

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	18 September 2023
Classification:	Part 1
Key Decision:	Yes
Title of Report:	School Admissions Arrangements for Community Schools 2025/26; the Coordinated Admission Scheme for Academic year 2025/26; and Review of the relevant area
Executive Director:	Councillor Helen Boyd
Report Author:	Catherine Braun, Head of Access and Inclusion and Chrissy Papas, Place Planning and Admission Manager

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The admission arrangements for (LA maintained) community schools must be agreed annually. The admission arrangements requesting agreement by council for the academic year 2025/26. This includes the published admission number (PAN) for each of the schools and the catchment areas.
- 1.2. The LA is required to undertake a statutory consultation for all community schools with school Governors on the proposed admission arrangements and PAN In addition, the LA is requesting a public consultation on the reduced PAN for Chalkwell Hall Junior School from 120 to 90. This is to bring in line with the reduced number at Chalkwell Hall Infant School (please refer to sections 3.16 – 3.28).
- 1.3. The LA must also consult schools on the Coordinated Admissions Scheme for 2025/26 and publish by the 1 January 2024. There are no significant changes proposed, but some areas have been refined to provide greater clarity. The breakdown of changes can be found in Appendix 3
- 1.4. The relevant area requires agreement by Council. This is the area that would be most impacted by Southend admission arrangements and scheme and is used for any formal consultation. The relevant area for agreement covers the entirety of Southend-on-Sea plus the bordering areas of Castle Point and Rochford.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. **To approve the proposed Admissions Arrangements for Community Schools for the academic year 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 1 and agree requirement for public consultation on changes proposed.**
- 2.2. **To approve the consultation with governing bodies of community schools takes place on the published admission number (PAN) for community infant, junior and primary schools for September 2025 as set out in the Admission Arrangements in 2.1**
- 2.3. **To approve the proposed Coordinated Admissions Scheme for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 and to agree the final version be ratified by the Executive Director for Children and Public Health in December for publication as required by law, 1 January 2024.**
- 2.4. **To approve the relevant area for schools is reviewed and agreed as follows: Southend, Castle Point and Rochford for the years 2025 and 2026.**

3. Background

Statutory Framework

- 3.1. The Council has the responsibility to determine the following in relation to school admissions:
 - a) the Admission Arrangements for Community Schools (admission numbers, admission criteria and catchment areas); and
 - b) the Coordinated Admissions Scheme, which sets out the way in which admissions for all schools (including academies and other own admission authority schools) will operate.
- 3.2. The local authority (as the admission authority for all community schools) **must** consult on the admission arrangements for community schools, if it proposes to make any changes to the existing arrangements or, at least every seven years, even if there are no changes.
- 3.3. Own Admission Authorities, (academy, foundation and voluntary aided schools) have the responsibility to consult on and determine their own admission arrangements including catchment areas.
- 3.4. The Admissions Code 2021 determines that the official window for formal consultation which must be between 1 October and 31 January and the consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 3.5. Admission arrangements for Community Schools in Southend must be determined by 28th February 2024 and included in a composite prospectus for all schools by 15th March 2024. These are statutory deadlines and must be adhered to by all admission authorities.
- 3.6. The current admission arrangements for Community Schools (including catchment areas) were last consulted on and approved by the Council in January 2021 for the admissions relating to academic year 2022/23.
- 3.7. The local authority (as the admission authority for community schools) must consult the governing body of each community school where it proposes either to increase or keep the same published admission number (PAN).

- 3.8 The proposed admission arrangements, published admission numbers and catchment areas includes all eight local authority (maintained) community schools. The LA is aware that two current community schools (Heycroft Primary and Barons Court Primary) are in the process of consulting to convert to academy status joining existing academy trusts. Whilst the legal status for these schools remains as LA community schools, the LA will continue to consult and determine arrangements which will transfer at the point of academization should they convert. Should this change occur prior to Cabinet determination, they will be removed from the final paper raised to Cabinet in January 2024.
- 3.9 The Council must balance the duty to ensure sufficient school places alongside its duty to make efficient use of resources. The DfE recommends Councils have a surplus of around 5% within each planning cluster. Where surplus becomes too low or too high consideration is needed to either increase or reduce the number of available places in the town. This results in changes to some school PANs.
- 3.10 Chalkwell Hall Infant school's Pan was reduced from 120 to 90 for admission into reception 2022/23. This reduced admission number will reach Chalkwell Hall Junior school in September 2025 when the year group reaches year 3.
- 3.11 **The proposal is to reduce the PAN of Chalkwell Hall Junior School from 120 to 90 for the year 2025. Further information is detailed from item 3.15-3.26**
- 3.12 **No further changes to other school PAN's are proposed.**
- 3.13 Schemes for coordinating all admission applications to schools must be formulated and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 1 January in the determination year. For the school year commencing September 2025, submission to the DfE must be submitted by 1 January 2024. Consultation on the scheme is mandatory every seven years or where substantial changes are being made. **Southend-on-Sea City Council will consult admission authorities in the City to ensure cohesion of the coordinated admissions round. Consultation will run from 1 November to 7 December 2023.**
- 3.14 The School Admissions guidance requires Local Authorities to determine every two years a "relevant area" for the purposes of admissions. This defines the area in which admission authorities consult on admission arrangements. The area of Southend, Castle Point and Rochford has been in place for many years and is most appropriate for consultation given that a significant number of pupils access provision in schools in those areas.

Admission Arrangements for 2025/26

Admission/oversubscription Criteria

- 3.15 There are no proposed changes from the previously consulted 2019/20 oversubscription criteria and definitions. The admission criteria for community primary schools are shown in **Appendix 1**

Published Admission Number (PAN)

- 3.16 The Admissions Code 2021 determines that admission authorities must consult the public if it proposes to decrease the PAN for a school.
- 3.17 The Admission limit for Chalkwell Hall Infant School was reduced from 120 to 90 in 2022/23 in response to reduction in birth rate.
- 3.18 Chalkwell Hall Junior School admits pupils from Chalkwell Hall Infant school. A public consultation must be held to ensure that the year 2 children moving from the Infant school can continue to the Junior school and that the Junior schools Admission Limit is matched to the infant school.
- 3.19 The change in admission limits between the schools is phased due to progression of children. The infant school admission limit will be at 90 for the year 2 pupils in the transfer window of 2025.
- 3.20 Although we have a mix of LA and academy maintained schools in the City, the Council retains the responsibility for ensuring the sufficiency of school places, which includes the number of surplus places. This information is reported annually to the Department of Education (DfE).
- 3.21 The Council already undertook conversations with 5 academy and voluntary aided schools regarding reducing their PAN (three 5FE and two 4FE). This resulted in five forms of entry (FE) being reduced across the city over the last two years. These discussions have all been finalised and agreed through formal consultation and have been included when calculating the continuing need for further reductions as demonstrated in the table below:

Cluster	FE reduction needed for 2022/23
North West	0
Leigh	1 (Chalkwell Hal Infant School)
West Central	1
East Central	1
Shoeburyness	1
Total	4 FE

- 3.22 Due to the depreciating birth numbers, the requirement for less primary school places is set to continue for at least the next 3 years. Numbers will be monitored on an annual basis and changes made accordingly to further decrease or increase as trends in births change.
- 3.23 From the four clusters each requiring one school to reduce by 1FE, only the Leigh Cluster identified a Local Authority maintained school (community school) where the LA is the admission authority. All other schools were either academy or foundation.
- 3.24 Chalkwell Hall Infant School, within the Leigh Cluster was identified for further discussion and consultation to reduce the schools PAN by one form of entry (FE) from September 2022. This was taking into consideration one other school in the cluster already reducing PAN from 4FE to 2FE; Chalkwell Hall's direct catchment area has seen a 22% reduction

in births; was a school that had expanded during the time of increased need; and is situated on a very small site.

- 3.25 The reduction in births is expected to continue for at least the next four years. This is under regular review.
- 3.26 Data, based on Chalkwell Hall Junior at 90, indicates sufficiency of places, with surplus across the City. Ensuring schools in the central area are securing places where required for 2025/26.

Area	Surplus 2025/26	Surplus 2026/27	Surplus 2027/28	Surplus 2028/29
Leigh	1%	7%	9%	16%
North West	1%	9%	14%	19%
East Central	5%	0%	17%	8%
West Central	17%	6%	20%	28%
Shoebury	0%	8%	6%	15%
	24%	30%	66%	85%

- 3.27 There are currently no proposed changes to the Admission Limits for the remaining community schools. However, Governing Bodies of community schools will have the opportunity to inform the local authority if they wish to comment on the proposal of no change. The proposed admission limits for all community primary schools for September 2025/26 are shown on **Page 2** of the Admission Arrangements for Community Schools at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.28 This would be a phased reduction in the admission limit, so that 2025/26 would be reduced to 90 and this would not impact years 4-5, and the roll out would roll forward for years 2026, 2027 etc. without the need to consult again.

Catchment Areas

- 3.29 The proposed catchment areas for primary schools for September 2022 are identified within the Admission Arrangements in **Appendix 1**. **There are no proposed changes from the last full public consultation for 2019/20.**

Primary and Secondary Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme 2025

- 3.30 Consultation rules for coordinated arrangements require the local authority to consult with other admission authorities in the area and other local authorities if there are changes from the previous year's scheme. Minor administrative practice changes are proposed for the coordinated scheme for 2025 as provided in summary in **Appendix 3**.
- 3.31 The coordinated admission scheme has not changed significantly from the version adopted for 2024, schools in the city and the CSSE will be consulted and feedback will be sought.
- 3.32 It is not anticipated that there will be significant comments for changes to the coordinated admission scheme from schools and therefore it is requested that the final version is ratified by the Executive Director for Children and Public Health in December for publication as required by law, 1 January 2024.

Background information on the relevant area

- 3.33 The “relevant area” for Southend, must include all of the city of Southend but may include parts of Essex. An area could be included in more than one “relevant area”, which would be the case if any part of Essex were included.
- 3.34 In view of the considerable cross border movement it is recommended that the “relevant area” for Southend includes the areas of Castle Point and Rochford in addition to the City of Southend-on-Sea.

4. Reasons for Decisions

- 4.1. Chalkwell Hall Junior school mainly admit pupils from the Infant school.
- 4.2. A phased reduction in the admission limit has been in operation since 2022 and the year 2 pupils from the infants will be at the admission limit of 90 in 2025.
- 4.3. An admission limit higher than the feed from the infant school would negatively impact schools in Leigh, as the pupils would generally move from neighbouring schools in the leigh area.
- 4.4. There would be a high surplus of places in the City resulting in a negative impact for some schools.

5. Other Options

- 5.1. The Council could decide not to consider reducing the PAN of one community school and thus not publicly consult on 2025/26 Admission Arrangements for Chalkwell Hall Junior School. This would add undue pressure on a small number of local schools for 2025, where a significant surplus of places is forecast, creating financial and organisational challenges.
- 5.2. Not undertaking a public consultation does not change the requirement that the Council must consult admission authorities and the CSSE on the proposed Coordinated Admission Scheme 2025 to ensure the delivery of school places, as required by law.
- 5.3. Not undertaking a public consultation does not change the requirement that the Council must consult Governors of community schools on their PAN and inform schools of the minor changes to the coordinated scheme.
- 5.4. The council could leave the admission limit at 120 for Chalkwell Hall Junior school. This could result in objections to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, from other primary schools, on the grounds that there is an oversupply of places, resulting in children moving from other local schools to Chalkwell Hall Junior school.
- 5.5. The council could leave the admission limit at 120 for Chalkwell Hall Junior school, however this would mean more admissions from local schools and children and children changing schools, unnecessarily and not for good reason, for year 3 is disruptive to their education

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There would be a financial implication for Chalkwell Hall Junior school as they would have 30 children less for year 3 and then rolling forward year on year from 2025/26.
- 6.2. The school has known of the planned reduction in the admission number since 2018 and are aware that the Infant school has been on a phased year group reduction in the admission number since 2022.
- 6.3. Chalkwell Hall Junior School has had significant lead up to the reduction in the admission limit, allowing for school organisation forward planning.
- 6.4. Were we not to consult the financial implication would rest with other schools in the area who would likely lose pupils from taking up new places at Chalkwell Hall Juniors.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The determination of admission arrangements for Community Schools and the provision of a coordinated admissions scheme is a statutory requirement. The determination for the Coordinated Admissions Scheme is a statutory requirement. The determination of a relevant area is also a statutory requirement.
- 7.2 The council could leave the admission limit at 120 for Chalkwell Hall Junior school. This could result in objections to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, from other primary schools, on the grounds that there is an oversupply of places, resulting in children moving from other local schools to Chalkwell Hall Junior school. Objections to the Adjudicator are administratively cumbersome and the outcome would impose a decision for the school.
- 7.3 In accordance with the Council's overview and procedural rules, the proposed admission arrangements for all community schools and reduced PAN for Chalkwell Hall Junior School has been subject to pre-cabinet scrutiny. Due to the statutory timeframe for consultation which must be a minimum of six weeks in term time and planned to finish on the 1 December, it will not be possible to provide pre-cabinet scrutiny prior to the final cabinet paper for the 11 January 2024 to determine arrangements. This is due to the timeline for submitting papers for pre-cabinet scrutiny not allowing time for analysis, evaluation and due considerations of the public responses to identify the final arrangements for cabinet determination in January.

8. Policy Context

- 8.1 The School Admissions Code 2021 prescribes the details of the statutory process in following the process for making changes to admission arrangements.
- 8.2 The School Admissions Code 2021 prescribes the details for determining the Coordinated Admission Scheme. Not having one in place would result in the Secretary of State imposing a scheme for Southend.

9. Carbon Impact

- 9.1. Not reducing the admission limit for Chalkwell Hall Junior School, would result in children potentially applying to move for year 3, and this would generally be children living out of the catchment area, or further away from the school would cold increase the use of cars to get to school.

10. Equalities

- 10.1 A coordinated admissions scheme and clear oversubscription criteria are necessary to ensure fair access to school places. Admission Arrangements for Community Schools and the Coordinated Admission Scheme for Southend Schools have been written in line with mandatory requirements set by the Admissions Code 2021. The code determines that authorities must ensure that the practices and criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective and that parents should be able to easily understand how places are allocated.
- 10.2 In line with the Equality Act 2010, the arrangements and scheme are reviewed annually against an expanded list of protected characteristics as identified within the Admission Code: disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
- 10.3 The proposed Scheme, arrangements and decisions made through their administration are clear that there is no discrimination on the grounds of disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation, against a parent who is applying for a school place or offered admission as a pupil.
- 10.4 There are limited exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and sex. Schools designated by the Secretary of State as having a religious character are exempt from some aspects of the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief and this means they can make a decision about whether or not to admit a child as a pupil on the basis of religion or belief. Single-sex schools are lawfully permitted to discriminate on the grounds of sex in their admission arrangements.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 The statutory timeframes for consultation for admission arrangements are legislated as a minimum of 6 weeks in term time from 1 Oct 23 to 31 January 24. Arrangements then must be determined by Council by the 28 February 24.
- 11.2 The local authority (as the admission authority for community schools) must consult the governing body of each Community School where it proposes either to increase or keep the same published admission number (PAN). Due to proposed changes for Chalkwell Hall Junior School the LA will hold a public consultation for the proposed PAN reduction for 2025/26 for this school only. The public consultation will be held on the [Your Say Southend](#) platform.
- 11.3 As no changes are proposed for the other seven community schools, there is no requirement to hold a public consultation however the governing bodies for all eight schools will be consulted.

- 11.4 Schemes for co-ordinating all admission applications to schools must be formulated and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 1 January in the determination year. For the school year commencing September 2025, submission to the DfE must be submitted by 1 January 2024. Consultation on the scheme is mandatory every seven years or where substantial changes are being made. Southend-on-Sea City Council will consult admission authorities in the Borough to ensure cohesion of the coordinated admissions round. Consultation will run from 1 November to 7 December 2023.

12. Appendices

- 12.1. **Appendix 1**: Proposed Admission Arrangements for community schools 2025/26
12.2. **Appendix 2**: Proposed Coordinated Admission Scheme 2025/26
12.3. **Appendix 3**: Summary of Proposed Scheme Changes