

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE **FINAL**

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Fixed catchment areas proposed for city's secondary schools

Plans to change the city's secondary school admissions policy to a system based on fixed catchment areas will be considered by the council's Children, Families and Schools committee on Monday 6 November.

The new system has been put forward by a working group comprising councillors from all the political parties, local parents and a school governor representative.

They have spent more than a year considering in the most minute detail the best way of creating a system that is easy to understand and offers the best chance of giving as many pupils as possible a place at their local school.

The proposed system, which would go live for pupils applying to start secondary school in September 2008, would mean that pupils in specific areas defined by postcode would have priority in applying for the community school or schools in their area.

Children with exceptional medical or other needs would continue to be given top priority under the proposals. The 'sibling link' where children who already have a sibling at a school get priority will also be retained – even if they are living outside the catchment areas – until September 2013.

An 'equal preference' system would be introduced to replace the current 'first preference first' system. This system is expected to mean more people getting one of their preferred schools, and will hopefully eliminate the need for tactical preferences.

Ballots would be used in the event of schools being oversubscribed with people from their catchment area and pupils with the sibling link or exceptional needs. The latest government guidance on school admissions promotes the use of ballots for this purpose in urban areas.

High priority has been given to getting a better balance in schools of children from a variety of backgrounds. In drawing up the catchment area boundaries the working group has taken into account not only projected pupil numbers, but also the number of pupils receiving free school meals – a recognised indicator of deprivation.

The working group has worked closely with a 20-strong group of parents from across the city. A series of open meetings were held during the summer to ascertain local people's views on a range of possible solutions. The group has also consulted with local headteachers.

The system would be reviewed in 2012, or earlier if there is a substantial increase in the number of young people living in the city. The Patcham High / Falmer High dual catchment area would be reviewed if Falmer High were to become a city academy.

The chair of the Children, Families and Schools committee, Councillor Pat Hawkes, said she hoped the working group's recommendations would be accepted in full.

Councillor Hawkes said: "The whole city owes the working group and parents' group a huge debt of gratitude for the time, energy and thought they have put into these proposals.

"In January we asked them to do more work on creating a system that would be as fair as possible to people living in all areas of the city – not just those who have a secondary school nearby.

"It's been an incredibly complex task, and I very much hope the committee will conclude that these proposals are a sensible and coherent way of enabling people to access a school near to them."

Councillor Vanessa Brown, opposition spokesperson on the committee, said: "I would like to add my sincere thanks to all the members of the Review Group and the Parent Stakeholders Group for their dedication and hard work in trying to resolve a very important and complicated issue.

"I very much hope that these proposals will make it a fairer and more transparent system for all our young people right across the city."

If agreed by the committee, a period of statutory consultation with schools will take place in the new year.

Ends

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Note to editors:

Postcode distribution – it is proposed that:

- Portslade Community College would have its own catchment area – postcode **BN41 2**

- Hove Park and Blatchington Mill would share a joint catchment area - postcodes **BN1 5** (excepting Tongdean Lane), **BN3, BN4** **1**
- Varndean and Dorothy Stringer would share a joint catchment area – postcodes **BN1 1-4, BN1 6- 7, BN2 0- 3, half of BN2 5*, BN2 9**
- Falmer High and Patcham High would share a joint catchment area – postcodes **BN1 8-9, BN2 4** and Tongdean Lane of BN1 5
- Longhill School would have its own catchment area – postcodes **BN2 6- 8, half of BN2 5***

* The area of the BN2 5 postcode has been split to take into account overall pupil numbers, established community areas and the balance of needs indicators such as free meals.

As a church-aided school, the governing body of Cardinal Newman RC School is responsible for deciding admission policy for that school, not the council.