proposals. There was also a call for the council to pause any further changes and allow time to assess the impact of changes made for 2025 and 2026 before introducing further changes.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The council could propose making further changes to its admission criteria through the consultation process however the existing arrangements upon which these proposals build have been subject to a recent review by the School's Adjudicator in October 2025 and determined lawful. The proposed change to the sibling link addresses the remaining issue associated with the recent changes to the arrangements. Therefore no other change was considered to be required.
- 4.2 The council could propose making no change to the secondary admission arrangements and not support families, utilising the recent changes to 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 could 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 public consultation ran between 14 November 2025 and 9 January 2026. There were 5 public meetings attended by 38 interested parties. 344 responses were received online through the YourVoice consultation portal and 8 written responses were provided by email. A petition of 201 signatories, organised by Equity in Education, supporting the proposed changes to the sibling link was submitted and accepted.

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 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 12/01/26

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. Part 2A of the council's Constitution provides that any strategic issues or reviews of the council's school admission arrangements, including any changes to catchment areas, are reserved to Full Council.
- 7.2. Section 88C of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 ('the Act') and the School Admissions (Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) Regulations 2012 ('the Regulations') set out the statutory framework for school admissions. The School Admissions Code

2021 ('the Code') is statutory guidance and imposes mandatory requirements in relation to the discharge of functions relating to admissions. Admission Authorities must ensure that their admission arrangements are compliant with the Code.

- 7.3. Under the Act admission authorities are required to determine their admission arrangements annually. Arrangements must be determined 18 months in advance of the academic year to which they apply.
- 7.4. Where changes to admission arrangements are proposed to admission arrangements the admission authority must first publicly consult on those proposed arrangements. The Regulations state 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 admission arrangements are to apply. Following consultation, the admission arrangements must be determined by 28 February.
- 7.5. Once all arrangements have been determined any person or body (e.g. parents, schools) who considers that any maintained school's arrangements are unlawful, or not in compliance with the Code or relevant law relating to admissions, can make an objection to the Schools Adjudicator. Objections can be made if the PAN for a school is set lower than the school would wish or if the catchment area set for a school is considered to be unfair or unreasonable. The 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 any objections to a reduction in the PAN.
- 7.6. In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.
- 7.7. Oversubscription criteria must also be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation.

Name of lawyer consulted: Serena Kynaston

Date consulted: 12/01/26

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 The council could find that its determined admission arrangements are objected to and are ruled to be non-compliant. However this risk is mitigated by the extensive review undertaken by the Schools Adjudicator and published in October 2025.
- 8.2 The findings of that review have informed the council's planning of the consultation and the design of the proposals consulted up as well as the recommendations outlined in this report.

- 8.3 Not making reductions to the PAN of both Downs Junior and Rudyard Kipling schools could lead to further pressure on the council's own finances as a consequence of the need to underwrite the extent of current school budget deficits.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 In advance of the consultation the council undertook an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) which accompanied the Cabinet report.
- 9.2 The council has subsequently completed an EIA to accompany this report that can be found at Appendix 5.
- 9.3 The recommendation of the EIA is to proceed with caution noting that Council's will often amend and change city-wide admission arrangements and/or changes to catchment areas as demographics and circumstances of a local area change.
- 9.4 There are some aspects of the admission arrangements that provide an individual pathway for a child or family's individual circumstances to be considered. In the case of the appeal panel this is after the allocation has been made.
- 9.5 The views heard about the proposals were not unanimous and care needs to be taken to consider where there are complex impacts. Where there may be disadvantage so others with protected characteristics will also benefit and so it can be concluded that no unfair disadvantage occurs.
- 9.6 The most significant impact will be on children seeking a place in a community secondary school who do not live in a catchment area but do have an older sibling attending the catchment school. Their priority for a place will be higher than in previous years.
- 9.7 Pupils with SEND who qualify for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are not impacted by the school admission arrangements being consulted upon. Mainstream community schools are expected to meet the needs of all pupils without an EHCP and are required to make reasonable adjustments in line with equality duties. However, the proposals may negatively impact pupils with disabilities where mitigations in place to minimise the negative impacts of managing within a community school are affected. For example, being placed with a friendship group or trusted adults, or where journeys to secondary school are longer and/or undertaken using public transport.
- 9.8 Cumulative effects are likely to be experienced by those whose children have SEND as a result of the impact of managing a child's needs before and after formal schooling together with the demands that schooling itself places on the child. We know that there can be a high correlation between families with children with SEND and socio-economic disadvantage and this will be compounded when the family live in a dual catchment areas and where the family do not have a sibling link to one of their catchment area schools.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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
- 10.3 Any change in PAN is expected to require the school's travel plan to be re-written to take account of the change.
- 10.4 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 admission arrangements are established, although these are unlikely to have a significantly adverse effect on air quality in the city generally.
- 10.5 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.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 It is proposed to make no changes to admission arrangements other than the ones outlined below.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 It is proposed that the Published Admission Number for Rudyard Kipling Primary School is reduced from 45 places to 30 places.
- 11.4 It is proposed that the sibling link for secondary schools should be applied regardless of the catchment area where families live. Suggestions during the consultation that the arrangements should distinguish between those with a sibling link living within and outside the catchment are not proposed to be taken forward.
- 11.5 It is proposed to implement a change to the way the council operates waiting lists and reallocation pools. Rather than implement the proposal consulted upon. It is recommended that parents are given 5 days, following a waiting

list offer, to request that the previous school place is reinstated if this is their preferred school.

- 11.6 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. Equality Impact Assessment.
6. Primary school pupil forecast.
7. Secondary school pupil forecast.

