

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford SG17 5TQ on Wednesday, 24 June 2009

Present:

Pauline Cotton

Shawn Fell

Sigrid Hillman

Frances Image

Councillor Mrs Anita Lewis

Anne Phillips

Nick Sharpe

Ray Slade

Ben Sear

Officers in Attendance: Rosa Bonwick, Alison Bray, John Goldsmith, Sandra Hobbs, Keith Lakin, Jo Maule, Rob Mills, Dr Kirit Modi and Patrick Shevlin

L/04/1

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

The Forum Administrator welcomed Members to the meeting whereby Members introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Steve Morrow, David Brandon-Bravo, Jim Parker and Chris Spurgeon.

L/04/2

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that, in the absence of any other proposal from the meeting, Patrick Shevlin act as Chairman for this meeting of the Admissions Forum and Shawn Fell become Chairman for future meetings.

L/04/3

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Nick Sharpe becomes Vice-Chairman of the Admissions Forum.

L/04/4

MINUTES OF CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM HELD ON 24 MARCH 2009

RESOLVED to approve the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 24 March 2009 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

L/04/5

MATTERS ARISING

A query was raised about minute no. 19 'Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements – Primary Schools 2010-2011'. Members were advised that the Regulation referred to primary schools and that because middle schools had an entry age below 11 years they were governed by the Primary regulations.

Members were advised that the Bedford Borough Council Admissions Forum had agreed to the joint approach between the two Councils with regard to parents applying for a primary school place during the 2010 admissions round, as this would ensure that two school places would not be offered.

L/04/6

UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members received an oral update on the revision needed to the Admissions Forum membership due to the changes arising from the new regulations and School Admissions Code, as previously reported at the last meeting of the Forum. The amendment to the Membership was submitted and approved by the Central Bedfordshire Executive at their meeting on 12 May 2009.

Members had received a revised agenda notice advising of the new membership, vacancies and Councillor Mrs Lewis, Executive Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, was appointed as the Local Education Authority representative. There were currently 13 members and 7 vacancies.

The School Admissions Administrator had written to community upper and voluntary controlled schools seeking nominations for the vacancies in those groups. Jacqueline Woodthorpe from Campton Lower School had been approached to become the community schools lower school headteacher representative, as she had shown an interest in the previous recruitment round.

Members were advised that as from September 2009 Northfields Technology College would become All Saints Academy. This would entitle them to a place on the Admissions Forum and John Kemp, Vice-Principal of All Saints Academy had been nominated for this position.

There was one vacancy for a parent representative. Members were informed that an election process was being held for a parent governor on the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members agreed that interest should be sought from the successful and unsuccessful candidates to become a member on the Admissions Forum.

Members were advised that with the resignation of Councillor Mrs Fairbairn there was a vacancy for a local community representative. Councillors Mrs Fairbairn had represented looked after children and a view was sought from members whether this vacancy should remain as a representative of looked after children. Members agreed that it was imperative that looked after children were represented as these children could be very vulnerable.

RESOLVED

- 1) that interest be sought from the successful and unsuccessful candidates from the nominations for a parent governor on the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to become a parent representative member on the Admissions Forum
- 2) that a suitable representative of looked after children be approached to fill the vacancy under local community representatives.

L/04/7

UPDATE ON 2009 ADMISSIONS AND APPEALS

The Forum received a report that provided Members with an update on admissions for 2009 and appeals held since 1 September 2008. The school preference data and online data in the report related to Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. The appeals data related to Central Bedfordshire schools.

Members were advised that the total preferences met for lower, middle and upper schools were between 98.38% - 99.5%. The national average for secondary (upper) schools was 96.2%, the regional average was 96.4% and the total preferences met for Bedfordshire was 99.5%. The percentage of Bedfordshire parents offered a place for their child at their first preference secondary (upper) school exceeded both national and regional averages, as did the percentage of total preferences met. Members noted that Bedfordshire achieved the highest percentage of first preferences met in the eastern region.

Members were advised that Officers worked hard to ensure that sufficient school places were available and that this would have enabled more parents to be offered their preferences. It was hard to determine whether there was any correlation between the preferences being met and surplus places, as surplus places in some schools had arisen from having popular schools locally.

The percentage of online applications received for each school phase across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough was:

- 52.44% for Lower Schools
- 31.51% for Middle Schools
- 30.0% for Upper Schools.

The national average for online applications was 30.0%, the regional average was 49.6% and Bedfordshire was 30.0%. Members were advised that when parents applied online an email confirming receipt was sent to the parents' email address. Headteachers would encourage parents to apply online and possibly have computers available at open evenings.

Members were advised of the number of appeals heard and the number upheld for the period 1 September 2008 and 5 June 2009 for Central Bedfordshire. There were still ten appeals pending, but all appeals had been processed within the required timescale.

Members were advised that discussions were taking place to extend the Service Level Agreement with Bedford Borough with regard to joint partnership working on Admission Appeals. Currently the Service Level Agreement ceased at the end of August, but it was hoped that this would be extended to July 2010.

Members noted that the phase transfer applications were required to be heard by 6 July. The headteachers reported that schools arrange their days when children visit their new schools at the very start of July. Members requested that all phase transfer appeals be scheduled to be heard by no later than the end of June (provided of course that they are not late appeals).

NOTED

- 1) the school preference and online application data
- 2) the appeals information.

L/04/8

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR

The Forum received a report that set out the requirement for the Local Authority to report to the School Adjudicator, by 30 June each year, on the admission arrangements for schools in Central Bedfordshire. It had been agreed at the Admissions Forum meeting on 24 March 2009 that the Forum would provide input to the Local Authority's statutory report rather than producing a separate report.

Members were advised that the wording in the Code was given in italics and had been retained in the draft report for the information of Forum members. The wording would be replaced by appropriate headings in the final version.

Members were taken through the Annual Report section by section and raised the following points:

- the number of children identified for admission to each school and admitted to the school under the Fair Access Protocol between 1 September 2008 and the date of report should be included in the report as well as in the appendix
- headteachers to be reminded that high level teaching assistants and teaching assistants were not permitted to teach an infant class
- members noted that officers were working closely with Thomas Johnson Lower School to address the organisational issues and to ensure that the school was not in breach of the infant class size legislation
- acronyms be spelt out in full, in particular in section 4.9 d) iii

- the Choice Adviser had held advice sessions for parents in Children's Centres including Leighton Buzzard and was due to hold further sessions in Dunstable and Houghton Regis to clarify any uncertainties about the admission process
- there had been an increase from 2008 to 2009 in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals this was likely due to the economic climate
- a request was made that if possible the data held within the ACORN database be circulated to headteachers as this information would prove useful
- it was agreed to include some information in the admissions booklet for September about the admission of twins where the Local Authority would seek to admit those children to the same school if that is the wish of the parent etc
- it was agreed to suggest to the Schools Adjudicator that there should be something in the Code that would enable twins, or children from multiple births, to be admitted to the same school where an infant class size has reached its maximum number of pupils.

The Forum thanked Rosa Bonwick and her team for their hard work in putting together the Annual Report.

RESOLVED to endorse the information provided in the Annual Report.

RECOMMENDED to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning that the report be agreed.

L/04/9

CHOICE ADVICE

The Forum received a report that summarised the work of the county's School Transfer Adviser, for the period April 2008 – March 2009. The report set out the details of the reactive case work and proactive projects that were undertaken to help vulnerable parents engage with the school admissions process across Bedfordshire.

Due to the successful School Action/School Action Plus Admissions sessions in 2008, four sessions were planned with the Parent Support Advisers in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable/Houghton Regis.

The current post holder was providing a service for both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council until the end of the academic year. Interviews would be taking place for the School Transfer Adviser for Central Bedfordshire and it was hoped the successful candidate would be able to start on 1 September.

Members were advised that the School Transfer Adviser had supported and helped vulnerable parents with completing their appeal form including the preparation for the appeal hearing, but had not attended school appeals with parents.

Members thanked the School Transfer Adviser for an excellent report.

RESOLVED that the School Transfer Adviser regularly provides information to the Forum arising from her regular contact with many parents regarding School Admissions issues and her assistance to numbers of vulnerable families, often as a result of referrals from the School Admissions Service.

L/04/10

IN-YEAR FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL

The Forum received a report that addressed issues raised by Central Bedfordshire schools about the Protocol and took account of implications for the practice of forthcoming new legislation and Department for Children, School and Families (DCSF) guidance.

Officers had taken on board issues raised by schools which included not receiving sufficient information or that planning prior to the child's admission with the interim provider was not adequate. The headteachers were pleased that Officers had taken on board their concerns.

The Fair Access Protocol (FAP) Review Group had been reconstituted into two separate groups to serve Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. Each Group had headteacher representation from each phase and included senior managers from each Local Authority. The Central Bedfordshire FAP Group had met twice and had decided to maintain the basic framework of the existing FAP and to include the changes under the new Admissions Code.

RESOLVED

- 1) that provision for children and young people excluded or out of school be tailored to suit the pupil's individual needs, that alternative provision be used more as an early intervention, that assessments for pupils excluded or out of school, be swift, flexible, responsive and child centred and that reintegration back into school be provided
- 2) that a Central Bedfordshire Fair Access Protocol (FAP) would include clear timescales and processes for considering the resolving cases
- 3) that information provided by a school to a future school would be through a structured meeting so that there was an understanding and an awareness of the pupil and that planning prior to the child's admission was good, that officers draw up guidance as recommended in the latest 'Back on Track Agenda' and that this be issued as a school circular
- 4) that the FAP would include a system by which information on SEN placements and LAC placements could be provided and taken into account when naming a school as part of the FAP process

- 5) that the Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships implement the FAP at a local level through headteachers' reintegration and placement panels, that each panel hold devolved resources and be supported by area/locality services
- 6) that the implications arising from the report by Sir Alan Steer be considered at a future Admissions Forum
- 7) that when identifying the receiving school any issues the school may have be taken into account.

L/04/11

ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2010

The Forum received a report on the admission arrangements for all foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools for 2010.

Members were advised that Sundon Lower School was the only school still to circulate their determined admission arrangements. The final version of their policy was expected shortly and officers reported that there were unlikely to be any issues. Officers had received Pulford Voluntary Aided (VA) Lower School's admission arrangements.

At the last meeting of the Forum St. Mary's Catholic Lower School had not consulted on their proposed admission arrangements. Consultation had now taken place and the Governors had determined their arrangements which were fully compliant with the School Admissions Code. Officers thanked Ray Slade for his support with the Church of England schools.

Members were advised that there was still concern that John Donne VA School's criteria, which gave siblings a higher priority than parish children, was inconsistent with the Local Authority's catchment area policy. The Governors felt that as a Christian School the family was at the heart of its community and that it would wish to support those parents from outside of the catchment area who had shown a commitment to the school. Members debated if it would be appropriate to refer the matter to the Schools Adjudicator for a judgement. Some of the Members were concerned that if the Local Authority agreed to this change then there was a chance that this would set a precedent in future years for other schools to follow the same practice and felt that advice needed to be sought from the Schools Adjudicator. Members took a vote on whether Officers should contact the School Adjudicator to see if it was appropriate to refer this issue to them, and if so, refer John Donne VA School's policy to the School Adjudicator for determination. A vote was taken and this was agreed.

NOTED that the admission arrangements for all foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools would be compliant with the School Admissions Code, once Sundon Lower Schools had circulated their admission arrangements.

RESOLVED to seek advice from the Schools Adjudicator to see if it was appropriate to refer the policy for John Donne VA School's for determination.

L/04/12 **Parental Feedback on 2009 Admissions**

The Forum received a report that provided Members with feedback on the admissions process, from parents who had applied for a lower, middle or upper school place for September 2009. The Admission booklets and the online application system contained feedback forms seeking parents' comments on the application process. The information in the report related to responses received from parents applying for a school place prior to the establishment of the unitary authority and therefore covered both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough.

Members were advised that there had been a few technical problems with the online admission process, but these had been resolved.

The number of responses received was very low. For transfer to Middle and Upper School only 17 parents returned the feedback form. For admission to lower school only two responses were received. From those parents filling in online application forms 41 responses were received. All comments were summarised in appendices A – E.

NOTED the analysis of responses and comments.

L/04/13 **INFORMATION FOR PARENTS FOR 2010 ADMISSIONS**

The Forum received a report that sought Members' approval to the information to be distributed to parents in respect of the transfer of children from lower to middle school and middle school to upper school, admissions to lower schools and In Year applications.

Last year's transfer phase booklet had been used as the basis for the 2010 version. The transfer to upper school form is specific to Central Bedfordshire as the secondary transfer process had to be co-ordinated by the home local authority. The transfer to middle school process did not have to be co-ordinated by the home local authority, so the 2010 application form would represent the shared approach with Bedford Borough and would have the appropriate logo(s).

The First Admission to Lower School booklet and In Year Applications guidance notes had been based on the 2009 version and the application process would also represent the shared approach and would have the appropriate logo(s).

It was agreed that where there were cross border issues between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough these issues/schools would be included in both booklets, including a note regarding St. Vincent's Primary School, Houghton Regis.

Members were advised that if any further amendments were needed then these could be fed back to Patrick Shevlin.

RESOLVED to approve the information to be distributed to parents in respect of the school admissions processes.

L/04/14

DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED that future meetings be scheduled at 8.30 a.m. at Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands on the following dates:

21 October 2009
24 March 2010
23 June 2010

(Note: The meeting commenced at 8.45 a.m. and concluded at 10.30 a.m.)