

Terms of Reference 2026–2027

Alternative Provision (AP) Placement Panel

Contents

1. Purpose	1
2. Governance and Constitution	2
3. Panel Membership:	2
4. Meeting Frequency and Format	3
5. Quorum	3
6. Referral Process	3
7. Placement Decision-Making	4
8. Parent and Child/Young Person Views	4
9. Decision Outcomes and Communication	5
10. Commissioning and Provider Suitability	5
11. Safeguarding	6
12. Attendance, Monitoring and Review	6
13. Reintegration	7
14. Other Statutory and Service Considerations	7
15. Documentation and Record-Keeping	7
16. Confidentiality and Information Governance	8
17. Reporting and Strategic Oversight	8
18. Equality, Inclusion and Fair Access	8
19. Review of Terms of Reference	9
20. Relevant Framework and Guidance	9

1. Purpose

The Alternative Provision (AP) Placement Panel ensures the fair, timely and appropriate placement of children and young people into approved Alternative Provision settings where mainstream education is no longer appropriate or is unable to meet their identified needs.

The Panel will:

- Consider the individual needs and circumstances of each child or young person
- Promote access to suitable education and positive educational and wider outcomes;
- ensure safeguarding and welfare are central to placement decisions;
- promote inclusion and, where appropriate, reintegration into mainstream education;
- ensure decisions are consistent, transparent and equitable;
- consider provider suitability, quality, capacity and value for money; and

- operate in accordance with relevant legislation, statutory guidance, the borough's Alternative Provision Strategy and commissioning arrangements.

The Panel will operate alongside, and not replace, other statutory or specialist decision-making processes.

2. Governance and Constitution

The AP Placement Panel operates under the authority of the Local Authority Education Service and within the borough's agreed governance, safeguarding and commissioning arrangements.

The Panel will consider referrals submitted through the agreed Gateway Referral process and make placement decisions within its delegated authority.

The Panel will work within the local authority's agreed commissioning arrangements, including relevant procedures for commissioning Alternative Provision and Individual Placement Agreements.

3. Panel Membership

The AP Placement Panel will comprise representatives from education, inclusion, attendance, vulnerable children, safeguarding, children's services, health and relevant partner services.

- Admissions, Attendance & Inclusions Service Manager - Chair
- School Admissions Team Leader
- School Attendance Team Leader
- Vulnerable Children Team Leader
- School Inclusions Team Leader
- Virtual School Representative
- Missing and Exploitation Team Representative
- Youth Justice Service Representative
- Social Care Representative
- Health Representative
- Team Around the School Service Representative

The Chair may invite additional officers or professionals to attend where their expertise is relevant to a particular referral.

Where a member is unable to attend, an appropriately briefed representative may attend with the agreement of the Chair.

Members are expected to contribute relevant professional expertise, consider referrals objectively, maintain confidentiality and declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest.

4. Meeting Frequency and Format

The Panel will meet fortnightly during term time to consider referrals and placement requests.

Meetings will normally be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

The Panel will not routinely meet during school holidays. The Chair may convene an exceptional meeting where required due to an urgent placement need, safeguarding concern, significant vulnerability, continuity of education or other exceptional circumstance.

All referral, assessment, safeguarding and commissioning documentation should be submitted in advance wherever practicable.

Where an urgent placement is required outside the normal meeting cycle, the Chair may agree an alternative decision-making arrangement in accordance with the local authority's delegated authority and operational procedures

5. Quorum

The Panel will be quorate when:

- two Team Leaders are present; and
- the Chair or an appropriately delegated Chair is present.

Where the meeting is not quorate, a formal placement decision should not normally be made.

The Chair may determine an alternative arrangement for urgent cases in accordance with delegated authority.

6. Referral Process

Children and young people will normally be referred through the agreed Inclusions Gateway Referral process.

A completed Inclusions Gateway Referral Form, together with any additional relevant information gathered by the Inclusions Officer, must be presented to the AP Placement Panel for consideration.

The referral should provide sufficient information to enable the Panel to make an informed decision, including where applicable:

- Reason for referral
- Current educational placement and attendance
- Educational attainment and progress
- Previous and current interventions
- Behaviour and inclusion information
- Safeguarding and vulnerability information
- Relevant additional needs and support arrangements
- Relevant health or medical information
- Social care involvement
- Information regarding exclusions or other barriers to accessing education

- Child or young person's views
- Parent/carer views
- Proposed outcomes
- Proposed duration and review arrangements

The referring school or service is responsible for ensuring that information submitted is accurate, current and sufficiently detailed.

7. Placement Decision-Making

The Panel will consider each referral individually and identify the most appropriate available provision to meet the child or young person's needs.

The Panel will consider:

- Whether AP is appropriate and necessary
- The child or young person's educational, social, emotional and other relevant needs
- Attendance and engagement
- Safeguarding and risk
- The views of the child or young person and parent/carer
- Intended educational and wider outcomes
- Provider suitability, quality and capacity
- Availability of commissioned provision
- Cost and value for money
- Arrangements for monitoring, review, transition and exit

The Panel will seek to ensure that AP forms part of a planned educational pathway and is not an unmonitored or indefinite placement.

8. Parent and Child/Young Person Views

The views of the child or young person and their parent/carer should be sought and considered.

A parent/carer's preference for a particular AP provider cannot determine the placement decision.

Placement decisions remain subject to the suitability and availability of provision, the child or young person's needs, safeguarding, provider capacity, funding and the local authority's statutory and commissioning responsibilities.

Where a requested provider or placement is not supported, the reasons should be recorded and communicated appropriately.

9. Decision Outcomes and Communication

Panel decisions will be reached collectively and within the Panel's delegated authority.

Possible outcomes include:

- Placement approved
- Placement approved subject to conditions or further information
- Further information requested
- Alternative provision/provider to be identified
- Referral to another service or statutory process;
- Placement declined because AP is not considered appropriate
- Case deferred pending further assessment, intervention or information

The decision and reasons will be recorded.

Where a placement is approved, the record should identify:

- Approved provision
- Expected start date
- Expected duration or review point
- Intended outcomes
- Responsible professionals
- Funding and commissioning arrangements
- Monitoring arrangements

Panel decisions are binding within the scope of the Panel's delegated authority.

Designated Inclusion Officers will communicate the decision to the referring school/service and relevant professionals.

10. Commissioning and Provider Suitability

No placement should commence until the required commissioning and funding arrangements have been confirmed, unless an urgent placement has been authorised under an agreed local authority process.

Where an Individual Placement Agreement (IPA) or other formal commissioning documentation is required, this must be completed in accordance with local authority procedures.

The Panel will work with commissioning colleagues to ensure that placements are made with providers that have undergone the required due diligence and quality assurance checks.

Provider considerations will include:

- Safeguarding;
- Quality and suitability of education
- Staffing and capacity
- Ability to meet the child or young person's needs
- Expected outcomes

- Cost and value for money
- Monitoring and exit arrangements.

11. Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a fundamental consideration in every AP placement decision.

Appropriate checks must be undertaken before a placement is commissioned to establish that the provision is safe and suitable.

This should include, where appropriate:

- Safeguarding arrangements
- Safer recruitment and suitability checks
- Premises and health and safety
- Insurance
- Staffing and supervision
- Risk assessments
- Attendance monitoring
- Arrangements for reporting safeguarding concerns
- Relevant provider policies and procedures.

Any safeguarding concern identified through the placement process must be managed and escalated in accordance with local safeguarding procedures.

12. Attendance, Monitoring and Review

The referring school and/or commissioning service will monitor attendance and engagement in accordance with agreed arrangements.

Each placement should have clear intended outcomes and a defined review point.

Reviews should consider:

- Attendance and engagement
- Educational progress and achievement
- Behaviour and participation
- Safeguarding and wellbeing
- Progress against agreed outcomes
- Suitability and effectiveness of the placement
- Child or young person's views
- Parent/carer views, where appropriate
- Next steps, including continuation, reintegration, transition or alternative provision.

Where a placement is not meeting the child or young person's needs, this should be escalated promptly and may require further Panel consideration.

13. Reintegration and Transition

Where appropriate, AP should support a planned pathway towards:

- Reintegration into mainstream education
- Transition to another suitable educational setting
- Progression to further education
- Training or employment
- Another appropriate destination

The intended transition pathway should be considered when the placement is agreed and reviewed throughout the placement.

14. Other Statutory and Service Considerations

The AP Placement Panel will operate alongside other statutory and specialist processes.

The Panel must not be used to circumvent statutory processes relating to:

- School admission
- Exclusion
- Children with medical needs
- Social care;
- Children looked after by the local authority
- Any other statutory entitlement or decision-making process

Where another statutory or specialist process is required, the case should be referred to the appropriate service.

15. Documentation and Record-Keeping

A dedicated folder will be maintained within the shared Microsoft Teams channel titled 'AP Placement Panel'.

Records will be retained in accordance with local authority records management and retention requirements.

Records should include:

- Minutes;
- Decisions and reasons
- Placement information
- Review information

Minutes will record:

- Attendees and apologies
- Cases considered
- Key considerations
- Decisions and reasons
- Actions
- Responsible officers
- Timescales

The completed AP Placement Panel form and relevant decision information will be uploaded to the child or young person's Synergy record by the designated Inclusion Officer

16. Confidentiality and Information Governance

Information considered by the Panel must be handled in accordance with:

- UK GDPR
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Local authority information governance policies
- Safeguarding information-sharing requirements
- Applicable statutory guidance.

Information should only be shared with professionals who have a legitimate need to know.

Panel members and attendees must maintain confidentiality in relation to all information discussed.

17. Reporting and Strategic Oversight

The Panel will provide information to support strategic oversight of AP demand, commissioning and outcomes.

Monitoring may include:

- Referrals and placement decisions
- Reasons for referral
- Provider usage and capacity
- Placement duration
- Attendance and engagement
- Educational and wider outcomes
- Reintegration and transition outcomes
- Safeguarding concerns
- Placement breakdowns
- Waiting times
- Expenditure and value for money
- Demand and capacity trends

This information will support the Alternative Provision Strategy, sufficiency planning, commissioning, budget management, provider quality assurance and service improvement.

Emerging risks, gaps in provision and recurring themes will be escalated through the appropriate strategic governance arrangements.

18. Equality, Inclusion and Fair Access

The Panel will ensure that placement decisions are equitable, consistent and based on the individual needs and circumstances of the child or young person.

Decision-making will have regard to relevant equality duties and seek to avoid discriminatory practice.

The Panel will consider whether individual circumstances or vulnerability create barriers to accessing suitable provision and whether reasonable adjustments or alternative arrangements are required.

19. Review of Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference apply for 2026–2027

They will be reviewed annually and may be updated earlier where required by:

- Changes in legislation or statutory guidance
- Changes to the Alternative Provision Strategy
- Changes to commissioning or procurement arrangements
- Changes to local authority structures or delegated responsibilities
- Quality assurance or audit findings
- Changes in AP demand or provision
- Operational requirements.

Substantive amendments will be approved through the appropriate local authority governance arrangements.

20. Relevant Framework and Guidance

The Panel will operate with reference to the current versions of relevant legislation, statutory guidance and local policies, including:

- Department for Education Alternative Provision – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Headteachers and Governing Bodies of Settings Providing Alternative Provision;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- DfE Non-school Alternative Provision: Voluntary National Standards;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- relevant education, attendance and exclusion legislation and guidance;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- Procurement Act 2023, where applicable;
- DfE High Needs Funding Arrangements 2026–2027, where relevant to AP commissioning and funding;
- Local Authority (LA) Alternative Provision Strategy;
- LA commissioning and procurement procedures;
- LA safeguarding and information-sharing policies; and
- LA delegated decision-making arrangements.

Where legislation or statutory guidance changes during the academic year, the Panel will operate in accordance with the revised requirements from the date they take effect.

Effective Date and Review

Academic Year: 2026–2027

Effective From: 1 September 2026

Meeting Frequency: Fortnightly during term time

Meeting Format: Teams

Review Date: August 2027
Version: 2026–2027