

Council

31 January 2013

Agenda Item 83

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Review of the Secondary Admission Process for 2014/15		
Date of Meeting:	31 January 2013 14 January 2013 – Children & Young People Committee		
Report of:	Director of Children's Services		
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Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The present Secondary School Admissions system was agreed at the full Council Meeting held on 27 February 2007.
- 1.2 At that meeting the following recommendations were agreed:
 - (4) *That it be agreed that the new schools admission system be kept under review so that if necessary the catchment area boundaries could be adjusted after the first year of operation, in light of the pattern of preference and allocations in that year; and*
 - (5) *That as recommended by the Working Group, a review of the whole secondary schools admissions system in 2012 be approved.*
- 1.3 In 2011, a cross party working group was set up to look at the availability of school places. This has proved a useful vehicle for seeking consensus in an area which can be very difficult for parents/carers and their children. In June 2012 the remit of the group was expanded to review the secondary schools admissions policy and relevant catchment areas.
- 1.4 This report details the results of this review, and recommends that no changes to the present Catchment areas be proposed for adoption for the academic year 2014/2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) That the Committee notes the summary details of the Review into the Secondary School Admissions process for Brighton & Hove and its particular focus on the delineation of Catchment areas .
- (2) That the Committee agrees that no changes will be made to the existing Secondary Catchment areas for the academic year 2014/15.

- (3) That the Committee agrees that the cross party working group will continue to meet on a termly basis to monitor the impact of national and local changes related to Secondary Admissions. This will include the creation of new academies or free schools.
- (4) That the Committee agrees that the cross party working group will reform its stakeholder group as and when needed to consider proposals for any change beyond 2014/15.
- (5) That Committee notes that the Admissions Team will review its annual publications in the light of concerns over the 'equal preference' system and the continuing misunderstanding regarding parental 'choice'.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Each year local authorities are required by statute to consult upon school admission arrangements and school admission numbers with community schools and voluntary aided schools, neighbouring Local Authorities and with parents living in the City. This process includes the proposed admission priorities for community schools and those proposed by the governing bodies of voluntary aided schools and academies. The Council has carried out the required consultations on school admissions each year, however this Review was intended to be an additional wholesale review of the secondary admissions policy following the adoption of the new policy in 2007.
- 3.2 The annual consultation exercise carried out in 2012 identified concerns regarding the Patcham, Portslade and BACA catchment areas and this led to the changes for 2013 regarding Portslade and Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment areas being proposed and agreed.
- 3.3 Additionally an independent review of the Secondary Admissions process was commissioned by the Council through Cognisant Research in January 2012. A number of issues were raised at focus groups meetings in local primary schools and at public meetings. The findings of Cognisant Research require contributed to this review of the Secondary Admissions process.
- 3.4 Secondary school number projections identify the need for up to another 500 places by 2018/19. These may be provided through increasing existing schools or by providing entirely new schools. If a new school is to be provided this has to be as a free-school or academy. It was necessary in the review to consider where these schools are likely to be established and their potential impact on existing catchment areas.
- 3.5 The terms of the Review of the Secondary Admissions process were as follows:
 - Establish monthly meetings of the cross party working group to consider progress with the Review
 - Analyse the number projections for each catchment area between 2013/18
 - Identify possible new secondary school provision in the City
 - Model possible changes to catchment areas including potential new schools and identify those that ensure that catchment areas 'catch'

- Agree with the cross party working group consultation processes to ensure that the community, members and schools are fully informed regarding any proposed changes
 - Ensure that the implications of potential changes are fully detailed in the School Organisation Plan which is published annually
- 3.6 The cross party working group began meeting on 8th December 2011 and has continued to meet on a monthly basis. Following the Children and Young Peoples Committee of June 2012 it was agreed that the focus of this group would move from school place planning to that of the Secondary Admissions process and relevant catchment areas. Membership of the group was expanded to include two councillors from each of our local political parties.
- 3.7 The Cross Party group agreed that the present process for Secondary Admissions involving designated catchment areas and the use of random allocation as a 'tie-breaker' should continue. This system, although controversial at its inception, is now well understood by parents and has led to a significant reduction in directed school places in the last four years.
- 3.8 The national change to an equal preference system replacing the 'first preference first' system is still not universally recognised and is further confused by the publication of first preference data and frequent references to parental 'choice'. As these are dictated by the national agenda they cannot be changed by the Council. However members of the working group felt that we should review the admissions booklet, website and any other published material to better explain the change to the preference model and amplify the fact that parents can express preferences rather than have a 'choice' of secondary school for their children. This will be done as part of the annual review of published admissions details.
- 3.9 The Cross Party Group also felt that further focussed work should be carried regarding the delineation of catchment areas.
- 3.10 To do this the cross party working group agreed the introduction of a stakeholder group which included a representative from each of the secondary schools in the City. The group included a Headteacher, assistant heads, bursars, and Chairs of Governors. The group was supported by a team of four officers. The Stakeholder group met on three occasions beginning on 23rd October 2012 with members of the cross party group attending the final two meetings.
- 3.11 Officers visited each of the secondary schools in September/October and met with Headteachers and their Governor Representative to garner their views regarding any potential catchment area changes for 2014/15.
- 3.12 Both the cross party and stakeholder groups were presented with number projections for each catchment area between 2013/18. Both groups received Officers reports on their visits to individual schools.
- 3.13 It was concluded that there were four possible catchment area changes being requested by individual schools. Patcham, PACA, BACA and Longhill were all keen to have their catchment areas expanded.

- 3.14 Following discussion with members and school representatives, Officers modelled a range of changes and their associated permutations. These were presented to the groups alongside amended figures identifying potential student numbers in each postcode area and relevant trend data.
- 3.15 Both groups also considered the introduction of King's Church of England School, a Secondary Christian Freeschool, and its likely impact on projected pupil numbers and existing catchment areas. This was seen as the biggest unknown and in the absence of trend data for King's Church of England School intake was seen as a key concern in the immediate future.
- 3.16 Having looked in detail at this array of information and having set these against the potential impact of a range of catchment area changes and the introduction of Kings School, both groups recommended no change for 2014/15.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Review of Secondary School Admissions for 2014/15 included consultation with the cross party working group, with headteachers and their governor representative, and with a stakeholder group comprising of a representative from each secondary school in the City and King' Church of England School.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 It is not possible to quantify in detail the financial implications of these recommendations. However, any changes to admission arrangements or patterns may impact on the numbers of pupils at individual schools and therefore individual school budget allocations which are largely driven by pupil numbers.

Finance Officer Consulted: David Ellis

Date: 20 December 2012

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Any admissions policy adopted by the Council must comply with the requirements contained in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and in the School Admissions Code 2012. In carrying out the Review the working group has also been mindful of the need to ensure that it fulfils its statutory duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to secure that there are sufficient school places in the City.

Lawyer Consulted: Serena Kynaston

Date: 3 January 2013

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Planning and consultation for school admissions procedures and school places and the operation of the admission process are conducted in such a way as to avoid potentially discriminatory admissions priorities or planning processes. The city council and voluntary aided school and academy governing bodies must be mindful of bad practice with regard to equalities issues as described in the School Admissions Code of Practice.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 School admission arrangements are intended so far as it is possible to provide pupils with local places where they have asked for them. The planning of school places for the City takes into account the changing population pattern and resultant demand for places. The current pattern of parental preference is reflected in different schools operating both over and under capacity. In planning for school places the Council will have regard to sustainability priorities and seek to provide local places and places which are accessible by safe walking and where possible cycling routes and public transport wherever this is possible.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Balanced school communities with firm parental support contribute to orderly and harmonious communities.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Any change to school attendance patterns and pupil numbers will impact directly on resource allocation both revenue and capital, and on the Council's ability to meet parental expectations on school places. Pupil data and broader population data is used to identify the numbers of school places required and where they should be located. This feeds into the capital programme so that resources are allocated where they will have the most beneficial effect.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The allocation of school places affects all families in all parts of the City and can influence where people choose to live. Failure to obtain the desired choice of school can create a strong sense of grievance. The process of expressing a preference and if disappointed, entering an appeal can create intense anxiety for many families in the City. Admission arrangements together with school place planning are framed in such a way as to be mindful of supporting the needs of communities.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The cross party working group and the stakeholder group considered the introduction of King's Church of England School, a Secondary Christian Freeschool, and its likely impact on projected pupil numbers and existing catchment areas. This was seen as the biggest unknown and in the absence of trend data for King's Church of England School intake was seen as a key concern in the immediate future.
- 6.2 Having looked in detail at this array of information and having set these against the potential impact of a range of catchment area changes and the introduction of King's Church of England School, both groups recommended no change for 2014/15.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The present Secondary School Admissions system was agreed at the Full Council Meeting held on 27 February 2007. At that meeting it was agreed that as recommended by the Working Group, a review of the whole secondary schools admissions system in 2012 be approved.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. NONE

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. NONE

Background Documents

1. NONE