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| Item No. 11. | Classification: Open | Date: 6 February 2024 | Meeting Name: Cabinet |
| Report title: | | Admission arrangements for community primary schools - September 2025 | |
| Ward(s) or groups affected: | | All | |
| Cabinet Member: | | Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Refugees | |

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, EDUCATION AND REFUGEES

Southwark Council has a statutory responsibility for coordinating school admission applications on behalf of all Southwark residents applying for a place at a primary, junior or secondary maintained school/non-maintained state funded school in England.

The Admissions Code requires all admission authorities to consult when proposing to change their admission arrangements.

The current arrangements have worked well to support the admissions process and provide access to places. No changes are proposed to the overall arrangements, other than to reduce the Published Admissions Number at two primary schools: Bessemer Grange and Grange Primary Schools. Cabinet agreed for officers to discuss PAN reductions at these schools when it considered the Keeping Education Strong recommendations at its June 2022 meeting. Both schools were supportive of these changes, which have now been consulted on. Responses from the consultation are summarised in the report.

The PAN reductions will contribute to Southwark's Keeping Education Strong Strategy of reducing surplus places across primary schools so that the borough can maintain a high standard of education.

I ask that Cabinet now agree the proposed admission arrangements for Southwark community primary schools for September 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Cabinet agree the Southwark Community Primary Schools Admission Arrangements ("the Arrangements") for September 2025 onwards as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
2. That the Cabinet agree the Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) for

primary community schools for September 2025 onwards as set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Southwark Council (“the Council”) is the admission authority for community primary schools within Southwark and must determine the admission arrangements for those schools by 28 February each year, for application in the following academic year. Voluntary aided schools and academies are their own admissions authorities, with their admissions arrangements set by their governing body or Academy Trust.
4. The School Admissions Code 2021 (“the Code”), which applies to all maintained schools, academies and free schools came into force on 1 September 2021. When determining admission arrangements, admission authorities are required to act in accordance with all mandatory provisions contained in the Code.
5. Admission arrangements must also adhere to the requirements of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (“SSFA 1998”), the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). (“the Regulations”) and the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012.
6. At the Cabinet meeting on 19 March 2013, the Leader of the Council delegated authority to the cabinet member for children’s services to agree the admission arrangements for community primary schools for 2015 admissions and onwards where there were no changes made from the previous year. This report is being brought to Cabinet for agreement as there are proposed changes to the Published Admission Number (PAN) at two community primary schools as set out in paragraph 18 of this report.
7. The Regulations and paragraph 1.45 of the Code require all admission authorities to consult when proposing to change their admission arrangements. A full consultation in respect of September 2025 admission arrangements for Southwark community primary schools was carried out this year between 14 December 2023 and 25 January 2024. The consultation was published on the Council’s online consultation hub and on the school admissions web page. The consultation was circulated by email to all maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the borough, neighbouring local authorities, the diocesan boards and Southwark councillors and MPs. A formal notice about the consultation was published in Southwark News and the consultation was also publicised on the Council’s social media pages alongside the resident newsletter. Six responses were received by 25 January 2024 confirming agreement/disagreement to each of the proposals set out in the consultation document. A summary of the responses received by the closing date, 25 January 2024 are provided in Appendix 4 of this report.

8. All admissions authorities must as a minimum consult on their admissions arrangements at least once every seven years, even if there are no changes to their existing arrangements. Consultation on admission arrangements must run for a period of at least six weeks and be completed by 31 January in the year preceding the year the change is to be effected (i.e. 31 January 2024 for September 2025 admissions). The Council has written to all admission authorities in Southwark with a reminder of this for their school.
9. Admission Arrangements for September 2025 admissions, must be determined by 28 February 2024.
10. Full details of the Admission Arrangements for 2025, along with those of all other own admission authorities in the borough, will be included in the Starting Primary booklet for September 2025. Many families will use this booklet as a main source of information when selecting a primary school and will be able to download the booklet from the school admissions web page or view a hard copy upon request.
11. The full admission arrangements, including supplementary information forms and any proposed changes for Southwark admission authorities consulting on their September 2025 arrangements have been checked by officers to ensure compliance with the Code. Comments were provided in respect of any issues of non-compliance or, where a proposed change could adversely impact on the community or be amended to improve clarity. All comments provided must be considered before determination of arrangements.
12. Any serious breach of compliance is able to be referred to the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator by the local authority or other key stakeholders if not remedied through discussion with the admission authority directly.
13. A list of the published admission numbers for all Southwark primary schools for the September 2025 intake is attached at Appendix 2.
14. Should any changes to either 2024 or 2025 determined admission arrangements be required by an admission authority in Southwark, this would now be subject to a request for an in year variation to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA).

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

15. The annual Place Planning Report to Cabinet presented in October 2023 confirmed a trend of falling rolls in the borough which is continuing. There is currently an oversupply of approximately 4,600 primary school places, 585 of these are in reception year which equates to 17% of reception capacity currently vacant. In order to operate within the recommended level of surplus capacity for Reception of 5-10%, the current vacancies would need to reduce from its current level of 585 to approximately 280 spare places, a reduction of approximately 385 places (13FE).

16. School funding is linked to pupil numbers – fewer children equals less funding and contribute towards schools moving into a deficit budget. Education officers are currently consulting and working with school leaders to address this situation. One of the agreed measures is to take steps to ‘right-size’ capacity, this enables schools to reorganize resources towards the smaller intake and, provides greater stability.
17. Consultation took place during the autumn term 2023 with Head teachers and Governors of schools where rolls have been falling consistently over recent years to consider reducing the PAN. It should be noted that a PAN reduction would only apply to the Reception year of a school.
18. Agreement has been reached to reduce the PAN for 2025 at Grange and Bessemer Grange Primary Schools. If agreed, the PAN reduction will take place from September 2025 onwards. However, if the request is not upheld for any reason, the PAN would have to remain at its current level for that year.
19. This report is therefore seeking to reduce the admission number at two schools as set out in para 18.
20. Officers have also been supporting St Francis RC Primary School, a voluntary aided Roman Catholic school (planning area 3) to reduce their PANs, which will assist in the Council’s overall aim to right size capacity across the borough.
21. The overall reduction of places is summarised in the table below:

| School | PAN | Proposed PAN | Reduction |
|------------------|------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Grange | 60 | 30 | 30 |
| Bessemer Grange | 90 | 60 | 30 |
| St Francis RC | 60 | 30 | 30 |
| Reduction | 210 | 120 | 90 |

22. These proposals will achieve a reduction of 90 places (3 FE) across Southwark’s primary school places capacity in total (60 community school places and 39 voluntary aided school places).

Policy framework implications

23. The Council’s Delivery Plan 2022-26 presents a set of commitments, which will help the Council work towards a fairer, safer and greener Southwark. It is a requirement that reports to Cabinet explicitly refer to the Delivery Plan and how the report and or the actions outlined will help deliver key aspects of the plan. The school admissions process supports families to secure access to school places, thus enabling children and young people in the borough to thrive. This is in line with theme 7 of the Council’s Delivery Plan – ‘Supporting families’.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement, including equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

24. The 2025 Arrangements, together with the Council's participation in the coordinated admissions scheme for primary admissions is designed to produce fair and equitable access to school places for all children. Allocation of places is delivered through strict application of admissions and oversubscription criteria of each school in Southwark through a central (pan-London) computerised system.
25. Support is provided to families that find it difficult to navigate the admissions system through our school admission officers, school staff and the Southwark Information, Advice and Support (SIAS) Team. This involves a significant amount of training, outreach support and drop in sessions for families throughout the year. SIAS officers also provide support to specific EAL communities with the use of interpreters as well as parents/carers of children, who may have a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.
26. In addition, Southwark residents also have direct access to one to one telephone or video call support from the school admissions team during the application stage of the admissions process – this is on request and through referrals from schools and other agencies.
27. The Public Sector Equality Duty, at section 149 of the Equality Act, requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.
28. It requires public bodies to have due regard when carrying out their activities to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those with none. The Council's Approach to Equality ("the approach") commits the Council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
29. "Protected characteristics" are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful - the characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. In this case, the characteristics covering gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and sexual orientation are unlikely to be issues for consideration. Managing the capacity of primary provision to meet demand has the potential to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those with none. An EQIA assessment has been carried out, no negative impacts of the new arrangements have been identified, so no mitigating actions are required, and no equality objectives will derive from these specific proposals.

30. We have had due regard in preparing the arrangements and will have due regard when carrying out the proposed activities, for the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those with none. Provision of new school places and fair and equitable admissions policies:
- a. “advances the cause of the elimination of discrimination” by removing potential discrimination based on the protected characteristics.
 - b. “advances equality of opportunity” by ensuring that all groups, irrespective of background, have equal access to school places.
 - c. “fosters good relations” by implementing a demonstrably fair and equitable policy for school admissions across the borough for people with protected characteristics and those without.

Health impact statement

31. There are no specific identified health impacts resulting from any of the recommendations, so a health impact statement is not necessary for this report.

Climate change implications

32. Following the council assembly meeting on the 14 July 2021, the council has now committed to considering the climate change implications of any decisions made.
33. As the numbers of pupils in the authority area falls, and the numbers of pupils attending particular schools reduce, then it is likely that less pupils will be travelling to schools, thereby potentially reducing travel (and carbon emissions) overall, and, where utilised, car use. There will be a negligible effect on the other categories outlined - enhancing the environment and green space, green jobs and businesses, sustainable energy and reducing waste, as these are not substantively addressed or required in this report.
34. No direct measures have been taken to reduce or enhance the impact on climate change as part of this school admissions report, as no substantive negative effects have been identified. Additionally as no direct measures have been taken to reduce or enhance the impact on climate change as part of this admissions process, no monitoring will be required. As explained above, the falling numbers of pupils is likely, if anything, to have a net positive effect on climate change, as fewer pupils attend school and are therefore transported by car or other forms of transport. Reducing the number of school places will not directly enhance the environment and green space, nor will it create “green” jobs and businesses, or benefit sustainable energy or reduce waste, albeit that less pupils in a particular school could potentially use less energy and produce less waste.

35. There are no substantive negative effects anticipated as a result of the recommendations and proposals.

Resource implications

36. Resource implications are covered in the finance implications at paragraph 38.

Legal implications

37. Please see the concurrent from the Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance.

Financial implications

38. The responsibilities for funding and the sources for that funding pertinent to this report are clearly set out in the relevant funding and grant regulations. All the funding for schools comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and does not impact on the core funding.

Consultation

39. A full consultation on 2025 school admission arrangements for Southwark community primary schools was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out in the School Admissions Code, 2021 between 14 December 2023 and 25 January 2024. The consultation was published on the Council's online consultation hub and on the school admissions web page. The consultation was circulated by email to all maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the borough, neighbouring local authorities, the diocesan boards and Southwark Councillors and MPs. A formal notice about the consultation was published in Southwark News and the consultation was also publicised on the Council's social media pages alongside the resident newsletter. Six responses were received by 25 January 2024 confirming agreement/disagreement to each of the proposals set out in the consultation document. Responses from the consultation are summarised in Appendix 4 of this report.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Head of Procurement

40. As no services are being procured, no comment is required.

Assistant Chief Executive of Governance and Assurance

41. The recommendations in this report are included in the matters reserved to full Cabinet in Part 3C of the Council's Constitution.
42. Cabinet is advised that school admission arrangements are governed by the SSFA 1998, together with the Regulations and Code, as stated within the body of the report. Cabinet is advised that the proposed arrangements for 2025 comply with the applicable law.
43. Cabinet is asked to note that the Council is not required to consult on proposed admission arrangements so long as they remain unchanged, for the period of up to 7 years from the last consultation. A full consultation in respect of September 2025 admission arrangements for Southwark community primary schools was carried out between 14 December 2023 and 25 January 2024 as set out in paragraph 39 of this report. Responses to this consultation are set out in Appendix 4 to this report to which Cabinet should have regard when making this decision. .
44. Cabinet is reminded of the public sector equality duty under section 149 Equality Act 2010 when making this decision. This requires that, due regard be given to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with relevant protected characteristics and those with none. In particular the Cabinet Member will note the adjustments in place to enable full access to support and information for all communities in Southwark, outlined in the Community Impact Statement. That Statement also makes clear that whilst an equality impact assessment has been carried out in relation to the proposed changes, no negative impacts on people with a particular protected characteristic have been identified. The Equality Impact Assessment is included at Appendix 5 to this report.

Strategic Director of Finance REF: [CAS23/41]

45. This report seeks approval from Cabinet to the Southwark Community Primary Schools Admission Arrangements for September 2025 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report. Paragraph 38 confirms that the costs associated with the admissions process are met from the Dedicated Schools Grant, and that there is no direct financial implication on the council's revenue budgets.
46. However, the excess capacity within our school system poses financial risk to the council. Therefore, there is a risk if PAN numbers are not reduced in line with the falling pupil numbers then this might restrict the school's ability to take necessary steps to reduce their expenditure to mitigate the effect of falling rolls.

Other officers

47. There have been no other officers appropriate to advise.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

48. The Consultation on admission arrangements must run for a period of at least six weeks and be completed by 31 January in the year preceding the year the change is to be effected (i.e. 31 January 2024 for September 2025 admissions).

REASONS FOR LATENESS

49. Results from the consultation will be available from week commencing 22 January 2024 (approximately) and no later than 31 January 2024.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers | Held At | Contact |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 | Children and Families Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th floor, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH | Neil Gordon-Orr 020 7525 5234 |
| Link: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/31/contents | | |
| 2. The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 | Children and Families Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th floor, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH | Neil Gordon-Orr 020 7525 5234 |
| Link: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/31/contents | | |
| 3. The School Admissions Code 2021 | Children and Families Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th floor, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH | Neil Gordon-Orr 020 7525 5234 |
| Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2 | | |

APPENDICES

| No. | Title |
|------------|---|
| Appendix 1 | Southwark Community Primary Schools Admission Arrangements - September 2025 |
| Appendix 2 | Southwark Primary Schools – Published Admission Number for September 2025 |
| Appendix 3 | Southwark Secondary Schools – Published Admission Number for September 2025 |
| Appendix 4 | Summary of responses to Southwark Council’s Admissions consultation 2025-26 |
| Appendix 5 | Equality Impact and Needs Analysis: Admission arrangements for community primary, junior and secondary schools - September 2025 |

AUDIT TRAIL

| | | | |
|---|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Cabinet Member | Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Refugees | | |
| Lead Officer | David Quirke-Thornton Strategic Director of Children and Adult Services | | |
| Report Authors | Rizwana Natha, Compliance Officer, Education Access and Statutory Services Neil Gordon-Orr, Assistant Director, Education Access and Statutory Services | | |
| Version | Final | | |
| Dated | 30 January 2024 | | |
| Key Decision? | Yes | | |
| CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER | | | |
| | Officer Title | Comments Sought | Comments Included |
| | Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance | Yes | Yes |
| | Strategic Director of Finance | Yes | Yes |
| | List other officers here | N/A | N/A |
| | Cabinet Member | Yes | Yes |
| | Date final report sent to Constitutional Team | | 30 January 2024 |