

WESTMORLAND AND FURNESS COUNCIL

Cabinet

Report Title	2025-2026 School Admission Arrangements
Date of Meeting	12 September 2023
Report Author	Amy Holliman – Assistant Director, Quality, Resources and Transformation
Director	Milorad Vasic – Director of Children’s Services
Lead Cabinet Member	Councillor Sue Sanderson – Children’s Services, Education & Skills
Why is this a key decision?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates. For these purposes, savings and expenditure are “significant” if they are equal to or greater than £500,000 and/or – NO 2. Is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the area of the Council – YES
Wards Affected	All
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Not applicable
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	Not applicable
Appendices (if any)	<p>Appendix A Proposed School Admission Arrangements 2025-26</p> <p>Appendix B Proposed Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme 2025-26</p> <p>Appendix C Proposed Nursery Admissions Policy 2025-26</p> <p>Appendix D Proposed Relevant Area 2025-26</p>

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out, at Appendix A, the proposed 2025-26 admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, for which Westmorland & Furness Council is the statutory admission authority. The Local Authority (LA) is required to consult other admission authorities on any changes to the policy, including catchment areas and proposed reductions to published admission numbers (PANs). The LA must also consult the governing bodies of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools where it proposes to increase or retain the existing Published Admission Number (PAN) for 2025-26.

- 1.2 Consultation on the 2025-26 arrangements must take place for a 6-week period between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2024.
- 1.3 The paper also sets out, at Appendix B, the proposed co-ordinated scheme for school admissions in 2025-26, which the LA is required to formulate by 1 January 2024. The LA is required to consult on the scheme if it has changed from the scheme adopted for the previous academic year.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve for consultation in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021 (para 1.47) the proposed admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools at Appendix A
- 2.2 Approve for consultation the proposed co-ordinated admission scheme for 2025-26 at Appendix B;
- 2.3 Approve the nursery admissions policy for 2025-26 for Community and Voluntary Controlled nursery schools and infant/primary school providing nursery education at Appendix C; and
- 2.4 Approve, for consultation with the appropriate schools, 'the relevant area' for admission authorities in Westmorland and Furness, Appendix D.
- 2.5 Review the arrangements for admissions to school that were in place in county council and consider any future changes that may be required for Westmorland and Furness.

3. Information: the Rationale & Evidence for the Recommendations

- 3.1 Westmorland & Furness Council is the statutory admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in the LA area of Westmorland & Furness, and must determine admission arrangements by 28 February 2024 for the 2025-26 academic year.
- 3.2 Admission arrangements for the Community and Voluntary Controlled schools include catchment areas and the criteria that will be applied to the applicants to determine place allocation in the case of oversubscription.
- 3.3 Voluntary Aided, Foundation, Free schools and Academies are 'own admission authority' (OAA) schools. The governing body or academy trust for each individual school is responsible for determining the admissions policy and making decisions about the allocation of places. The Local Authority is not responsible for allocation decisions made by Voluntary Aided, Foundation, Free schools or Academies. The parental information booklets for starting school and transfer to junior and secondary school make clear the distinction between own admission authority schools and those schools to which the Local Authority admissions policy applies.

3.4 Where changes are proposed to admission arrangements (or at least every seven years where no changes have been proposed), including reductions in PANs the Council is required to consult with:

- i) Parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
- ii) Other persons in the relevant area which in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
- iii) All other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
- iv) Whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;
- v) Any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and
- vi) In the case of faith school, the body of person representing the religion or religious denomination.

(School Admissions Code 2021: paragraph 1.47)

3.5 Where the co-ordinated scheme is substantially different from the scheme for the previous year the LA must consult. If the scheme has not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that the LA must consult on the scheme at least once every seven years, even if there have been no changes.

3.6 There is also a requirement to consult the governing bodies of individual schools on the PAN the Council proposes to use for their school in September 2025 where it is proposed to remain unchanged or to increase.

3.7 It should be noted that the admissions policy set out here and in the attached appendices closely mirrors the policy applicable to 2023-24 and 2024-25, which was previously determined by Cumbria County Council. In due course, Westmorland & Furness members may wish to review whether Cumbria County Council's policy appropriately reflects the needs of Westmorland & Furness families. There is significant scope to make changes to the Council's admissions policy, particularly in terms of the oversubscription criteria used to determine place allocations when there are more applications at any given school than the number of places available.

3.8 Any review of the existing admissions policy would be a weighty task. Given the possibility that a change could fundamentally impact on the allocation of school places, it would be necessary to fully model any proposals so that the implications are fully understood by families, schools and elected members prior to being formally consulted upon. Should members wish to have the existing policy reviewed, it is recommended that this be undertaken in time for statutory consultation during the autumn term 2024, with any changes being implemented from September 2026.

Nursery Admissions Policy

3.9 There is no requirement to consult on nursery admissions in the same way as for school admissions.

- 3.10 The nursery admissions policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled nursery schools and infant/primary schools providing nursery education is in line with the proposed general admissions policy for Westmorland and Furness and has been updated for 2025-26. A copy is attached at Appendix C.

Relevant Area

- 3.11 Regulations require each Local Authority to define a 'relevant area' within which own admission authorities (OOA) must consult on their proposed admissions arrangements.
- 3.12 The relevant area is determined after consultation with local admission authorities and is reviewed periodically and at least every two years. The determination remains in place until there is a subsequent determination.
- 3.13 The relevant area was last reviewed in autumn 2021. Appendix D sets out the proposed relevant area for consultation with relevant schools in Westmorland and Furness.

4. Link to Council Plan Priorities: (People, Climate, Communities, Economy and Culture, Customers, Workforce)

- 4.1 People, Communities, Customers – the proposed admissions policy contributes to the Council Plan priorities relating to people, communities, customers and climate by ensuring that the vast majority of children and families are able to access a place at their preferred school, within a reasonable distance of home.

5. Consultation Outcomes

- 5.1 Consultation with all relevant stakeholders as prescribed in the School Admissions Code and associated legislation will be undertaken for a six-week period between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2024.
- 5.2 A further report to Cabinet in December 2023 will include details of any responses received during the consultation period and will seek a decision on adoption of the 2025-26 admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, the co-ordinated admission scheme for all maintained schools and academies in Westmorland & Furness, and the 'relevant area' within which own admission authority schools must consult on changes to their policies.

6. Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 Members can approve the proposed admissions arrangements and proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for 2025-26 for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, including changes to PAN, for consultation with the required groups; or

Members can request that the proposed admissions arrangements and proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for 2025-26 for Community and

Voluntary Controlled schools, including changes to PAN, be amended prior to consultation with the required groups.

- 6.2 Members can approve the proposed nursery admission policy for 2025-26; or
Members can request that the proposed nursery admissions policy for 2025-26 is amended.

- 6.3 Members can decide to consult on the proposed relevant area for Westmorland & Furness; or

Members can request that the proposed relevant area for Westmorland & Furness be amended prior to consultation.

7. Financial Implications and risk

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations to approve the proposed admissions policies or to consult on the proposed admission scheme.

Schools are funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) with funding allocated based on a National Funding Formula linked to pupil numbers as at the October census.

8. Legal and Governance Implications

- 8.1 As per Part 2, Section 4, para 1 of the Constitution, Cabinet can approve/reject the recommendations in this report as it sees fit. In making these decisions Cabinet should note –

- 8.2 Recommendation 2.1: When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information form) that will apply for admission applications the following school year. Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

- 8.3 Recommendation 2.2: There is no statutory obligation to consult on the co-ordinated scheme unless the scheme is substantially different from the scheme adopted for the previous academic year, subject to the requirement that the local authority must consult on the scheme at least once every seven years, even if there have been no changes during that period. As per regulation 27 of the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012, if consultation is required, the local authority must consult each admission authority in the local authority's area and any other local authorities it determines. Consultation must be undertaken with a view in particular to securing that the arrangements for the admission of pupils to schools in the areas of different local authorities are, so far as is reasonably practicable, compatible with each other.

- 8.4 Recommendation 2.3: There is no statutory obligation to consult on the nursery admissions policy, as per paras 3.9-3.10 of this report. It can therefore be approved.
- 8.5 Recommendation 2.4: Regulation 6 of the Education (Relevant Areas for Consultation on Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999 sets out who the local authority is compelled to consult with in respect of a change to the relevant area/s it is proposing. When consulting under this regulation, the local authority shall communicate their proposals by, at least, sending each admission authority which they are required to consult a written copy of the proposals and inviting their written comments within a specified period (which shall not be less than 30 days).
- 8.6 Recommendation 2.5: Cabinet can initiate a full review of admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.
- 8.7 In respect of the consultations, Cabinet must carefully consider the responses received back before making any decision on implementation. Cabinet must give due regard to the outcome of the consultation/s but is not obligated to follow the dominant view.

9. Human Resources

- 9.1 No human resource implications arise from this report.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty, Armed Forces Families, Care Leavers and Health inequalities implications)

11. The proposed admissions policy has not been screened. It replicates the former Cumbria County Council policy, which has traditionally ensured that well over 95% of families are able to access a place at their first preference school.

12. Background Documents

None