

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting were approved as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

4. Draft School Admissions Policy 2022-2023

The members considered the proposed changes detailed in the draft policy.

All changes proposed to reflect the necessary changes in academic years and dates were approved.

All changes proposed with the aim of providing extra clarity, and not any actual change in policy or practice, were approved.

Applications in respect of children overseas and UK children living abroad

Members noted the legal advice that whether any changes to specific requirements in respect of such applications would be required would depend on whether the UK left the EU on 31 December 2020 with a deal or with no deal. Current legal advice was that the wording of this section of the policy may sufficiently allow for any future position.

Closing date for the part-time nursery admission round

DD advised members that many parents/cares who had submitted late applications for part-time nursery places had expressed that the reason for their late submission was because the admission round closed too early in comparison to the start date for the places. Accordingly, the local authority proposed extending the closing date of the part-time nursery admission round from March to the end of July 2022. The proposal was approved by members.

Oversubscription criteria

DD highlighted that children with a statement of special education needs (SEN) who are transitioning to Year 7 at secondary school in September, must have an amended statement of SEN naming the secondary placement by the preceding 15 February. If, in the allocation of places for the admission round, due account was not taken of these children whose named placement was a mainstream school, it could automatically result in these children having to be admitted over the published admission number when places were oversubscribed. The local authority was, therefore, proposing that oversubscription criterion 1 be extended to cater for these children. The proposal was approved by members with merit for the change to be reflected in the oversubscription criteria for all admission rounds.

DD highlighted that children who meet the medical / psychological / social oversubscription criterion (criterion 4) and satisfy the associated evidence

requirements, but who live in catchment, are automatically considered under oversubscription criterion 2, or 3 if it is applicable. Accordingly, the medical / psychological / social oversubscription criterion was only relevant in practice to children living out of catchment for the requested school. In a situation where the level of oversubscription is such that the local authority has to refuse in-catchment applications, a child meeting criterion 4 would be refused a place. The local authority was, therefore, proposing that if the necessary evidence conditions are met, such children should be prioritised after looked after, previously looked after children and statemented children for all admission rounds, ie this should move to be criterion 2. The proposal was approved by members.

DD highlighted that in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 policies, the oversubscription criteria for part-time nursery places prioritise in-catchment children for April entry over out-catchment children eligible for January entry. However, the local authority had recently concluded the allocation of places for January and April 2021 and some schools had expressed concerns with the implications of the prioritisation, given that they continue to experience that many children allocated places for April simply do not present. Children eligible for January entry can be denied a place by virtue of this prioritisation because places are allocated to April entry children, who then do not attend to take up the place. Such occurrences also have financial implications for a school. The local authority was, therefore, proposing to revert to all January applications being prioritised over all April applications, irrespective of the in/out catchment position. The proposal was approved by members and it was noted that there would be consequent changes to the order of the full oversubscription criteria for part-time nursery places.

Applications for in-year admission/school transfer

With regard to applications for in-year admission or school transfer, DD highlighted that for the last two years, policy has been that where there is a place in the relevant year group at the requested school but the application is not made in consequence of a change in the child's ordinary residence, or the circumstances are such that the local authority determines there is no need for an immediate move of school, the admission is deferred to the start of the following school term. Deferred admissions are permitted under the statutory code but until two years ago it was not Bridgend's policy to defer any admissions. The change to policy was requested by schools to minimise disruption to the education of both the child and the other children at the school.

DD explained that deferred admissions are extremely unpopular with parents/carers and many choose to protest in the manner of keeping their children out of school until they can start at the new school. This is clearly detrimental to the children's education, especially in light of the amount of school time missed due to the Covid pandemic. Additionally, a number of schools routinely express a preference for the children to be allowed to start at the school without deferment. DD requested discussion on whether a change to a policy should be pursued.

After discussion, members proposed that the current approach remain, with the proviso that if the current school and requested future school should subsequently reach a joint agreement for the transfer to be immediate, the local authority, once informed, would amend the course of action accordingly. DD highlighted that the proposal could result in claims of the approach not being consistent and fair to all; however, after further discussion, the members confirmed approval of the proposal for reflection in the 2022-2023 policy.

5. Admissions policies of voluntary-aided schools

DD explained that the statutory School Admissions Code states that admission authorities who are not local authorities must supply a copy of their determined admission arrangements to their local authority, and by no later than 1 June. This is to allow local authorities to comply with their statutory duty to publish the admission arrangements.

The local authority has been experiencing some difficulties acquiring the written admission arrangements of the voluntary-aided schools. Furthermore, when received, it has been noted that, in some instances, the documents do not meet the requirements of the code.

RD and DD highlighted that advice can be sought from the local authority in the event of any queries regarding admissions requirements. JT agreed to raise the issue with the heads of the voluntary-aided schools.

6. Admissions data

Members considered the data on the 2020-2021 admissions rounds and 2019-2020 in-years admissions/transfers, which covered those schools for which the local authority is the admitting authority.

Specific points of note and discussion were:

- The data for the 2020-2021 admissions rounds related only to on-time applications and late applications received before 1 September 2020. All applications received on or after 1 September each year become in-year admission applications.
- Significant percentages of applications for all admission rounds continue to be submitted late.
- Applications are increasingly being submitted online. The percentage for all admissions rounds was over 90%, with the online applications for the part-time nursery rounds in combination being 98.3%.
- Across all admissions rounds, a significant percentage of parents/carers did not express a first preference for their catchment school.
- Across all admissions rounds, a significant percentage of parents/carers did not record a second preference school, despite the potential implications.

- The oversubscription at some schools was noted. Despite this, the vast majority of first preferences had been met.
- There was substantial unfilled capacity across the borough.
- In 2019-2020, in-year admission/transfer requests due to house moves were again the most common with circa 40% of all the applications relating to children moving into the county.
- Despite the closure of schools for an extensive period due to the lockdown, in-year admission/transfer requests were only 4% lower than 2018-2019.
- The number of admission appeal registrations continued to be high. As the emergency legislation in Wales had not delivered any changes as far as admissions requirements are concerned, admission appeals had continued throughout lockdown, and beyond, but in a virtual format.

7. Any other business

RD stressed that the emergency Covid-related legislation in Wales had not delivered any changes as far as admissions requirements are concerned, which had been challenging, and was likely to remain so, given the significant additional Covid-related activities and pressures on staff.

8. Date of next meeting

No specific date was agreed.

RD thanked all attendees for their attendance and contributions.