

**LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM
THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2024**

Present:- Mrs. I. Hartley (in the Chair), Mrs. K. Beresford, Mrs. M. Gambles, Mr. R. Griffiths, Mrs. R. Hibberd, Mrs. J. Hudson and Mr. D. Shenton,

Also in attendance were:- Ms. M. Jordan, Mr. C. Stones, Mrs. J. Unwin and Mrs. S. Whitby.

Apologies for absence were received from:- Councillors Allen and Cusworth, Mrs. A. Gyte and Mrs. K. Peart.

93. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 2023

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th November, 2023.

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th November, 2023, be approved as a correct record.

94. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

A warm welcome was issued to Jenny Hudson who was replacing Carol Cockayne on the Local Admissions Forum.

95. ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS DETERMINATION AND CONSULTATION REGARDING RELEVANT AREA

Further to Minute No. 85 of the previous meeting consideration was given to the report presented by Sarah Whitby, Head of Access to Education, which detailed how Admission Authorities must determine their admission arrangements annually by 28th February, regardless of whether there had been any consultation or changes proposed.

The proposed admission arrangements were consulted upon between 27th November 2023 and 14th January 2024. This consultation was undertaken in line with the requirements of the School Admissions Code and ran for the required six week period. Consultees were invited to respond via an online survey, hosted on the Council's website.

The admission arrangements consulted upon proposed a change to the Published Admission Number at Sitwell Infant School from seventy-five to sixty. This was requested due to a reduction in the pupil population at first admission to school. Analysis of sufficiency of school places across the planning and local area indicated that this reduction could be supported. The number of applicants living in catchment and expressing a first

preference for the school was routinely well below the number of children born in the catchment area and had fallen over the last three years.

There were currently over eighty surplus places in Reception across the planning area and this number was projected to increase further.

Any increase in demand as a result of new house building had been accounted for.

Taking into account all responses received to the consultation, it was recommended that the proposed admission arrangements were now determined as the proposed reduction in the Published Admission Number was not projected to impact on the availability of an appropriate school place for every child who needed one.

The consultation in respect of the relevant area proposed no changes, and for this to remain as the whole of Rotherham.

Eight responses were received to the online consultation which included two questions; the details of which and the responses were set out as part of the appendices to the report submitted.

In receiving the report Forum Members sought to establish the availability of infant class spaces in the locality and whether any savings realised were redirected back into schools.

Forum Members were assured that following an analysis of sufficiency of school places across the planning and local area this reduction could be supported. It was also pointed out that there would be no direct saving as a result of the reduction in the Published Admission Number as schools were funded for the number of children on roll.

Agreed:- (1) That the admission arrangements for 2025-26 for community and voluntary controlled schools be approved.

(2) That the relevant area remains the whole of Rotherham following the period of consultation be noted.

96. UPDATE ON ADMISSIONS AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ALLOCATIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2024

Consideration was given to the latest position with regards to Admissions and Secondary School Allocations for September, 2024 presented by Joanne Unwin, Admissions Manager.

An update was provided on the final checks/allocations that were still taking place ahead of National Offer Day on 1st March, 2024. Similar to last year a large intake was expected.

Sarah Whitby, Head of Access to Education, wished to place on record

her thanks to Joanne Unwin and her colleagues for all their work with the high volume of applications within an ever increasing workload set against long term absence within the Team.

Agreed:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

97. SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS UPDATE - STATISTICS

Consideration was given to the latest position in relation to admission appeals in the report submitted and the numbers of school admission appeals received and the appeal hearings taking place. Statistics were included for the full academic years 2022/23 and also to date for the 2023/24 school year.

As indicated previously the high volume of appeals received was unprecedented.

Training for Panel Members and Clerks also took place at the Town Hall on the 31st January, 2024.

Agreed:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

98. UPDATE ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION

Consideration was given to an update on School Organisation presented by Chris Stones, Principal Officer, where it was noted the Cabinet had approved the expansion of Waverley Junior Academy to add an additional 210 places from September, 2025.

It was also noted that the site at Bassingthorpe Farm, Greasbrough had been adopted in the Core Strategy for over 2,000 houses and triggered the need for the building of a new primary school in this area.

The Forum welcomed the news that Waverley Junior Academy had finally received its extension approval and how this would hopefully allow all catchment children to be accommodated in their local area.

Agreed:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

99. UPDATE OF SCHOOL TERM DATES CONSULTATION FOR 2025/26

Further to Minute No. 91 of the last meeting of the Local Admissions Forum consultation on the school calendar for the 2025/26 academic year had taken place with all schools during January 2024.

The traditional calendar wrapped around Good Friday and Easter Monday and was in line with Doncaster and Sheffield. It was hoped that eventually the South Yorkshire Authorities would all align, but Barnsley was still yet to publicise their dates.

Approval of the school calendar for 2025/26 would take place at the next meeting of the Education Consultative Committee set to take place during February, 2024.

Agreed:- The calendar update be received and the contents noted.

100. FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL CONSULTATION

Further to Minute No. 88 of the last meeting of the Local Admissions forum consideration was given to the Fair Access Protocol which needed to be reviewed to ensure that best practice of regular review was met, but more importantly to ensure that timely outcomes were secured for vulnerable children in borough who were out of school.

The current Protocol provided for a two step decision-making process, meaning children could be discussed in multiple forums prior to a final decision being made whilst they remained out of school. Pupils are first discussed at a Pupil Management Group, but where agreement could not be reached a referral made to the Strategic Fair Access Panel.

Feedback received questioned the rationale for the decision-making process and advocated for a fairer and more transparent route to decision making.

There were key proposals to consult and agree upon in order to ensure that both decision making forums could function effectively for all children and schools in Rotherham. Key issues were proposed to be consulted upon in order to determine a revised Protocol.

An update was provided on the unprecedented numbers of children coming through that had been exhausted by the Admission Appeals process. This new process once agreed would be fair and run alongside the Admission Appeals process giving children a greater chance of a school place quicker.

The Forum sought and received clarification on the timescales for both processes and welcomed the opportunity to make processes as smooth as properly for children without school places in areas where all schools were oversubscribed. This would seek to reduce the pressure on appeals and challenge places within a reasonable distance.

Agreed:- (1) That a formal review of the Fair Access Protocol with associated consultation as outlined in this briefing paper be approved.

(2) That the final revised Protocol be received for ratification at the next meeting on 13th June, 2024.

101. ACADEMY CONVERSIONS AND MULTI ACADEMY TRUST UPDATES

The Forum were advised there were no further updates to the list Rotherham schools which had converted/about to convert to academies as of October 2023.

In noting this information the Forum received a further update that Rob Holsey who produced the conversion lists for schools had since retired.

Agreed:- That the information be received, and the contents noted.

102. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Local Admissions Forum take place on Thursday, 13th June, 2024 at 10.00 a.m. via Microsoft Teams.