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| Report to: | Cabinet | Date: 01 June 2022 |
| Subject: | Changes to Admission Arrangements for Secondary Schools | |
| Report of | Cabinet Member for Children and Young People | |

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Approval is sought to consult on making changes to the admissions policy for maintained secondary schools.
- 1.2 It is proposed to remove catchment areas and the associated oversubscription criterion giving pupils residing in a designated catchment area priority for admission to Community secondary schools in the borough.
- 1.3 The changes, if adopted, would come into effect for applications for secondary school places for the academic year 2024/25 and would apply to all Community secondary schools in the borough.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The current admissions policy for Community secondary schools provides higher priority to those children who reside within the designated catchment area than children with siblings in the school and children who may live geographically closer, but not within the specified catchment area.
- 2.2 The proposed change to policy will remove the barrier for admission to the nearest school, due to the locally set historic boundaries of a catchment area.
- 2.3 A catchment area is a geographical area, from which children may be afforded priority for admission to a particular school. A catchment area is part of a school's admission arrangements and must therefore be consulted upon, determined, and published in the same way as other admission arrangements.
- 2.4 It is proposed to remove catchment area priority from admission arrangements to Community secondary schools. The proposed new admissions policy for maintained secondary schools would therefore be as follows:
 - 2.4.1 Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) will be given a place at the school named in their plan. When schools are oversubscribed, priority for allocation of places will be as follows:

- *Children in public care (Looked after children) and previously looked after children.*
- *Children who have an older brother or sister in the school in the September of the year of admission. For this purpose, a brother or sister may be a full or step-brother or a full or step-sister, living at the same address at the time of admission.*
- *Other children*

If there is over-subscription in any category, places will be offered using straight line distance from the child's home address to the school as a tiebreaker. The distance will be measured using the Local Authority's computerised mapping system, which measures from the address point of the home to the address point of the school using the local land and property gazetteer. Those living closer to the school will receive the higher priority.

3.0 Statutory Process

- 3.1 As the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools in Bury, the LA is responsible for determining their admission arrangements. Within the admission arrangements are the oversubscription criteria. These criteria are used to determine which applicants will be allocated a place where there are more applications than places available.
- 3.2 Academies and voluntary aided schools are their own admissions authorities and as such are responsible for determining their own admission arrangements.
- 3.3 Of the 13 secondary schools in Bury, 4 are community schools, 8 are academies and 1 is voluntary aided.
- 3.4 Under the Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme, the LA is responsible for co-ordinating the admission of all children to Bury schools and academies.
- 3.5 In accordance with the School Admissions Code (the Code), when changes are proposed to admission arrangements all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements that will apply for admission applications the following school year.
- 3.6 The Code also sets out the timeframe for consultation and determination of admission arrangements, and the stakeholders to be included within the consultation.
- 3.7 Currently, the non-faith Academies within Bury all follow the Community Secondary School Policy and still have their designated catchment areas. However, if catchment areas are removed from the Community policy, the Academy Trusts would need to determine their own admission

arrangements. If the non-faith academies wish to adopt the proposed policy, the LA could consult on their behalf at the same time.

3.8 Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

The School Admissions Code sets out the stakeholder that authorities must consult with:

- parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
- other persons who have an interest in the proposed admissions;
- all other admission authorities within the relevant;
- governing body/LA, whichever is not the admission authority;
- adjoining neighbouring LA's where the admission authority is the LA;
- the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

3.9 All admission authorities must determine admission arrangements by 28 February for entry in September the following calendar year.

3.10 The following timetable is proposed to consult upon policy changes for implementation for admission to secondary school September 2024

| DATE | KEY EVENT |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| May 2022 | Pre-consultation engagement with stakeholders |
| June 2022 | Cabinet approval to consult |
| 3 October 2022 to 5 December 2022 | 8-week consultation period. An opportunity for stakeholders to submit their views and responses. |
| 6 December 2022 To mid-January 2023 | Analysis of consultation responses undertaken. Recommendations made to the Cabinet on the arrangements to be determined. |
| By 28 February 2023 | Cabinet to determine the 2024 admission policy for Community secondary schools. |

4.0 Recommendation(s)

That:

- Cabinet give approval to consult on proposed changes to admission arrangements for maintained secondary schools.
- Cabinet to note that further recommendations will be made to Cabinet following the consultation process.

5.0 Reasons for recommendation(s)

- 5.1 Catchment areas in Bury have not been reviewed for many years and as a number of secondary schools have closed over time, their previous catchment areas have been amalgamated with other school's existing catchment areas.
- 5.2 As new housing developments have been constructed and continue to be developed, this has resulted in some catchment areas being very large and each school may not have the capacity to accommodate the growing number of children residing within its designated catchment area. In some cases, children reside in a catchment area of a school which is further away and less accessible than their nearest geographically located school.
- 5.3 The majority of secondary schools in Bury have converted to Academies, or are in discussions about conversion, and as such are, or will be, free to determine their own admission arrangements. Furthermore, Bury Council is committed to delivering a new secondary school in Radcliffe, working in collaboration with Star Academy Trust and the Department for Education (DfE). The school is to be located in Radcliffe and is expected to admit its first cohort of pupils in September 2024. This will also impact on the current designated catchment areas.
- 5.4 Analysis of transfer applications for 2021 indicates that a large proportion of families are disregarding their catchment area school when stating their preferences.
- 5.5 Discussions have taken place with neighbouring LA's as to their admission arrangements. Removing catchment areas would align with our neighbouring LA's admissions policies whilst complying with the School Admissions Code.

6.0 Alternative options considered and rejected

- 6.1 To retain existing admission arrangements for maintained secondary schools would not be viable due to the reasons stated above.

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Links with the Corporate Priorities:

The proposed changes to admission arrangements have the potential to support key ambitions of the Let's do it strategy:

- A better future for the children of the borough

- A better quality of life
- A better future for the children of the borough
- A chance to feel more part of the borough
- Building a fairer society that leaves no-one behind

Equality Impact and Considerations:

A full EIA will be undertaken as part of the consultation process.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

The proposed changes to admission arrangements could potentially reduce transport across the borough/neighbouring authorities.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

| Risk / opportunity | Mitigation |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Impact on stakeholders | Full consultation and engagement |

Legal Implications:

The requirement for consultation and the process to be followed, is as set out within the report and is in accordance with the relevant legislation and associated statutory guidance, which the Council must have regard to. The consultation itself must be undertaken in accordance with the 'Gunning principles' in that it must be undertaken when the proposals are still at a formative stage; there must be sufficient reasons put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response; adequate time must be given for consideration and responses; and the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

The outcomes of the consultation will be considered and a further report with recommendations will be brought back to cabinet.

An assessment as to the impact on equality will be required in due course.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications associated with these proposals.

Background papers:

Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

| Term | Meaning |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Catchment Areas | A catchment area is a defined geographical area around a School. Once the area has been defined, a priority can be given in the oversubscription criteria to children living within that defined area. Living within a catchment area does not guarantee that a place will be offered |
| Stakeholder | Someone who has an interest in the proposal e.g., parent, member of staff, member of local community group, local residents. |
| Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme | The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 |
| Looked after child | A child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions, in England. |
| Previously looked after child | A child who was looked after (in England), but ceased to be so because they were adopted, or become subject to a child arrangements or special guardianship order, as well as a child who appears to have been in state care outside of England care (i.e. In the care of/or accommodated by a public authority, religious organisation or any other provider whose sole/main purpose is to benefit society) but ceased to be so as a result of being adopted. |