

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Education Services Committee – 22 September 2021**

Subject: Response on the Proposal to Consult on Changes to the Admissions and Placing Requests Policy for mainstream schools

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of the report is to inform the Education Services Committee of the outcome and findings of the statutory consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the formal consultation on the proposed changes to West Dunbartonshire's Admissions and Placing Requests Policy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Notes the findings from the statutory consultation exercise,
- (ii) Approves the implementation of the proposal to make a limited variation to the Admissions and Placing Requests Policy for mainstream schools within West Dunbartonshire Council from school session 2022/2023.

3. Background

- 3.1** At the meeting on 11 March 2020, Education Committee agreed to commence formal consultation on a proposal to: vary the placing request criteria in respect of handling placing requests for primary and secondary schools; provide clarity on the documents to demonstrate proof of residency, and to clarify the ballot process.
- 3.2** The consultation has been undertaken in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and copies of the proposal document were made available to all stakeholders as prescribed by the Act. The consultation ran from 16 March 2020 until 13 May 2020, however due to Covid-19 and restrictions on public gatherings the consultation period was extended until 31 March 2021.
- 3.3** The details of the proposed changes were fully explained in the proposal document that was previously issued to Education Committee on 11 March 2020, and was available to all stakeholders from the Council's website or by request.
- 3.4** Responses to comments received from the consultation were published as part of the consultation report which was available from our website

from Monday 14 June 2021 until Sunday 4 July 2021 allowing a full 3 week review of the document. No further comments were received on the consultation report.

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 and in a small number of schools there have been occasions when not all placing requests could be accommodated. The placing requests criteria have not been reviewed for a number of years, and whilst they work well in most cases, in recent years informal feedback from parents suggested that not all the criteria were perceived to be fair and / or clearly understood by all. The consultation exercise provided an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on the proposed changes and help formulate the policy in order to make the process clearer and more transparent.
- 4.2** The majority of schools are not oversubscribed and most pupils attend their designated catchment school. The proposed limited variations would not result in any more or any fewer placing requests being granted. In the majority of cases, the only consequence of this change would be the pupil's position on the criteria ranking. In varying the current Admissions and Placing Requests Policy it is important to note that the proposed changes will not affect the majority of mainstream schools and will not affect most of our 12,317 school pupils. In schools where the intake is oversubscribed, places would continue to be granted in accordance with the agreed capacity and agreed criteria.
- 4.3** The current criteria and proposed revised criteria contained within the Proposal Paper are detailed in Appendix 1. The placing request criteria are applied in the rank order shown. 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, two or more requests cannot be distinguished as having priority, then a ballot will be held to allocate the places available. The current ballot process is undertaken by a Senior Education Officer and members of the staffing team and parents are subsequently notified of the outcome. Informal feedback from parents in previous years indicated parents were not aware of the ballot until it had taken place and had concerns in relation to this. The proposed change would ensure that parents are notified in advance of the ballot and invited to attend whilst the ballot is being undertaken.
- 4.4** One of the main changes is the proposed inclusion of criteria for denominational schools. This proposal will ensure clarity on the prioritisation of placing requests to denominational schools. Where there are more placing requests received than places available, the new criteria would enable pupils with a baptismal certificate to be given appropriate priority. This criteria would only be applied in the event of there being more

placing requests than places available. Where there are sufficient spaces available this would not impact on pupils who do not have a baptismal certificate.

- 4.5** The proposed revisions to the current policy took into consideration concerns raised previously by parents / carers in relation to residency and the Proposal Paper made reference to further information about proof of residency documentation being required and possible checks that the Council may use to confirm the information provided.

Statutory Consultation Process

- 4.6** The statutory consultation process was undertaken and the Proposal Paper which set out the proposal on which the Council was consulting was published on our website and stakeholders were invited to participate in the consultation exercise. An electronic link to the Proposal Paper was issued by email to the consultees listed within the document and was also published on the Council's website and social media accounts.
- 4.7** The consultation ran from 16 March 2020 until 13 May 2020, however due to Covid-19 and restrictions on public gatherings the consultation period was extended until 31 March 2021 to enable public meetings to be held. Four public consultation meetings were set up, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on public gatherings these meetings were held virtually. No members of the public attended the 2 virtual public consultation meetings held on 3 March 2021. The virtual public consultation meeting held on 16 March 2021 at 2.00 p.m. was attended by 1 member of the public, and no members of the public attended the virtual public consultation meeting held on the evening of 16 March 2021.
- 4.8** At the public meeting the proposal was broadly accepted and the main points raised related to oversubscribed schools, review of class numbers, and how the Council was ensuring everyone could participate in the consultation exercise. The points were addressed at the meeting and noted in the Minute from the meeting which was published as part of the Consultation Report.

Responses to the Consultation

- 4.9** 175 respondents registered with the online survey. 171 respondents (98.84%) identified as resident within West Dunbartonshire, 2 respondents (1.16%) identified as not being resident within West Dunbartonshire and 2 respondents did not answer the question.
- 4.10** From the 175 respondents, 143 (86.67%) identified as parents or carers, 5 (3.03%) identified as child/young person, 28 identified as Council staff member, 1 (0.61%) identified as Trade Union representative, 3 (1.82%) identified as 'other', and 10 skipped the question. It was also noted that 15 respondent identified themselves within 2 categories.
- 4.11** Table 1 below provides a summary of the number responses in relation to the proposed revised criteria and rank order.

Table 1

Do you agree with the proposed revised criteria and rank order?	Yes	No	Did not answer	Agreed	Disagreed
1. Children residing within West Dunbartonshire area.	99	7	69	93.40%	6.60%
2. In relation only to denominational schools, those children/young people who have been baptised in the RC church and whose parents/carers have the same religious beliefs as the school.	68	39	68	63.55%	36.45%
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 community paediatrician.	102	6	67	94.44%	5.56%
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. The number of siblings at the school will be taken into consideration.	100	7	68	93.46%	6.54%
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.	81	26	68	75.70%	24.30%
6. Travel distance from home to school by a suitable walking route. Those living closest in the school ranking highest.	88	19	68	82.24%	17.76%
7. Suitability of particular teaching methods to the child's needs or the availability of subjects which he/she was previously studying.	82	24	69	77.36%	22.64%
8. Children from outwith West Dunbartonshire (priority in order of categories 2-7)	71	36	68	66.36%	33.64%

4.12 Table 2 shows the responses to the question asking whether respondents agreed with the proposal to revise the ballot process and arrangements.

Table 2

Do you agree with the proposal to revise the ballot process and for parents to be notified in advance of arrangements for a ballot, and to be invited to be present when the ballot is being carried out?	Yes	No	Did not answer	Agreed	Disagreed
Respondents	89	15	71	85.58%	14.42%

Comments – Online Survey

4.13 65% of respondents to the online survey indicated that they would not want their comments made public in relation to the respondent and therefore comments received were collated into themes and responses were contained within the Consultation Report.

4.14 26 comments were received in relation to the proposed changes to the criteria / rank order and these comments have been grouped broadly as follows. The Education responses to comments are detailed in Appendix 2.

- Children should attend their catchment school unless there was a reason they could not go to that school
- Against the use of the denominational criteria
- Did not agree with the method of calculating distance to school and travel methods
- Children with additional support needs should attend the most suitable school
- Siblings should be given a higher priority, or guaranteed a place
- Unclear on how to change rankings or what was being asked in relation to one of the questions
- Comments relating to ELCCs: in relation to priority being given to children who attend the ELCC in the school; and clarification on whether the criteria for siblings means that priority would be given for an ELCC if there were siblings in the attached school)
- Concern that individuals may find it difficult to understand and complete the survey
- Clarification on what happen when a family moves outwith the catchment area
- Specific question relating to individual circumstances and ballot process for places at ELCCs.
- Wrap around care.

4.15 13 respondents provided additional comments on the proposal, and these comments were varied and have been grouped below, and the Education response to the comments is detailed within Appendix 3.

- Schools are oversubscribed and need to be replaced
- Consideration be given to childcare
- Ensuring accuracy of address
- Compliance with GDPR
- Not in agreement with denominational criteria being used Parents should be able to put forward their case in person
- Agreed that parents should attend ballot
- Not in agreement that parents should attend ballot
- Children outwith catchment area not considered in ballot
- Non resident children being considered for schools
- Early years ballot process

Oral or Written Comments

4.16 In addition, 2 submissions were received by email outwith the online survey and Appendix 4 provides details on the comments and the Education response.

Education Scotland Report

4.17 The full report from Education Scotland (Appendix 5) was published on their website and also published as part of the Consultation Report. Education Scotland was, overall, supportive of the proposal. Education

Scotland raised issues that the Council should consider if the proposal is taken forward and these were addressed within the Consultation Report and are detailed in Appendix 6. HM Inspectors believe West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal is of educational benefit, and will offer clear criteria on the process of allocation school places.

Consultation Report

- 4.18** The Council is required to prepare and publish its final Consultation Report when the consultation exercise has been concluded. In preparing the report, the Council must consider the report from Education Scotland and other responses to the consultation. The consultation report must explain how the Council has reviewed the proposal, a summary of the points raised during the consultation and the Council's response to them. The Consultation Report was published for a 3 week period from Monday 14 June 2021 until Sunday 4 July 2021 allowing a full 3 week review of the document. No further comments on the proposal were received.

Proposed Changes to current criteria

- 4.19** Having reviewed all the comments in detail, the notes from the public meeting and the report from Education Scotland, Education Services are proposing the following criteria for granting requests (in rank order of priority). Full guidance will be developed on each of the criteria to support parents should these criteria be agreed.
1. Children residing within West Dunbartonshire
 2. In relation only to denominational schools, those children/young people who have been baptised in the Roman Catholic (RC) Church. All applications seeking to receive recognition under this category should be supported by documentary evidence (for example a baptismal certificate from the Roman Catholic Church or a supporting letter).
 3. Children who have a medical condition which requires the provision of facilities or support provided only within the school requested. All applications under this category should be supported by documentation evidencing the reasons for the request from a medical practitioner such as the family doctor or the community paediatrician. There is a separate process for placements for pupil with additional support needs and information on this process is available from our website.
 4. Children who have siblings at the school during the next academic year. The number of siblings at the school will be taken into consideration and multiple siblings will be given higher consideration.
 5. Children from single-parent families where, for example, proximity of school to the parent's place of work or study would be advantageous for the care and well-being of the child.

6. Travel distance from home to school by a suitable walking route. Those living closest to the school ranking highest.
7. Suitability of particular teaching methods specific to the needs of the child, or the availability of subjects which the child was previously studying.
8. Children/young people from outside West Dunbartonshire (priority in order of categories 2-7) will be considered only after those resident within West Dunbartonshire have been considered.

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, two or more requests cannot be distinguished as having priority, then a ballot will be held to allocate the places available and parents will be made aware of the arrangements for the ballot.

Proposed Changes to Proof of Residency

- 4.20** There were no objections to the proposal to clarify the documentation required to provide proof of residency when pupils move into the catchment area, and Education is of the view that clarity would be beneficial and therefore proposes to revise the wording within the current policy as follows:

“If you move house during term time you can register your child at their new catchment school at any time. Contact the school direct for information on registration. You need to provide proof that you now live in the area, as places cannot be allocated until we have proof that the child is resident within the property. You must provide the child’s birth certificate and at least 2 proofs of residence which must include:

- council tax notice for the property, or proof that you have registered for council tax at that property, and
- mortgage statement for address or solicitor’s letter confirming missives have been concluded, or a rent book for rented property, or a tenancy agreement.

You must provide original documents and not copies and supporting evidence will be checked for accuracy.”

Proposed Clarification of Ballot Process

- 4.21** A significant number of respondents agreed with the proposed change to the ballot process which would enable parents to be notified of the ballot and invited to attend, and it is proposed to amend the current policy to reflect the revised process.

Date of Implementation

4.22 The above criteria will take effect for entry to school in August 2022.

5. People Implications

5.1 There will be no implications for any teaching or support staff in any schools as a result of the limited variation to the Admissions and Placing Requests policy.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

6.1 There are no financial or procurement implications associated with this report.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 There are no risks in adopting the recommendations contained in this paper and HM Inspectors believe the proposal is of educational benefit.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 The policy complies with the requirement that all children have the right to education. Where applications exceed the number of school places, authorities have to use a fair process to make practical, objective decisions and ensure that applications are considered on their merits before a final decision is made. There is potentially some differential impact in terms of religion in some very limited potential sets of circumstances that might arise, but this is in pursuit of a legitimate aim, is proportionate and is within the law. The Equalities Impact Assessment identified positive impacts in terms of disability and for women - Appendix 7.

9. Consultation

9.1 Consultation on the proposed changes was undertaken in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The proposed changes to the policy were fully consulted upon and support the Council's strategic priorities of meaningful community engagement and open, accountable and accessible local government.

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23 August 2021

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Proposed Changes in Proposal Paper
Appendix 2 – Education Response to Survey Comments on
Criteria and Rank Order
Appendix 3 - Education Response to Other Survey
Comments on the Proposal
Appendix 4 – Education Response to Written or Emailed
Comments
Appendix 5 – Education Scotland Report Published June
2021
Appendix 6 – Education Response to Education Scotland
Report
Appendix 7 - Equalities Impact Assessment No.390

Background Papers: Report and Proposal Paper submitted to Education
Committee on 11 March 2020
Consultation Response Report published June 2021
[here](#)

Wards Affected: All council Wards

