

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held at Room 3, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 1 November 2011

Local Authority:	Cllr M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools:	Ms Neale Mrs J Woodthorpe	Governor, Dunton VC Lower School, Dunton and Wrestlingworth VC Lower School, Wrestlingworth Headteacher, Campton Lower School, Campton
Church of England Diocese:	Mr R Garrard	Diocesan Representative, Diocese of St Albans
Parent Governor:	Mr I Robinson	Parent Governor, Caldecote VA Lower School, Upper Caldecote
Apologies for Absence:	Ms W Anderson-Welsh Mrs D Day Mr S Fell Mrs F Image Mr J Kemp Mrs A Phillips Mr B Sear Squadron Leader T Sellers Mr N Sharpe Mrs C Spurgeon	
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs R Bonwick Ms L Braisher Mr L Manning Mrs H Redding	Admissions Manager Senior Admissions Officer Committee Services Officer Head of School Support

### CBAF/11/10 **Election of Chairman**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that Councillor M A G Versallion be elected Chairman of the Forum for the 2011/12 municipal year.**

### CBAF/11/11 **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Nominations were sought for the position of Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the 2011/12 municipal year. However no nominations were forthcoming.

**CBAF/11/12 Minutes and Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**RESOLVED**

**that the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 28 June 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**CBAF/11/13 Admission Arrangements September 2013 - Consultation**

The Forum considered a report which informed Members of proposed revisions to the requirement to consult on changes to the admission arrangements. The meeting noted that, under the current Schools Admission Code, admission authorities were required to consult every three years on their admission arrangements unless changes to them were proposed within that period. It was now suggested, under the replacement draft School Admissions Code, that admission authorities need only consult every seven years on their admission arrangements unless changes were proposed within that period.

It was further noted that it was not clear whether all admission authorities would be required to consult on their admission arrangements in September 2013.

The Forum was advised that there were no proposals to change the dates of the consultation which would still need to last a minimum of eight weeks and take place between 1 November and 1 March.

The draft Code would require admissions authorities to consult with:

- relevant parents (currently defined as a parent living in the local area with a child aged between two and sixteen and who has been, is, or will be eligible to apply to the school or academy in question)
- their local authority
- neighbouring local authorities
- the relevant religious authority (in the case of faith schools)
- other groups with an interest in the local area (for example community groups and Admission Forums)

There would no longer be a requirement to consult on any increase to the Published Admission Number.

Last, the meeting noted that the local authority would be writing to its schools and academies to advise them of the consultation requirements once the new School Admissions Code was published.

**NOTED**

**the proposed revisions within the draft School Admissions Code on the requirement to consult on proposed changes to admission arrangements.**

**CBAF/11/14 Admission Arrangements September 2013 - Standard Admissions Policy**

The Forum considered a report which informed Members that, although there had been no changes proposed to the oversubscription criteria, an amendment had been made to the notes section of the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. The meeting was advised that the note (Note 2) referred to catchment area applications and the action taken when it was not possible to offer a place at the catchment area school. The current policy referred to a place being offered at the next nearest maintained school but that had now been amended by deleting the word 'maintained' and adding 'or academy' following 'school'. Members noted that the proposed change would be included in the consultation on admission arrangements for September 2013.

The Admissions Manager explained that the local authority would consult an academy first to establish whether it was willing to accept a pupil as the local authority could not require it to do so. The Head of School Support added that the local authority enjoyed an excellent working relationship with upper school academies and discussion with them on this issue had been very positive. However, a Member expressed concern that this position could change over time.

In connection with oversubscription, and following a request for clarification from the Chairman, the Admissions Manager advised on the composition of Appeals Panels.

At the request of the Chairman the Admissions Manager undertook to notify him when the new School Admission Appeals Codes were published and to provide him with the link to the website.

**NOTED**

**the change in the notes section of the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services.**

**CBAF/11/15 Admission Arrangements September 2013 - Admission Numbers**

The Forum considered a report on changes to admission numbers and on the exceptions which could result in admissions to a school above the published admission number.

Members first noted that no changes were proposed to the admission numbers for any community and voluntary controlled schools. However, the Council would be contacting such schools about the arrangements proposed for September 2013 and any changes that arose would be reported to the next meeting of the Forum.

The meeting was next reminded that, at the last meeting, Members had discussed the exceptions which could result in the admission number for a school being exceeded. It had been agreed that the exception relating to Looked After Children be amended by removing the reference to the direction by the local authority acting as corporate parent. As such children were required to be admitted a direction was not required.

The meeting noted that the exception relating to twins or children from multiple births had been amended to remove the proviso that the admission should not breach infant class size limits. This was in accordance with the draft School Admissions Code which proposed that two new categories be added to the list of exceptions which permitted an infant class size to be over 30, these being twins and other multiple birth children and service children. The latter had been included as an additional exception which could lead to the admission number being exceeded.

In connection with the admission of service children a Member stated that service children tended to all go to one school in an area and the admission of a sizable group could have a major affect on infant class size. In response the Admissions Manager explained that if such a situation was likely then discussions would take place with the school. The physical constraints of classroom sizes would also be an influencing factor.

The Forum was reminded that the draft Code proposed that schools would no longer need local authority approval to admit pupils in-year above the published admission number. These exceptions would, therefore, only apply to the normal admissions round and to in-year admissions at community and voluntary controlled schools. The Admissions Manager sought Members' support for recommending to the governing bodies of foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools that they also adopt these exceptions as way of maintaining a consistent approach.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the amendments to the exceptions which might result in the admission number being exceeded, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services, be approved;**
- 2 that it be recommended to the governing bodies of foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools that they adopt the exceptions in order to maintain consistency within Central Bedfordshire;**

- 3 that, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State, it be recommended to the governing bodies of academies that they adopt the exceptions in order to maintain consistency within Central Bedfordshire.**

CBAF/11/16 **Admission Arrangements September 2013 - Co-ordinated Admission Schemes**

The Forum considered a report which set out the proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for the upper schools, upper phase academies and secondary schools and the proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for middle, primary, lower schools and middle and lower phase academies for the academic year 2013/2014.

The Admissions Manager advised the meeting that the timescales for the transfer process had been updated in both schemes for the 2013/14 admissions round. In addition changes were proposed to the requirement that parents notify the School Admissions Service of whether they accepted or rejected the place offered. As parents who did not respond were deemed to have accepted the place offered it was felt that, in future, parents should only be asked to notify the Admissions Service if they rejected the place offered.

The meeting was aware that the draft School Admissions Code proposed the removal of the requirement on local authorities to co-ordinate in-year admissions. The Admissions Manager stated that the relevant sections within both admissions schemes would be reviewed once the new Code had been published.

**RESOLVED**

- 1 that the proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for upper schools, upper phase academies and secondary schools in the academic year 2013/14, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services, be approved with the exception of the section on in-year admissions;**
- 2 that the proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for middle, primary and lower schools and middle and lower phase academies in the academic year 2013/14, as set out in Appendix B to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services, be approved with the exception of the section on in-year admissions.**
- 3 that the sections on in-year admissions found in both admissions schemes be reviewed following the publication of the new School Admissions Code.**

**CBAF/11/17 Admission Arrangements September 2013 - Open Evenings**

The Forum considered a report which advised Members of the proposed dates for open evenings for the September 2013 admissions round.

The proposed dates were as follows:

- Upper Schools and Academy: 17 September 2012 – 19 October 2012
- Middle Schools: 5 November 2012 – 23 November 2012

In response to a query the Admissions Manager stated that schools did hold open evenings outside of the recommended dates. The meeting also noted that lower schools made their own arrangements and usually organised open days rather than evenings. In response to a Member's query regarding optimal times for such open days the Admissions Manager stated that, given the closing date for applications was 15 January, open days should take place during the previous autumn term.

The meeting discussed the measures taken by some lower schools to ensure their pupil intake figure was at a viable level and the resulting impact on neighbouring schools.

With regard to upper and middle school open evening arrangements the Admissions Manager stated that information was issued to parents which included details on schools so that parents could visit before an application was made. With lower schools the situation was different because children were already likely to be attending the school nursery. She acknowledged, however, that this approach was inconsistent. A Member commented that introducing open days for lower schools as part of the admission arrangements would signal that the status of lower schools was as important as that of other schools. The Member added that holding the open days during a specified period would also make the process of showing parents around schools easier. In response the Admissions Manager stated that it would be difficult to introduce this before September 2014 due to the larger number of lower schools requiring co-ordination. The question was raised as to whether the local authority should publicise the middle and upper school open evenings. It was felt that this matter should be discussed further at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED**

- 1 that the proposed dates for the open evenings, as set out in the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services, be agreed and recommended to the middle and upper schools and academies for adoption;**
- 2a that the Admissions Manager examine the possibility of introducing dates for lower school open days during November to mid-December each year, starting as part of the admission arrangements from September 2014, and report to the Forum on her findings;**

- 2b that, as an alternative to 2a above, the Admissions Manager also consider whether the local authority should publish details of middle and upper school open evenings and report to the next meeting of the Forum.**

#### CBAF/11/18 **Future of the Admissions Forum**

The Forum considered a report by the Admissions Manager which reminded Members that, subject to the passage of the Education Bill 2011 and the Parliamentary process, the statutory requirement on local authorities to set up Admissions Forums was to be removed. Instead partnerships dealing with admissions issues would be left to develop as and when it was felt necessary at the local level.

Mindful that Members had previously supported the continuation of the Admissions Forum, the Admissions Manager suggested that the Forum could continue as an advisory group although this would be dependant on appropriate support being available to service the group. As an alternative she also suggested that the Forum cease to exist as a separate body and that its role be absorbed into existing headteacher groups or other group/representative meetings.

Discussion followed during which Members considered the possible creation of an advisory group and the range of representation. However, given the high number of changes elsewhere, Members felt that the Forum should continue, at least in the medium term. The meeting was also aware that the Children's Trust Board, although having lost its statutory basis, had continued in existence because it was viewed as providing a useful mechanism by its membership.

The meeting felt that the opportunity existed to encourage a wider range of representation on the Forum.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum continue in its current form following the removal of its statutory basis;**
- 2 that the Admissions Manager advise the Forum of those local authorities, if any, that decide to dissolve their forums;**
- 3 that the Admissions Manager consider the possible role and membership of an advisory group and report to the next meeting of the Forum.**

#### CBAF/11/19 **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Forum discussed possible dates for its next meeting. The meeting noted that this was due to be held towards the end of March 2012. The 26 and 28 March 2012 were identified as provisional dates.

To encourage future attendance the Forum felt that the dates of its meetings to be held in 2012/13 should be agreed and circulated to all Members during the summer.

**RESOLVED**

- 1 that the Admissions Manager, in consultation with the Chairman of the Forum, be authorised to decide the date for the next meeting of the Forum in March 2012, mindful of the provisional dates that have been identified;**
  
- 2 that the dates of the Forum's meetings in the municipal year 2012/13 be agreed and circulated during the summer of 2012.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 8.30 a.m. and concluded at 9.44 a.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....