

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2023

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICY 2024-2025

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the School Admissions Policy 2024-2025 (see Appendix A).

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

Supporting a successful sustainable economy – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.

3. Background

- 3.1 Welsh Government's School Admissions Code 2013 (the Code) imposes requirements on local authorities and admission authorities, regarding the discharge of duties in respect of school admissions. The Council must act in accordance with the Code, as determined by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
- 3.2. As part of the statutory process, the local authority has a duty to consult with stakeholders as identified in the Code. This includes the governing bodies of all schools in Bridgend (including voluntary controlled schools) and all neighbouring local authorities.
- 3.3. The local authority is required to publish annually an admissions policy and guidance on the admission arrangements for its schools. These are published on the local authority's website. The policy and arrangements include details of the published admission number (PAN) for each school in Bridgend for which the local authority is the admission authority. The PAN for a school is the number of pupils that can be admitted to any year group for statutory-age pupils.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The Bridgend Admissions Forum agreed a draft School Admissions Policy for 2024-2025, as per the requirements under the Code, in September 2022.

- 4.2 The aforementioned consultation on the 2024-2025 policy took place with all parties between 30 November 2022 and 6 January 2023 (refer to paragraph 3.2).
- 4.3. While no formal responses to the consultation were received, a concern was expressed regarding the policy formalising an increase to the PAN of Caerau Primary School from 45 to 60.
- 4.4 As mentioned above, the PAN for a school represents the number of pupils that can be admitted to any year group for statutory school-age pupils. The PAN for each school reflects the outcome of calculations undertaken in accordance with the capacity assessment method set out in the Welsh Government guidance document 'Measuring the capacity of schools in Wales'.
- 4.5 The background to the proposed increase in the PAN for Caerau Primary School is that for the Reception year intake for September 2018, the local authority was facing multiple admission appeals by parents whose children had been refused places at the school, due to oversubscription. At the appeal hearings, the admission appeal panel was critical of the local authority's application of a PAN for the school of 45 when the capacity calculation had resulted in a higher indicated admission number. As a consequence, the panel recommended that the local authority should revisit its decision to refuse the admissions and offer places for all the children whose applications had previously been refused. The local authority acknowledged the admission appeal panel's views and decided to adopt a 'working PAN' of 60 for the school, which was supportable given the capacity calculation and the pupil projections for the school.
- 4.6 The local authority has continued to adopt the 'working PAN' of 60 in all the subsequent years as it has been justifiable given the outcomes of the annual capacity calculations. The local authority now proposes to formalise the PAN as 60 within the proposed School Admissions Policy for 2024-2025.
- 4.7 The concern expressed in writing, although not a formal consultation response, is important given its context. The concern implies that an increase in the PAN for Caerau Primary School, which is an English-medium school, contradicts the information in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), as statistics within the WESP do not mention the possible increase of English-medium places at any schools where the capacity to increase the PAN may exist. Any increase in English-medium places in such circumstances may have a negative impact in terms of applications for Welsh-medium school places, particularly in respect of families for whom the English-medium school is the closer school, of greater capacity and, therefore, potentially the more convenient school for the parents/carers to access.
- 4.8 Even though the local authority has a very generous school transport policy offer for pupils in Bridgend wishing to pursue a Welsh-medium education, many parents/carers may not want their child to travel to access a school place and, therefore, by increasing the number of English-medium school places in an area without a corresponding number of readily accessible Welsh-medium places, this may have a detrimental impact on the take-up of Welsh-medium places and, consequently, the Welsh language.

- 4.9 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been carried out (see Appendix B). Formalising the increase in the PAN for Caerau Primary School may potentially have a negative impact on the Welsh language as parents/carers may choose to consider a Welsh-medium education for their child at one of the local authority's Welsh-language primary schools may choose Caerau Primary School instead as the number of available places has increased significantly.
- 4.10 Nevertheless, it is important to note that the 'working PAN' arrangement has been monitored annually by officers and there is no evidence that working to a PAN of 60 at Caerau Primary School since 2018 has reduced the number of pupils applying annually for places at the nearest suitable Welsh-medium primary school (that is, Ysgol Cynwyd Sant). However, neither is there evidence that if there had been no increase in the 'working PAN' from 45 to 60, that there would not have been more applications to Ysgol Cynwyd Sant for Welsh-medium school places, than to Caerau Primary School for English-medium school places.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 An initial Equality Impact assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage. However, there is potentially a negative impact on the use of the Welsh language. Therefore, although it is not considered necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy proposal, a Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been undertaken. A summary of the Welsh Language Impact Assessment (see Appendix B) is detailed in paragraph 4.9.
- 6.2 It is a statutory duty that admission authorities are mindful of their duties with regards to equalities legislation. The School Admissions Policy 2024-2025 adheres to these requirements.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment has been completed. A summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is as follows:

Long-term

The school admissions policy sets out how the local authority will balance the discharge of its statutory duty in relation to parental preference, the need to safeguard the delivery of effective education and the safety of pupils, and the need to support pupils in particular circumstances (for example, learners with specific vulnerabilities), in circumstances where the applications for places at a school exceed the number of available places.

Prevention

Consultation on the school admissions policy allows stakeholders to raise issues or make comments on proposals, for consideration of appropriate actions.

Integration

The school admissions policy supports the provision of education in the communities in which pupils live.

Collaboration

Each year, the local authority works in conjunction with key stakeholders to develop proposed school admission arrangements, for those schools for which it is the admissions authority.

Involvement

In accordance with the specified requirements of the Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) (Wales) Regulations 2006 and the School Admissions Code 2013, the local authority consults each year on the proposed admission arrangements for those schools for which it is the admissions authority. Consultation for an academic year takes place two years in advance.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications regarding this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- approve the Schools Admissions Policy 2024-2025 (see Appendix A); and
- determine whether to approve the formal increase in the PAN for Caerau Primary School from 45 to 60, acknowledging the increase has been operationally implemented for a number of years and while considering the potential negative impact identified in the accompanying (Appendix B) Welsh Language Impact Assessment.

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Background documents:

None