

Children's Services Committee

Report title:	Determination of Admission Arrangements – 2020/21
Date of meeting:	22 January 2019
Responsible Chief Officer:	Sara Tough Executive Director of Children's Services
Strategic impact Norfolk County Council has a statutory duty to determine a co-ordinated scheme and timetable for administering around 29,000 admission applications for mainstream school places each year. As the admissions authority for all Community and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, Norfolk County Council must also determine the admission policy detailing how applications for these schools will be prioritised (<i>currently 195 schools</i>). The admission authority for each Academy, Foundation and Voluntary Aided School (the trust for Academies and the governing body for all other own admission authority schools) must determine the policy for their school(s). All admission authorities must determine their arrangements for the academic year 2020/21 by 28 February 2019.	

Executive summary

This report summarises the statutory consultation outcomes and changes to Norfolk's admissions co-ordination scheme and timetable for the academic year 2020/21.

The co-ordination scheme details the process and timetable for administering the formal admission rounds (Reception, Transfer to Junior schools and Transfer to Secondary schools) for all mainstream schools in Norfolk including Academies and Free Schools. Whilst no longer a statutory duty, the Council also continues to co-ordinate in-year admissions and the scheme details how in-year applications are administered.

The consultation process included a proposed change to the Looked After Children priority within over-subscription rules to include "adopted children from abroad" for Community and VC schools for 2020/21 and the introduction of a revised, consolidated Fair Access Protocol.

A separate statutory process deals with the placement of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans.

Recommendations:

- **To approve the co-ordination schemes and timetables including in-year co-ordination for 2020/21**
- **To agree the admission arrangements for Community and VC schools
To agree to the revised priority for Looked After Children, to include children adopted from abroad within the over-subscription rules for Community and VC schools**
- **To approve the introduction of the Fair Access Protocol**

1. Proposals

- 1.1 Each year the County Council is required to determine the admissions co-ordination scheme for all schools and to determine the admissions policy for all Community and VC schools as the admission authority for these schools.
- 1.2 The co-ordination scheme has been developed following annual consultations over a number of years. The proposed schemes and timetable meet the requirements imposed by the School Admissions Code and associated legislation to ensure a fair and consistent process for parents.
- 1.3 As required by legislation, admissions consultation must run for at least six weeks. The consultation opened on 1 November and closed on 13 December 2018. The consultation was highlighted on the Council's website under "current consultations" and in the school admissions section of the website.
- 1.4 As schools and governing bodies are key consultees, a school management information sheet was sent to all Headteachers and Chairs of governing bodies on 1 November 2018 inviting them to respond with an online survey. Schools were also encouraged to promote the consultation with parents via their own newsletters and websites.
- 1.5 The statutory timescale for consulting on and determining arrangements and the limited scope for introducing changes may discourage parents and school leaders from engaging in the consultation. Discussions with colleagues from both the Eastern Region and the Department for Education (DfE) Admissions team confirm this remains a common feature of this statutory process. The DfE does receive a significant response when consulting on proposals to change the statutory school admissions code particularly when high profile proposals are consulted on.
- 1.6 Any statutory changes to the code could impact on the proposed 2020/21 arrangements but any guidance to admission authorities seeking changes to admission policies would not apply before the academic year 2021/22.
- 1.7 The response, typical of previous consultations, was low with only 31 completed responses received. All, but 1, respondents supported the proposed arrangements for the admissions rounds, in year co-ordination and the timetable.
- 1.8 The Minister of State for School Standards has asked Local Authorities to give priority within over-subscription criteria to children previously in state care outside of England, and have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. The School Admissions Code will be amended in due course. 23 respondents to the consultation (74%) agreed with the extension of the priority given to Looked after Children to include children adopted from abroad. The 8 respondents who did not, gave no reason for their decision.
- 1.9 The consultation also included a revised Fair Access Protocol, which included a consolidation of current Fair Access processes, documentation and to establish Fair Access Panels across Norfolk. 27 respondents (87%) supported the introduction of the revised protocol.

2. Evidence

- 2.1 From the very limited consultation response there is support for the existing co-ordination arrangements and the admissions policy for Community and VC schools.
- 2.2 Parents who are refused admission are entitled to appeal to independent admission appeals panels. Since 2010 appeal panels have been required to consider the legality of admission arrangements as part of this process. Our arrangements have not been referred by appeal panels to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) as part of this regular review.
- 2.3 Additionally parents can refer our determined arrangements to the OSA. This has not occurred since 2014 when our arrangements were confirmed as compliant.
- 2.4 Parents dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal can refer concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman but again no concerns have been expressed regarding the co-ordination scheme or admissions policies.
- 2.5 The vast majority of parents gain a place at a preferred school.

Admission Round 2018/19	Norfolk – 1 st preferences met	Norfolk 1 st -3 rd preferences met
Reception	8463 (94.7%)	8802 (98.5%)
Transfer to Junior	3178 (94.5%)	3239 (96.3%)
Secondary transfer	8018 (92.3%)	8466 (97.4%)

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The admissions function is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant and all costs associated with the function are covered by this grant. The proposed admission arrangements do not add to the current costs.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1 The School Admissions Code sets out statutory requirements to ensure a fair and equitable process for all families seeking a mainstream school place. The co-ordination scheme follows the model scheme set out in the School Admissions Code and admission policies for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools have been developed to fully comply with the School Admissions Code.
- 4.2 Norfolk County Council is under a statutory duty to determine admission arrangements by 28 February each year. If these cannot be determined, the Secretary of State has the power to impose a co-ordination scheme.

5. Background

Full details of existing admission arrangements and policies for all Norfolk schools: - www.norfolk.gov.uk/admissions -

Norfolk's proposed 2020/21 arrangements: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-admissions/norfolk-admission-arrangements-2020-21>

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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