

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 21 October 2015 at 7.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Will Purvis (in the Chair)
Hannah Hockaday
Ryan Brent
Ken Ferrett
Suzy Horton

Education Representatives

Helen Reeder, Teacher's Liaison Panel Representative
Urszula Top, Roman Catholic Diocese Representative

25. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Paul Godier.

26. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

27. Minutes of Previous Meeting - 24 September 2015 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 24 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

28. Review into home to school transport and access to primary school places (AI 4)

Scoping Document

A draft scoping document had been circulated to members with the agenda papers. The Chair felt that under the objectives heading, bullet point five regarding pupil place planning and town planning should be reworded as the Council has very little say on where new housing developments are located.

From the written evidence obtained from Richard Harvey showing a breakdown of home to school transport by category, the panel noted that a high percentage of primary aged pupils had been granted assistance with home to school transport following an appeal to the panel. It was agreed that some written evidence be obtained on the school transport appeal process including Home to School/College Transport Exceptional Circumstances Criteria and - what they are and how this is applied by the Inclusion Transport Appeal Panel.

No further changes were requested to the draft document.

RESOLVED that the draft scoping document be approved, subject to amendment during the course of the review.

Neil Stevenson, Admissions (Exclusions and Reintegration) Manager

Neil referred to the council's admissions booklets, and advised that school places are allocated using the equal preference system as shown in the flowchart included with the papers. If a parent chooses a school further away but there are spaces locally, they have to cover transport costs themselves. All school places are allocated according to the criteria as set out in the admissions booklet. The most realistic preference is usually the catchment area school because this is the top criterion in all bar one school (and they are looking to amend). Some schools are more popular at varying times and catchment areas do not move.

In response to questions the following matters were clarified:

- A high percentage of children are allocated their first preference school as highlighted in the table below:

	Primary	Junior	Secondary
2013			
1 st pref	85%	95.0%	95.0%
2 nd pref	7.60%	2%	2.70%
3 rd pref	2.80%	0.80%	0.60%
4 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
5 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
6 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014			
1 st pref	85.10%	92%	93.40%
2 nd pref	7.80%	3.80%	4.20%
3 rd pref	2.20%	0.70%	0.90%
4 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
5 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
6 th pref	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015			
1 st pref	87%	92.00%	86.20%
2 nd pref	7.60%	3.10%	6%
3 rd pref	1.40%	1%	1.90%
4 th pref	0.20%	0.40%	N/A
5 th pref	None	0.10%	N/A
6 th pref	0.08%	none	N/A

Note: 6 preferences were introduced for starting school and junior transfer.

- Academy schools consult on their own admissions policies. The consultation period is a minimum of six weeks between 1/10/15 and 31/1/16 (i.e. must end on 31/1/16). On the 28/2/16 policies must be determined i.e. published on the website and sent to all neighbouring admission authorities. This will include schools and neighbouring local authorities. Following the consultation window there is sometimes a change to the order or criteria.
- The pupil forecasts show that a significant number of schools are at capacity so it was inevitable that there will be an increase in children not being allocated their first preference school. Currently the majority of catchment area children are allocated a place at their catchment school.
- The admissions booklet has a section to explain for each school how many applicants were successful, and admission criteria used in the allocation process including the criteria that the last place was allocated under for the previous year's intake.
- For pupils who are making in-year transfers to their catchment school that is oversubscribed, the admissions team would look at other schools within a reasonable distance to offer a place at. This would be in line with their preferences or where no preferences can be allocated because they are oversubscribed the LA will allocate to the next nearest school with spaces.
- Proposed new housing developments are taken into account when the pupil place planning team work on the pupil forecasts. The Panel raised concerns that there are a number of new housing developments proposed in the city, particularly in Milton and Cosham, which will create additional pressures on school places for schools in these areas. They asked for further information on how the council will respond to this for their next meeting.
- The pupil place planning team also review schools which have the space to expand and are usually good at forecasting. If there are more children than the forecast had predicted temporary classrooms is one option that can be implemented until a more long term solution is put in place.
- Some local authorities such as Southampton have made the decision to put sibling above catchment however this would be a big change and there would be lots of things to consider before making this change. Historically when the council has consulted on the admissions criteria, catchment is the one that remains the highest criteria. PCC is part of the south east network who constantly discusses issues around access to school places.
- Catchment areas overlap (e.g. in relation to Trafalgar school gaining a catchment area) but it was likely that there would be a review into catchment areas at some point in the future, however this would be a long process and could take a few years to complete with numerous implications and interested parties.
- The number of primary school places available in the city is the main issue at present, however in a few years' time when this 'bulge' moves through there will be an issue at secondary level.

- Neil advised that parents usually put at least one realistic preference school on their application form, which is often their catchment area school.
- The admissions booklet explains detail to parents on what a realistic preference is and gives information on each school including the number of applications received in the previous year, the admission limit for the school and the criteria on which the last place was allocated. The admissions team also visit schools to advise parents of the process and the link to the admissions booklet is available online when parents are completing their forms online.

The Chair said that travelling two miles from for example a village to the nearest town to go to school wasn't such an issue however travelling two miles from one end of the city to the other is a long way and often more difficult due to public transport issues. Richard Harvey advised that he could provide the panel with projections on home to school transport for the next five years, which would help the panel see where the tipping point is likely to be.

The panel asked for the following information from officers to help with their review:

- A list of potential housing sites split into catchment areas, when these are likely to come forward and the potential yield i.e. if the sites are going to be 1 bedroom flats they are less likely to have children compared to 2,3,4 bedroom houses. To enable the panel to see where there will be pressures for primary school places in the city.
- A list of primary schools that the council are looking at expanding/have potential to expand
- Information on the percentage of children who get the first preference, second preference school etc. and historical data of this going again back 3 years so the panel can see if this has changed.
- Figures of the number of pupils within each phase residing in a particular catchment to compare this with the numbers on roll at each school.
- How PCC compares with its statistical neighbours and it was mentioned that Southampton have changed their admissions criteria so that sibling is above catchment - the chair asked whether Neil could contact his contact at Southampton to ask how they have found this and their perspective on if this has been successful.
- Projections of home to school transport broken down into areas
- A report on the Home to School/College Transport Exceptional Circumstances Criteria and - what they are and how this is applied by the Inclusion Transport Appeal Panel.
- Data on the number of appeals over the last few years to see whether this has been increasing
- The Chair also asked for details about the school transport appeals process - he noted that a number of the non-statutory home to school transport had been allowed on appeal - he asked for some historical data on this as well maybe over the last 5 years how many have been allowed on appeal?

29. Date of next meeting (AI 5)

The Panel discussed when to hold the next meeting and it was agreed the next meeting be held on Wednesday 18 November 2015 at 7:00pm. It was agreed to invite officers from the pupil place planning team and also Jacqueline Boulter from the Planning Policy team to understand more about the interaction between town planning and pupil place planning.

The meeting concluded at 7.50 pm.

Councillor Will Purvis
Chair