

Executive Decision Report

Secondary School Catchment Area Review

Lead executive decision maker: City Mayor

Lead director: Rachel Dickinson



City Mayor

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 2

1. Summary

Purpose of report: This report summarises the outcomes of a recent public consultation exercise on proposed revisions to secondary school catchment areas for entry in September 2014.

Consultation & decision timelines: The national School Admissions Code states that consultations must last for a minimum of 8 weeks and occur between 1 November and 1 March. This consultation took place between 20 December 2012 and 28 February 2013 (10 weeks).

Admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements by 15 April 2013.

The results of this consultation is being presented to Scrutiny and Executive at the earliest opportunity to enable discussion and determination to be made in accordance with the above timeline.

Scrutiny Commission is invited to comment on the process and recommendation contained within this Report.

2. Main report

The need to review Secondary catchment areas: Secondary School catchment areas have not changed significantly since the City became a unitary authority in 1997. The Council has however closed five secondary schools since then and operated a system of priority and “linked areas” for school admissions. This review of secondary school catchment areas seeks :

- To secure alignment of the new primary and secondary catchment areas.
- To secure removal of secondary “linked areas”

Prior consultation: The City Council has recently consulted on changes to both primary school and secondary school catchment areas between 5 December 2011 and 10 February 2012. This resulted in the implementation of all proposed primary catchment area changes (excluding a relevant Samworth Academy proposal) but not the related secondary proposals. The Council took this decision in direct response to representations/ concerns received from a number of secondary school headteachers about the process followed, proposal content and implications of these

proposals for their schools.

As a result it was agreed that further immediate dialogue would take place with all secondary school headteachers to explore their concerns and allow for the possible formulation and consideration of alternative secondary catchment proposals that were potentially more acceptable to them. This decision was undertaken on the clear understanding that the Council would subsequently consult once again in the winter of 2012 upon changes to secondary catchment areas for admissions to schools in 2014-15.

Outcome of dialogue with secondary school headteachers: Council officers and representative headteachers of secondary schools met on 4 occasions during the summer term 2012; these meetings were convened and chaired by the Assistant Director of the Education Improvement Partnership and covered a wide range of issues. Headteachers were supplied with all requested data and provided within an opportunity to interrogate this, formulate alternative options and propose a consensus of the way forward.

These meetings resulted in the representative headteachers submitting revised proposals affecting four secondary schools. Unfortunately, these proposals also impacted upon a number of primary schools and would have required further consultation with these primary schools upon changes to their newly agreed catchment areas. These proposals were also not in line with the principles of the catchment area review and would have necessitated the physical realignment of some primary catchment areas or partitioning of these at key transition points.

It was the view of the Council that these alternative proposals would not lead to greater clarity for parents and would not result in a universally acceptable solution for all City children, schools and secondary headteachers. This view was reflected in the content of the public consultation materials issued on 5 December 2013.

Current consultation proposal outcomes: The Council has consulted once again upon the original secondary catchment area proposals that were the subject of consultation in December 2011 and February 2012. Supporting consultation documents detailing these proposals can be found at **Appendices A, B and C** to this report. *These documents set out the proposed catchment areas and associated changes to over subscription criteria that will be implemented in the event that the Council decides to implement these proposals.*

Views were invited upon these and responses received are summarised below.

Consideration of over-subscription criteria: In the event of the removal of current linked areas being agreed it will be necessary to amend the oversubscription criteria relating to linked areas. This matter is the subject of a separate but related report on proposed Admission Arrangements for 2014/15.

In this event of recommended changes to Secondary catchment areas being agreed for implementation it is proposed to remove Criterion 5 'Children living in the area of a closed school whose parents name one of the linked schools to that area'

It is also proposed to make sibling links a separate criterion rather than a tie-break in criterion 3. This will have no impact on the way places for siblings are allocated, but will lead to greater clarity for parents.

Should there not be any changes to the implementation of the proposed Secondary School Catchment Areas, it will be necessary to continue to operate the current oversubscription criteria.

Consultation outcomes

Who engaged with the consultation and in what capacity is summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1

	In what capacity are you responding?
Governor	2
Head teacher / Teacher	3
Local Authority	1
Local representative group	1
Other (please specify below)	1
Parent / Carer	46
Total	54

Within the above (other) the City Council has received a representation from the Education Improvement Partnership on behalf of City secondary schools and separate representations have also been received from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of Soar Valley School. These are reproduced as **Appendix D** to this report.

In response to **Question 1** respondents stated:

Do you agree with the aim of one primary and secondary school catchment area for each address in the city?		
Agree	12	(22.2%)
Disagree	40	(74.1%)
Not sure	2	(3.7%)
Total	54	

In response to **Question 2** respondents stated that

Each secondary school catchment area is to be made up from a number of whole primary school catchment areas. Do you support this proposal?

Agree	21	38.9%
Disagree	30	55.6%
Not sure	3	5.6%
Total	54	

In response to **Question 3** respondents stated that

Do you agree with the proposals for secondary schools?

Agree	10	18.5%
Disagree	42	77.8%
Not sure	2	3.7%
Total	54	

It is clear that with regard to questions 1,2, & 3 the majority of respondents do not support the Authority's proposed approach to this matter.

In response to **Question 4** respondents stated that

Do you agree with the proposed catchment area for the primary section of The Samworth Enterprise Academy?

Agree	7	13.0%
Disagree	22	40.7%
Not sure	25	46.3%
Total	54	

In view of the above it is important to review what respondents stated in the comments field for each of the above questions.

What people said about the aim of having one primary and secondary school catchment area for each address in the City.

In total only 12 additional comments were registered. A further response was provided by the EIP.

In agreement -

Prefer to attend local school 1

Ensures a place at local school 1

In disagreement

Should be parental choice 4

No changes needed 1

Single sex school/equality 1

Distance from proposed CA school 2

Distribution of schools 1

Unsure

Voluntary Aided 1

It is clear from the above that there is some confusion around the exercise of parental choice. The establishment of a catchment area does not prevent parents from expressing a preference for any school in the City. The situation is further complicated by preferences being expressed for single sex or faith based provision – an issue raised by some respondents who mistakenly saw this mitigating against choice.

EIP headteachers themselves agreed with the 4 principles used as the basis for redrawing the catchment areas, except where “sticking to these rigidly” “produces a set of catchment areas that present real problems and concerns”. A compromise was suggested however dialogue with secondary headteachers failed to identify a solution that all headteachers were happy with.

One of the City Council's key catchment area principles is that every address should have a single catchment primary and secondary school. The EIP headteachers

acknowledge this but also contest this arguing that parents may find it confusing that their geographically closest secondary school is not “allocated to them.”

Some Heads have suggested that where two secondary schools are so very close together that it would be worth investigating the practicalities of a joint/ shared catchment area.

It is important to recognise however that the City Council does not simply allocate school places on the basis of geographical proximity but seeks to accommodate parental preference wherever possible. School catchment intake varies significantly across the City from a maximum of 63% to a minimum of 17% resident within a catchment area cohort. This evidences that parents themselves are able to discern and express their preference and that they do exercise this option.

What people said about the principle that each secondary school catchment area is to be made up from a number of whole primary school catchment areas.

In total seven additional comments were registered. A further response was provided by the EIP.

From the perspective of secondary headteachers it was stated that though they can see the sense in this they did not feel it should be a requirement for all addresses within a particular primary school catchment area to be always associated with the same secondary school area. The EIP once again reiterated the view that parents might find it confusing that their geographically closest secondary school is not allocated to them. A number of parents raised specific issues with regard to the proximity of Crown Hills School.

What people said about the overall secondary proposals (Question 3)

Comments here reflect those made above with a number of parents raising issues about the alignment of Coleman Primary with a school other than Crown Hills. It was asserted that this is where the majority of Year 6 leavers go however this view is not substantiated by destination analysis of last year’s transfer cohort which shows this figure to be 34%

What people said about the primary catchment proposal for Samworth Enterprise Academy.

Only three comments were received in this regard with a view being expressed about a preference for whole streets to be included within the catchment area.

General comments received

16 further comments were received from members of the public however these reiterate the themes explored above.

EIP heads expressed a view that there are a number of other factors that have not been taken into account e.g. travel routes. It is asserted that little heed has been paid to longstanding successful relationships between secondary and primary schools which have been the basis for transition from primary and secondary schools.

It was stated that the the catchment area review procedure also appears to have not taken into consideration other major city wide initiatives, particularly, so in the case of Crown Hills (BSF) in which it was argued that the secondary school had been designed specifically to emphasise the links to a primary school, which would not now be in its catchment area if these proposals were agreed.

It is the judgement of Officers that to implement the alternative suggestions put forward by the City Council/ EIP heads working group during the Autumn 2012 would require the redrawing of some primary catchment areas. EIP heads do not accept this. Officers are of the view however that for the majority of City secondary schools the current City Council proposal represents a reasonable, working compromise. However, for some schools where the principles have produced catchment areas with significant issues, the EIP working party believe that they offered options that would not need wholesale redrawing of the catchment areas but instead a compromise on the application of the principles.

Several of the Heads have expressed misgivings that the significance of the primary catchment area proposals being agreed last year. It is felt that this has resulted in a subsequent restriction on the possibility of variation to the secondary proposals and that this was not communicated well. They feel that they have wasted time and effort in seeking solutions to their concerns and state that this was “a fait accompli” for the secondary proposals once the primary ones were fixed.

Discussion with secondary headteachers prior to recent consultation launch

In response to the above comments Scrutiny and Executive members will wish to be appraised of the extensive discussions that have taken place with secondary headteachers in advance of the most recent consultation in an attempt to find a compromise solution that was more acceptable to the concerns raised by a relatively small number of headteachers,

Earlier discussions with Secondary Headteachers during the course of the Autumn Term identified two core issues:

1. Coleman Primary School catchment area formed part of the proposed catchment area of The City of Leicester College despite the school's close proximity to Crown Hills Community College.

2. The alignment of Sandfield Close Primary School with Rushey Mead School rather than Soar Valley School.

Alignment of Coleman Primary

Dialogue with secondary headteachers identified three potential options

Option 1 – Split Coleman Primary Catchment Area at secondary transfer as suggested by the headteacher representatives . Align the north section with The City of Leicester College and the south section with Crown Hills Community College. This proposal would not affect the current primary catchment area for Coleman Primary and would only be utilised during the Secondary Transfer process. Officers are of the view that this suggestion is difficult for parents to understand and accept and breaches one of the core principles underpinning the recent Catchment Area Review - i.e. that every secondary school catchment area is formed by the alignment of a number of whole primary school catchment areas.

Option 2 – to maintain the principle of building the secondary catchment areas from a group of whole primary school areas, the Council could consider reducing the current catchment area for Coleman Primary School by dividing the north section between St. Barnabas C of E Primary School and Rowlatts Hill Primary School. This reconfiguration would enable the catchment area for The City of Leicester College to be built up from the following primary school areas: Whitehall, Rowlatts Hill and St. Barnabas. The catchment area for Crown Hills Community College would be built up from the following primary school areas: Mayflower, Spinney Hill, Shenton, Bridge and Coleman. This option maintains the principle of building secondary catchment areas from whole primary school areas. The data on primary attendance patterns would support this proposal as a viable option as only 7.1% of the primary age children who live in the north section of the catchment area actually attend Coleman Primary (18.7% attend Rowlatts Hill Primary and 13.8% attend St. Barnabas C of E Primary School).

Option 3 – Maintain the original proposal which was consulted upon - to align Coleman Primary with The City of Leicester College.

On reflection on the above the Executive authorised progression of the original consultation proposal.

Alignment of Sandfield Close Primary

Three options were proposed by secondary headteachers. In the event of Options 1 or 2 being favoured then further consultation with Sandfield Close Primary School community would prove necessary.

Option 1 – Divide the Sandfield Close Primary catchment area between Rushey Mead School and Soar Valley College at secondary transfer. This proposal does not affect the current catchment area for Sandfield Close Primary and would only be utilised during the Secondary Transfer process. This suggestion is difficult for parents to understand and accept and once again does not accord with the principle of building each secondary school catchment area from a group of whole primary school catchment areas.

Option 2 – Align the whole of Sandfield Close Primary catchment area with both Rushey Mead School and Soar Valley College; pupils would have priority for a place at either school. This proposal does not accord with the principle of one secondary school catchment area for each address within the City and may generate unrealistic parental expectations as school capacity is likely to be unable to meet first preferences.

Option 3 – Align Sandfield Close Primary with Soar Valley College and Taylor Road Primary with Rushey Mead School. In the original proposal and most recent consultation Sandfield Close Primary was aligned with Rushey Mead School and Taylor Road Primary was aligned with Soar Valley College.

Option 4 – maintain the original proposal which aligned Sandfield Close Primary School catchment area with Rushey Mead School.

On reflection on the above the Executive authorised progression of the original consultation proposal.

Recommendations

Dialogue with secondary headteachers outlined above has clearly identified that concerns have only been raised with regard to the catchment areas for 4 secondary schools – Crown Hills, City of Leicester, Soar Valley and Rushey Mead. No specific concerns have been raised with regard to the 14 other secondary schools and the consultation proposals themselves had the prior support of three Trust Schools (Babington, Fulhurst and New College) and the Samworth Enterprise Academy who act as admission authorities in their own right. The proposals themselves do not impact on English Martyrs, St Paul's Catholic School, Madani Boys and Madani Girls Schools as these faith based schools do not have catchment areas.

Recommendation: In view of the lengthy consultation process followed, the content of responses to the consultation, the need to implement agreed core planning principles and the pressing need to remove current link priority areas, the officer recommendation is that all consultation proposals are implemented as set out in **Appendices A, B & C.**

Summary comment: In the event of the above recommendation not being agreed it will be necessary to continue to operate the current oversubscription criteria.

Scrutiny and Executive is advised that in the event of retention of the linked areas into the future there is an increased likelihood that families resident in these areas will be significantly disadvantaged in the admissions processes as the secondary demographic rises.

3. Details of Scrutiny

This matter was last considered by Scrutiny on 21 November 2012 prior to the commencement of the public consultation exercise.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no capital or revenue costs to the proposals. A failure to address the inherent inequality in continuing with linked areas could result in complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman who could award financial compensation.

Pupil numbers are a key driver behind elements of the City Council's funding; this proposal would not impact on this provided the same number of pupils remained within City schools. However there may be a financial impact on individual school budgets if the changes in catchment areas meant there were pupil movements between schools.

Kate McGee, Principal Accountant - ext 39 7490

5.2 Legal implications

Consultation has been carried out in compliance with the Schools Admission Code(2012) or The School Admissions (Admissions Arrangements)(England) Regulations 2012.

Objections to changes to the catchment areas can be referred to the Schools Adjudicator

Satish Surani, Solicitor Ext 7034

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

The setting of catchment areas can impact upon city-wide carbon emissions as it can influence travel options that are available to pupils. However, travel choices aren't determined by distance alone and schools should be working with pupils to improve sustainable travel choices. Overall, the proposals in this report are not likely to have a significant impact on carbon emissions.

Helen Lansdown, Senior Environmental Consultant – Sustainable Procurement
Ex 296770

5.4 Equality Impact Assessment

The previous consultation did not raise any community cohesion or other equality issues, arising from the catchment area review. A limited number of issues have been raised during the consultation itself and on this basis there is no foreseen equality impact.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext 296303

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

Scrutiny and Executive is advised that in the event of retention of the linked areas into the future there is an increased likelihood that families resident in these areas will be significantly disadvantaged in the admissions processes as the secondary demographic rises.

6. Background information and other papers:

Secondary School Catchment Area Review – update report to Executive 30 August 2012

Secondary School Catchment Area Review and Consultation on Admission Arrangements 2014/15 – Report to scrutiny Commission 21 November 2012.

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A – Secondary Schools Catchment Area Review

Appendix B – Consultation on Admission Arrangements 2014 -2015

Appendix C – Secondary School Catchment Area Review Questionnaire

Appendix D - Representations from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of Soar Valley School.

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”?

Yes