

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 27 March 2012

### PRESENT

Local Authority:	Cllr M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools:	Ms C 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
Local Community:	Ms G Royle	Vulnerable Learners Consultant, Central Bedfordshire Council (representing Looked After Children)
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs A Phillips Mrs D Day Mr S Fell Mr J Kemp Mrs A Phillips Mr B Sear Mr N Sharpe Mrs C Spurgeon	
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs R Bonwick Ms L Braisher Mr L Manning Mr R Parsons Mrs H Redding	Admissions Manager Senior Admissions Officer Committee Services Officer Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning Head of School Support

### CBAF/11/20 **Minutes and Matters Arising**

The meeting was informed of the reallocation of responsibilities amongst officers following the disaggregation of the Admissions Service with effect from 1 April 2012. Members were also advised that the Admissions Manager would shortly be leaving Bedford Borough Council and the Chairman, on behalf of the Forum, offered her Members' thanks for her hard work, help and commitment.

Members briefly discussed the declining level of attendance at meetings of the Forum. Possible reasons for this were suggested including the start time, the availability of information on the website and the removal of the statutory basis for the Forum. The meeting was aware that a later item on the agenda would consider the future of the Forum.

**RESOLVED**

**that the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 1 November 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**CBAF/11/21 Consultation Process and Responses**

The Forum considered a report setting out the outcome of the consultation on the proposed admission arrangements for the academic year 2013/14. The meeting was aware that no significant changes to the existing admission arrangements were proposed other than those required to comply with the new School Admissions Code. Members were advised that no responses had been received.

**NOTED**

**that there had been no responses received to the proposed admission arrangements for 2013/14.**

**CBAF/11/22 Standard Admissions Policy - Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools**

The Forum considered a report which sought agreement on the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. The meeting noted that, as discussed at the Forum meeting on 1 November 2011, the Policy had been amended to include academies in the consideration of an alternative school when a place was not available at the preferred or catchment area school. In addition, the changes required to comply with the mandatory provisions of the new School Admissions Code had been included in the Policy.

In response to queries the Admissions Manager explained that Central Bedfordshire Council employed a catchment area policy, as was permitted in the School Admissions Code, although she was aware that some local authorities did not. She added that there was, however, no guarantee that a place at the catchment area school would be offered to a child living within that catchment area if the school was full.

A Member referred to the possible impact on the availability of school places to local children as more schools became academies and therefore able to draw up their own catchment areas independently of the local authority.

**RESOLVED**

**that the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools be approved.**

CBAF/11/23 **Additions to Standards Admissions Policy - Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools**

The Forum considered a report which sought approval to additions to the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. Members were aware that a number of community and voluntary schools had additions to the standards admissions policy some of which had been in existence for a number of years. Those schools were listed in Appendix A to the report.

The meeting was advised that the governing bodies of the following schools had requested additional criteria for September 2013:

- Dovery Down Lower School (pending conversion to academy status)
- Everton Lower School
- Wrestlingworth VC Lower School

The meeting was further advised that the governing body of Southcott Lower School had requested that one of its oversubscription criteria be removed from September 2013. The change was set out in Appendix B to the report. The standards admissions policy, as set out in Appendix A, would, therefore, apply to the school.

The meeting noted that no comments were received during the consultation process on the proposed changes.

**RESOLVED**

**that the additions to the Standard Admissions Policy for those schools listed in Appendix A to the report be approved.**

CBAF/11/24 **Admission Numbers - Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools**

The Forum considered a report which sought approval of the admission numbers for community and voluntary controlled schools listed in Appendix A to the report and to note the exceptions which might result in the admission number for a school being exceeded as set out in Appendix B. It was noted that some of the changes were subject to the outcome of further consideration.

It was noted that no responses had been received to the consultation on the proposed changes.

The meeting also noted that the in-year exceptions had been amended to include previously Looked After Children.

In response to a query regarding the absence of admission numbers for voluntary aided schools the Admissions Manager explained that some information was still awaited. Further, voluntary aided schools were no longer required to consult on an increase in admission numbers or seek the local authority's approval to admit above the published admission number.

Discussion followed on admission numbers, the meeting noting that pressure existed on the reception year at schools in some areas. The Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning explained that the Council would examine schools annually to establish the extent of any pressures on admission numbers and, if so, how they could be addressed.

Discussion also took place on the affect of disaggregation on the provision of the admission appeals service. The Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning reported that a service would be made available by Central Bedfordshire Council should schools wish to purchase it.

### **RESOLVED**

**that the proposed admission numbers for those schools listed in Appendix A to the report be approved.**

### **NOTED**

**the exceptions which might result in the admission number of a school being exceeded as set out in Appendix B to the report.**

## **CBAF/11/25 Co-ordinated Admission Schemes**

The Forum considered a report which sought approval of the co-ordinated admissions schemes for 2013/14. The co-ordinated scheme for upper schools, upper phase academies and secondary schools was attached at Appendix A to the report and the co-ordinated scheme for middle, primary, lower schools and middle and lower phase academies was attached at Appendix B.

The meeting noted that following publication of the new School Admissions Code and the removal of the need by local authorities to co-ordinate in-year admissions, the section on in-year admissions in both of the above schemes has been amended. The Admissions Manager advised that parents were now to send admission applications directly to their first preference school. Discussion took place on this process.

The meeting further noted that no responses had been received to the consultation on the proposed changes.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the co-ordinated admissions scheme for upper schools, upper phase academies and secondary schools attached at Appendix A to the report be approved;**
- 2 that the co-ordinated admissions scheme for middle, primary, lower schools and middle and lower phase academies attached at Appendix B to the report be approved.**

CBAF/11/26 **Determination of Admission Arrangements - September 2013**

The Forum considered a report setting out the requirement and arrangements for the determination of the admission arrangements for September 2013. The meeting noted that the determination of admission arrangements was required whether or not the arrangements had changed from those determined for September 2012.

**NOTED**

**the requirement and arrangements for determining the admission arrangements for September 2013.**

CBAF/11/27 **School Open Days/Evenings**

The Forum considered a report which asked Members to decide whether or not the local authority should continue to publish middle and upper school open evening information and whether co-ordinated dates for lower and primary school open days should be introduced and published.

Members were reminded that, at the last Forum meeting (minute CBAF/11/17 refers) they had approved the proposed dates for the open evenings for the September 2013 middle and upper school admission rounds. Members had also considered the possibility of introducing dates for lower school open days as part of the September 2014 admissions round or, as an alternative, consider whether or not the local authority should continue to publish details of the middle and upper school open evenings. The officers had been asked to examine these options and report to the Forum.

First, and with regard to the continued publication of the dates of the middle and upper school open evenings, the Forum was advised that, as the local authority currently co-ordinated the dates of the open evenings to ensure that there were no conflict between schools, the publication of the dates required little extra effort or resources. Information on the transfer process, which included the dates of the open evenings, was provided for all children in Years 4 and 8 and the advanced notice enabled parents to plan their visits accordingly. Without this parents would have to contact individual schools or access their websites. The officers therefore felt that the benefits of providing the information at phase transfer outweighed the effort required to co-ordinate and publish the dates.

Turning next to the feasibility of introducing open days for lower and primary schools the officers reported that schools had been surveyed to establish whether or not open days were held and the schools' views sought on introducing a co-ordinated approach. All 96 schools with a reception year were contacted, of which 39 had responded. Of the 39 responders 23 held open day or evening events, although many held open days several times a year rather than at a specific time whilst others also offered parents individual appointments. Four of the schools did not support a co-ordinated time frame with open days held during November to December but preferred to continue

with their current arrangements. Others, whilst supporting a co-ordinated approach, also wanted to continue to hold additional events throughout the year. Of the 16 schools not currently holding open days, eight would not support a co-ordinated timeframe. The remaining eight would support a co-ordinated timeframe but some had concerns about the events being held in November or December and others would still want to arrange individual visits by parents.

Given the range of responses the report felt a co-ordinated timeframe would appear over prescriptive and disadvantage those schools that did not wish to hold open day events. In addition the co-ordination and publication of open day events for lower and primary schools would be a significant challenge given their number. There would also be resource implications. For these reasons it was felt that it would not be feasible to introduce a co-ordinated timeframe for such open days.

Comment was made that the parents of some four year olds were not always aware of the date that their child should start school. This was reflected by a failure each year for the relevant forms to be completed at the correct time by some parents. In response the Admissions Manager explained that letters were sent to the parents of those children who, based on Health Authority data, were of the age to start school. She pointed out, however, that a significant proportion of the letters were returned because the families had moved on and not advised their GPs. The Senior Admissions Officer added that advertisements were placed in libraries, doctors' surgeries and leisure centres and posters, leaflets and flyers were used to publicise the school start dates for birth ranges. The Head of School Support added that information was also displayed in supermarkets.

The Admissions Manager concluded that it was the parents who were new to the process of applying for a school place who were usually unaware of the timescales of the Starting School application process.

The meeting concurred with the officer's recommendations.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1 that Central Bedfordshire Council continue to publish the dates for middle and upper school admission rounds;**
- 2 that, for the reasons set out within the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services and outlined in the preamble above, no further action be taken regarding the introduction of co-ordinated dates for lower and primary school open days.**

## **CBAF/11/28 Future of the Admissions Forum**

Members received an oral report from the Admissions Manager regarding the future of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum. She reminded the meeting that the Panel had considered this matter at its last meeting (minute

CBAF/11/18 refers) when it had been resolved that the Forum would continue following the removal of its statutory basis. It had also been resolved that the Admissions Manager advise the Forum of those local authorities, if any, that had dissolved their admissions forums and, last, that she consider the role and membership of an advisory group (as a possible replacement for the Forum) and report back. The Admissions Manager then advised that some forums had continued as non-statutory bodies though it had not been possible to establish the full figure as some local authorities had not been present at the last regional meeting.

Members gave full consideration to the Forum's future role in view of the absence of any statutory requirement for its existence. Comment was made on the usefulness of the Forum to consider admissions issues, disseminate information and as a source of mutual support. However, in response it was stated that, as part of the statutory process, consultation took place with schools before changes were made to the admissions arrangements and admissions information was readily available on the local authority's website and through such electronic publications as Central Essentials and Governors' Essentials. Concern was expressed at the possible agenda content for future meetings of the Forum.

Following discussion, and given the relatively low attendance figure at the meeting, the Chairman stated that he would first wish to gauge a wider range of opinion from Forum Members before any decision on the future of the Panel was taken. In addition, he felt that consideration should be given to the items that appeared on the agendas of those admissions forums that had continued as these could provide a useful guide. The Head of School Support undertook to arrange a meeting between the Chairman and officers to examine agenda content.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that, following a meeting between the Chairman and officers to consider the agenda content of those admissions forums that had continued, a letter be sent to all members of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum setting out the nature of the discussion on the future of the Forum and seeking Members' views on its future;**
- 2 that the future of the Forum be determined at its next meeting in late June 2012.**

#### **CBAF/11/29 Dates of Future Meetings**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that the next meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum be held on Monday, 25 June 2012 at 4.45 p.m. at Priory House, Chicksands.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 4.30 p.m. and concluded at 6.05 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....