

Newport City Council

School Admission Arrangements 2021/22

Consultation Report

Legislation

It is a statutory requirement of the Welsh Government School Admissions Code that Newport City Council, as the admissions authority for all community and voluntary controlled schools in Newport, carries out an annual consultation on its school admission arrangements. The consultation must conclude by 1st March each year so that the resulting admission arrangements can be determined, either in their original form or with such modifications as the Council think fit, by 15th April in the determination year.

The determination year is the school year beginning two years before the school year in which the arrangements will apply. Consequently, Newport City Council recently undertook public consultation on proposed changes to the admission arrangements that will become effective from September 2021.

Consultation Period

Whilst the School Admissions Code states that consultation on admission arrangements must be carried out between 1st September and 1st March in the determination year, the actual length of the consultation period is not specified. Newport City Council's consultation on admission arrangements for 2021 therefore commenced on 8th January 2020 and closed on 28th February 2020. This afforded a consultation period of seven weeks, including the February half term.

Purpose of the report

To inform consultees and other interested parties of the outcome of the consultation on admission arrangements for the academic year 2021/22.

This consultation report includes the following sections:

- Proposals for change
- Rationale for the proposals
- Stakeholder engagement
- Consultation responses
- Learner Voice
- Recommendations

Proposals for change

1. To redefine the Caerleon Comprehensive School catchment area to align with the Newport City Council boundary, thereby removing all areas of Monmouthshire and Torfaen from the catchment area;
2. To move Somerton Primary School from the Lliswerry cluster and catchment area to the Llanwern cluster and catchment area;
3. To replace the guaranteed school place for children of UK service personnel in any school of their choice with the catchment school;
4. To remove the specific priority for children who are on the child protection register.

Rationale for the proposals

Access to school places

Newport's population is continuing to increase and with it the number of school age children. There has been a rise of 1,949 children in Newport schools between 2011 and 2019. Pupil population forecasts indicate that by 2024 there will be 14,097 primary school and 12,260 secondary school children in Newport, which represents an additional 2,038 children compared with 2019.

Primary and secondary cohorts for the September 2019 annual admissions round were the largest to date with an unprecedented demand for Year 7 English-medium places across the city as a whole. In response to this demand, the Council negotiated additional Year 7 places across four English-medium secondary schools for this specific year group. A similar issue has since arisen in relation to the September 2020 Year 7 cohort, with additional provision created at two English-medium secondary schools.

Welsh Government recommends 10% as the optimum level of surplus school places. In terms of English-medium places, Newport schools have only a 7.6% surplus at primary level and a 9.6% surplus across secondary schools. Whilst it would appear that this surplus at secondary level is broadly in line with Welsh Government's recommendation, it is worth noting that a significant element of this surplus is located in just two schools, both of which are located in the East of the City (Llanwern High and Lliswerry High). In addition, the actual number of surplus places are much lower in Years 7 and 8 than they are in Years 9, 10 and 11.

This is also a concern in the context of the significant number of in-year school applications traditionally received in previous years. The Council is therefore seeking to maximise the number of school places available to Newport pupils across the city, through a variety of methods.

How will the proposed admission arrangements achieve this?

In the event that a school (or schools) has more applications than there are places available, admission authorities must have in place, criteria to determine priority for the allocation of places. This is termed "oversubscription criteria".

Currently the oversubscription criteria for Newport's community maintained primary and secondary schools is as follows:

"Where a school is named in a statement of Special Educational Needs, the Council has a duty to admit the child to the named setting before the over-subscription criteria is applied against applications received. This will reduce the amount of places available to other applicants.

If the total number of preferences for admission to a school exceeds the number of places, then the following order of priority will be applied to allocate the available places:

1. *Looked-after children (children in public care) and previously looked-after children;*
2. *Pupils living within the catchment area and making an application on medical grounds or placed on the Child Protection Register and recommended by Social Services;*

3. *Pupils living within the catchment area but with relevant siblings;*
4. *Pupils living within the catchment area;*
5. *Pupils living outside of the catchment area and making an application on medical grounds or placed on the Child Protection Register and recommended by Social Services;*
6. *Pupils living outside of the catchment area but with relevant siblings;*
7. *Pupils living outside the catchment area.*

After considering the above categories, or if the number of applications in any one of the above categories exceeds the published admission number, priority will be based on those residing closest to the preferred school."

In addition, and under the heading of "Armed Forces Personnel", the policy states that:

"Where the application is for a child of armed forces personnel that are either serving or returning from service at the time the application is made, the Council will admit the child to the school if the application is accompanied by an official proof of posting declaring:

- *a definite return date;*
- *confirmation of the new address wherever possible;*
- *confirmation of the serving / returning family status."*

Details of Proposals

In view of the pressure on school places across the city, some of these priorities present too broad a position for the Council to sustain and therefore consultation sought to change this via a range of proposals as follows:

(a) To redefine the Caerleon Comprehensive School catchment area to align with the Newport City Council boundary, thereby removing all areas of Monmouthshire and Torfaen from the catchment area

Historically, since the days of Gwent County Council, parts of Monmouthshire (Usk and Goytre) and Torfaen (Ponthir) have fallen within the designated catchment area for Caerleon Comprehensive School. This has meant that Monmouthshire and Torfaen pupils residing within this agreed catchment area receive a higher priority for a place at the school than Newport children living outside of the catchment area – thus reducing their chances of gaining a place at the school.

However, in determining its admission arrangements for September 2020, Monmouthshire County Council took the first steps to change this position by, following public consultation, designating Monmouthshire secondary schools as the catchment schools for the Usk and Goytre areas. Newport City Council supported this proposal; however, the timing of the consultation did not allow Newport sufficient time to include any catchment area changes in its own consultation on admission arrangements for 2020. Consequently, with effect from September 2020, some Monmouthshire residents will have two designated catchment secondary schools – one in Newport and one in Monmouthshire.

In moving to align the catchment area for Caerleon Comprehensive School with the proposals put forward and agreed by Monmouthshire County Council, this Council was mindful that the current catchment area for the school also extends into Ponthir, which falls within Torfaen. As a result, pupils living in this area also currently have priority for admission to the school over Newport children. In view of the significant demand for secondary school places in Newport, the proposal to align the Caerleon Comprehensive School catchment area with the city boundary will in effect remove the catchment priority that non-Newport residents currently have over Newport pupils. If the proposal is approved, all non-catchment pupils whether resident within or outside of Newport will be deemed equal in terms of priority for admission to this school.

Welsh Government has confirmed that the responsibility for designating alternative catchment schools lies with the Local Authority (LA) in which a pupil is resident. As a result, both Monmouthshire and Torfaen LAs were notified in September 2019 that Newport was likely to take forward consultation on this basis. As has already been noted, Monmouthshire County Council has already designated alternative catchment schools for families in Usk and Goytre.

It is important to note that this proposal does not exclude any applicants from expressing a preference for Caerleon Comprehensive School. Reducing the size of the catchment area simply increases the opportunity for out-of-catchment applications to be successful. As a result, many Monmouthshire and Torfaen residents may continue to apply for a place at this school, and some applications will undoubtedly be successful based on sibling priority and/or home to school distance.

(b) To move Somerton Primary School from the Lliswerry cluster and catchment area to the Llanwern cluster and catchment area

Secondary catchment areas also represent groups of schools, known as clusters, where the primary schools in the defined area work with the co-located secondary school to share best practice and support pupil transition.

In June 2019, a joint proposal was taken forward by the governing bodies of Eveswell Primary School and Somerton Primary School and Newport City Council to formally federate Eveswell and Somerton Primary Schools under one single governing body. The proposal followed a three-year collaborative arrangement whereby the Headteacher of Eveswell Primary School had also been the Executive Headteacher of Somerton Primary School. This proposal was approved in the autumn term of 2019 and implemented in January 2020.

One issue however is the fact that the two primary schools currently sit within separate secondary school clusters. During the consultation process, it was noted that longer term, working across two separate clusters could be a potential barrier to the success of the federation. Currently, Somerton Primary School is aligned with the Lliswerry High cluster despite being geographically located between two Llanwern cluster primary schools. Eveswell Primary School currently sits within the Llanwern High cluster.

Given this current position, the Executive Headteacher is required to work across two clusters and to two separate cluster plans. In order to support effective partnership working, it seems logical to use this opportunity to align the two schools to the same secondary cluster.

In taking this forward, consideration was given to two options – moving Eveswell into Lliswerry or moving Somerton into Llanwern. However, the second option is preferred due to the geographic location of Somerton Primary School, and the fact that the combined admission number of the year 6 cohorts in the current Lliswerry cluster primary schools exceeds the admission number of the secondary school.

(c) To replace the guaranteed school place for children of UK service personnel in any school of their choice with the catchment school

Since 2017, the school admission policy has facilitated the admission of children of UK Service Personnel to their preferred school, even if the year group is already full. However, this position is far more generous than the statutory School Admissions Code requires. Consequently, in relation to applications for children of UK service personnel, the proposed change is as follows:

- To afford catchment priority to the preferred school but not guarantee a place there, unless it is also the catchment school;
- To afford priority to those families that have moved to Newport as a direct result of a posting only, and no longer a discharge.

Notwithstanding this change, it is anticipated that the revised policy will continue to support those specific personnel that are required to move at short notice and, as a result, cannot comply with the usual school admission procedures.

(d) To remove the specific priority for children who are on the child protection register

Admission authorities must ensure that their arrangements will not unfairly disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social group. As the Council has various arrangements in place to serve the interests of vulnerable children there is no requirement for a specific priority for children who are on the child protection register. Consequently, the proposal is to remove this statement from the current oversubscription criteria.

Stakeholder Engagement

In accordance with Welsh Government's School Admissions Code, formal consultation was undertaken with the following statutory and non-statutory consultees:

Statutory consultees	
The governing body of relevant schools	The governing bodies of all community and voluntary controlled schools in Newport
All neighbouring local authorities	Caerphilly County Borough Council Cardiff City Council Monmouthshire County Council Torfaen County Borough Council
Admission authorities for all other maintained schools in the area	The governing bodies of all voluntary aided schools in Newport
In the case of schools with a religious character, such body or person representing the religion or religious denomination in question	Diocesan Director, Church in Wales Diocesan Director, Roman Catholic
Non-statutory consultees	
The admission forum serving the area	Newport School Admissions Forum
Parents of children attending the primary schools likely to be affected	Parents of children attending: <i>Caerleon Lodge Hill Primary</i> <i>Charles Williams Church in Wales Primary</i> <i>Goytre Fawr Primary</i> <i>Langstone Primary</i> <i>Ponthir Church in Wales Primary</i> <i>Somerton Primary</i> <i>Usk Church in Wales Primary</i>
Headteachers	The Headteachers of all schools in Newport plus the following affected schools in Monmouthshire and Torfaen: <i>Goytre Fawr Primary</i> <i>Ponthir Primary</i> <i>Usk Church in Wales Primary</i>
Elected members	All Newport City Council elected members
Community councils	All community councils in Newport
Representatives of UK Service Personnel	The Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer Newport Armed Forces Champion UK Service families attending Newport schools

Non-statutory consultees	
Other organisations	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations Newport Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership
Newport City Council Teams	Children & Young People's Services Law & Regulation Family Information Service Flying Start Housing & Regeneration Integrated Transport Vulnerable People Relocation Project
Pupils attending the primary schools likely to be affected	Pupils attending the following schools: <i>Caerleon Lodge Hill Primary</i> <i>Charles Williams Church in Wales Primary</i> <i>Goytre Fawr Primary</i> <i>Langstone Primary</i> <i>Ponthir Church in Wales Primary</i> <i>Somerton Primary</i> <i>Usk Church in Wales Primary</i>
Pupils attending the relevant secondary schools	Pupils attending the following schools: <i>Caerleon Comprehensive</i> <i>Llanwern High</i> <i>Lliswerry High</i>

The consultation document was also publicised through the Council's 'Have your say' web page and via their social media channels.

Consultation Responses

In total, 52 responses were received during the consultation period, all of which related to the proposal to amend the catchment area for Caerleon Comprehensive School. Of these, 47 responses raised concerns regarding the proposal. The remaining five responses neither supported nor objected to the proposal but merely raised questions in relation to their particular circumstances. Respondents included pupils, parents and carers, members of the public, Community Councils, Governing Bodies, Members of Parliament, Elected Members, neighbouring Local Authorities and the Diocese of Monmouth.

Whilst some respondents raised more than one issue in their response, a breakdown of the number and type of objections, along with the Council's responses, is summarised as follows:

Reason for Objection	Number Received	Council Response
Impact on local community cohesion and pupil wellbeing	46	Whilst the catchment area for Caerleon Comprehensive School has traditionally extended into the areas of Usk, Goytre and Ponthir, the demand for school places amongst Newport residents means that this is no longer sustainable. Notwithstanding this, parents will still be able to apply for a place at Caerleon Comprehensive School albeit as an out-of-catchment applicant.

Reason for Objection	Number Received	Council Response
Distance to an alternative school and safety of home to school transport routes	40	The parents of pupils affected by this proposal will still be able to apply for a place at Caerleon Comprehensive School, albeit as out-of-catchment applicants. If the school is oversubscribed, all out-of-catchment applications will be assessed equally against the same criteria, and those closer to the school will have a better chance of securing a place. In terms of alternative schools, your home local authority may provide home to school transport in accordance with their agreed policy.
Impact on transition and siblings	23	The parents of pupils affected by this proposal will still be able to apply for a place at Caerleon Comprehensive School, albeit as out-of-catchment applicants. If the school is oversubscribed, all out-of-catchment applications will be assessed equally against the same criteria, and those with relevant siblings already attending the preferred school will have a higher priority in terms of securing a place. Transition arrangements will continue to be facilitated between primary and secondary schools after the offer of a secondary school place has been made.
Environmental impact and wellbeing of future generations	21	Caerleon has been designated an air quality management area due the elevated levels of pollution caused by road traffic. Any reduction in the number of vehicles that travel through Caerleon will help elevate some of the pressure causing the high pollution levels. Furthermore, in the recent Centre for Cities report (https://www.centreforcities.org/city/newport), Newport has been identified as the third highest emitter of the greenhouse gas Carbon Dioxide per head of population. A reduction in the distance of the school commute will likely result in a reduction in the generation of greenhouse gases. Whilst both reductions (air pollution and carbon dioxide) are relatively minor in the grand scheme of things, every little action that can be taken to reduce commuting distances can contribute to an overall improvement. Given that there is no intention to increase the overall capacity of the secondary school, the number of pupils travelling to the school from outside Caerleon will not significantly change.

Reason for Objection	Number Received	Council Response
Consultation process and methodology	11	The consultation is compliant with Welsh Government's statutory School Admissions Code and is in line with similar arrangements in previous years.
Impact on educational standards	10	There is no negative impact on standards anticipated because of this proposal at any of Newport's primary or secondary schools.
Cost of alternative home to school transport	4	Each Local Authority is responsible for agreeing an individual Home to School Transport policy to support access to school. Newport's policy provides free transport to those pupils living three miles or more from their catchment school or their nearest available school. If parents apply for their child to attend a school that is not their catchment or nearest available school, parents are fully responsible for all transport costs and arrangements. It is not anticipated therefore that the costs to Newport will increase because of this proposal but it is acknowledged that there may be an impact for other LAs.

In terms of the specific responses from neighbouring LAs, Torfaen noted that they would be unable to make provision for the displaced (Ponthir) pupils in readiness for September 2021. In response, Newport noted that they had made Torfaen aware of the proposal in September 2019, thus giving almost two-years notice of the change.

Having already considered similar changes in 2019 to take effect in 2020, Monmouthshire was broadly in favour of Newport's proposal. However, they asked that consideration be given to two matters as follows:

- An area within Monmouthshire's boundary that currently falls within the catchment area for Charles Williams Church in Wales Primary School (this is a voluntary aided school responsible for its own admission arrangements). This area was omitted from Monmouthshire's proposal and therefore is now in danger of being without a denoted secondary catchment school. This was not identified as an issue by any party prior to the launch of Newport's consultation, and
- That additional priority be afforded to pupils whose older siblings were admitted to Caerleon Comprehensive School when it was their catchment school.

Whilst sympathising with the issues raised in relation to the first point, this would lead to some disparity with other areas of Monmouthshire and Torfaen, and therefore after consideration it does not seem reasonable to accommodate this request. In response to the comment about sibling links, the Council would advise that the parents of pupils affected by this proposal would still be able to apply for a place at Caerleon Comprehensive School, albeit as out-of-catchment applicants. If the school is oversubscribed, all out-of-catchment applications will be assessed equally against the same criteria, and those with relevant siblings already attending the preferred school will have a higher priority in terms of securing a place

No comments, either positive or negative, were received regarding any of the other three proposed changes out forward within this consultation.

Learner Voice

The Council is keen to gain the views of learners when proposing policy changes. As a result, whilst the School Admissions Code does not stipulate that consultation should include engagement with learners, attempts were made for this to be undertaken. This was the first year that this has been attempted in relation to the annual consultation on admission arrangements and was facilitated via an on-line SNAP survey that was circulated via the schools listed in the section above.

Some of these surveys were issued late in the consultation period, and the Education Service acknowledges therefore that this engagement was not as effective as it was intended. As a result, the Learner Voice is difficult to assess effectively in this case. Notwithstanding this, 66 responses were received by the deadline date as follows:

Proposal 1 - Sixteen responses were received with 15 (93.8%) identifying that they understood the proposal. The same number noted that they felt the proposal would affect them. Closer analysis identified that parents rather than pupils had submitted some of the responses. In all cases, the respondents referred to their close proximity to Caerleon Comprehensive School, established transition links and the fact that family members already attend the preferred school. The Council's response to these issues is already covered in the previous section.

Proposal 2 - Forty-six responses were received, with 39 (86.7%) identifying that they understood the proposal. Only 12 pupils (27.3%) felt that the proposal would affect them, and noted concerns including being unable to attend PE events at the current cluster secondary school. Should this proposal be taken forward however, similar events would likely be arranged at the new cluster secondary school. One comment also noted the distance to the alternative school. This proposal will not however preclude families from applying to any school of their choice.

Proposal 3 - Four responses were received and all confirmed that they understood the proposal. All respondents felt that the proposal would impact unnecessarily on Armed Forces families, and that the current arrangements should continue. As noted previously, Newport's current policy is far more generous than the statutory School Admissions Code requires. Notwithstanding this change, it is anticipated that the revised policy arrangements would continue to support those specific personnel that are required to move at short notice and, as a result, cannot comply with the usual school admission procedures.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the changes proposed via this consultation be taken forward for implementation with effect from September 2021.

This decision will be now referred to the Leader of the Council and taken through the Council's agreed democratic process.

This report is published electronically on Newport City Council's website at www.newport.gov.uk/schooladmissions

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