

Newport City Council: Education Services

School Admissions Forum

Minutes of the Meeting



Date: 28th June 2023

Present: NCC Elected Member (in the Chair)

NCC School Admissions & Appeals Manager
NCC Assistant Head of Education
VA Schools Representative
AF Regional Schools Liaison Officer
Local Community Representative (ALN)
Local Community Representative (GEMS)
Parent Governor Representative

Observing: Senior School Admissions Officer
Senior School Admissions Officer
School Admissions Officer
School Admissions Officer
School Admissions Officer

Clerk to the Forum

Apologies: VA Schools Representative
Children Looked After Representative (non - voting)
Community and VC Schools Representative
Advisor for Behaviour and Autism (non-voting)
Community and VC Schools Representative

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr AN welcomed those present, and apologies as noted above were given and accepted.

2. Minutes from previous meeting & matters arising

The minutes of the meeting were held to be a true and accurate record.

Item 7 (Membership Training) – Request for presentation on new ALN Code – Provided in item 9 of this meeting.

Item 8 (Consultation on Admissions Arrangements 2024) – Policy approved and published within timescale, draft copies circulated to members, see item 6 of this meeting.

Item 9 (Annual Report) – Completed and submitted to Welsh Government within timescale.

3. School Admissions Team Plan 2023/24

DW advised the Forum that a new format had been agreed in drafting team plans, which identifies key work streams and performance indicators and how the team supports the overall deliverable outcomes of the service area.

The new format and changes, which came into effect from 1st April 2023, will now also be used to inform the statistics shared with the Forum to aid in more effective monitoring of performance, and enable members to advise on any issues.

To support consistent monitoring across the city, Voluntary Aided representatives were also invited to adopt this new statistical approach.

Action: Meeting to be arranged between LA and VA representatives to discuss data required and implement new format from November.

4. Proposed report cycle

JL outlined the new proposed reporting cycle which was circulated prior to the meeting.

The purpose of this was to formalise the requirements for each meeting in line with the admissions calendar and provide greater focus and clarity for monitoring effectiveness of admission arrangements.

The new report cycle also included a proposal to reduce the number of meetings held per year from 3 to 2.

No concerns were raised, and all members present, agreed and accepted the proposal to take effect immediately.

5. 2023 Phase Transfer outcomes

JL updated the members on the latest position, highlighting the following key points:

- 5% of Reception and 6% of Secondary applications remain outstanding, meeting target of 10%.
- All statutory deadlines were met during the 2023 Phase admission round, despite encountering several IT challenges rendering software unavailable for periods of time.
- 26 applications in total were initially refused however subsequently offered due to information shared relating to ALN.
- 100% of Secondary admission appeals proceeded to stage 2. (Reception hearings not yet concluded).
- As a result of the formal increase in the admission number at Bassaleg and The John Frost schools, no pupils were refused a secondary place at their catchment school.
- 20 Reception in catchment refusals were made relating to 2 primaries within the west of the city.
- Despite receiving 3481 applications, 89% of first preferences were successful (not including 92 mainstream ALN pupils who were allocated a place before the admissions criteria was applied).

There continues to be challenges regarding the new ALN process following implementation of the new legislation. The School Admissions Manager and ALN Manager are working together to resolve the teething problems.

Cllr AN queried prioritisation for asylum seekers within the over subscription and a discussion ensued.

It was confirmed that unaccompanied asylum seekers are classed as Looked After Children and as a result receive the highest priority. Accompanied asylum seekers do not receive any additional priority within the oversubscription criteria however are supported in other ways via housing accommodation and transportation. EK also confirmed a designated member of the Gwent Ethnic Minority Service (GEMS) also links up with such families when they are made aware of their arrival, to provide support.

JB queried the availability of places trend and what effect this is having on school budgets / site usage, noting the current circumstances around St Andrew's Primary.

JL confirmed the city continues to have more availability generally in the east of the city however this does not include all of those schools and have found in the west, there is generally availability in the Newport High cluster.

DW confirmed that some schools are struggling financially however, only 1 school has been unable to set a balanced budget this year (from the west of the city not the east). The Planning of School Places group meets on a half termly basis to monitor surplus places and developments on the radar, however there is no contingency for another situation such as St Andrews and Monnow Primaries.

6. 2024 Determined admission arrangements and parent's booklet

JL brought the forum's attention to the new 2024 booklet which was approved by Cabinet in April this year. The role of the forum is to ensure the literature is published, clear, free from jargon and readily understandable.

Members were asked to review and inform LP of any concerns regarding clarity.

7. 2025 Proposed policy changes

In the Autumn term, consultation on admissions arrangements for 2025 will begin. Currently, only 1 small change is proposed to the back-office process of waiting lists.

Forum members were invited to feedback if there are any aspects they feel need to be considered for change.

It was confirmed that all VA schools will also need to consult for 2025. One aspect for consideration will be the inclusion of service children.

8. Voluntary Aided school updates

PB confirmed nearly 330 applications were received in respect of the Year 7 intake for September 2023, 15 were withdrawn and 240 offered. 8 appeals have been heard so far, 1 upheld on behalf of the parent and the remaining 7 refused.

PB reported St Joseph's RC High School have also been receiving a large volume of in year applications with 81 received so far this year, 6 of which were offered.

LP provided an update on behalf of JM, confirming on time applications for Reception 2023 were lower than previous years but numbers have increased across the RC primary cluster since the offer date. In year transfer requests are also increasing with limited space and appeals are becoming a regular thing.

9. Briefing Topic: Additional Learning Needs (ALN) transformation

This item was moved to the beginning of the meeting and NK provided a summary of the previously circulated PowerPoint presentation, highlighting the following:

- The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and subsequent Code of Practice replaces all prior legislation in Wales for newly identified pupils with ALN.
- A transformation period of 2 years is currently in place, whereby the previous legislation will remain live until all pupils have moved over.
- Children or young people with ALN will have one system of support from the age of 0 – 25 years old (an extension from 3 – 19 years old).

- Pupil voice will be a fundamental element in developing an Individual Development Plan to include the child's aspirations for the future. The child's voice will also override a parent's if they have capacity.
- School action, School action + and Statements will cease and be replaced with One Page Profiles and IDP's.
- Responsibility is largely being transferred from LA to schools providing 2 levels of IDP, school IDP and where the needs are complex or specific provisions are required such as a Learning Resource Base, it will become a LA IDP.

A discussion ensued regarding the current processing challenges as the legislation does not expressly state how the new ALN code will apply in practice and neither does this align with the Admissions Code. Clarity has been sought from Welsh Government and managers are working together with counterparts from the Southeast Wales consortia.

VA schools were advised to note they will also see direct applications from pupils with school IDP's, however for those that are refused, to note that the remit of an Admission Appeals Panel, will only be to consider the admissions process, not ALN, as that will follow a separate process.

PB raised the importance of early communication, which was noted by the ALN Manager, who explained this can be impacted where parental preference changes or a decision is affected by a tribunal hearing. Work has been done to align the ALN dates with Admissions as far as possible, and it is hoped for Year 7 work will be undertaken by October half term, this year and Reception by January (for Sept 2024).

Cllr AN queried the forum's role over the next 24 months as this new process roles out and whether age is a restriction to a child's ability to override a parent's choice.

With regard to any restrictions, it must be documented if a child has a particular view from the moment they start the process – this can be any age. However, if that view cannot be documented, the reasons why must be documented, e.g cognitive learning difficulties.

NK confirmed at present, members need to note the contents of the presentation however if anything transpires as precedence is set in the courts, policies may need to be reviewed.

10. School Reorganisation Programme update

This report was circulated prior to the meeting for which all forum members noted the content and no questions were raised.

11. AOB

No other business

12. Future Meeting Dates

Autumn Term – Tuesday 21st November 2023