

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Forum Finance Group
Meeting date:	08 November 2017
Subject/Report Title:	SCHOOL ADMISSIONS SERVICE
Report Author	Lois Brough, Team Leader Admissions and Transport
Schools affected:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All Schools <input type="checkbox"/> All Primary <input type="checkbox"/> All Secondary <input type="checkbox"/> All Special <input type="checkbox"/> All Primary and Secondary <input type="checkbox"/> Maintained Schools Only <input type="checkbox"/> Academy Schools Only <input type="checkbox"/> PVI Settings <input type="checkbox"/> PRUs <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)
Type of Report	For information
Forum Voting	Whole of Forum
Public/Private report:	Public

1. Purpose of Report
1.1 To inform Schools' Forum Finance Group of the function of the School Admissions Team.
2. Decision(s) Recommended
2.1 For information and discussion.
3. Background
3.1 School admissions is regulated by the School Admissions Code, Appeals Code and related legislation. All maintained schools including academies, community schools, foundation schools, voluntary-aided schools, voluntary-controlled schools, free schools, UTCs and studio schools must act in accordance with the codes and legislation.
3.2 Each Local Authority has a statutory duty to coordinate intake admissions to all publicly funded schools in its area. The LA must also report annually to the Schools' Adjudicator and return data on the allocation of secondary and reception places to the Department for Education.
3.3 The LA is the admissions authority for community and voluntary-controlled schools. The governing body or the trust board is the admissions authority for all the other types of schools - academies and voluntary-aided schools.
3.4 Each admissions authority is responsible for determining the admission

	arrangements including the oversubscription criteria to be used if there are more applications than places available.
3.5	Parents make one application to the LA in which they live. They can apply for schools in any local LA area.
4. Service provided to different types of schools	
4.1	As the admissions authority for community and voluntary-controlled schools the LA manages the admissions process as follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Determine the admission arrangements (b) Publish information for parents (c) Provide a portal for applications (d) Receive applications and carry out address checks (e) Co-ordinate with own admission authority schools (f) Co-ordinate with other local authorities (g) Allocate places (h) Inform parents of the outcome (i) Receive acceptances (j) Manage the appeals process
4.2	A Service Level Agreement has been designed and offered to academies to provide the non-statutory elements of admissions process.
4.3	All academies in Solihull purchase the Service Level Agreement. This enables the Admissions Team to offer a consistent service to parents and schools across the borough.
5. Managing efficiencies with the service	
5.1	The team consists of Team Leader who also has responsibility for School Transport and full time Senior Admissions Officer who manages the day-to-day process and three full-time equivalent Admissions Advisers represented by four employees and one Admissions Administrator. During 2017 the team has managed a maternity leave absence and long-term sickness absence.
5.2	The team constantly reviews the admissions processes, identifying failure demand and identifying opportunities to streamline the systems.
5.3	Incoming phone calls and emails are reviewed for trends which identify areas for improved communications.
5.4	The team focuses on early intervention, such as chasing those who have not applied for a school place, which results in few time-consuming and costly appeals later in the process. Priority is currently being given to vulnerable parents who do not apply for a secondary place.
5.5	Address checking is carried out early in the process to prevent fraudulent applications which later result in the offer of a school place. This reduces the number of appeals. The team is ruthless in respect of fraudulent applications and will thoroughly investigate any suspicious application reported by a school or any other source.
5.6	There is a focus on accuracy and checking to minimise errors.
5.7	The team is well established with experienced members who work across all aspects

of service delivery to achieve maximum efficiency.

- 5.8 The nature of the business means that parents demand a high level of contact by phone and/or email. In 2016 the team responded to approximately 40,000 phone calls and 14,500 emails.
- 5.9 Since 2012 there has been an emphasis on using online channels for providing information, making applications and communication. This has significantly reduced printing and postage costs.
- 5.10 The success and smooth running of the service is dependent upon the positive relationships that have been built between team members and head teachers, school staff and other stakeholders.
- 5.11 Numbers of applications processed for 2017 intake:

Intake round	Places available	Solihull applicants	Out of borough applicants	Total applicants
Secondary	3340	2564	2229	4793
Junior	709	685	115	800
Reception	2818	2617	749	3366
Nursery	2544	2076	384	2460

6. Challenges for the admissions service

- 6.1 There is a national shortage of school places for children starting Reception which has been impacting on admissions for the last four years. To meet the increasing demand for school places School Place Planning has added four and half forms of entry (135 places). Greswold Primary School, Blossomfield Infant School and Daylesford Infant School have been expanded to meet the ongoing demand in the south of the borough. Four schools in the north of the borough take additional forms of entry on alternate years.
- 6.2 As a consequence of higher numbers of children in infant year groups it is extremely difficult to manage in-year applications for families moving into the area. It is often not possible to comply with parental preference or offer a place at a school within a reasonable distance from the family home.
- 6.3 During the academic year 2016-2017 the team processed in the region of 2,600 in-year applications. Many of the children arrive from overseas. Demand for places is mostly met by normal pupil turnover (other pupils leaving), but we also increasingly rely on the co-operation of Head Teachers agreeing to admit children over and above their admission limit, including exceeding class size 30 limit in key stage one.
- 6.4 The Admissions Team also relies on the co-operation of Head Teachers to find appropriate school places for children with challenging behaviour, poor attendance or those for whom English is not their first language, but who are entitled to a place in a mainstream school.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The 2017-18 annual charge to the DSG for the admissions function is £223,260. .
- 7.2 The benchmarking tables produced by the DfE consistently show that Solihull is among the lowest spending local authorities on admissions. In 2017-18 Solihull

spending equated to £6 per pupil compared to a national average of £9 per pupil, and Solihull is the lowest spending authority bar one across all Midlands (average £8pp) authorities and our statistical neighbours (average £9pp).

- 7.3 Solihull is the lowest spending authority in the whole of the Midlands, bar Herefordshire and Shropshire, who spend £5 per pupil.

8. List of other relevant documents

- 8.1 School Admissions Code
- 8.2 School Admissions Appeals Code
- 8.3 Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools.
- 8.4 Booklets for parents - primary and secondary 2018 editions.