


Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
21 February 2024	
Report of: Steve Reddy, Interim Corporate Director Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Determination of School Admission Arrangements for 2025/26	

Lead Member	Councillor Maium Talukdar Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
Originating Officer(s)	Catherine Grace, Head of School Admissions
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Significant impact on wards
Forward Plan Notice Published	17/11/2023
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Accelerating education

Executive Summary

This report presents recommendations for Cabinet to agree the Local Authority's school admission arrangements for Tower Hamlets Community Schools and those schools for whom the Local Authority acts as the admission authority.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the Local Authority Relevant Area (geographical area) for admissions purposes.
2. Agree the admission policy for admission to Community Nursery Schools/Classes in 2025/26, as set out in Appendix A.
3. Agree the admission policy for admission to Community Primary Schools in 2025/26, as set out in Appendix B.
4. Agree the admission policy for admission to Community Secondary Schools in 2025/26 as set out in Appendix C.

5. Agree the schemes for co-ordinating admissions to the Reception Year and Year 7 for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix D.
6. Agree the scheme for co-ordinating 'In-Year' Admissions for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix E.
7. Agree the planned admission number (PAN) for each school in Tower Hamlets in 2026/26, as set out in Appendix F.
8. Note the specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4.1.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Local Authority decides and implements its school admission arrangements through local consultation and collaboration, enabling it to fully understand and meet circumstances in its area. In doing so, the Local Authority seeks to provide a clear framework intended to ensure that arrangements are lawful, reasonable and minimise delay to children accessing education.
- 1.2 The proposed schemes, consultation and recommendations in this report are consistent with the Local Authority's statutory duties as set out in the most recent revision of the Department for Education's School Admissions Code (2021).
- 1.3 The statutory timetable for the determination of School Admission Arrangements 2025/26 is as follows:

Date	Duty
Between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2024	Consultation for a minimum of six weeks
By 28 February 2024	Determination (formal agreement) of admission arrangements
By 15 March 2024	Publication of admission arrangements
From 1 September 2024	Applications open for admission in September 2025

- 1.4 The co-ordination of all admission arrangements, including nursery and 'in-year' together with school catchment areas provide a framework to plan the provision of school places more coherently, taking account of existing and future school locations; travelling distance; pupil migration and changes in neighbouring boroughs.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 When changes are proposed to the school admission arrangements, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to consult and determine the arrangements that will apply for applications to its community schools the

following school year, and to formulate a compliant scheme for co-ordinating admissions at the main points of entry (i.e. Reception, Year 3 for junior schools and Year 7 for transfer from primary to secondary school). If Cabinet fails to take such action the Local Authority would be acting contrary to the law.

- 2.2 The recommendations in this report have been prepared with regard to the need for arrangements to be clear, objective, and fair. Due consideration has been given to alternative admission arrangements, but any alternative action could lead to inequality and leave the Local Authority open to legitimate complaint and legal challenge. If Cabinet wished to consider adoption of alternative arrangements, then full consideration would need to be given to the guidance provided, particularly as to the legal requirements.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Local Authority must consult the public on its school admission arrangements if it wants to propose changes and at least once every 7 years, even if there are no proposed changes. This is to ensure transparency, openness, and relevance in our arrangements and to give parents and the wider community opportunity to make informed representation, which can then be considered as part of the determination of the arrangements.
- 3.2 A public consultation commenced on 26 October 2023 and concluded on 2 January 2024. An analysis of the responses is included as Appendix H to this Cabinet report. In summary, the consultation was promoted with a wide range of stakeholders and other interested groups including residents, schools and their governing bodies, neighbouring Local Authorities, Members, Local Authority employees. Promotions were delivered through the 'Let's Talk Tower Hamlets' and Local Authority websites, direct emails, social media, bulletins and newsletters, agenda items at a Joint Consultative meeting and Transition Team led informal face to face events.
- 3.3 Respondents included parents, school staff, Headteachers and Governors. The consultation website was visited **540** times, **94** viewed the survey, with **15** responses received. The majority of respondents agreed with the proposed admission arrangements, including the significant change to banding arrangements. Informal feedback in meetings and conversations were positive and supportive and indicate that those that were interested in the consultation did not feel the need to respond because the proposed changes, whilst considerable are not contentious and will not lead to disadvantage.
- 3.4 The Tower Hamlets School Admission Forum, representative of schools, parents, community organisations and other key stakeholders in the admission process discussed and agreed the proposals at its meeting on the 18 October 2023. The forum is one of the 15 respondents.

Church, Academy & Free Schools

- 3.5 Church, Academy and Free Schools are responsible for determining their own admissions policies. They will therefore consult separately and especially when changes are being proposed. Although these schools decide on their own admissions, they must participate in the Local Authority's determined arrangements for coordinating admissions for entry to primary and secondary school as set out in paragraphs 3.13 – 3.15 below.
- 3.6 Central Foundation Girls' School, George Green's School, London Enterprise Academy, Mulberry Academy London Dock, Mulberry Academy Shoreditch, Mulberry School for Girls and Mulberry Stepney Green Maths, Computing and Science College have adopted the same admission arrangements as our community secondary schools.

Nursery Admissions Arrangements (Appendix A)

- 3.7 The Local Authority has a central system and process for co-ordinating admissions to nursery schools and classes. This scheme enables parents to apply online for a nursery place at a Tower Hamlets community nursery school, a nursery class or Early Years Unit attached to a community primary school. These schools offer a mixture of part-time and full-time places for children aged 3 to 5 (inclusive).
- 3.8 There are no proposed changes to nursery admission arrangements 2025/26.
- 3.9 Out of 15 individual full responses, 15 respondents (100%) agreed with the proposal.

Primary School Admission Arrangements (Appendix B)

- 3.10 Co-ordination continues to ensure positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents with a high proportion of children gaining a place at a nearby primary school. The percentage of Tower Hamlets children securing a place at one of their parent's top three preferences has remained broadly in line with the London average, as shown in the table below:

School Year	% of LBTH children securing a place at one of their top three preferences of primary school	London Average
2023/24	97.7%	97%
2022/23	96.7%	97%
2021/22	95.3%	96.5%
2020/21	96.7%	95%

- 3.11 There are no proposed changes to primary admission arrangements 2025/26.
- 3.12 Out of 15 full individual responses, 14 respondents (93.3%) agreed with the proposal. 1 respondent (6.7%) did not agree with the proposal.

Secondary School Admission Arrangements (Appendix C)

- 3.13 The outcomes for children starting secondary school also remain positive and broadly in line with the London average, with the percentage of Tower Hamlets children securing a place at one of their top three preferences for the past three years shown in the table below:

School Year	% of LBTH children securing a place at one of their top three preferences of secondary school	London Average
2023/24	84.9%	89%
2022/23	88.2%	89%
2021/22	88.5%	87%
2020/21	88.9%	88%

- 3.14 However, the small but noticeable trend down in the Tower Hamlets percentage success rates over previous years reflects the pressure on secondary school places as a result of rising Year 7 pupil numbers. This was amplified in 2023/24 as the new Mulberry Academy London Dock did not open. Outcomes are expected to improve as the school opens in September 2024.

Proposed Changes to Banding Assessment

- 3.15 Tower Hamlets has always used a 'local' banding system to ensure that the Year 7 intake at secondary school is balanced across the pupil ability ranges. The current system assigns pupils to bands using a teacher assessment of their reading level, based on the range of ability of pupils in the borough's schools at the end of Year 5. Pupils are grouped in one of four bands (A, B, C and D – D being the highest level). The Local Authority is proposing to update its method of banding with a more wholistic approach, which takes account of a wider range of abilities than just a pupil's reading level. This proposed new method of banding will use a digital CATS4 assessment.
- 3.16 Out of 15 full individual responses, 10 respondents (66.7%) agreed with the proposal. 5 respondents (33.3%) did not agree with the proposal.
- 3.17 Details of the proposed changes to banding can be found in Appendix G. A full analysis of the consultation results is provided in Appendix H.

Co-ordinated Admission Scheme – Reception, Year 3 and Year 7 (Appendix D)

- 3.18 The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to co-ordinate admissions for children starting primary school, moving from infant to junior school and those transferring from primary to secondary school. The aim is to ensure that as many children as possible receive a single highest preference offer of a

school place at the earliest stage. The scheme and timetable are devised in conjunction with the other London Local Authorities which enables parents to apply for a place in their own borough as well as in other boroughs using a single application form.

- 3.19 There are no proposed changes to the existing coordinated scheme for admissions to Reception, Year 3, and Year 7 for the 2025/26 school year other than an update to the dates to reflect the calendar years.
- 3.20 Out of 15 full individual responses, 13 respondents (86.7%) agreed with the proposal. 2 respondents (13.3%) did not agree with the proposal.

Co-ordinated Admission Scheme – In-Year Admission (Appendix E)

- 3.21 The Local Authority also co-ordinates admissions for children who require a school place outside of the normal points of entry.

School Year	In-Year applications processed with at least one preference
2023/24	1332 (autumn term only)
2022/23	2603
2021/22	3101
2020/21	3168
2019/20	2180

- 3.22 We have seen current demand grow from 2180 applications naming at least one preference school (2019-20), to a high of 3168 (202/21) to 2603 (2022/23). These increased numbers are expected to remain higher than pre-pandemic levels and may be rising again. The autumn term saw 1332 applications received, compared to 1077 in the same term last year. Many of these are new arrivals to the borough, including from abroad, and not currently attending school. Migration into, and out of the borough as well as considerable movement within the borough can account for much of the increase in numbers.
- 3.23 Coordinated in-year admission is not a statutory requirement, but it is an essential safeguarding provision that provides the Local Authority with the most effective way of ensuring that children missing from education can be identified and supported back into school quickly, particularly vulnerable children and children who have experienced more complex problems and would therefore face tougher obstacles to them getting back into suitable education.
- 3.24 A scheme for coordinating in-year admissions is essential at a time when the numbers of children requiring school places outside the normal points of entry (i.e. Reception Year and Y7) remains high. The Local Authority and its schools have put in place a number of measures to support existing residents

and new arrivals to the area, including an established Fair Access Protocol that enables vulnerable children to be placed in education provision quickly as well as ensuring that every school takes its fair share of children who are difficult to place.

- 3.25 There are no proposed changes to the existing coordinated scheme for in-year admissions for the 2025/26 school year other than an update to the dates to reflect the calendar years.
- 3.26 Out of 15 full individual responses, 13 respondents (86.7%) agreed with the proposal. 2 respondents (13.3%) did not agree with the proposal.

Published Admission Numbers for Schools in Tower Hamlets (Appendix F)

- 3.27 The Published Admission Number (PAN) sets the maximum number of children that each school will admit to the reception year (primary), Year 7 (secondary) or Year 9 (UTC) in the school year 2025/26. The proposed PANs for each school in Tower Hamlets are listed in Appendix H.
- 3.28 12 respondents (80%) agreed with the proposed planned admission numbers across all Tower Hamlets schools, 3 (20%) did not agree.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Authority aims to establish and promote admission arrangements that seek to eradicate inequality and maximise the accessibility of school places. These policies are circumscribed by law and statutory guidance. They comply with equalities legislation and, as far as possible, are inclusive of the community. The Local Authority is also mindful of its duty to ensure that school admission decisions meet parental preference, where possible. It monitors outcomes to ensure that any proposed policy change explain the background, identifies the issues of concern, and highlights the potential benefits.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

Best Value

- 5.2 Best Value is a core objective of the proposals outlined as they seek to secure the best outcomes for the population in the context of fair access to high quality local school provision.

Environmental Implications

- 5.3 The underpinning principle of the admission policy for community schools is to provide **local places for local children**. This reduces the need for pupils to travel long distances to school as well as the impact of school transportation on the environment. The existing admission arrangements, aligned with the Authority's pupil place planning strategy, seek to alleviate pressures on school places in parts of Tower Hamlets as well as reduce the number of children who are travelling out of their immediate areas to access a school place.

Risk Management Implications

- 5.4 Admission arrangements must be reviewed periodically in accordance with the School Admissions Code (2021). Failure to do so could lead to legal challenge and a loss of confidence in Tower Hamlets as an admission authority.
- 5.5 Although, in practice, the Local Authority maintains a high standard in ensuring that a very high percentage of families obtain a place at one of their preferred schools, there is still the need for it to regularly monitor and review its school admissions arrangements. The Local Authority also needs to ensure that these arrangements continue to provide fair and equal access to school places for all children. The risk of not implementing the proposed policies could mean that arrangements would no longer reflect these underlying social equity principles.

Safeguarding Implications

- 5.6 These proposals, particularly the arrangements for the Local Authority to co-ordinate admissions at all points of entry, enable it to work collaboratively with schools and other agencies to safeguard and promote the well-being of all children in the borough, particularly our most vulnerable.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 School admissions are managed through the School Admission service which is funded from the Dedicated Schools grant (DSG). There are no financial implications to the General Fund contained within this report.
- 6.2 The total cost of the proposed new method of banding (the digital CATS4 assessment) will be met from contributions by the Tower Hamlets secondary schools, with each secondary school contributing a proportion of the total cost based on the level of their applications.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 A local authority has a general duty under Chapter III of the Education Act 1996 to ensure that sufficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the population of their area. In addition, the Education and Skills Act 2008 requires local authorities to exercise their functions so as to promote the participation of young people aged 16-18 in education and training.
- 7.2 Statutory guidance (the School Admissions Code, published in January 2021) sets out the requirements imposed on a local authority relating to school admissions.
- 7.3 The School Admissions Code and the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-Ordination of Admission Arrangements (England) Regulations 2012 set out detailed requirements for consultation on proposed changes to school admission arrangements. Consultation must take place when changes are proposed, or every 7 years if no changes have been proposed.
- 7.4 The Code and Regulations also set out the details of people and bodies which must be consulted.
- 7.5 In exercising its functions a local authority must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups. A local authority must also make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the 'best value duty').
- 7.6 The matters set out in this report comply with the above legislation and guidance.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- **Appendix A**
Proposed admission policy for Tower Hamlets community nursery schools & classes in 2025/26.
- **Appendix B**
Proposed admission policy for Tower Hamlets community primary schools in 2025/26.
- **Appendix C**
Proposed admission policy for Tower Hamlets community secondary schools in 2025/26.

- **Appendix D**
Proposed co-ordinated schemes for admission to nursery, Reception, and Year 7 for 2025/26
- **Appendix E**
Proposed co-ordinated scheme for In-Year admissions for 2025/26
- **Appendix F**
Proposed published admission numbers for Tower Hamlets School 2025/26
- **Appendix G**
Proposed Changes to Banding
- **Appendix H** Consultation results & analysis

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A