

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/09/20

Decision Date – 07/02/24

Key Decision – yes

Confidential Information – no



Determination of 2025/26 Somerset Council Admission Arrangements

Executive Member(s): Cllr Heather Shearer - Lead Member for Children, Families and Education

Local Member(s) and Division: All members

Lead Officer: Executive Director of Children, Families & Education

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1. Summary / Background

1.1 Admission Authorities are required by the School Admissions Code and associated legislation to determine their admission arrangements annually and the Executive, acting as the Admission Authority for all Somerset Voluntary Controlled and Community schools is required to fulfil this function in relation to the 2025/26 admission arrangements.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive agrees:

1. To the proposed changes to the over subscription criteria for Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Primary Schools (as set out in Appendix 1)
2. To the proposed changes to the over subscription criteria for Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Secondary Schools (as set out in Appendix 2)
3. To determine the Admission Arrangements for all Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Primary Schools for 2025/26 (as set out in Appendix 3)

4. To determine the Admission Arrangements for all Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Secondary Schools for 2025/26 (as set out in Appendix 4)

3. Reasons for recommendations

3.1 It is a requirement of the School Admissions Code that all Admission Authorities determine their admission arrangements for 2025/26 by 28 February 2024.

The School Admissions Code 2021 states that;

‘In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.’

3.2 Somerset Local Authority consulted on the changes outlined below in appendices 1 and 2 for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools in order to make the over-subscription criteria clearer and more concise as expected by the School Admissions Code.

3.3 Additional criteria have been added over the years resulting in a relatively high number of criteria. Also, factors such as academisation and changes to the SEN code of practice have resulted in some criteria becoming outdated and unnecessary. Therefore the Local Authority is looking to remove criteria that are no longer useful.

The current Somerset Local Authority Admissions Arrangements contain more over-subscription criteria than most of our neighbouring local authorities.

3.4 Each proposed change was modelled using data from previous years and it was established that those criteria that are no longer useful or relevant (see appendices 1 and 2.) The proposed changes were presented to the Senior Management Team and the changes to be consulted on were agreed by them.

3.5 Four comments were received in relation to the Somerset Council Admission Arrangements consultation.

One comment was not relevant to the consultation and was in regard to other issues. One was requesting clear guidance on summer born legislation from Somerset Council and schools. A response has been sent with the relevant information in the arrangements highlighted and a link to the webpage for further information. One comment was unclear and the consultee has been emailed to request clarification. The final comment was not in relation to a Local Authority School.

4. Other options considered

4.1 The Equalities Team in Public Health requested the impact of including a criterion giving priority to children in receipt of Service Premium be investigated.

4.2 It was determined this was unnecessary because there have been just 2 service family refusals in the last 3 years. Also, disadvantage for service families is already considered and adjustments are made in other ways.

4.3 Service families more often require places as in year admissions rather than starting or transferring school places. Including this as a criterion would have no impact on in year admission applications except for the position on the waiting list at an over-subscribed school.

5. Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

5.1 Continue to protect and care for the most vulnerable children, adults and families in the community and support their carers.

5.2 Improve the prospects of children and young people most at risk of being disadvantaged.

5.3 By prioritising siblings, local schools and families in receipt of pupil premium Somerset Council is supporting the delivery of the above priorities.

6. Financial and Risk Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications. The admission arrangements meet the requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021 and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

6.2 There is minimal risk to the Local Authority as the admission arrangements proposed are compliant with the School Admissions Code.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications. The admission arrangements meet the requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021 and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

HR Implications

7.2 There are no HR implications.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

7.3 There are no negative equalities implications.

Community Safety Implications

7.4 There are no community safety implications as this consultation does not have any impact on Community Safety.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

7.5 There are no climate change and sustainability implications and supporting local schools for local Children is likely to reduce environmental pollution as pupils are more likely to walk or cycle to school.

Health and Safety Implications

7.6 There are no health and safety implications as this consultation does not have any impact on health and safety.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

7.7 There are no implications for health and wellbeing. There are no implications for preventing ill-health (physical and mental health). There are no implications for reducing health and social inequalities

Social Value

7.7 Not applicable

8. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

8.1 The proposed decision has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee.

9. Background

9.1 The School Admissions Code 2021 requires all admission authorities to determine their 2025/26 admission arrangements by 28 February 2024. Where changes are proposed to admission arrangements, the admission authority must first publicly consult on those arrangements for a minimum of 6 weeks between 1 October and 31 January the year before those arrangements are due to apply. Once all arrangements have been determined, arrangements can be objected to and referred to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May 2024. Any decision taken by the adjudicator must be acted upon by the admission authority.

9.2 The over-subscription criteria relate to 94 Voluntary Controlled and Community schools (92 primary phase and 2 secondary phase).

The over-subscription criteria is only applied when more applications are received than there are places available. In 2023, 22 primary phase Voluntary Controlled and Community schools were over-subscribed. There were no over-subscribed secondary phase Voluntary Controlled and Community schools.

In line with the School Admissions Code 2021 a public consultation on the proposed changes to the primary and secondary admission arrangements was held between 8 December 2023 and 26 January 2024.

9.3 In the admission round for school entry in September 2023, for both primary and secondary school applications, 98% of applicants were offered a school place at one of their first three preferences.

The 2025/26 proposed admission arrangements for Somerset Voluntary Controlled and Community schools are fit for purpose, are clear and transparent and support the principle of local schools for local children.

10. Background Papers

[School Admissions Code 2021](#)

[Local Authority 2025/26 Primary Co-ordinated Scheme](#)

[Local Authority 2025/26 Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme](#)

[Local Authority Sixth Form Policy 2025/26](#)

[2025/25 Published Admission Numbers for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools](#)

Appendix 1

Proposed changes to the over subscription criteria for Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Primary Phase Schools and the reason for each change.

Removal of criteria 2 that relates to children identified with a sensory, physical or medical disability.

No allocations have been made under this criteria for the past 5 years in either Local Authority or own admission authority schools where this criteria is included.

When this criteria was introduced Somerset had a low number of statemented children compared to other Local Authorities. With the introduction of the 2014 SEND code of practice the number of children in Somerset with an EHCP has increased from 1000 in 2019 to 5000 currently and therefore this criteria is now redundant.

Removal of feeder link between first and middle schools

There are no longer any Local Authority Middle Schools so this criteria is not relevant.

Removal of priority for an infant school if there is a sibling link at the junior school

This criteria was last used for 3 children in 2019 – 2 of which would have been allocated a place regardless of this criteria and therefore this criteria is now redundant.

Removal of the faith based criteria following a request from the Diocese of Bath and Wells who believe that church schools within the Diocese are schools for all, those of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no religious faith.

Removal of priority for children of staff

This criteria has only been used to allocate six places at four primary schools in the past three years. Therefore in the interests of the over-subscription criteria being clearer and more concise this criteria is now considered redundant.

It was decided at the pre-agenda meeting that this criteria should be reinstated to support the recruitment and retention of school staff.

Addition of a priority for children entitled to pupil premium funding

Senior Officers consider this addition important in order to support the requirements of a Fairer, Ambitious Somerset as outlined in the Council Plan.

It is suggested that this criteria is added below catchment siblings and catchment pupils in order to ensure that catchment pupils and siblings are not displaced and therefore incur a possible travel assistance cost to the Local Authority. This is in line with the Somerset Council policy of local schools for local children.

The Published Admission Numbers have been decreased for four Voluntary Controlled and Community primary schools

The reduction in PAN for Beech Grove Primary School and Elmhurst Junior School has been requested following a recommendation from the deficit budget working group and is solely financial. The reduction in PAN for Cotford St Luke Primary School and East Coker Primary School is due to the fall in pupil numbers forecast over the next few years.

Appendix 2

Proposed changes to the over subscription criteria for Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Secondary Phase Schools and the reason for each change.

Removal of criteria 2 that relates to children identified with a sensory, physical or medical disability.

No allocations have been made under this criteria for the past 5 years in either Local Authority or own admission authority schools where this criteria is included.

When this criteria was introduced Somerset had a low number of statemented children compared to other Local Authorities. With the introduction of the 2014 SEND code of practice the number of children in Somerset with an EHCP has increased from 1000 in 2019 to 5000 currently and therefore this criteria is now redundant.

Removal of priority for children living in the rural catchment area

Rural catchment' is defined as living in the catchment area of a school and there is no alternative school within the statutory walking distance of the home address (2 miles for a child aged under eight years old and 3 miles for a child aged eight years old and over)

Frome College and Wadham School are the only Voluntary Controlled or Community secondary schools. The entire catchment for both schools is rural so this criteria is now redundant.

Removal of feeder link between middle and upper schools.

This criteria is only relevant for Frome College which is always extremely under-subscribed. If Frome College should become full we could consider allocating places over PAN to catchment pupils. In addition Frome College is likely to become an academy at some point this year in which case there will be no school for which this criteria is relevant.

Removal of the faith based criteria following a request from the Diocese of Bath and Wells who believe that church schools within the Diocese are schools for all, those of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no religious faith.

Removal of priority for children of staff

No places have been allocated under this criteria at a secondary phase school within the last three years. Therefore in the interests of the over-subscription criteria being clearer and more concise this criteria is now considered redundant.

It was decided at the pre-agenda meeting that this criteria should be reinstated to support the recruitment and retention of school staff.

Addition of a priority for pupils entitled to pupil premium funding

Senior Officers consider this addition important in order to support the requirements of a Fairer, Ambitious Somerset as outlined in the Council Plan.

It is suggested that this criteria is added below catchment siblings and catchment pupils in order to ensure that catchment pupils and siblings are not displaced and

therefore incur a possible travel assistance cost to the Local Authority. This is in line with the Somerset Council policy of local schools for local children.

Appendix 3

[Local Authority 2025/26 Primary Admission Arrangements](#)

Appendix 4




[Local Authority 2025/26 Secondary Admission Arrangements](#)

Assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	11.01.2024
Communications	Peter Elliott	18.01.24
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	10.01.24
Workforce	Alyn Jones	12.01.24
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	10.01.24
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Amelia Walker / Claire Winter	11.01.24
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	12.01.24
Executive Lead Member	Heather Shearer, Lead Member for Children, Families and Education	26.01.24
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	All	
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Frances Nicholson	29.01.24
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Leigh Redman	29.01.24

Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment

Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)	 Somerset Council		 NHS Somerset		 NHS Somerset NHS Foundation Trust	
Version	1.0		Date Completed	05/01/23		
Description of what is being impact assessed						
<p>Changes to the over-subscription criteria for all Local Authority Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools for 2025/26 which are as follows;</p> <p>Primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of criteria 2 that relates to children identified with a sensory, physical or medical disability. • Removal of feeder link between first and middle schools as there are no longer Voluntary Controlled or Community middle schools in Somerset. • Removal of priority for an infant school if there is a sibling link at the junior school • Removal of the faith based criteria following recommendation from the Diocese of Bath and Wells. • Removal of priority for children of staff • Addition of a priority for children entitled to pupil premium funding 						

Secondary

- Removal of criteria 2 that relates to children identified with a sensory, physical or medical disability.
- Removal of priority for children living in the rural catchment area
- Removal of feeder link between middle and upper schools.
- Removal of the faith based criteria following recommendation from the Diocese of Bath and Wells.
- Removal of priority for children of staff
- Addition of a priority for pupils entitled to pupil premium funding

c. Reduction to the Published Admission Numbers for Beech Grove Primary School, Cotford St Luke Primary School, East Coker Primary School and Elmhurst Junior School. These are all Local Authority schools.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/or [area profiles](#), should be detailed here

School Admissions Code 2021
By modelling data from previous intakes

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

In line with statutory guidance, these proposals have been subject to a full public consultation running from 8 December 2023 to 26 January 2024. All statutory consultees were consulted with. This includes;

- 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

Three comments have so far been received in relation to the Somerset Council Admission Arrangements consultation.

One comment was not relevant to the consultation and was in regard to other issues. One was requesting clear guidance on summer born legislation from Somerset Council and schools. A response has been sent with the relevant information in the arrangements highlighted and a link to the webpage for further information. One comment was unclear and the consultee has been emailed to request clarification.

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

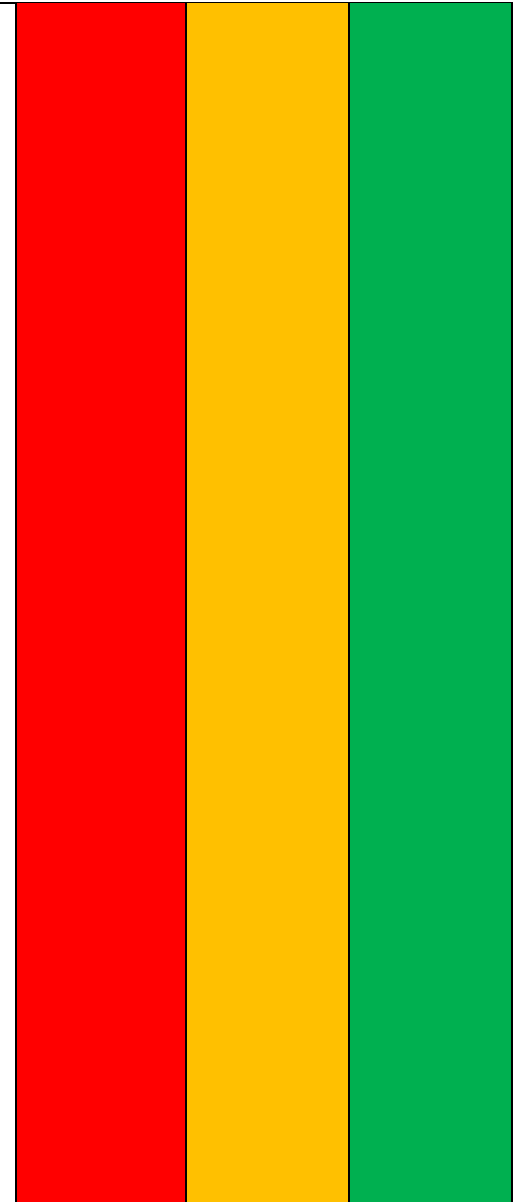
Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	□	⊗	□
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed removal of criteria 2 that relates to children identified with a sensory, physical or medical disability has not been used for the last 5 years. 	□	⊗	□
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	□	⊗	□

Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	□	⊗	□
Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	□	⊗	□
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	□	⊗	□
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The decision to consult removing faith-based criteria was taken following a recommendation from the Diocese of Bath and Wells and in order for schools to be inclusive to all; <p><i>The Diocesan Board of Education has this year decided, after careful consideration, to advise that faith-based oversubscription criteria should not be used in admission arrangements. Church schools within our diocese are schools for all; those of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no religious faith. Our schools are places for the whole community to be welcomed into with impartiality. If we believe in community and dignity, evidenced through just systems, we should not set up exclusive criteria but actively build communities and promote living well together whilst ensuring all are treated with dignity and respect. Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Education</i></p>	□	□	⊗

	<i>advises that this principle is explicitly reflected within church school admission arrangements.</i>			
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no disproportionate impact as the proposed changes do not affect this protected group. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families and veterans)	<p>The Equalities Team in Public Health requested the impact of including a criterion giving priority to children in receipt of Service Premium be investigated.</p> <p>It was determined this was unnecessary for a number of reasons;</p> <p>There have been just 2 service family refusals in the last 3 years.</p> <p>Disadvantage for service families is already considered and adjustments are made in other ways. For families of service personnel with a confirmed posting, or crown servants returning from overseas, the admission authority will:</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. Allocate a place in advance of the family arriving in the area (as long as one is available), provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date. Admission authorities must not refuse to process an application and must not refuse a place solely because the family do not yet have an intended address, or do not yet live in the area.
2. Use the address at which the child will live when applying their oversubscription criteria, as long as the parents provide some evidence of their intended address. Admission authorities must use a Unit or quartering address as the child's home address when considering the application against their oversubscription criteria, where a parent requests this.
3. Accept late applications as on time wherever possible
4. Allow exceptions to infant class size limits for children of Service Personnel admitted outside the normal admissions round.

Service families more often require places as in year admissions rather than starting or transferring school places. Including this as a criterion would have no impact on in year admission applications except for the position on the waiting list at an over-subscribed school.



	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.				
Completed by:	Linsey Banks			
Date	05.01.24			
Signed off by:	Jane Seaman			
Date	08.01.24			
Equality Lead sign off name:	Tom Rutland			
Equality Lead sign off date:	29.01.24			
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	Tom Rutland			
Review date:	01/09/24			