

**LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM
THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025**

Present:- Mrs. I. Hartley (in the Chair); Mrs. M. Gambles, Mrs. R. Hibberd, Mrs. K. Beresford, Mr. D. Shenton and Mrs. N. Towers. and

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

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

24. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14TH NOVEMBER, 2024

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 November 2024.

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

25. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

With regards to Minute No.15 (Local Admission Forum Terms of Reference, Conditions and Consultation), it was noted that the Terms of Reference for the Local Admission Forum were to be circulated following the meeting to allow for further comments. Any feedback received would be relayed to the Monitoring Officer for consideration before the final approval by the Council in June 2025.

A warm welcome was issued to Nevine Towers, who recently joined the Local Admissions Forum.

Agreed:- That the Local Admission Forum Terms of Reference be circulated following the meeting.

26. MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

Consideration was given to the membership of the Local Admission Forum, and the existing vacancies were discussed. It was noted that there were currently two vacancies for Voluntary Aided/Controlled schools, one vacancy for the Church Dioceses, one vacancy for a Parent Representative, and two vacancies for Community Representatives.

Various suggestions were made on how to circulate information about these vacancies and engage potential candidates. The Forum agreed to work collaboratively to fill the positions.

Additionally, the Chair wished to formally record thanks and appreciation on behalf of the Panel to Mrs Ann Gyte who had recently stepped down.

Agreed:- (1) That vacancy nominations be sought for:-

The Parent or Carer Representative vacancy through the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum.

Community Representative vacancies and information circulated to Admission Appeal Panel Members and other mediums.

(2) That a letter of thanks be sent to Mrs. Ann Gyte in recognition of her contribution to the Local Admissions Forum.

27. SCHOOLS ADMISSION CONSULTATION DETERMINATION REPORT TO APPROVE OUTCOME FOR THE 2025/26 ACADEMIC YEAR

Consideration was given to the consultation on proposed admission arrangements for the 2026/2027 academic year, as outlined in Appendix 1. The consultation took place from 25 November 2024 to 17 January 2025, in line with the School Admission Code. It was shared with relevant consultees, made available on the Council's website, and publicised via RMBC social media channels. Feedback was collected through an online survey on the RMBC webpages.

A parallel consultation on the 'Relevant Area' – the geographical area within which admission authorities must consult other schools – was also undertaken.

No changes were proposed to the existing admission arrangements or the defined relevant area, which remains the whole of Rotherham.

Fourteen responses were received via the online consultation, with an additional email highlighting incorrect dates in the oversubscription criteria. These errors had now been corrected.

Agreed:- That the admission arrangements for 2026-27 for community and voluntary controlled schools, as detailed in Appendix 1, be determined.

28. UPDATE ON ADMISSIONS AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ALLOCATIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2025

Consideration was given to the latest update on admissions and secondary school allocations for September 2025. It was noted that the team had experienced significant staffing challenges over the past eighteen months; however, these had now been resolved, and the team

was fully staffed. Three new team members joined in January and integrated well, making a positive contribution.

In-year school admissions remained high, with many parents requesting school transfers during the academic year. Efforts were made to comply with response timeframes for applicants, with a target of responding within 10 days and a maximum of 15 days. The Fair Access Protocol was revised and implemented in September 2024, which improved the timeframe for placing children in schools and ensured a more efficient process.

A total of 96 children were placed through the Fair Access Protocol across primary and secondary schools. However, many children were initially placed through the standard admissions process before reaching the Fair Access Protocol stage. This stage was only used when a school place had not been secured through a regular admissions process. Additionally, it was informed that efforts were made to place children via the Fair Access Protocol before their admission appeal was heard in an attempt to reduce the number of appeals. However, parents had retained the right to appeal if they chose to do so.

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

(2) That the detailed information on the number of children placed through the Fair Access Protocol be provided to the next meeting.

29. SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the submitted report, which set out the latest statistics on admission appeals received and the number of appeals held. The report included data for the full 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.

It was noted that the number of full appeal days had been 127 in 2023, but had significantly reduced to 98 in 2024, due to the implementation of the revised Fair Access Protocol. The total number of secondary school appeals was 942 in 2022/23 and 509 in 2023/24. Primary school appeals remained steady, with 392 in 2022/23 and 366 in 2023/24. The total number of appeals received so far for 2024/25 remained at 281.

Regarding arrangements, it was stated that in-year transfers were typically held on Tuesdays and Thursdays for a full day. However, these arrangements had recently been changed to mornings on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

It was also noted that provisional dates for the relevant year for secondary and primary school admission appeals had been set based on last year's schedule, with the hope that this year's process would proceed smoothly.

In terms of the venue, most in-year appeals had been conducted via

Teams, while those with specific requests had been held at the Rockingham PDC. However, the group appeal hearings were held at the Town Hall for its convenience.

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

30. UPDATE ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION

Consideration was given to an update on school organisation. It was noted that consultation had taken place regarding the proposal to change the age range at the Sitwell Infant School. However, the decision had not yet been made and was currently under review by the senior management team.

The forum was informed that the Todwick Primary School was considering reducing its school age range, linked to a DfE funding grant, which would allow schools to apply for up to £150,000 to support extensions or renovations for lowering the age range.

The expansion of Waverley School was ongoing, with the expanded school set to open in September. It was reported that a few days had been lost earlier in the year due to adverse weather conditions, but confidence remained that the project would be completed and the keys would be handed over in July.

With regard to the Bassingthorpe Farm development, it was noted that a consultation would be held from Monday, 10th February until 21st March. The consultation would be made available at Rawmarsh, Greasbrough, and Riverside House libraries, as well as online, to gather views from the public.

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

31. UPDATE OF SCHOOL TERM DATES FOR 2026/27

It was noted that consultation on the school calendar for the 2026/27 academic year had been held in January 2025 and approved in February 2025. It also was noted that, for the first time in many years, the school term dates for Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield for 2026/27 were aligned.

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

32. UPDATE ON FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL

Consideration was given to the latest position with regard to the Fair Access Protocol. It was noted that since the new arrangements were

implemented in September 2024, the number of Fair Access cases in primary schools has significantly increased, leading to a decrease in the school admission appeals.

It was explained that these Fair Access cases included children who had not secured a place through the normal admissions or appeal routes. However, it was highlighted that these cases were being addressed before the appeal process even began.

In cases where parents had chosen elective home education and it was deemed unsuitable, and where parents had not made preferences for a school through the normal process, a school place could be allocated to those children under the Fair Access Protocol.

This protocol also applied to children who were reintegrated following permanent exclusion, including those returning from the Aspire Pupil Referral Unit. Additionally, children who had been removed from the roll due to new DfE regulations were also eligible for inclusion in the Fair Access Protocol. Therefore, a diverse cohort of children could be supported through the protocol.

In secondary schools, the Fair Access Protocol had been revised in September, with more schools grouped in central areas. This adjustment was made due to increased pressure for places from families relocating, and initial indications suggested it was proving effective.

In primary schools, the team continued to contact local schools and arrange meetings where necessary. Although Fair Access cases were less frequent in primary schools, the process was still working well.

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

33. ACADEMIES UPDATE

The Forum noted the list of Rotherham schools that had either converted to academies or were in the process of conversion. It was noted that, since the last meeting, three schools, such as Newman School, Bramley Sunnyside Junior School and Anston Park Junior School, had successfully academised, leaving only eighteen schools remaining under local authority control.

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