

Leeds Admissions Forum

Wednesday, 15th June, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor Gruen in the Chair

Mr R Raj – Muslim Community
Mrs S Loye – C of E Diocese
Ms F Woolaston – Community School
Mrs H Lewis – Jewish Aided School
Mr R Madeley – Controlled School
Ms A Moorehouse – Other Member
Mrs L Bryan – High School (Parent)
Mrs S Knights – Primary School (Parent)

In Attendance

Mrs V Buckland – Children’s Services
Ms J Andrew – Children’s Services
Mrs C Lockwood – Children’s Services
Mr A Rees – Children’s Services
Mr A Broughton – Chief Customer Services Officer
Mrs A Oldroyd – Legal Services
Mr J Grieve – Governance Services

55 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the June meeting of the Leeds Admission Forum.

56 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: Mrs S Norfolk, Mrs F Beevers, Mr J Daulby, Mr M Woods, Ms A Williamson and Mr P Forbes

57 UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP - LEEDS ADMISSION FORUM

The Secretary to the Forum reported that Mr Mike Woods who represented the Aided Schools category had recently resigned as a Member of the Forum. There were also outstanding vacancies for the Foundation School and the Local Community Category.

The Chair also pointed out that from 1st July 2011 John Smeaton Community College would become an Academy with the effect that the Headteacher, Mr John Daulby would no longer be eligible to serve on the Forum as the Community Schools Representative.

(At this point Councillor Gruen declared a personal interest as a Governor of John Smeaton Community College)

In the discussion that followed Mrs Knights confirmed she was eligible to serve as the SEN Representative on the Local Community Category, having a child in school with Special Educational Needs.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That Mrs Knights be appointed as the SEN Representative in the Local Community Group category (Creating a vacancy in the Parent Primary School Group)
- (ii) That Officers be requested to pursue all outstanding vacancies: Aided School Representative (One), Foundation School Representative (One), Community High School Representative (one) – (From 1st July 2011) and Parent Primary School Representative) (One)
- (iii) That a letter of appreciation be sent on behalf of the Forum to Mike Woods (Aided School Representative)

58 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st March 2011 were submitted for comment and approval.

Mrs Lewis said although she sent her apologies they do not appear to have been recorded

RESOLVED – That with the inclusion of Mrs Lewis's name in apologies for absence the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2011 be accepted as a true and correct record

59 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- (i) Initial Preference Summary for September 2011 (Minute No. 48 refers) - Mrs V Buckland, Head of Service, School Access Service provided an update on school preferences and the impact on demand for September 2011.

Mrs Buckland reported that the offer date for Reception allocations was 20th April 2011. The final date given for coordinating information with other local authorities was 31st March each year, so offer day for primary would remain in mid April.

This year there had been an increase in the number of Reception places available by 225 in line with the increased number of children being born. When offers were made in March last year 8229 places were allocated, currently there are 8642 children actually in Reception classes.

8756 Reception places have been allocated for September 2012. There were 84.4% (87.8% last year) who were successful with their first preference, and 94.6% (96.9% last year) that were offered one of their three preferences.

7392 children were given their 1st preference
701 children were given their 2nd preference
193 children were given their 3rd preference

470 children were not able to be offered any of their preferences and were made an alternative offer. For almost all of these parents they did not follow the advice given to include their nearest school as one of their preferences, had they done so, a place would have been offered.

66 schools still had one or more vacant places and there were 522 places still available in the system to take account of any late applications that may come forward on offer day.

To date (15th June 2011) there were 50 schools with one or more vacant places.

The Chair thanked Mrs Buckland for the update

RESOLVED – That the update on school preferences and the impact on demand for September 2011 be noted.

- (ii) Migration of Children from Colton to Primary Schools within Garforth (Minute No.50 refers) – Mrs Bryan requested to know if there were any outstanding issues with children from the Colton area trying to obtain places in Garforth Primary Schools?

In responding Mrs Buckland said there were no outstanding issues but the situation continued to be monitored

60 CHALLENGING AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN'S SUB COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Challenging and Vulnerable Children's Sub Committee held on 24th May 2011 were submitted for information and comment.

The Sub Committee Chair, Sue Knights gave a brief resume of the following topics discussed at the meeting.

- Update on Fair Access Protocols
- Admission of Looked after Children
- Children missing from Education

On the issue of "Looked After Children" Mrs Knights reported that Mr Nigel Richardson, Director of Children's Services had been invited to the next meeting of the Leeds Admissions Forum with a view to explaining the challenges and achievements of Children's Services in Leeds.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the contents of the minutes be noted
- (ii) To note that Mr Nigel Richardson, Director of Children's Services had been invited to the next meeting of the Leeds Admissions Forum scheduled for 15th November 2011

61 FAIR ACCESS PANELS AND THE ADMISSION OF CHILDREN DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2010/11 - UPDATE

Members considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the operation of the In Year Fair Access Panels and the admission of children during the academic year 2010/11

Addressing the report Mrs Buckland reported that the Fair Access Panels (Secondary) continued to sit on a monthly basis to consider parental preferences. There had not been any directions to schools this academic year and all young people who had been discussed at Panel, who did not have a school place, had been offered one.

The Fair Access Panels for Primary schools continued to sit as and when required.

Schools were continuing to develop stronger relationships both within and outside of their own Wedges. This had enabled them to offer more 'managed moves' for young people, for a variety of reasons who may benefit from a 'fresh start' or because they believe that a change of school was the answer to an issue they are experiencing.

Mrs Buckland suggested that Panels continued to operate even though long term funding was uncertain. The Area Inclusion Partnership's (AIP) had been funded for a further 12 months which had allowed the Panels to find funds to support some of the placements made through Panel. However, there were concerns as to how they would operate effectively after this time and how a move to 3 areas would affect their ability to continue to be cohesive and inclusive.

The publication of the Schools Admissions Code was currently awaited which may have an impact on Fair Access and the way that Leeds implements this across the City. However, until the release of the New Code, Children Services would be unable to ascertain the impact on the Admission Team or any of the work they currently do.

It was reported that there was an issue around the capacity to operate the current scheme. The existing resources were stretched, as the number of In Year Applications increased the number of Admissions Team cases also increased. The resources required to service all 5 Fair Access Panels placed pressure on the team and significant impact on the other statutory work of the service.

The number of officer hours involved in the current format of the Panels' and in particular the Secondary Panels was, with the current number of staff and the increase in transfers and Fair Access cases, not viable in the medium to long term.

In conclusion Mrs Buckland said that consultation would be undertaken, by the Admissions Team with the schools, through the Fair Access Panels, with a view to streamlining the administration and identifying the level of support provided by the Admissions Team in the administration of the Panels.

In passing comment the Chair asked if staff resources was an issue which required addressing.

Mrs Buckland, in responding said the issue of workloads and staff resources was constantly under review

RESOLVED -

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted
- (ii) That the issue of resources to deliver the current Fair Access Scheme be kept under review

62 EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2009 – 10

Members considered a report by the Director of Children Services which provided a summary of the outcomes of looked after children and the care leavers against educational performance indicators.

Appendix No.1 of the report provided information on the trends in the admission of looked after children

Addressing the report, Mr Rees, the Head of the Virtual School for Looked After Children highlighted the following issues:

- Characteristics of the looked after children cohort
- Education outcomes for the 2008 – 2010 Academic year
- Focus for future development

The Chair, asked about attendance and achievement of gypsy, roma and traveller children, which arose from a recommendation of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board following an inquiry into gypsy and traveller girls.

In responding Ms J Andrew, Head of Service, Attendance Strategy Team, Children Services and Mrs C Lockwood, Travellers Education Officer suggested that from the age of 11 it was a challenge to get children from travelling and gypsy roma families into school. Parents usually elected to have their children home schooled, many being reluctant to allow their children to attend due to cultural differences (the teaching of sex education and drugs issues)

Mrs Bryan suggested it was not just a case of education the pupils but making the parents more informed

Mrs Knights referred to the TV series “Bit Fat Gypsy Wedding” and asked if the programme had affected the lives of travelling and gypsy roma families?

In responding, Mrs Lockwood said that generally no, but there had been a number of bullying issues reported.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To approve the preparation of a report providing an analysis of admissions data for looked after children for the previous academic year. Report to be compiled each Autumn, allowing up to date information to be included in the annual report to Elected Members of the Corporate Care Group, recognising the information would not be available in May to the Vulnerable and Challenging Children's Sub Committee, as was the current practice
- (ii) That the Virtual school in Leeds would continue to use the benchmark's described in the submitted report for the foreseeable future in order that a continuous line of comparable data could be maintained

63 RESULTS OF THE ANNUAL CONSULTATION 2011

Members considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which set out the results of the Annual Consultation Exercise for 2011

In providing background information Mr Buckland said a consultation document was sent out on 1st December 2010 with a closing date of 4th February 2011 to all schools in Leeds, all neighbouring Local Authorities, the Church of England and Catholic Diocesan Boards, all Councillors and relevant trade unions. The Leeds Admission Forum were advised of the content of the consultation at their meeting on 16th November 2010, consulted through the sub committee, and collectively consulted at their meeting on 1st March 2011. All responses were summarized and presented to the Executive Board of Leeds City Council on 30th March 2011 who determined the final arrangements.

The consultation on the proposed admission arrangements included a proposal to hold waiting lists for a whole academic year, and asked for views on the sibling priority. Additionally there were a small number of requests to changes to admission numbers. Other than minor amendments to the timetable there were no other changes to the co-ordinated scheme.

Mrs Buckland outlined the main issues which included the following:

- Coordinated Scheme – Primary Annual Cycle
- Coordinated Scheme – Secondary Annual Cycle
- In Year Waiting Lists
- Consultation on the Sibling Priority
- Aided and Foundation Schools and Academies

RESOLVED – To note that:

- (i) Waiting lists will, in future, be held for all year groups for the academic year, for all community schools.
- (ii) The waiting lists will be closed at the end of the summer term each year and parents will have to reapply if they still wish to seek a transfer to another school.
- (iii) For applications for Reception and year 7 the waiting lists will be held from the deadline for requests after the offer day, throughout the summer before they begin their new schools and then on until to the end of the summer term at the end of the academic year.

64 ADMISSIONS CUSTOMER SERVICES SATISFACTION

Members considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided information on customer feedback indicators.

Addressing the report Mrs Buckland spoke on the following issues

Online applications

It was reported that this year 71.5% of parents applying for secondary places used the online service. Although this fell a little short of the government target of 80%, the national average was 66% and the local Yorkshire and Humberside average was only 42.3%. These figures show Leeds performed well both locally and nationally in the online service it offers to parents.

There were 69% of parents applying for primary places that chose to do so online. Data was not collected nationally for primary applications so no comparisons were available with other local authorities. During the application rounds for both primary and secondary school places, that equates to almost 11,000 parents applying online.

Feedback from questionnaire

Each year a questionnaire is provided inviting feedback from parents on the quality of the information published and on the customer service they have received if they have had reason to contact the admissions team. This year 503 chose to complete and return some, or all, of the questionnaire. There were both a paper version and an online interactive version. Although only 30% of parents applied using a paper preference form, 84% of those returning a questionnaire said that they had applied on a paper form. The questionnaires were returned prior to the transfer of telephony to the contact centre and are reflective of communication directly with the Admissions Team.

Summary table of responses

Question	Good or excellent	Poor
How would you rate the information in the summary guide?	86%	1%
How would you rate the information in the full guide for parents?	87%	0.4%
How would you rate the explanation of the admission process?	85%	0.6%
If you applied online, how would you rate the online application system?	74%	13%
If you used the website how easy did you find the information you wanted?	71%	11%
If you contacted the team by telephone or email how would you rate the promptness of the response?	88%	2.3%
If you contacted the team by telephone or visited how would you rate the staff in terms of being professional, polite and helpful?	92%	0
If you contacted the team by telephone or visited how would you rate the information we gave you?	94%	0.5%
Overall, how would you rate the quality of information and service?	89%	0.8%

Contact Centre transfer

In December 2010, as part of the Council's customer first strategy the public telephony was transferred from the Admissions Team to the Contact Centre.

Mr Paul Broughton, Chief Customer Services Officer attended the meeting and spoke about the transfer of service.

Mr Broughton said that a significant amount of work went into the preparation for the transfer. Customer Service Officers who would be working at the Contact Centre were given the opportunity to spend time in the Admissions Team understanding the back office work, before the transfer of calls. In turn experienced officers from the Admissions Team spent time at the Contact Centre during the first few weeks of transfer to offer advice and guidance on calls to refine the processes.

Prior to the transfer the Admissions team used to answer on average 65% of the 100,000 calls received each year. At peak times, in March and September, this

answer rate would fall to below 50%. Since transferring the telephony the performance standards were significantly improved achieving 96%.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results (From February 2011)

- Overall customer satisfaction 98.8%
- Treated with respect 99.6%
- Is this the first time you have contacted us? 69.5%
- Acceptable wait time 93.9%
- Enquiry resolved today 77.5%
- Next steps clearly explained 98.3%

Mrs Buckland reported that all of the evidence and feedback collected to date suggested that the transfer of the admissions calls to the Contact Centre had been successful, achieved its aims, and was delivering a more favourable customer experience. The relationship between the Contact Centre staff and the Admissions Officers was a positive one.

In conclusion Mrs Buckland said that performance in relation to telephony standards were significantly improved, providing parents with better access to the service. Parental engagement with the admissions team on the telephone, face to face, and by email was reported to be mainly good or excellent. The guidance that was produced for parents continues to be well received and offers a good explanation of the application process. The online services needs to focus on ensuring that the web based communications were as clear and easy to use as they could be.

In passing comment the Chair said the results were a lot better than expected and that is a credit to the officers overseeing the transfer

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and it's findings welcomed

65 DRAFT REPORT TO THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR 2011

Members considered and offered comment on the draft report by the Director of Children's Services which would provide the basis of a report to the school's Adjudicator for 2011.

Addressing the report Mrs Buckland said that the local Authority was required to provide a report to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator on an annual basis.

The Schools' Adjudicator provided a template for the local Authority on which to report, covering the matters required annually and any specific queries they may have arisen.

The commentary that accompanies the report confirms that all of the legal requirements around consultation and determination of policies had been met, that schools are complying with the Infant Class Size legislation, and how well the Fair Access Protocol was working. It also provided comment on whether or not Appeals Panels were complying with the School Admissions Appeal Code.

In setting out the salient points Mrs Buckland reported that:

- All admission authorities in Leeds were working positively with the local Authority with respect to all aspects of the School Admissions Code
- There was no intention to refer any objections to the Schools Adjudicator this year.
- All the required information would be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator

The Chair asked if the report should go to Executive Board?

In responding Mrs Buckland suggested that the views of the Executive Member for Children's Services should be obtained in the first instance

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the Admission Forum note the positive way in which the local Authority, Diocese, Foundation, Academy and schools had worked together to ensure full compliance with the School Admissions Code.
- (ii) That any further comments be made known to the Clerk of the Forum by 27th June 2011.
- (ii) That the views of the Executive Member for Children's Services be sought as to whether the report should go to the Executive Board

66 BRIEFING ON THE DRAFT ADMISSIONS CODE 2011

Members received a report by the Director of Children's Services which set out the proposed changes to the Admissions Framework and sought the Members views on the draft School Admissions Code and the Draft School Admissions Appeal Code, which were at the centre of the proposed changes.

In providing background information Mrs Buckland reported that the current Schools Admissions Code had been in force since February 2009. The draft School Admissions Code and draft School Admission Appeals Code were released for consultation on 27th May 2011. It was reported that the consultation period runs for 12 weeks, closing on 19th August 2011. The government's stated intention was to simplify and slim down the Code and to reduce bureaucracy.

The Education Bill, subject to Royal assent, would enable the Schools Adjudicator to hear objections about all state-funded schools, including academies. It would also see the statutory requirement for an Admissions Forum removed. It was pointed out that there was no reference to Admissions Forums in the new Code. Enactment of the Education Bill was currently expected to be in early 2012.

Mrs Buckland highlighted the following Key changes within the consultation documents:

- The removal of the requirement on local authorities to coordinate in year admissions.
- Changes to the Published Admission Number (PAN)
- Random Allocation
- Infant Class size exceptions
- Reduction in consultation requirements
- Giving priority to children attracting the Pupil Premium
- Children of school staff

Changes not highlighted in the consultation but worthy of note:

In streamlining the Code the obstacles to creating the sibling link between entry into infant school when the older child had already moved on to junior school had been removed.

The authority must provide full time and part time places for parents wishing to defer entry into primary school.

The prospectus would continue to need to be available online, but only in hard copy for those parents without access to the internet. There is also no detail as to what must be contained, which would allow admission authorities to produce information for parents in a more flexible way.

There is no requirement for independent Choice Advice to be provided. The local authority does retain a duty to provide information, advice and guidance for parents but it does not have to provide an independent service.

Fair Access Protocol

This service remains but must be agreed with the majority of schools. It must include how the local authority will use alternative provision for those not considered ready for mainstream schools. The Protocol would only be triggered where a parent cannot secure a place. At present in Leeds the Protocol is used very proactively, on application, to enable the admission authority to balance the needs of the child with a fair sharing arrangement for schools, that has in recent years ensured that every child in Leeds does receive the offer of an appropriate school place. With the support and partnership of all of the schools and academies in Leeds, the Fair Access Protocol has been very successful. To use FAP only when a parent has been unable to secure a place will leave the most vulnerable and difficult to place children out of school for longer. Under the proposal there would also be no requirement to consider parental preference when using the Protocol.

Key changes to the Admission Appeals Code:

Changes to timescales. At present parents must be given a minimum of 10 days in which to appeal, although there is no deadline and appeals must be accepted at any time. The proposal is to give parents a minimum of 30 working days to appeal, for two stated reasons. The first is that it gives parents longer to consider other options in the belief that fewer parents will go on to appeal. The second is to allow parents time to submit a more complete appeal. This leads into a further proposal that parents will have at least two opportunities to submit further evidence, but that there will be no requirement for the panel to accept evidence not submitted in advance of the hearing.

Currently timescales for appeals are in school days. The new Code changes these to working days. This will lead to a necessity to hear appeals during school holiday, which may prove difficult for schools that are their own admitting authority.

Admission Authorities presently have until 6 July to hear all on time secondary school appeals, which Leeds does achieve each year. The new Code will require appeals to be heard with 40 working days of the deadline. For large authorities such as Leeds, this will be very difficult to achieve. For example last year 400 secondary appeals were heard during the summer. We had all of April, May and June within which to hear them. Under the proposed timescales parents would have six weeks in which to lodge their appeal which would be about 20th April. The Admission Authority would then have to give 15 days notice of the appeal leaving 25 working days to hear all appeals. To hear all primary appeals within the timescales would require the offer date to be at least two weeks earlier than it is at present.

Appeals would be able to be heard on school premises and would no longer require a neutral venue. Training for panel members is currently required every two years with annual updates. The proposal is that this be relaxed, although panel members will still require training before they can first begin to hear appeals.

Mrs Buckland said in conclusion that the Code was much reduced in size and is now only 29 pages in length. A great deal of prescriptive detail had been removed. The role of the local authority would be diminished, and the Education Bill would also see the removal of the statutory role of the Admission Forum.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted
- (ii) That further/ individual comments could be made direct to the online response facility available on the Department for Education website www.education.gov.uk/consultations closing date 19th August 2011

67 ADMISSION FORUM WORK PROGRAMME

Members received and considered the Forum's Work Programme for 2011/12.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the scheduled Work Programme for 2011/12
- (ii) To update the Work Programme to reflect the decisions made at today's meeting

68 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no issues raised under any other business

69 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED – To note that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday 15th November 2011 at 4.00pm in the Civic Hall, Leeds