

SUBJECT:	SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICY 2025/26 INCLUDING REVIEW OF SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREAS
MEETING:	PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	5TH MARCH 2024

1. PURPOSE:

On 13th December 2023, Cabinet agreed to enter into a consultation proposing some changes to Primary School catchment areas.

The purpose of this report is to request that the People Scrutiny Committee conduct pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals ahead of Cabinet making any decisions at their meeting on 10th April 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the People Scrutiny Committee conducts pre decision scrutiny of the proposals and makes any recommendations to the Cabinet ahead of their meeting on 10th April 2024.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The School Admissions Code Wales (July 2013) places a requirement on Local Authorities to consult on its school admissions policy on an annual basis. On 13th December 2023, Cabinet agreed to enter into a more extensive consultation in order to seek the views of the wider community on some changes proposed to primary school catchment areas.
- 3.2 The Council is the admission authority for almost all secondary schools and almost all primary schools within the county. It is therefore responsible for the admission arrangements that underpin the decision made for allocating school places.

3.3 Within the county, there are 4 Voluntary Aided Schools where the governing body form the admission authority for their school. These schools are:

- Archbishop Rowan Williams Church in Wales Primary School
- Magor Church in Wales Primary School
- Our Lady and St Michaels Roman Catholic Primary School
- St Marys Roman Catholic Primary School

All other schools within the county fall under the admission arrangements published by the Council.

3.4 The School Admissions Code Wales (July 2013) requires admission authorities to consult on its admission arrangements on an annual basis. In circumstances where significant changes are proposed, a more wider consultation is required with those affected by proposals. School catchment areas form part of the Council's admission arrangements, and any proposed changes should be undertaken within this framework.

3.5 The majority of primary school catchment areas within Monmouthshire have existed in their current form since the reorganisation of Local Government in 1996, and it is thought that they have been in place for many years prior to this.

3.6 School catchment areas were last reviewed in 2019, where the Council consulted on changes to secondary school catchment areas. The review undertaken focussed on two key factors:

- To ensure that Monmouthshire residents had a designated secondary catchment school within the County.
- To improve the alignment of primary and secondary catchment areas in support of transitional arrangements

3.7 The findings of this consultation were presented to Cabinet in March 2019 where a decision was made to implement the changes as proposed. The catchment area for Goytre Fawr Primary school was aligned to King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, and the catchment area for Llandogo, Trellech and Usk Primary Schools were aligned to Monmouth Comprehensive School. The decision has resulted in all secondary age children now falling within the catchment area for a school that's within the county.

3.8 The majority of primary school catchment areas have been in place in their current form since local government reorganisation in 1996, and it is felt

that they have been in place for many years prior to this. In some cases, it could be questioned whether there is a rationale behind how some catchment areas are formed e.g. they may not be aligned to the nearest school, or in some cases may divide communities.

3.9 As a reminder, primary school catchment areas are significant because:

- They support the assessment process for determining the allocation of school places. Children residing within a catchment area for a school will be afforded priority over those who are not.
- They support the assessment process for the award of free home to school transport. Primary age children are currently eligible to receive free home to school transport if they reside more than 1.5 miles away from their nearest or catchment school.

3.10 The Council is introducing a new revised local development plan that proposes housing developments in each cluster of the county between now and 2033. This coupled with the knowledge that primary school catchment areas haven't been reviewed for some time suggests that now would be an appropriate time to build on the successes outlined under 3.7 above.

3.11 Cabinet agreed at their meeting on 13th December 2023 to commence a rolling programme that reviews primary catchment areas within the county, and agreed to kick start this review through undertaking a consultation on proposed changes to the following area:

Tredunnoch, Llanhennock and Llandegveth

These areas currently fall within the catchment area for Charles Williams Church in Wales Primary School and Monmouth Comprehensive School. They do not currently have an allocated primary catchment for a school within the county. The proposal is to consult with the affected community on proposals for the affected area to form part of the catchment area for Usk Church in Wales Primary School.

The proposal to amend the primary school catchment area is likely to result in an increase in transport costs as outlined under section 7 of this report. However, there is a question around the equity of the current arrangements as this is the only remaining area of the county that does not have a primary school catchment within Monmouthshire. As a result, these families are not eligible for free home to school transport to a Monmouthshire primary school.

- 3.12 The consultation documents can be found under appendix 1 and 2 and outlines the agreed consultation arrangements. The feedback from this public consultation alongside the input from this committee will be returned to Cabinet on 10th April 2024 for a decision on next steps.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

An integrated impact assessment associated with the proposals has been completed and can be found under appendix 3. This assessment will be reviewed and updated to incorporate the feedback received during the consultation period.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

At this stage of the process, we are seeking to consult with those affected by the proposals so that their views can be understood. On conclusion of this consultation, a consultation report will be produced to provide Members with the feedback received towards proposals. The consultation report will include a full options appraisal prior to any final decisions being made.

6. REASONS:

- 6.1 The School Admissions Code Wales (July 2013) requires admission authorities to consult on an annual basis on its admission arrangements. Where significant changes are proposed, a detailed consultation with affected parties is required. Changes to school catchment areas forms part of the admission arrangements and therefore any changes requires consultation under this framework.
- 6.2 Primary School catchment areas have not been reviewed for some time and therefore it seems sensible to consider an ongoing review to ensure that there are relevant and sustainable over the coming years.
- 6.3 This proposed consultation considers amendments to the only area of the county that does not offer a primary school catchment for a school within Monmouthshire.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Tredunnock, Llanhennock and Llandegveth

Charles Williams CIW Primary School is currently the designated catchment school for the affected area. Should the children known to be residing within

the affected area chose to attend their catchment school and require home to school transport assistance, the home to school transport costs would be in the region of £41,580 per annum. However, there are no children currently receiving transport from the affected area to Charles Williams CIW Primary School so the costs of current provision is zero.

Usk CIW Primary School is the proposed new catchment school for the affected area. Should the children known to be residing within the affected area chose to attend their proposed new catchment school, they would receive an entitlement to free home to school transport, with the costs estimated to be in the region of £41,580 per annum.

In light of the above, the immediate financial impact associated with this proposal is thought to be in the region of £41,580 per annum.

Important: It is important to note that the above costs are estimates provided on the basis of current home to school transport costs, which are likely to increase by the implementation date of September 2025. Its also important to note that the Council may still have a duty to provide transport to the schools currently designated as catchment in circumstances where its deemed nearest and there is a parental preference. This will increase the costs over those quoted above.

8. CONSULTEES:

CYP DMT
SLT
Cabinet Member for Education

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Welsh Government School Admission Code 2013

10. AUTHOR:

Matt Jones, Access Unit Manager

11. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644585

E-mail: matthewdjones@monmouthshire.gov.uk