

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **10<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People & Education**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Watts, Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	07.03.24	22.03.24			19/3/24	10.04.24		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline the outcome of the annual consultation process, in line with the revised draft of the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26. The Cabinet is asked to provide their views and comments on the document in preparation for the 2025/26 admission round, prior to its determination and publication on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024.
  
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013) dictates that Councils must review their admissions policies annually for consultation and publication by April 15<sup>th</sup> in the academic year preceding the admissions round. Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy outlines the arrangements, criteria and relevant legislation that underpin school admission processes and methodology and has been drafted in line with the aforementioned Code, along with the Admissions Appeals Code (2013). The Admissions Authority must ensure that the following information is provided during the consultation process:
    - The admission numbers for each school
    - Application procedures and the timetable for the admission process
    - The criteria to be applied to applications in the event that there are more applications than places for a school
    - Arrangements for waiting lists and how they operate
    - Arrangements for the processing of late applications
    - Details of how parents will be notified of a decision on their application, as well as appeal procedures should their application be unsuccessful
  
  - 2.2 The primary changes to the policy document for the 2025/26 academic session are as follows:
    - Updated consultation and application details.

- A review of the nursery, primary and secondary admission numbers in line with the annual capacity review process has been undertaken. This process is carried out in line with the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). The final agreed capacity calculations are then used to inform admission numbers detailed with the policy document.
- A review of the dates for the admission round(s), associated processing and offer deadlines.
- Changes to the application process for applicants residing in neighbouring authorities.
- Allocation of school places at Brynmawr Foundation School.
- Updates as requested by consultees (detailed below).

2.3 The draft Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26 (please refer to **Appendix 1** for the policy document), was distributed to relevant consultees as outlined within Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013, pages 6-7) and detailed on page 2 of the appended policy consultation document. The consultation period commenced on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and concluded on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024. During the consultation period, 2 responses were received as follows:

- Torfaen County Borough Council requested that the policy be updated to include all applicants who require a place in a Torfaen school to apply directly to them, rather than through another admission authority.
- Glanhowy Primary requested clarification around an appropriate evidence base that suggests the chronological year group is not able to meet the needs of the child in real terms.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee supported Option 1, at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

3.2 **Option 1:** That Cabinet considers and accepts the policy document; or

3.3 **Option 2:** That Cabinet considers the policy document and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made in consideration of the publication date (15<sup>th</sup> April 2024).

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 In accordance with the Welsh Government's School Admissions and Admission Appeals Code (2013), there is a statutory requirement upon the Council to determine and publish their admission's arrangements annually by the 15<sup>th</sup> April, the year preceding the admissions round to which they apply.

4.2 Education is a priority in the Council's Corporate Plan of which the planning of school places, is an essential component.

## 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

### 5.1 **Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)**

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.

### 5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There is a risk that Council will not be compliant with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) if the policy is not approved and published by the 15th April 2024. The timeline for approval takes account of the publication requirements and dates.

### 5.3 **Legal**

The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update accessibility strategies for all schools for which they are the responsible body.

### 5.4 **Human Resources**

5.4.1 There are no direct implications associated with this report.

The Education Directorate Management Team along with Wider Corporate Leadership Team, have a key role to play in ensuring that the policy is effectively implemented and reviewed in accordance with relevant strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks.

### 5.5

#### **Health & Safety**

There are no direct Health and Safety implications associated with this strategy.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Please refer to **Appendix 2**, for a summary of the 2023/24 Admissions Round. The Council are presently implementing the 2024/25 policy.

### 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

The public can expect a fair and equitable admissions process for all pupils in accessing education, and where possible place allocation in line with parent/pupil preference.

### 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Stakeholders and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both the policy development, and ongoing admissions process. The Policy is subject to consultation on an annual basis, in line with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013). Due to sufficiency issues anticipated in a number of secondary schools, the Education Directorate are planning to undertake a catchment area review and consult on this during the 2024/25 academic session.

### 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The admissions process contributes to effective pupil place planning and management, ensuring that there are sufficient pupil places and promoting access to education for all Blaenau Gwent pupils.

## 6.5 **Preventative focus**

The admissions process prevents oversubscription of schools and inequality in line with access to education.

## 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The Admissions Authority works with other internal admission authorities i.e. the faith and foundation schools, along with external admission authorities within the region and partners such as Social Services, to ensure that there are sufficient arrangements and pupil places for Blaenau Gwent Schools. Also, supporting effective appeal, capacity assessment, childcare offer and other associated processes. The Blaenau Gwent Admission Forum which is comprised of school, council, governor and other service representatives; oversee the application of the policy, procedures and compliance with the Welsh Government School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes (2013).

## 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education is aligned to early year's education, pupil place planning, school organisation, the work of social services, planning in line with housing developments etc. Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, whilst also securing appropriate access to education for current and prospective pupils. The Admissions process is monitored and assured by the Admissions Forum.

## 6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings are planned in order to take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.

## 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***

An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed in line with the policy, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics. The policy promotes equality of opportunity for all, with regards to accessing education.

## 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Admissions Authority monitors the development and delivery admission round(s) and processes on a weekly basis; reporting the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Forum twice yearly, providing monthly data analysis and undertaking annual appraisals, which are reported via the Councils political processes.

### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

[Appendix 1](#) – Draft Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education (2025/26)

[Appendix 2](#) – Annual Admissions Analysis 2023/24