

26 April 2012

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	School Admission Arrangements for 2013/14		
Date of Meeting:	26 April 2012		
Report of:	Strategic Director; People		
Lead Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children & Young People		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Gil Sweetenham	Tel: 293433
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Key Decision:	Yes	Forward Plan No:	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 On 22 March 2012 full Council considered the admissions arrangements for the city for admissions in 2013/14. Admissions arrangements are specifically reserved to full council under the constitution.
- 1.2 In considering the secondary school admission arrangements particular consideration had been given as to whether or not to change the boundaries of the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington Mill/Hove Park catchment areas, as further detailed in the body of this report, below .
- 1.3 On 15 March 2012 the Cabinet considered the secondary school admissions arrangements, including the boundaries of these catchment areas. Cabinet resolved that the proposal to alter the boundary between the catchment areas for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington Mill/Hove Park not be adopted for 2013/14, but be postponed until 2014/15 to allow for a wider consultation to take place, and that the existing boundary be retained for 2013/14.
- 1.4 On 22 March 2012 the admissions arrangements were adopted by full council with the boundaries unchanged. However concern was expressed at full council that there might be grounds to reconsider whether or not the boundary of the catchment area for Varndean/Dorothy Stringer should be changed for school admissions in 20-13/14.
- 1.5 In the light of the concern expressed that the issue needed to be looked at in more depth, it was agreed to convene a special CMM where this specific issue would be the sole agenda item. As a result a Special CMM was held on 4 April 2012 in order for the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to consider whether there was information which warranted looking at this issue again. The Cabinet Member was asked to consider whether or not to resolve to recommend to full Council to redraw the boundary for the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington Mill/Hove Park catchment area for school admissions in 2013/14. The Cabinet Member did not have the power to change the boundary, but only the power to recommend that this was an agenda item at full Council and to

recommend to full Council that the boundary should be changed. It would then be a matter for full Council as to whether or not to resolve that the boundary was changed for admissions in 2013/14.

- 1.6 It was resolved at the CMM meeting to recommend to Council that approval be given to alter the boundary between the catchment areas for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington/Mill Hove Park for 2013/14 as indicated by the yellow area on the indicative plan; the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment area to include the area to the east of Dyke Road. Commensurate with that the sibling link to be retained for a five year period to expire in 2018/19.
- 1.7 The City Council must have reached its decisions and confirmed its admission arrangements for 2013/14 by 15th April 2012 in order to conform to the requirements of the School Admissions Code. However in view of the recommendation that the boundaries of two key catchment areas should be re-considered by full council, and in order that this proposal could be considered on proper notice, and during school term time, it was considered that on balance the issue should be considered by full council on 26 April, so providing for proper notice.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Council consider the recommendation to approve the changing of the catchment areas for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington/Mill Hove Park for 2013/14 as indicated by the yellow area on the indicative plan (Appendix 1); the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment area to include the area to the east of Dyke Road.
- 2.2 That Council approve the retention of the sibling link to Blatchington Mill and Hove Park for any changed area be retained for a five year period to expire in 2018/19.

3. **RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 Each year local authorities must 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. This consultation takes place approximately 18 months in advance of the school year in which pupils will be admitted under the proposed arrangements. The consultation paper is attached at Appendix 2. This included the detailed proposals for changes to the boundaries.
- 3.2 The consultation process must have been concluded by 1st March 2012, with a minimum of 8 weeks consultation time. This requirement was fulfilled
- 3.3 The consultation paper was sent to all schools across the city (including both primary and secondary) for onward dissemination to parents. In addition the consultation paper was placed on the council's consultation portal. There were two drop in sessions (at the Jubilee library and the Hove Sainsbury's) , and there

were 12 focus sessions offered in primary schools across the city (two in each catchment area).

- 3.4 The annual consultation process this year included more detailed questions seeking views on how well the secondary admissions system works. This consultation asked for views from parents, schools and school governors in the usual way, but also asked a number of more specific questions about the oversubscription priorities and catchment areas. Parents were also encouraged to use the free text part of the response form to comment more generally about the community secondary admission arrangements.
- 3.5 As seen in Appendix 2 the consultation document included proposals to change the current catchment areas for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean, Blatchington Mill/Hove Park and Portslade Aldridge Community Academy. Responses to the Admissions consultation for 2013/14 were reported to Cabinet on 15th March and to Council on 22nd March. These responses are considered in more detail below.
- 3.6 On 15 March the cabinet considered school admissions and specifically the issues relating to these boundaries. At that time the report to cabinet recommended **that** the proposal to alter the boundary between the catchment areas for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean and Blatchington Mill/Hove Park not be adopted for 2013/14 to allow for a more detailed consultation process, and that recommendation was accepted, as indicated above.
- 3.7 Following the closure of the consultation period a number of further responses were received including two deputations and two petitions. These were split for and against the boundary change.
- 3.8 Concern was expressed at full council on 22 March, that there might be grounds to reconsider whether or not the boundary of the catchment area for Varndean/Dorothy Stringer should remain the same. In the light of the concern expressed and the petitions received it was agreed that this issue needed to be looked at in more depth. It was agreed to convene a special CMM where this specific issue would be the sole agenda item.
- 3.9 The two petitions and two deputations were presented to the special CMM held on 4th April. The text of those petitions is appended, at APPENDIX 3. At this meeting the Cabinet Member, Children and Young People considered the re-circulated report of the Strategic Director, People relative to the proposed school admission arrangements for 2013/14.
- 3.10 The Cabinet Member having considered the submissions made and the subsequent discussion agreed to refer the matter back to the meeting of Council scheduled for 26 April, with a recommendation that changes to the existing catchment area boundaries be made to include the area to the east of Dyke Road in the catchment area for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean for 2013/14; with any commensurate changes to the boundaries for Blatchington Mill/Hove Park. In addition she recommended that in the event the boundaries were changed the retention of a sibling link for the resulting catchment area would need to be retained for a further five year period.
- 3.11 All schools in the city are being advised that consideration of changes to these boundaries will be considered at full council on 26 April.

4. BOUNDARIES UNDER CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The proposal to increase the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment area for 2013/14 which went to consultation had been developed in recognition that there had been a change in numbers in the catchment area requiring more places in the Blatchington Mill/Hove Park area. If the proposal was accepted it would balance the numbers in the Blatchington Mill/Hove Park and Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment areas for the immediate future.
- 4.2 In addition there are long standing concerns regarding the impact of the current catchment areas on the Port Hall area of the city. Children living in this area currently sit in the catchment for Hove Park and Blatchington Mill.
- 4.3. The proposal which went out to consultation was as follows:

“The proposal is to shift the boundary of the dual catchment area westwards so that the boundary between the two catchment areas would be Dyke Road, with families to the east of Dyke Road falling in the catchment area for Dorothy Stringer and Varndean, and families to the west falling into the area for Blatchington Mill and Hove Park. “
- 4.4 Specifically the boundary recommended for consideration is that the boundary between the catchment areas would be Dyke Road as far as the Brighton-Worthing railway line. The boundary would continue along this railway line as far as Brighton Station, where it would continue down West Street (the current boundary)- this affects the area shown in map 1 of Appendix 2.
- 4.5 The results of the consultation were split. The Council received 49 e-mails from parents opposing the possible expansion of the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment area and 51 e-mails from parents supporting this.
- 4.6 In addition the council received a detailed response from Patcham High School Governing Body. This raised a number of issues regarding the number of pupils within catchment areas and the future provision of secondary places within the City. Patcham High School requested a further consultation period to involve detailed modelling of the impact of any changes to the DS/BM boundaries. The consultation responses are available for inspection by members.
- 4.7 Another issue which had been raised prior to, during, and post the consultation was in relation to the number of secondary schools being allocated to children currently attending Stamford Juniors. Stamford Juniors serves many pupils living in the Port Hall area of the city. Currently pupils from Stamford Juniors can be allocated places at any one of the nine schools in the city, (including Cardinal Newman). This concern has been considered. In reality irrespective of whether or not the relevant boundaries are changed as primary schools are not linked to secondary schools, and the transfer to secondary school will depend on the locality of the child's home in relation to their catchment area, rather than the locality of their primary school it remains inevitable that children at some relevant primary schools will still be going to a wide range of different schools, dependant on where they live.
- 4.8 Some of the consultation responses raised issues about the overall impact on places available within the city. Currently the catchment areas either as currently

drawn or with the proposed changes to the boundary have sufficient places for the potential pupils within those areas, or to put it another way the catchment areas do catch. The boundaries of the catchment areas will not resolve the long term need for more places in the city as a whole.

- 4.9 Post the consultation period the petitions and deputations received at the CMM on 4 April indicate that as seen in APPENDIX 3 there are still strong feelings on all sides of the debate about how these catchment areas should be drawn.

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: Louise Hoten

Date: 06/03/2012

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Section 88C of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as amended by the Education and Skills Act 2008 requires admission authorities to determine before the beginning of the school year, the admission arrangements which are to apply for that year. The determination must be preceded by consultation with the Governing Bodies of Schools within the area of the LA for which the LA is the admission authority, with parents and with neighbouring admission authorities. Consultation must be completed by 1st March in the year preceding the admission round, and should be for a period of no less than 8 weeks. Admission Authorities must determine their admission arrangements following that consultation by 15th April. Admission arrangements must conform to the Admissions Code which sets out acceptable and unacceptable admission arrangements and priorities. The new School Admissions Code 2012 came into force on 1 February 2012 and applies to admission arrangements for the 2013-2014 academic year. The new Code now provides that any person or body who considers that any maintained school admission arrangements are unlawful, or not in compliance with the Code relevant law relating to admissions can make an objection to the Schools Adjudicator.

Lawyer Consulted: Serena Kynaston

Date: 17.04.2012

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 only alternative option would be for the existing catchment area to remain in place for 2013/2014.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The City Council must conform to legislative requirements on the publication of admission arrangements which reflect the requirements of the Admissions Code. The recommendations ensure the City Council's compliance, and reflect the body of debate and consultation which has taken place around admission arrangements in Brighton & Hove this year and in previous years.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Indicative Catchment area plan
2. Consultation Document
3. Petitions text

Documents in Members' Rooms

None.

Background Documents

None

