

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Consultation on Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27

**Report of: Claire Williamson – Director of Education, Strong Start
and Integration**

Report Reference No: CF/29/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek approval of the Committee to consult on the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to comply with the statutory duty.
- 2 To share with the Committee the draft Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements that are to go for consultation

Executive Summary

- 3 Cheshire East has statutory duties relating to school admissions under the School Admissions Code.
- 4 Cheshire East has a role in co-ordinating school applications. This is set out in the Co-ordinated Scheme. It currently co-ordinates mainstream applications for all schools except Crewe Engineering and Design UTC and Cheshire Studio School.
- 5 Cheshire East is the Admissions Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools within the borough. This means that it is responsible for decisions relating to admissions to these schools. The Admissions Arrangements set out the policy for admissions including the oversubscription criteria. Other schools, for example, Academies are responsible for their own admissions decisions and policies.

- 6 Consultation must take place at least every seven years to comply with the School Admissions Code.
- 7 Some minor changes have been made to improve accessibility and use plain English where possible and avoid duplication. Although these documents provide the legal basis for admissions there is other support available for parents through clear information on the Cheshire East website, parent information booklets (referred to as the composite prospectus) and the opportunity to seek telephone advice.
- 8 The Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme were previously combined into one document. The draft documents proposed separate them to assist in making clearer for parents, schools and other stakeholders to access.
- 9 There are no changes proposed relating to the order of oversubscription criteria. Under the School Admissions Code paragraph 1.8 these must be "*reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation.*" There has been little feedback from parents, schools, members, M.P.s, Independent Appeal Panels and other stakeholders to suggest that the current criteria should be changed and are not meeting the needs of residents and other applicants. Cheshire East has a consistent record of reaching a high level of meeting parental preference, so most parents are successful in being offered a place at their first preference school.
- 10 Every school has a published admission number. There is no requirement to consult where this is to be increased. There are some schools where it is proposed to be increased these are highlighted in the document in appendix 3. There are no reductions planned for any schools where Cheshire East is the Admissions Authority.
- 11 Shared responsibility - More detail has been added in about how Cheshire East deals with applications where parents have shared responsibility for a child and how the address to be used for admissions purposes is determined. This reflects comments in recent years from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) around the fairness of basing a decision on which parent is the recipient of child benefit. The proposed Admissions Arrangements highlight different evidence that may be considered, and that the decision will be made by a Panel of Officers. It reiterates that the local authority cannot get involved in parental disputes and parents are strongly encouraged to reach agreement about their child's school application.

- 12 Summer born children – Children who are born between 1 April and 31 August are considered to be “summer born” children under the School Admissions Code. Parents have the right to send their child to school a year later but it is for the Admissions Authority to make a decision over which year group a child should be admitted to. The Department for Education guidance for parents and admissions authorities was updated in April 2023. Further detail has been added in to assist parents in understanding how to make a request and what to consider.
- 13 Admission of children outside their normal age group – more detail has been added in to assist parents in understanding how to make a request and what to consider.
- 14 Admission Arrangements for Wilmslow High School Sixth Form are also for consultation. No significant changes are proposed. There are changes for Shared responsibility which mirror the changes in the main Admission Arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve for the Draft Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to be put for consultation in line with the School Admissions Code in Autumn 2024.

Background

- 15 The last consultation took place for the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements for 2019-20 so must be consulted on even if no significant changes.

Consultation and Engagement

- 16 To comply with the School Admissions Code consultation in the Autumn would take place as set out in paragraph 1.45-48 of the School Admissions Code.

1.45 When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information form) that will apply for admission applications the following school year. Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the

requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

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

1.47 Admission authorities must consult with:

- a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;*
- b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;*
- c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools); d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority;*
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and*
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.*

1.48 For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed PAN) on the school's website or its own website (in the case of a local authority) together with details of where comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought. Admission authorities must also send, upon request, a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.

- 17 Consultation is likely to be through specific targeted questions but there will be an opportunity for consultees to provide feedback on any issue relevant to the Co-ordinated Scheme or Admissions Arrangements. Responses will be reviewed and analysed, and the proposed final Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements will be considered by the Children and Families Committee in early 2025.

Reasons for Recommendations

18 To comply with the School Admissions Code

Other Options Considered

19

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	This would put the local authority in breach of its duties under the School Admissions Code	High

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

20 Both the Admission Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme have been reviewed and approved by Legal.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

21 There are no direct financial implications of this decision.

Policy

22 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to co-ordinate school admissions and this links in with the corporate plan aim of *A council which empowers and cares about people* and the priority to *ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve to their full potential.*

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

23 An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed following the consultation if any equality implications are identified.

Human Resources

24 There are no increased human resource implications for the Council.

Risk Management

25 The Local Authority is required to consult on its Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements at least every 7 years so if it does not consult then it would not be complying with the statutory duty under the School Admissions Code.

Rural Communities

- 26 There are no direct implications for rural communities, but the oversubscription criteria gives priority to children living in catchment and closest to the school to assist in parents securing a place at their local school.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 27 Children with an Education and Health Care Plan and Cared for and Previously cared for children are given high priority within the oversubscription criteria as required by the School Admissions Code.

Public Health

- 28 There are no direct implications for public health, however providing sufficient places in their local community could improve a child's social and emotional wellbeing.

Climate Change

- 29 By providing local school places the distances which some children may have to travel to attend school should be reduced thus reduce congestion on the roads and therefore reduce emissions, improving the air quality and making a better environment to live in.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Jo Bowkett, Team Manager – Admissions and Transport joanne.bowkett@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Cheshire East Admissions Arrangements 2026-27 for consultation Appendix 2 - Cheshire East Co-ordinated Scheme 2026-27 for consultation Appendix 3 - Cheshire East Sixth Form Admissions Arrangements 2026-27 for consultation
Background Papers:	School Admissions Code, 2021