

**AGENDA ITEM**

**COMMITTEE:**                    **LIFELONG LEARNING AND  
SOCIAL INCLUSION  
SCRUTINY**

**DATE:**                         **20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2002**

**SUBJECT:**                    **SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND CATCHMENT  
AREAS**

**REPORT BY:**                 **TERRY REDMAYNE – HEAD OF ACCESS**

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MANAGER**

**IMPLICATIONS:**

- |                   |                                     |                         |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>LEGAL</b>      | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>COMMUNITY SAFETY</b> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>EQUALITIES</b> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>ENVIRONMENT</b>      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>FINANCIAL</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>CONSULTATIONS</b>    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>STAFFING</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>OTHER</b>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

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**PURPOSE**

1. To give information to the Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee on Luton Borough Council’s current admissions policy and catchment area system.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2. **The Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the report.**

**BACKGROUND**

3. The use of geographical catchment areas to determine admissions to schools has been common practice locally and nationally for many years. In Luton the concept of catchment areas has been in place for many years and is well understood by most parents.
4. The Department for Education and Skills’ Code of Practice on school admissions recommends “catchment areas” as one of the “commonly used and acceptable criteria” for determining the allocation of school places.
5. Luton’s Admissions Forum has approved seven principles for admission to all schools in Luton. The first principle states: “In order to encourage neighbourhood schooling, the first priority for allocating places should be residency of the pupil within a clearly defined

catchment area for the school, so long as the request is made at the appropriate time" (See Appendix 1 for the Seven Principles).

## **REPORT**

### **Current Admissions Legislation**

6. Admissions practice has changed following the Rotherham Judgement (1997) and subsequent legislation in the School Standards and Framework Act (1998). The Rotherham Judgement has affected the catchment area principle to some extent. In accordance with the Rotherham Judgement, the Admissions Authority has to consider requests from those parents who have expressed a written preference ahead of those who have not, irrespective of whether they live in the catchment area or not. This means that parents living within a school's catchment area have to make a written first preference request for their catchment area school to maximise the chances of gaining a place at the school.
7. New legislation contained in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 means that Local Education Authorities and Governing Bodies of schools must comply with limits on infant class sizes. From September 2001, no five, six or seven year old in an infant class at a maintained school can be in a class of more than 30 pupils for an ordinary teaching session with a single teacher.
8. Where more parents have expressed a preference for a school than there are places available in the appropriate year group, the Admissions Authority must apply the published over subscription criteria to allocate places.

### **Current Position in Luton**

9. For all community schools, living in the catchment area is the first criterion in the over subscription criteria. For community nursery schools, a catchment area system is not in operation with the exception of Lea Bank Nursery. For community special schools places are allocated with reference to the child's individual needs identified at their statutory assessment.
10. For Luton schools for which the LEA is not the Admissions Authority, the Governing Body of the school has responsibility for admissions. There are nine voluntary aided schools (eight Catholic and one Church of England) and five foundation schools in Luton. All these schools have a geographical catchment area although it may not be the first criterion in their over subscription criteria.
11. The LEA's admissions criteria for September 2002 is detailed below:
  - a) To pupils living in the catchment area of the school where the parents express a written first preference for the school.
  - b) On medical grounds supported by a medical certificate.
  - c) To brothers and sisters of pupils currently attending the school.
  - d) On the shortest distance, measured in a straight line, between the central point (to be determined by the Governing Body) of the main school site and the pupil's home address, with those living closer to the school being accorded higher priority.
12. Luton is served by 61 infant, junior or primary schools serving 38 primary catchment areas, hence such catchment areas are comparatively small in size (see Appendix 2). At secondary level, Luton is served by 12 high schools, although Cardinal Newman serves the

whole of Luton and the two Challney Schools share the same catchment area. Thus there are 10 high school catchment areas which are, approximately, 4 times the size of their primary counterparts (see Appendix 3).

#### **Percentage of first preferences met.**

13. In the previous Going to School at 5 admissions round, the Council was able to agree 97% of first preference applications received before the deadline date.
14. For the September 2002 transfer to community junior schools 92% of parents returned their junior school transfer form before or by the deadline date. The Admissions Team was able to agree 99.5% of first preference applications received before the deadline date.
15. For the September 2002 transfer to community and foundation high schools 94% of parents returned their high school transfer form by the deadline date. The Admissions Team was able to agree 85% of first preference applications received before the deadline date.
16. For parents moving into the Borough, outside of the usual phase transfer times, the Council was able to agree 68% of first preference applications received during 2001.

#### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

17. The Council aims to ensure equality of opportunity for all Luton pupils in the admissions process and aims to agree as many first preference applications as possible.

#### **COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

18. Giving priority to catchment area pupils ensures that the distance pupils need to travel from home to school is minimised. This will aid the reduction of traffic congestion in and around local schools.

#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Seven Admissions Principles Agreed By Luton’s Admissions Forum

Appendix 2 - Infant, Junior and Primary School Catchment Area Map

Appendix 3 – Secondary School Catchment Area Map

#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

##### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

DfES Code of Practice on School Admissions (1999)

‘Rotherham Judgement’ on school admissions (1997)