



**Oxfordshire County Council**

**Equalities Impact Assessment**

**Policy for Processing School Admission Applications Where There Is a  
Parental Dispute**

**10/02/2026**

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## Section 1: Summary details

<b>Directorate and Service Area</b>	Children's Services – School Admissions & Transport
<b>What is being assessed</b> (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Policy for Processing Disputed School Admission Applications
<b>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</b>	New policy addition to existing schemes
<b>Summary of assessment</b> Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community?  (following completion of the assessment).	The policy formalises a transparent, legally compliant process for handling applications where parental disputes exist. It ensures child welfare, legal compliance and neutrality. No negative equalities impacts identified; positive impacts include improved fairness and clarity for families in dispute.
<b>Completed By</b>	Carly Williams, School Admissions & Transport Service Manager
<b>Authorised By</b>	Jaswinder Didiyally, Assistant Director Schools and Settings Sufficiency
<b>Date of Assessment</b>	10/02/2026

## Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p><b>Context / Background</b></p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>The policy has been developed in response to an increase in the number and complexity of school admission applications affected by parental disagreements. Operational experience over recent years has highlighted that the absence of a clearly defined and publicly available process has resulted in delays, inconsistent expectations among parents, and additional administrative burden for both the School Admissions Team and schools.</p> <p>The statutory framework, including the School Admissions Code 2021, Children Act 1989, Education Act 1996, DfE’s Parental Responsibility Guidance (2023), and UK data-protection legislation, places explicit duties on the Council as the Admission Authority for community and voluntary controlled schools. These duties relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring that admission decisions are made lawfully,</li> <li>• treating all individuals with parental responsibility fairly, and</li> <li>• ensuring that decisions are aligned with court orders where these exist.</li> </ul> <p>The development of the policy therefore reflects the need to provide a structured, transparent and legally sound process which ensures the Council can meet its statutory duties while minimising the impact of parental conflict on children and on the integrity of the admissions process.</p>
<p><b>Proposals</b></p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>Introduction of a formalised policy setting out how the Council will process school admission applications where a parental dispute arises. The new policy provides clarity for both parents and professionals by:</p> <p><b>Establishing clear evidence requirements</b></p> <p>The policy sets out what evidence the Council may request, including proof of parental responsibility and relevant court orders (e.g., Child Arrangements Orders, Specific Issue Orders, Prohibited Steps Orders). This ensures that decisions are made based on verified legal authority rather than informal assertions.</p> <p><b>Introducing a structured decision-making pathway</b></p> <p>The policy describes a consistent approach for processing applications under different scenarios, including:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where only one individual holds parental responsibility;</li> <li>• where a court order delegates authority; and</li> <li>• where multiple individuals hold parental responsibility but do not agree.</li> </ul> <p>This structured approach supports lawful and timely decision-making.</p> <p><b>Clarifying how applications will be placed on hold and what is required to proceed</b></p> <p>Where disputes exist, applications may be paused until written agreement is obtained from all parties with parental responsibility or until a relevant court order is provided. This ensures fair treatment and compliance with statutory expectations without the Council arbitrating between parents.</p> <p><b>Strengthening safeguarding and information-sharing provisions</b></p> <p>The policy embeds safeguards for cases involving domestic abuse, court-imposed restrictions, or other risk factors. It also clarifies how information will be shared with parents while meeting legal duties under UK.</p> <p><b>Managing processes after an offer has been issued</b></p> <p>The policy explains when an offer may be withdrawn if made without lawful authority and how the Council will consider the child’s best interests where the child has already started at the school.</p> <p>Overall, the proposed policy seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve operational consistency</li> <li>• Reduce delays for children awaiting placements</li> <li>• Provide transparency for families</li> <li>• Strengthen legal compliance</li> <li>• Minimise disputes escalating into the admissions process</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evidence / Intelligence</b></p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research</p>	<p>The development of the policy is directly informed by:</p> <p><b>Statutory and legal frameworks</b></p>

findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.

- **School Admissions Code 2021** (legal duties on admission authorities regarding validity, withdrawal, and coordination).
- **DfE Parental Responsibility Guidance (2023)** (clarifies PR definitions, rights, court-order effects, and information-sharing duties).
- **Children Act 1989** (definition and application of parental responsibility).
- **Education Act 1996 (s.576)** (defines “parent” in education law).
- **Education (Pupil Information) Regulations 2005** (information rights for parents).
- **Data Protection Act 2018 & UK GDPR** (requirements for processing and sharing personal data).

#### **Operational practice**

Admissions officers have noted an increase in duplicate or conflicting applications, as well as rising levels of parental conflict that impact timeliness and fairness. Existing informal practices lacked an authoritative and publicly accessible framework.

#### **Legal advice and feedback**

Legal Services advised that the previously considered approach of using GP registration to determine which parent’s application should be prioritised would be legally unsound and potentially discriminatory. This evidence directly informed the decision to adopt the more robust PR-verification and court-order-based model.

#### **Consistency with regional and national practice**

The policy draws on reasonable operational approaches used by other local authorities (e.g., holding places open for short periods to allow parents to resolve disputes). This ensures that Oxfordshire’s approach is aligned with accepted best practice.

<p><b>Alternatives considered / rejected</b></p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p><b>a) Using GP registration to determine which parent’s application takes precedence</b></p> <p>This approach was rejected following legal advice. GP registration is not a lawful determinant of parental responsibility and may not reflect court orders or safeguarding considerations. It was therefore inappropriate as a basis for processing admissions in cases of dispute.</p> <p><b>b) Continuing with informal practices</b></p> <p>Maintaining the status quo would perpetuate inconsistencies, create legal risk, and fail to meet good administrative practice. Parents would continue to receive inconsistent messaging, and children could face unnecessary delays.</p> <p><b>c) Defaulting to the first application received</b></p> <p>This was dismissed as unfair, legally unsound, and incompatible with both the School Admissions Code and DfE PR guidance. It would risk advantaging one parent over another and could encourage tactical behaviour.</p> <p><b>d) Treating all disputed applications as invalid</b></p> <p>This was rejected because it would conflict with the Council’s statutory duty to process applications and could disadvantage children awaiting school placement.</p>
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### Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No differential impact is expected as a result of this policy. The council will of course remain vigilant to feedback, and where negative impacts are discovered, the council will reasonably adjust this policy in order to ensure mitigation of those impacts.			
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

### Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Armed Forces	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Carers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

### Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts

<b>Additional Wider Impacts</b>	<b>No Impact</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>	<b>Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts</b>	<b>Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)</b>	<b>Timescale and monitoring arrangements</b>
<b>Staff</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Other Council Services</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Providers</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Social Value <sup>1</sup></b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

<sup>1</sup> If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

## Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

<b>Review Date</b>	12 months after implementation or earlier if legislation updates
<b>Person Responsible for Review</b>	School Admissions & Transport Service Manager
<b>Authorised By</b>	Assistant Director Schools and Settings Sufficiency