

**LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM
THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2023**

Present:- Mrs. I. Hartley (in the Chair); Mrs. C. Cockayne, Mrs. A. Gyte and Peart.

Along with Mr. C. Stones, Ms. J. Unwin and Mrs. S. Whitby (Access to Education).

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. S. Butterworth.

69. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2023

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th February, 2023.

It was noted since the last meeting Dean Fenton, Head of Service, had since retired.

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th February, 2023, be approved as a correct record.

70. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Further to Minute No. 65 (Update Term Dates and Consultation 2024/25), it was noted the calendars had been updated accordingly.

71. THE LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORT TO THE SCHOOL ADJUDICATOR

Consideration was given to the draft Annual School Adjudicator Report for 2023, noting the earlier submission date of 31st October, 2023. This submission would be subject to approval by the Director of Children and Young People's Services and the final version would be provided to the Forum at the November, 2024 meeting.

Agreed:- (1) That the draft Annual School Adjudicator Report 2023 be received and noted.

(2) That a copy of the final version be presented to the November, 2023 meeting.

72. ACADEMIES UPDATE

The Forum noted the updated list of Rotherham schools which had converted/about to convert to academies as of June, 2023.

It was noted that since the last update West Melton Junior and Infant school had converted and was now known as Highfield Farm Primary School, along with Swallownest Primary in May, 2023.

Whilst only a small number of primary schools remained maintained, the Local Authority was undertaking a piece of work about figure conversions. No formal decisions had as yet been made.

There was some direction from Government in terms of the School Bill going through Parliament which was causing some confusion.

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

73. ADMISSIONS UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update on the current position with regards to Admissions.

It was noted that secondary schools were heavily oversubscribed for the Year 6/7 cohort with large waiting lists and more secondary schools full. For some parents the next nearest offer had been further away from home this year. Whilst there would be some movement following the spring appeals, it still remained that some families would be travelling further to school.

In terms of the primary cohorts:-

- Waverley was still very over-subscribed and some "Catchment" category children had been refused places. Discussions were taking place on the triggers to vary the Section 106 Agreement to add another form entry to the school. No firm plans had yet been agreed.
- All the primary children submitting applications on time had received offers around the area they were located.
- There had been increased oversubscription for junior schools resulting in some Year 3 appeals.

As part of the Admissions Policy, academies were responsible for setting their own criteria and details of this should be clear on their own websites. The Access to Education Team were working with schools to ensure this as updated accordingly and training being provided to ensure compliance.

The Forum sought information on the admission of pupils and over-subscription and asked if schools could refuse places if their admission number had not been reached.

The Forum were advised that schools should comply with the Admissions Policy and could refuse places where it was demonstrated admission would not be appropriate. Full reasons must be provided.

The Council was still receiving a large number of applications for in-year transfers.

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

74. SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS UPDATE

The Forum received information regarding the high volume of in-year transfer admission appeals planned well into the Summer along with those for Reception/Foundation Stage 2 and Year 2/3.

It was noted that there had been a rise in appeals for children with SEND issues with more mental health and anxiety patterns arising. This was causing some problems for schools as funds were not always available for those children needing support and more needed to be accessed to assist in this area.

The Council was moving forward at speed with the next phase of SEND Sufficiency which was focused on increasing capacity in mainstream for children with Education and Health Care Plans whilst managing parental expectations.

This was an ongoing situation that would take some time to resolve.

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

75. FAIR ACCESS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the current position with regards to the Fair Access Protocol and the admission of hard to place children.

It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of SEND and primary children with forty-five children being identified in January. This had been impacted by the number of children moving into the borough with pressures in two particular areas.

There was an increasing number of children without any plans in place and more children with more complex needs. The primary age children were considered at the primarily locality and referred on if needed.

The Forum asked about the complexities with children with English as an additional language and were advised numbers were increasing. This had resulted in many appeal hearings requiring the use of interpreters following movement across local authorities.

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

76. SCHOOL ORGANISATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to the latest position with regards to school organisation and it was confirmed the service were rather busy.

The Annual SCAP Return had opened by the DfE on the 5th June, 2023 and would close on the 28th July. The return data would include projections for primary schools and have added sections for SEND numbers.

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

77. UPDATE ON CONFIRMED TERM DATES FOR 2024/25

Consideration was given to the consultation on the school calendar for the 2024/25 academic year.

It was noted that over the last few years Rotherham had moved to a fixed calendar and was aligned with Doncaster and Sheffield. Barnsley were, however, still different and out of kilter with the rest of South Yorkshire.

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

78. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Consideration was given to the date and time of the next meeting.

Agreed:- (1) That the next meeting of the Local Admissions Forum take place on Thursday 16th November, 2023 at 10.00 a.m. via Microsoft Teams.

(2) That the meetings in 2024 would take place on Thursday, 1st February and 13th June, 2024 at 10.00 a.m.