

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

4729

Author:

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Department:

People

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Subject:

Consultation on Admission Arrangements for 2024/2025 Academic Year

Total Value:

0 (Type: Nil)

Decision Being Taken:

To approve consultation on proposed changes to the arrangements for admission to schools in the 2024/2025 school year from those determined for the previous year, with the only alteration being a reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Dovecote Primary School.

Reasons for the Decision(s) Following on from analysis carried out by the LA's School Organisation Team, it was identified that there is a continued growing surplus of places in primary schools in some areas. Caused primarily from falling birth rates, the team carried out further analysis on primary school capacity in planning areas. This identified a need for PAN reductions at some schools and academies, Clifton was identified as one area with a surplus of school places. Collaboratively, a review was undertaken between the LA and own admissions authorities in the area to identify appropriate solutions to address this. We therefore propose to reduce the PAN of Dovecote Primary School in the 2024/2025 academic year. The reductions are necessary to safeguard the future financial viability of schools, optimising capacity with a potential to repurpose space and support strategies that aim to introduce flexibility and sustainability. Many areas of the city are seeing a decline in the demand for primary school places and our pupil projections suggest there will be a continuing and increasing decline. This reflects the national picture of falling birth rate year on year and the falling inward / increasing outward migration. Projections indicate that this surplus will increase over the projected period, which is currently up to 2024/25. Excessive surplus places will have a negative impact on school budgets and the quality of provision for pupils, therefore the situation presents all primary school providers in the city with a challenge to limit the number of surplus places. In light of this, a well-managed and collaborative review process is required to ensure that all children have access to high quality and financially sustainable education in their local area. The LA is committed to collaborating and developing solutions together with all primary school providers to review the options. Strategies need to be flexible and sustainable to account for housing growth and further demographic changes. Closing schools is not a favourable option and at some point the pupil population is likely to grow again. We need to avoid the risk of closure by implementing other viable solutions, such as potentially re-purposing space and developing other types of provision or joined up planning on a neighbourhood level. Within the same planning area, two academies have agreed to reduce and have consulted (Glapton and Highbank), reducing published admission numbers for the 23/24 academic year. This contributes to ensuring sustainability and financial viability of schools in the area. Forecasting and live admissions data identified these schools along with Dovecote as the most appropriate options for reductions.

Other Options Considered: Alternative options would be to leave the admission numbers as they are but this could create vulnerabilities for the schools in respect of staffing and finance.

Background Papers: None

Published Works: Draft Admissions Arrangements 2024/2025 Fair Access Protocol

Affected Wards: Clifton East, Clifton West

Colleague / Councillor Interests: None

Consultations:
Date: 11/11/2021
Ward Councillors: Roger Steel, Andrew Rule, Kevin Clarke, Kirsty Jones, Maria Watson
Ward councillors informed of proposals informally. They will be formally consulted as part of consultation process in October.

Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision.

Crime and Disorder Implications:

None.

Equality:

EIA not required. Reasons: No changes to policy, service or function.

Decision Type:

Portfolio Holder

Subject to Call In:

Yes

Call In Expiry date:

06/10/2022

Advice Sought:

Legal, Finance, Human Resources

This decision seeks approval for consultation on proposed changes (a reduction in the PAN) to the arrangements for admission to schools in the 2024/2025 school year from those determined for the previous year.

All admission authorities must consult in accordance with the School Admissions Code (September 2021) where they propose to reduce the PAN. Community and voluntary controlled schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. There is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to the PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection.

The Admission Authority is the body responsible for setting and applying a school's admission arrangements. For community or voluntary controlled schools, this body is the local authority, i.e. NCC.

Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

Admission authorities must consult with:

- a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
- b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
- c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
- d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority;
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed PAN) on the school's website or its own website (in the case of a local authority) together with details of where comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought. Admission authorities must also send, upon request, a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.

Regulations 12 to 17 of the School Admissions Regulations 2012, also cover consultation requirements.

It is therefore essential that the proposed consultation complies with both the Code and the Regulations referred to above, especially given the potential for an objection/appeal in respect of the same.

It is clear that there is a statutory requirement to consult in relation to this decision and the only way to proceed with that consultation, is for approval to be provided by Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment.

Advice provided by Majid Iqbal (Legal Team Leader) on 16/09/2022.

Finance Advice:

As a result of there only being a reduction in the pupil admission number for Dovecote Primary in 2023/24 to the admissions code there is no cost implication to the Local Authority.

Funding for the School Admissions service is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant. This budget allocation was approved by Schools Forum for the financial year 2022/23 on 7 December 2021 and is taken to the Executive Board for approval on 22 February 2022 as part of the budget setting process. This process is undertaken on an annual basis.

This proposal will support the school to manage the financial implications on their delegated budget of falling pupil numbers by helping ensure class sizes are at a viable level. Advice provided by Julia Elizabeth Holmes (Finance Analyst) on 16/09/2022.

HR Advice:

During spring term 2021/22, Dovecote reviewed their staffing in light of falling admissions predicted for the next two years and commenced consultation on a staffing reduction process in order to reduce to one form entry based on the estimates. As a result 4.51 FTE staff left on 31 August 2022 by voluntary redundancy and one 0.6 FTE teacher resigned. This process was supported by HR and was compliant with Council procedures and legislation.

It is hoped that this action will ensure appropriate staffing for the next two years, during which time the school will consider natural wastage and the need to carry out further reductions in the future.

School Governors are advised to engage HR support for any future process that may be necessary. The Governing Body are committed to minimising the impact on staff wherever possible. Advice provided by Carol McCrone (HR Consultant) on 06/09/2022.

Signatures

Cheryl Barnard (Portfolio Holder- Children, Young People, Schools)
SIGNED and Dated: 28/09/2022
Catherine Underwood (Corporate Director for People)
SIGNED and Dated: 22/09/2022