

Report No.
ED12030

London Borough of Bromley

PART ONE - PUBLIC

Decision Maker: Education and Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 11 September 2012

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: **ON-LINE APPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

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Chief Officer: Tessa Moore, Assistant Director (Education)

Ward: Boroughwide

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on the use of 'on-line' processes for free school meal eligibility checking and admission applications.
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 **Members are asked to consider and comment on the use of on-line processes for free school meals eligibility checking and admission arrangements.**

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy: Further Details
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People: Further Details
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable: Further Details
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable: Further Details
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Access and Admissions
 4. Total current budget for this head: £428,490
 5. Source of funding:
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 10.2
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement: Education Act 2002
 2. Call-in: Applicable:
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): 16,000 per annum
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Background

3.1.1 At its meeting on the 22 June 2011, the Executive endorsed the recommendations of the New Technology Working Group of the Executive and Resources PDS. The working group had considered evidence relating to the use of on-line applications for school admissions and for the checking by the Local Authority of eligibility for free school meals. The report of the working group included free school meals and admissions within a recommendation that “the Council should focus on increasing the proportion of transactions conducted and handled on line or through other automated means, to reduce costs and unnecessary customer contacts”. This report provides members with information on the current and potential use of on-line processes in these areas.

3.2 Free School Meal Eligibility Checking

3.2.1 Free school meals (FSM) are available to pupils whose parents/carers are in receipt of one of the following:

- Income Support; or
- Income Based Job Seeker's or Employment Support Allowance; or
- Child Tax Credit only with a gross annual income not exceeding £16,190; or
- guarantee element of State Pension Credit; or
- support from the National Asylum Support Service; or
- support from a local authority Social Services Asylum Team

3.2.2 In previous years, up to and including the academic year 2010/11, parents applying for free school meals submitted a paper application form to the Local Authority accompanied by paper evidence of their eligibility. Officers manually checked the evidence submitted and notified the parent of the outcome from their application. If the application was successful, the parents/carers were sent a letter of authorisation for each child and the authority informed the relevant school(s).

3.2.3 For applications for the academic year 2011/12, parents/carers no longer had to submit paper evidence of their eligibility and, since the summer term 2012, parents have been able to submit their application details on-line. The practice of mailing out application forms to previous successful applicants has ceased.

3.2.4 Parents provide the Local Authority with their national insurance number which enables officers to check on-line through ‘the Hub’ whether the applicant is in receipt of the relevant benefit. This is a system that allows users to undertake record checks from one central point - the DfE Hub - of the data held by the Department of Work and Pensions, the Home Office and HMRC (Revenue and Customs) in order to establish FSM eligibility. Local Authorities can now make individual record checks in real time and there is also the facility to check larger batches of records on an overnight basis. Approximately 6000 free school meals grant applications were processed in the academic year 2011/12.

3.2.5 The Local Authority is responsible for checking the eligibility of pupils attending maintained schools in the Borough. Academies are responsible for arranging the eligibility checking of pupils attending their school. Currently twelve of the secondary academies and all the primary academies within Bromley have decided to purchase the eligibility service from the local authority.

3.3 On-line School Admissions

- 3.3.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to co-ordinate all applications from Bromley residents for admission to any maintained school or Academy, irrespective of the location of the school. The Local Authority is also required to operate within agreed Pan-London arrangements in order to process applications from out-of-borough residents for Bromley maintained schools and Academies.
- 3.3.2 Bromley has been one of the most successful Local Authorities in operating co-ordinated admissions for secondary transfer since 2005 and reception applications since 2006. In moving to increased online applications, the department needs to sustain the high levels and standards of access expected by parents.
- 3.3.3 In the Academic year 2011/12, the Local Authority received 3,938 applications for the 2012 reception intake, 3,478 for secondary transfer, 700 applications for infant to junior transfer and 2,367 in-year applications for other year groups. 27% of secondary applications were received on-line compared with an average across all London Boroughs of 55%, the corresponding figures for Reception applications were 48% and 56%. In-year and infant to junior transfer applications cannot currently be submitted on-line.
- 3.3.4 The following table shows the percentage of applications submitted on-line for Bromley compared to neighbouring Boroughs.

Secondary Transfer

Borough	Percentage on-line applications 2011-12	Percentage on-line applications 2010-11	Percentage on-line applications 2009-10
Bromley	27%	17%	15%
Croydon	63%	53%	45%
Lewisham	42%	25%	21%
Greenwich	68%	27%	26%
Bexley	57%	58%	35%

Primary (Reception)

Borough	Percentage on-line applications 2011-12	Percentage on-line applications 2010 -11	Percentage on-line applications 2009-10
Bromley	48%	31%	24%
Croydon	60%	55%	53%
Lewisham	36%	33%	27%
Greenwich	71%	39%	28%
Bexley	53%	46%	34%

- 3.3.5 For secondary transfer in 2013 the Admission team has reduced the number of secondary admissions booklets produced from 6,000 in 2011 to 1,500. The booklet will no longer be available in a paper version for all applicants. The booklet has been designed to be more accessible and easier to navigate on-line, encouraging on-line applications. All information leaflets encourage on-line applications as the first choice method of application.

3.3.6 Despite an increase, the proportion of on-line applications remains low compared to neighbouring authorities. The admissions team are

- opening presentations to primary parents with an emphasis on the benefits of using on-line applications
- continuing to promote on-line as the first choice of application method
- promoting on-line applications through libraries and children's centres
- seeking agreement from a number of schools to make facilities available within the school for parents to submit on-line applications
- continuing to monitor and report on proportion of on-line applications for both secondary transfer and reception.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Published baseline indicators which provide comparative data on local authorities spend using Section 251 Budget Statements, indicate that the per capita cost for Bromley CYP Admissions function is £13.00. This places Bromley in the lower quartile of London Boroughs' costs where the average (median) cost is £15.00.

4.2 Efficiencies and savings may arise from increasing the take up of on-line admissions. This will be monitored and any potential savings will be factored into the budget monitoring and budget setting processes.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority is required to operate schemes to co-ordinate admissions to schools in line with the requirements of the Education Act 2002 and subsequent regulations.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Policy and Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	ER PDS 19.05.11 New Technology Working Group Report 19.5.2011 Executive and Resources PDS Item 23