

Education, Children & Families Committee

10:00am, Tuesday, 23 January 2024

School Placements and Appeals Process

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

Executive
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 Note changes to the P1 and S1 Appeals process to be implemented for 2024.
 - 1.1.2 Note that Officers continue to work collaboratively to look at how appeals outside of the P1 and S1 process are managed to ensure consistent decision making.

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Schools Placement Appeal Process

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 During 2023 resource and procedural issues impacted the effective operation of the school placement appeals procedure, with appeals being heard later in the year than usual. This report provides an update on the immediate actions being taken to strengthen the process.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on 31 August 2023, members sought further information on the Placing in Schools and Appeal processes.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The P1 and S1 school placement appeals process requires close collaboration between Committee Services, Customer Services, Legal and Education services. The current process is detailed in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 A lessons learned activity has now been completed by the relevant services and this identified the following issues during the 2023 process.
- There was a delay in sourcing panel members and identifying availability to allow Appeal Hearings to be established.
 - Low levels of panel members exist, despite a recruitment drive in 2022.
 - Intake limits are set at officer level, where previously these were ratified by elected members (this provided a steer to parents about availability in schools and was designed to support the appeals process).
 - Multiple appeal channels, with the potential for duplication and inefficiency.
 - Multiple touchpoints for data sharing are overly resource intensive.
- 4.3 To strengthen the process and stakeholder journey the following actions will be progressed:
- **Improved administration** – The current Appeals availability calendar will be replaced with an appeals timetable for each cluster of schools and issued in January as well as publishing on-line.

- **Improved process** - Appeals will only be accepted via an online form. This will provide one concise and coordinated customer channel. Officers are developing IT systems to support this process.
- **Enhanced administrative support** - Dedicated resource to be allocated by Committee Services to support the appeals process.
- **Improved records management** - Appeals to be held on an electronic workflow and document management system, with all case notes linked to the appellant. This will provide a full case history of process, as well as comprehensive management information at an individual school level.
- **Improved visibility of school availability** – Recommended that Elected members ratify intake limits at an appropriate Committee meeting.
- **Expand appeal resources** - Engagement exercise to be undertaken with Parents Councils to increase number of appeal panel members and create greater resilience.
- **Appropriate Escalation** - The process will be supported by effective service levels across all areas involved with the appeal process, and associated escalation triggers.
- **Consistency of Decisions:** Officers will look for opportunities to consolidate other years appeals into this process. This work is currently undertaken directly by schools.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Officers will collaborate to implement the improvement plan for the 2024 process and consider closer coordination with the other years appeals process.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Budget considerations associated with enhanced resource requirements and the improved records management functionality are being progressed. It is anticipated that these costs will be contained within existing budgets.
- 6.2 It is anticipated that with a more joined up process that this will control, and limit schools being oversubscribed and in turn will minimise the impact of the requirement for additional resources.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The activities in this report are designed to ensure that all citizens can simply and timeously exercise their right to seek alternative education opportunities for children and young people with exceptional circumstances.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

8.1 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

9.1 The updated process will ensure clear role responsibility, governance and compliance activities and these will mitigate against future operational challenges.

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 Admissions in Mainstream Schools

Start primary school – The City of Edinburgh Council

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 Current School Office Process

Appendix 1

Current School Appeals Process

- Preparatory step - availability calendar normally issued by Committee Services in January, with the intention that appeals will be heard in May/June for clusters of schools within the same area. This is designed to ensure that parents/pupils are notified of the outcome of their appeal prior to the new academic year and pupils can attend the appropriate transition days.
- Appeals requests received by Committee Services via central mailbox and online form.
- Committees instruct Customer Services to prepare reports on specific appeal.
- Customer Services engage with Legal Services to validate paperwork.
- Customer Services return appropriate appeals paperwork to Committee Services.
- Committee Services confirm date of appeal to appellant and issue related paperwork.
- Appeals panel hears the case (NB Appeals can take a full day to be dealt with)