

Thurrock Council volunteer role description

Independent admission and exclusion Appeal Panel member

Supported by	Democratic Services, on behalf of the Clerk to the Appeal Panel
Role summary	We are seeking volunteers who are prepared to support the council by acting on school admissions panels. Parents who have been refused a place for their child are entitled to appeal against this decision, and Appeal Panel members decided if the original decision was fair.
Location	Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL
How to apply	Complete the application form at www.thurrock.gov.uk/volunteering

School admission appeals

School admission appeals are used when a child has been refused a place in their preferred choice of school. The parent then has the right of appeal, and can put their case before the Appeal Panel as to why their child should attend. The school, or their presenting officer, will also have the chance to submit their case as to why the school cannot accept an additional child.

The Appeal Panel is independent of the local authority and its decisions are binding for all parties, unless overturned by the courts. Appeal Panels perform a judicial function and need to be transparent, independent, and impartial. Although Panels act independently, they must consider very carefully any legal or procedural advice given by the Clerk.

Who can apply

Each appeals panel consists of three people and there are strict legal rules about who can be a Panel Member, and the criteria for admissions and exclusions are similar. The following individuals are currently being sought:

- lay people – who have no involvement in education
- experienced people – school governors and people who have involvement in education, for example a parent who has a child at school
- current head teachers and head teachers who have left teaching within the last 5 years

Panel members must be over the age of 18, and we would like the panel to reflect the diversity of the borough. We welcome people with all types of knowledge, background and experience, as groups made up of diverse individuals tend to make more informed decisions. There are certain people, however, who cannot sit on a panel:

- anyone who has a connection, including employment, with the local authority, or whose impartiality may be called into question
- anyone who makes arrangements for or maintains the school in question
- any person who does not satisfy the training requirements

There may be appeals for certain schools that you will not be able to hear, for example because you have a connection with an interested party, which may raise doubts about your ability to act impartially. You will need to consider whether your independence and objectivity could be challenged each time you are asked to sit on a panel.

Tasks and responsibilities

The appointed panel considers the reasons why the admission authority has refused a child a place, or excluded a child from school, as well as the special circumstances of the parents' or carers' case.

Panel members are expected to:

- read all of the papers that are sent to them
- play an active part in questioning all parties at the hearing
- show favour to neither party
- avoid expressing personal opinions
- avoid making a case for either party

You will need to be familiar with and, when making a decision, take into account:

- the Schools Admission Code
- the Schools Admissions Appeals Code
- guidance on exclusions
- any relevant background legislation

We will provide regular training sessions on all legislation.

The panel makes a decision on the issues in line with the regulations, codes, and other guidance and law that affects admissions and admission appeals in England.

You will be expected to attend training sessions and briefing sessions to keep up to date with all legislation and relevant codes.

Skills and experience

You will need:

- the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people
- the ability to read and assess information and identify key points/issues
- the ability to listen to information and identify key points being made
- the ability to analyse information and use it to form opinions and conclusions
- the ability to obtain and weigh-up evidence to reach reasoned decisions, based on that evidence
- willingness to work as part of a team
- willingness to take advice
- willingness to develop your own skills and knowledge

You will also be asked to develop an understanding of:

- the admissions and exclusions appeal processes and the guidance/legislation supporting them
- the rules of natural justice
- the role of the clerk

No specific prior knowledge is needed, but proof of previous decision-making experience is preferred.

Time commitment

You will be contacted by Democratic Services when we need to put an appeal panel together, and you can choose to serve as a panellist as few or as many times as you like.

Exclusion appeals can take place anytime during the year. Admission appeals can also take place throughout the year, but the majority occur in June, July and September.

Support you will get

The councils pledge to provide ongoing training, support and legislative guidance throughout your time as a panellist. We will also reimburse you for agreed expenses.

This role does not require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

If you have any specific questions about this role, either:

- email school.appeals@thurrock.gov.uk
- phone 01375 652 403 or 01375 652 229