

**LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM
THURSDAY 13 JUNE 2024**

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

Also in attendance were:- Ms. M. Jordan, Mr. C. Stones, Mrs. J. Unwin and Mrs. S. Whitby and observers, Ms. S. Cooper, Ms. J. Hopkins and Miss V. Rentyuk

Apologies for absence were received from:- Councillors Allen and Cusworth.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 1ST FEBRUARY, 2024

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st February, 2024.

With regards to Minute No. 100 (Fair Access Protocol Consultation) the word "properly" needed to be replaced with the word "possible" in the last paragraph before the decision.

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st February, 2024, be approved as a correct record, subject to the clerical correction indicated above.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

With regards to Minute No. 96 (Update on Admissions and Secondary School Allocations) reference was made to the current workload situation in the Access to Education Team arising from the ever-increasing workloads and long-term absences.

The Forum were advised that the Access to Education team were still managing some challenges, but there were plans for improvements and action was being taken to recruit more staff to vacant positions.

With regards to Minute No. 98 (School Organisation) an update was provided on Bassingthorpe Farm at Greasbrough. Progress on the plans was ongoing, with final planning approval still pending. The site had been identified to accommodate around 2,400 houses with a minimum of around 1,750 houses. There were plans for a new primary school on the site and an extension for the local secondary school to accommodate the increased population.

3. THE LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORT TO THE SCHOOL ADJUDICATOR (DRAFT FOR INFORMATION)

Consideration was given to the submitted report in relation to the Local Authority Report to The Schools Adjudicator.

The Local Authority had been sent a template question for approval before publication, with a formal response deadline of 31st October 2024.

Feedback was still awaited. The final version would be presented back to the Local Admissions Forum in the Autumn.

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

4. ACADEMIES UPDATE

Consideration was given to the latest academy update. and in doing so noting those schools converting typically took place on the first day of the month.

Bramley Sunnyside Junior School was the next due to convert to an academy next month. This meant there was only around seventeen schools that were Local Authority maintained.

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

5. ADMISSIONS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the latest update on the Admissions by the Access to Education Team.

Despite the staff shortages the application processes for Reception, Year 6, Year 7, and Years 2/3 had been completed. A significant number of applications and preference changes were received, and work had commenced on identifying those who would receive alternative offers.

Decisions on the recent secondary schools appeals had now been received necessitating some adjustments to the school lists, with a few places being released, but noting overall capacity remained tight.

The majority of secondary schools were full, but some places were still available in certain areas, necessitating offers for the next nearest schools. There was still some availability in primary and junior schools.

The Access to Education Team were now preparing for opening applications for 2025/26 and aimed to be ready by 1st July, though a few days' delay may be anticipated.

The Forum sought clarification on the number of spare places across the borough and were advised that whilst there were issues for Year 6/7 due to the bulge in the birth rate, there was still some capacity in both secondary and greater capacity in primary schools.

Rotherham was not unique to the demand for places, but the difficulty remained with specific schools receiving a high number of applications and were often full. However, alternatives were still offered. Unfortunately, in some areas the demand was due to parental preference for certain secondary schools with no alternatives considered.

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

6. SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the submitted report which set out the latest position for admission appeals received and the numbers of appeals taking place. Statistics included the full academic year 2022/23 and also for the part-year for 2023/24.

The Forum wished to extend their thanks and appreciation to Gillian Frost, School Appeals Officer, for her hard work during this difficult time and noted that this could not be achieved without the support from Panel Members.

In order for Rotherham to reflect on its own demands with admission appeals it would be extremely helpful if some national/regional benchmarking figures could be included within the future report.

Agreed:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the national and regional benchmarks figure be provided for the future meeting.

7. FAIR ACCESS UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 100 of the previous meeting consideration was given to the latest position with regards to Rotherham's Fair Access Protocol which was last revised and agreed in September 2021. Following agreement from this Forum, a period of consultation had now taken place and a proposed Protocol was now presented back to this meeting for ratification.

An increase in referrals through the fair access protocol and requirements for placement was noted. The school system supporting vulnerable children and families had undergone a period of consultation, and proposed protocols were brought for agreement. Discussions had been held with regional neighbours to understand how best to support the appeals/ Fair Access Protocol interface.

The consultation period for the proposed Primary Fair Access Protocol similar to the Secondary Fair Access Protocol was held in April - May 2024. During that period all School Heads were invited to respond to the pre-consultation questionnaire, and the Protocol was set to be agreed upon if disagreement was in the minority. Nine responses were received and five responses were received in terms of Secondary Fair Access Protocol, all were in agreement.

The Forum sought clarification on how the Fair Access Protocol affected the Appeals Process and were advised that parents had to make a school application with schools having fifteen days in which to respond. When a response for all parental preferences was received and a place could not be offered, the Fair Access Protocol would be automatically triggered. The revisions to the Protocol would ensure that unplaced and vulnerable children, and those who were having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, were allocated a school place as quickly as possible.

A brief outline of the potential benefits in terms of appeals was provided.

The Forum wished to place on record their appreciation to the Fair Access Team for their outstanding work throughout the process.

It was suggested that Appeal Panel Members receive a briefing note on the key changes to the Fair Access Protocol.

Agreed:- (1) That the revised Fair Access Protocol for Primary and Secondary Schools be approved.

(2) That a briefing note be provided for the Admissions Appeal Panel Members on the key changes.

8. SCHOOL ORGANISATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update on school organisation presented by Christopher Stones, Principal Officer. It was noted that school capacity returns to the Department of Education occurred annually, with a five-year projection for primary schools and a seven-year projection for secondary schools.

These projections determined the basic need funding received by the Local Authority, which had varied from £0 to £5 million over the past few years. All Local Authorities were invited to submit applications for funding for the provision of school places. Details of funding amounts would then be conveyed during the Autumn term.

The Forum also noted that planning permission had been granted by the Planning Board for the extension at Waverly Junior Academy, which would provide an extra class per year group, adding ninety school places. This change would be applied to the 2025/26 academic year.

Further information was also provided on future projections and birth data and whilst this bulge year for secondary was working its way through, the figures coming forward whilst rising slightly were nowhere near what they had been.

The Forum noted the number of school transfer requests, especially for those schools on the Rotherham border, and the increase of migration.

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