

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Educational Services Committee: 11 March 2020**

Subject: Proposal to consult on amending the Schools Admission & Placing Request Policy**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of the report is to seek Committee approval to undertake a formal consultation on amending our Admission and Placing Request Policy for mainstream schools (primary and secondary). The consultation will be a formal consultation in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Committee is asked to approve the proposal to undertake formal consultation on the proposed changes to our Admission and Placing Request Policy.
- 2.2** A report on the outcome of the consultation will be brought to the Educational Services Committee in September 2020.

3. Background

- 3.1** Children attend their local catchment-area school, and catchment schools are allocated in relation to the location of the permanent residence of the child/young person. However, the right of parents to make a placing request for their child/children to be educated in a school other than their catchment school is recognised. The Admission and Placing Request Policy sets out the arrangements for the placing of catchment pupils and process for considering placing requests.
- 3.2** Placing request criteria are used to determine the allocation of places for children in situations where there are more children seeking places in a school than there are places available. The same placing request criteria are also used to allocate places in schools where the number of catchment children exceeds the number of spaces available in the school.
- 3.3** In the past 2 years, it has not been possible to grant all placing requests and this resulted in concerns being raised by parents about the process and the criteria applied. This subsequently resulted in a number of statutory appeals to the Placing Requests Appeals Panel and has identified that the Admission and Placing Request Policy, which was last updated in 2015, requires to be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

3.4 Placing requests are part of the entry requirements for schools, and changes to placing request criteria are covered by the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 and require statutory consultation in line with the Act.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Over the last 5 years, there has been change in the patterns of population density in relation to school catchment areas, which presents a challenge to the service in relation to effectively managing resources.

4.2 The placing request criteria have not been reviewed for a number of years, and in recent years parents have voiced concerns about the criteria. The Council therefore wishes to consult on changes to the placing request criteria and procedure in order to make the process clearer, more transparent and to improve our ability to effectively and efficiently manage resources through future-planning based on sound evidence and trends.

4.3 The current criteria are detailed in Appendix 1 and have worked well in most cases. However, feedback from the Placing Request Appeals Panel, parents and others suggest that not all criteria is perceived to be fair and/or clearly understood.

4.4 The information provided as part of an application for catchment place or placing request must be accurate and requires a rigorous process to ensure that catchment places are allocated appropriately and that the placing request process is fair and operates within the legal requirements. The policy requires to be updated to ensure parents/carers are aware of the documentation which is required to be provided and the checks which will be undertaken to establish the accuracy of information supplied which may include visits to premises to confirm residence.

Proposed Changes

4.5 It is proposed to revise the policy to provide clarity on the documents required to demonstrate proof of residency, guidance on shared custody, and clarity on legal guardianship. The proposals also provide a statement to clarify that if fraudulent information is provided, the school place may be withdrawn, even if the child has enrolled in the school.

4.6 It is also proposed to make changes to the current criteria for granting placing requests (in rank order of priority) as below:

1. Children residing within the West Dunbartonshire area.

There is no change to this criteria and priority will always be given to children residing within the West Dunbartonshire area.

2. In relation only to denominational schools, those children/young people who have been baptised in the Roman Catholic (RC) Church and whose

parents/carer have the same religious beliefs as the school.

This is a new criteria and supports families who can evidence their commitment to the denominational school. It does not exclude parents for making a placing request to the denominational school it just means priority will be given where the same religious beliefs as the school can be demonstrated.

3. Children with relevant medical conditions who require facilities or support available only in the requested school. All applications under this category should be supported by documentary evidence provided by your/ /family doctor and the community paediatrician.

The criteria has been expanded to clarify to parents that the medical condition relates to the child and that they need to demonstrate that the support required can only be provided at the placement school.

4. Children who have siblings already in the school and who will continue to attend the school for the session the application is being made.

This criteria is already in place and supports families with more than one child already in the school, and consideration will be given to number of siblings.

5. Children from single-parent families where, for example, proximity of school to the parent's place of work/study would be advantageous for the care and well-being of the child.

The criteria is already in place, however it has been widened to include situations where the single parent is studying rather than just their place of work.

6. Travel distance from home to school by a suitable walking route. Those living closest to the school ranking highest.

This criteria caused confusion with some parents who believed this meant priority was given to those furthest from the school and the criteria has been reworded to provide clarity.

7. Suitability of particular teaching methods to the child's needs or the availability of subjects which he/she was previously studying.

This criteria remains unchanged.

8. We then give children from outside West Dunbartonshire priority in order of categories 2-7

Only after children resident within West Dunbartonshire are considered would we then consider children outside the area and again the criteria would be used.

The criteria will be applied in the order shown above. If, for any category, the number of requests exceeds the number of places available the next succeeding criteria will be used to prioritise those requests, and so on, until all priority criteria have been exhausted. If, after this process, there are still more placing requests than places available, then a ballot will be held to allocate the places available. The Admissions and Placing Requests Policy will be amended to clarify that the ballot will be organised by the Senior Education Officer, and that parents will be notified of the arrangements for the ballot.

5.0 Consultation Process

5.1 In order to change the admissions arrangements for schools a formal consultation is required in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2020 which sets out the consultation process as follows:

- Committee makes the decision to consult on a proposal.
- Educational Services prepares a formal Proposal Paper containing an Educational Benefits Statement. (Appendix 2)
- The Council publishes the Proposal Paper, advertises the fact and notifies Education Scotland and the mandatory consultees.
- The Council meets certain consultation requirements, including holding a public meeting during the consultation period.
- The statutory consultation will run for a minimum period of 6 weeks, including at least 30 school days.
- Once the consultation period is complete and upon receipt of relevant paper from the Council, Education Scotland have 3 weeks to prepare and finalise a report on the proposal and send it to the Council.
- Upon receipt of the report by Education Scotland, the Council reviews the proposal having regard to the report, and representations received during the consultation period and then prepares and publishes a final consultation report.
- Following publication of the final consultation report the Council must allow 3 weeks to elapse before making a final decision on the proposal. It is proposed that this decision would be brought to the September 2020 Educational Services committee.

6. People Implications

6.1 There are no personnel issues.

7. Finance and Procurement Implications

7.1 The consultation will be carried out within existing resources.

8. Risk Analysis

- 8.1** Due to the change in the patterns of population density in relation to school catchment areas, there is a risk that more and more schools will be unable to accommodate placing requests or catchment pupils. A clearer process which is more transparent will support parents understand the criteria applied and how they can demonstrate they meet this, and reduce reputational risk. It will also enable Educational Services working with colleagues in Capital Investment and Asset Management to effectively and efficiently manage resources through future-planning based on sound evidence and trends.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** An EIA will be undertaken and included in the response document. No impact is anticipated on the protected characteristics.

10. Consultation

- 10.1** The Council is required to formally consult on proposed changes to school admission arrangements, in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 10.2** Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report

11. Strategic Assessment

- 11.1** The proposal reflects the Council's strategic priorities, and in particular the aspiration to have meaningful community engagement with active empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged; and also to demonstrate open, accountable and accessible local government.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Current placing request criteria.

Appendix 2 – Proposal to consult on mainstream placing
request criteria

Background Papers: Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010.

Wards Affected: All

Appendix 1

Current Placing Request Criteria

Guidelines and Criteria for awarding placing requests

Placing requests for primary and secondary schools will be considered against a set of guidelines which set out the council's priorities for admission. Placing requests for specialist settings are considered on the individual needs of the child or young person. As soon as a decision has been made the parent/carer will be notified of the result, if a placing request is successful, the parent/carer should make contact with the school to establish the procedure for enrolment.

The guidelines are summarised below:

Where there are more placing requests for primary or secondary schools than there places available, priority will be given to those:

- children who are resident within West Dunbartonshire;
- cases which include medical grounds supported by the family doctor and by the Community Paediatrician; and
- Children who have older siblings in the school.

Other Factors

After these criteria have been applied and if there are more requests than places available other factors which the Executive Director may wish to take account of include:

- single parent families, where, for example, proximity of school to the parent's place of work would be advantageous for the care and well-being of the child;
- distance between home and school; and
- the suitability of particular teaching methods to the child's needs of the availability of subjects which he/she was previously studying.

Where it is not possible to identify priority applications, the local Appeals Committee will be advised that the only reasonable solution is to draw lots.

