

School Admissions & Appeals
Co-ordination; Allocation; Monitoring; Challenge and Strategic Planning
(Appendices A, B and C refer)

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Executive Summary

The report provides an overview of admissions to publicly funded schools and academies including the statutory functions of the Local Authority and the interaction between different admissions authorities in managing processes. A summary of Local Authority duties and responsibilities as required by the School Admissions Code is provided for information (Appendix A).

Recommendation

That the Education Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the report.

Background and Advice

The Co-ordination of Admissions

The County Council has a statutory duty to co-ordinate admissions within its administrative area for all publicly funded schools and academies. It must also have the flexibility to consider cross border applications (with 12 neighbouring local authorities). Co-ordination requires annual consultation and confirmation of a statutory scheme and timetable by a mandatory deadline. A summary of the basic statutory requirements for co-ordination is:

- Providing application systems (on-line and paper) which adhere to statutory requirements and deadlines.
- Providing accurate on-line information and advice and (where requested) a hard copy prospectus.
- Issuing offers to all Lancashire resident parents by/on the national statutory offer dates.
- Scrutinising the legality and fairness of the admissions co-ordination process and challenging schools, academies and parents in relation to any anomalies or maladministration (including for admission appeals processes).
- Consulting within statutory timescales about any proposed changes to the co-ordinated scheme (for example - to admissions policy; geographic priority areas; relevant areas for consultation and timescales).

The statutory co-ordinated scheme and timetable for 2017-18 is provided for information (Appendix B) and data about offers and on-line application development is provided for information (Appendix C).

The role of the Admission Authority

The County Council is the legal admission authority for all Lancashire's community and voluntary controlled schools. A summary of the basic statutory requirements for being an admission authority is:

- To propose and determine published admission numbers and policy within statutory guidance and timescales.
- To scrutinise the accuracy of applications for all community and voluntary controlled schools and allocate places in accordance with the determined admission arrangements.
- To offer admission appeals where these are requested. To arrange and present at admission appeal hearings for community and voluntary controlled schools.
- To recruit, undertake background checks and train independent admission appeal panel members. Also to oversee performance and complaints.
- To strategically plan to ensure that admissions policy and school place availability will allow as many Lancashire children as possible to receive an offer for a parent's preferred school or academy.

The Pupil Admissions Team offers a traded admissions service to Lancashire's primary and secondary academies and free schools.

Fair Access Protocol (FAP)

The County Council has a statutory duty to have Fair Access Protocols (FAP) for placing specific children outside of the annual admission round (especially the most vulnerable groups). The FAP must be agreed with the majority of schools and academies - all admission authorities must participate within the FAP.

Lancashire has separate FAPs for primary and secondary schools and academies.

The Consultation process

The statutory requirements to consult about proposed changes to admissions policy and published admission numbers are set out in the School Admissions Code and associated legislation. Those with an interest who are consulted include:

- Parents and families
- The governing bodies of all publicly funded schools and academies
- Neighbouring local authorities
- Neighbouring admission authorities
- Diocesan and church authority representatives
- Lancashire County Council colleagues (e.g. Capital Development & Asset Management; Special Educational Needs & Disability; County Secretary & Solicitor; Finance)
- The general public

Annual Data Returns

The County Council is required to submit the following returns in relation to admissions and exclusions:

- APAD - admission appeals - each January to the DFE via its COLLECT programme and giving full year data for the previous school year.
- APEX - exclusion review hearings - each January to the DFE via its COLLECT programme and giving full year data for the previous school year.
- Secondary offers snapshot - each year during first week in March to the DFE via its COLLECT programme.
- Primary offers snapshot - each year during mid-April to the DFE via its COLLECT programme.
- Annual report about admissions, appeals and FAP to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) - each year by 30 June.

Issues

The County Council is required to act within the statutory guidance and timescales set out in the School Admission and Admission Appeals Codes and associated legislation. It must confirm specific actions with the Department for Education and also if required the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, Education Funding Agency and Local Government Ombudsman.

The co-ordination and administration of admission arrangements in a large geographically and demographically diverse county area is a workload heavy and complex exercise. This requires constant scrutiny and challenge to ensure legality and fairness. Lancashire's Pupil Admissions Team is consistently dealing with residual issues from the previous year's admission round whilst simultaneously administering and scrutinising the current process. At the same time strategic planning is being undertaken for future admission co-ordination and all proposed changes (policy and lowering or increasing published admission numbers). This is all managed within a defined statutory framework.

The County Council receives a consistently high level of complaints, queries and challenges associated with admissions and appeals (including from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator; Ombudsman, FOI and media requests and MPs).

The potential risk to reputation is extremely high in an area of work which draws a constant attention and scrutiny from parents and various interested parties including the media (at local and national levels).

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

N/A

Risk management

There are no implications for risk management arising from this report.

Local Govt (Access to Information) Act 1985 - List of relevant background papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
School Admissions Code	December 2014	Debbie Ormerod or Nan Hogg; 01772 531878 Or 531540
School Admission Appeals Code	February 2012	Debbie Ormerod or Nan Hogg; 01772 531878 Or 531540
The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations	2014	Debbie Ormerod or Nan Hogg; 01772 531878 Or 531540
The School Admissions (admissions Arrangements and Co-ordination) (England) Regulations	2012	Debbie Ormerod or Nan Hogg; 01772 531878 Or 531540