

REPORT TO CABINET

Title: **THE EFFECTS OF DESIGNATED AREAS ON CHILDREN IN THE ROYAL BOROUGH**

Date: 28 January 2010

Member Reporting: Cllr Mrs Quick

Contact Officer(s): Cliff Turner (6367)

Wards Affected: All

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a progress review on the Council's commitment to ensure that school admission arrangements do not disadvantage Borough residents.

2. RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) The information contained in the report be noted, particularly the analysis of current and future demand for places at the popular Charters School.

ii) The Director of Children's Services be asked to continue to analyse the designated areas of Borough schools, so that as many local residents as possible are able to secure places at the school(s) of their choice.

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?
--

The report is for information only and does not at this stage require a decision. However it does support the manifesto commitment to keep school designated areas under review so that Borough residents are not disadvantaged.
--

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 The attached analysis (Appendix 1), gives an indication of where pupils live, analysed by the school that they attend, for the academic years 2006/07 and 2008/09. As is to be expected in a local authority where no part of the borough is more than about three miles from the border, many schools have children on roll from out of borough. Some of these children will have moved out of the area and remained on roll at their Royal Borough school. A larger number will have been admitted because the designated area of the relevant school covers part of a neighbouring local authority – Churchmead, Charters, Eton Porny. A significant number will also have been admitted to borough schools because, although their designated areas only covered parts of the borough, there were still places available once any borough applicants had been offered places. In the overwhelming majority

of cases, therefore, it remains the case that borough residents are not disadvantaged by the current designated area arrangements.

- 3.2 The exception, and perhaps the school that causes greatest concern, is Charters. It is our most over-subscribed school. Part of its designated area includes Bracknell Forest. However, during most of the past ten years, the only times that residents have had difficulty getting into Charters is when they move into the area after the year groups have been formed and filled through the secondary transfer process.
- 3.3 The designated area for Charters extends beyond the Royal Borough borders to cover North Ascot and the sparsely populated rural areas to the north of the village, including Cranbourne and Winkfield, and to the west of South Ascot in Swinley Forest. The feeder schools for Charters include all five Ascot schools, plus the Bracknell Forest schools Ascot Heath CE Junior and Cranbourne CE Primary.
- 3.4 Up until recently, Charters School had been able to admit, at the point of secondary transfer, all children from the designated area who wanted a place at the school, together with a significant proportion of children from Bracknell and parts of Surrey who were not in the designated area. These children may have had siblings at the school or attended one of the feeder schools.
- 3.5 However, pressure for places at the school from within the designated area has grown in recent years so that, for the September 2007 intake, 227 of the 240 available places were offered on the basis of residency in the designated area. This was significantly higher than the 195 admitted under the same rule for the previous year. For the September 2008 intake, all places (excepting six statemented children) were taken by designated area children.
- 3.6 A further four designated area children (living in Bracknell Forest) were not initially admitted as there were no places left. These have since been offered places through the normal turnover as children move away or take up places at other, preferred, schools. This situation is expected to be repeated over the next few years as the number of children transferring from the seven local primary schools remains high, although it is expected to involve only a small number of children each year.
- 3.7 The situation continues, however, to be affected by house building locally. In the past, the effect of this has been that children and young people moving into the area after the secondary transfer process (whether into those new houses or into dwellings vacated by local people moving into the new housing) have not been able to obtain places at the school. These places have already been taken by children – from in and out of the designated area – who went through the secondary transfer process.
- 3.8 In future years, the risk is that not all children living in the designated area will be offered places at secondary transfer, and new housing in the area increases this risk. If the Council is unable to offer a place at the nearest suitable school, free transport will be provided to the next nearest school with a suitable place, provided this is further away than the statutory walking distance (3 miles for aged 8 and above). The more children who fall into this category, the greater the potential impact on the home to school transport budget, but it is difficult to quantify this until exact numbers and travel routes are known.

- 3.9 The options for changing the designated area to address this issue are limited. Removing the area to the west of South Ascot (Swinley Forest) would have little impact as very few children (fewer than 10) live there. More children live in the Cranbourne and Winkfield areas (30-40), and a considerable number (over 200) live in North Ascot. Taking these settlements out of the Charters designated area would be extremely unpopular with residents living there.
- 3.10 Taking all of these areas out of the Charters designated area would also be disproportionate to the likely level of difficulties in future years. It would most likely result in there being more than enough places at Charters for children living in the new, smaller, designated area. Anything up to 30 or 40 places could then be available to children eligible for places under other rules, such as the sibling rule or the feeder school rule. There is a very strong risk that, over time, children living in Windlesham in Surrey would have priority for places over the children living in North Ascot, as Windlesham is significantly closer to Charters. In essence, therefore, removing the above settlements from the designated area could simply swap one set of out-of-borough children with another set.
- 3.11 Logically, the feeder schools would also need to be reviewed, as Cranbourne CE Primary and Ascot Heath CE Junior schools would no longer be in the designated area. Their removal would make it much more difficult for children in those areas to obtain places at Charters, making an influx of children from Windlesham more likely.
- 3.12 The admission authority (the Royal Borough currently and Charters Governing Body once Trust Status is established) would also have to ensure that by changing the designated area of the school to be coterminous with the borough boundary, it did not fall foul of legislation, the Code of Admissions and case law. Any change in designated area would have to take these matters into account.
- 3.13 It should be noted that the number of children coming from outside the designated area is decreasing in response to increased demand locally, as shown below. The highest proportion from out of the borough are in the sixth form.

Charters School	In Designated Area	Out of Designated Area	In Borough but out of Designated Area	Out of Borough	Out of Borough and out of Designated Area
2006/07	66%	34%	4%	51%	30%
2008/09	71%	29%	5%	47%	24%

- 3.14 In terms of the future, the demand for places at Charters from children leaving one of the five Royal Borough primary schools in the area is expected to be slightly lower than in recent years. One exception will be the cohort due to start secondary school in September 2012, which is larger than usual and so could cause some problems at secondary transfer. With demand for places at the primary schools in Ascot seeming

to stabilise, it might be expected that something like the status quo will endure in demand for places at Charters for the next ten years.

3.15 In addition, the assumption in the forecasts is that there will be no further substantial increases in new housing locally.

3.16 Finally, no account has yet been taken of how possible significant new housing in Bracknell town will impact on demand for secondary school places in the locality. The situation will, therefore, continue to require careful monitoring.

4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	This report is for information only		

4.2 Risk assessment

4.2.1 There are no risks inherent in this report.

5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

A major public consultation was undertaken on reviewing designated catchment areas in Maidenhead during the autumn of 2008. The response rate was low (perhaps suggesting broad satisfaction with the status quo), although a small majority favoured simplification of the catchment areas in Maidenhead. Cabinet approved those changes and they will take effect from September 2010.

6. COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

To be reported verbally to Cabinet following the meeting of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 27 January 2010.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

Financial	Legal	Human Rights Act	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Background Papers: None