

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 25 June 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
Roman Catholic Diocese:	Mrs F Image	Diocesan Representative, Diocese of Northampton
Local Community:	Mrs D Day	Virtual School Headteacher, Central Bedfordshire Council (representing Looked After Children)
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs A Phillips Squadron Leader Ted Sellers	
Officers in Attendance:	Ms L Braisher Mr L Manning Mr R Parsons	– Senior Admissions Officer – Committee Services Officer – Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning

CBAF/12/1 **Election of Chairman**

RESOLVED

that Councillor M A G Versallion be elected Chairman of the Forum for the 2012/13 municipal year.

CBAF/12/2 **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Nominations were sought for the position of Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the 2012/13 municipal year. However, no nominations were forthcoming.

CBAF/12/3 **Minutes and Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 27 March 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CBAF/12/4 Current Status Report

Following an introduction by the Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning the Senior Admissions Officer provided an oral update on the allocations for the 2012 admissions.

The Senior Admissions Officer first reported on the Upper allocations. These had been processed and offer letters sent out on the national offer day of 1 March. 97.9% of children had been offered their first preference school. Three upper schools (Harlington, Manshead and Redborne) had been oversubscribed. The 35 appeals lodged in total for admission into Year 9 for these schools in September had been heard and 23 had been upheld. In response to a query the Senior Admissions Officer advised that 10 of the appeals had been for Manshead of which five had been upheld and five dismissed.

Turning next to Middle allocations the Senior Admissions Officer reported that offer letters had been sent out on 30 March and 93.8% of children had been offered their first preference school. Five middle schools (Holywell, Leighton, Linslade, Priory and Robert Bloomfield) had been oversubscribed. The 34 appeals lodged for the middle school transfer for Leighton, Linslade and Priory and were due to be held in the next two or three weeks.

With regard to Starting School allocations the letters were sent out on 27 April and 90.7% of children obtained their first preference school. Over a third of lower schools were oversubscribed and three schools (All Saints, Kingsmoor and Maulden) were unable to accommodate all of the children in their catchment area. 51 appeals had been lodged for admission into the Reception year in September and these were due to be heard in July.

The meeting noted that the Starting School admission round had presented the usual challenges and the School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning Team therefore investigated options for schools to accommodate local children in a local school where possible.

The Chairman referred to the Middle school allocations and queried what proportion of the 93.8% of children who had been offered their first preference school resided outside Central Bedfordshire and whether priority had been given to Central Bedfordshire children. In response the Senior Admissions Officer stated that admissions had followed the agreed procedure and places offered in accordance with the schools admission criteria. Catchment children were given priority and in some areas children living in other local authority areas such as Bedford or Milton Keynes were part of the catchment area to a particular school.

With regard to online admissions the Senior Admissions Officer stated that the School Admissions Service had been keen to increase the number of online applications received for the Upper, Middle and Starting School admission rounds on the basis that applying online was more efficient and parents who applied online were notified on the offer day of the result of their application. The service had promoted the benefits of applying online in the autumn term when the rounds were opened and sent leaflets to parents of children at a Central Bedfordshire school who were due to transfer to either an Upper school or a Middle school with information on the school open evenings and how to apply online.

The Senior Admissions Officer advised that Starting School admissions rounds were heavily promoted with posters being sent to nurseries, pre-schools, doctors' surgeries, supermarkets, leisure centres and libraries to advertise to parents of children in the relevant date of birth (dob) range that it was time to apply. Information was also provided by NHS Bedfordshire of children in the dob range and letters were sent to parents of those children to inform them of the need to apply. She stated that the online applications had been as follows:

- Upper schools – 83% (56% in 2011, an increase of 27%)
- Middle schools – 81% (58% in 2011, an increase of 23%)
- Starting School – 80% (71% in 2011, an increase of 9%)

In response to a query regarding the support offered in libraries to parents wishing to submit an online application the Senior Admissions Officer stated that she was unsure what assistance was provided at libraries although parents did telephone the Admissions Service and officers would guide them through the admissions process if they had any difficulties.

The Chairman referred to the number of appeals and requested that a note be circulated comparing the number of children securing their first preference with the previous two years in order that it could be established whether the situation was improving or getting worse.

The Chairman then queried the number of academies making use of the appeals service. The Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning stated that there were, currently, two but it was assumed that there would be a steady increase in demand as academies recognised the responsibilities involved in undertaking this function.

NOTED

the oral update on the allocations for the 2012 admissions.

RESOLVED

that a note be circulated comparing the number of children securing their first preference with the previous two years in order that it can be established whether the situation has improved or is getting worse.

(Note: Resolution 4 of minute CBAF/12/6 also refers).

CBAF/12/5 **Update on Disaggregation**

The Admissions Panel received an oral update from the Senior Admissions Officer on the disaggregation of the Admissions Service. Members had been advised at the previous meeting (CBAF/11/20 refers) that disaggregation would take effect from 1 April 2012 and the Senior Admissions Officer reported that the Schools Admission Service had moved out of Borough Hall into Watling House, Dunstable at the end of April. The meeting noted that the function was now part of the School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning Service which, it was felt, would enable greater opportunities to manage and respond to demand for school places.

The Senior Admissions Officer further reported that the Schools Admission Service was offering two traded services to own admissions authority schools and academies; these being the preparation and presentation of admissions appeals and the processing of applications received for point of entry admissions.

The Senior Admissions Officer advised the meeting that the appeals provision was still provided by Bedford Borough Council but this service was scheduled to be disaggregated from 1 September 2012 when it would be provided in-house by Central Bedfordshire Council's Committee Services. She added that disaggregation would enable Central Bedfordshire Council to take ownership of all aspects of the school admissions and appeals process and make the system simpler for parents who appealed as everything would be dealt with by one authority.

In response to a query the Senior Admissions Officer stated that local authorities were required by statute to co-ordinate all admissions for their area. It was then the responsibility of own admission schools and academies to determine which applications met their criteria. This function could be provided at cost by the Council if required.

With regard to the membership of the appeals panels the Senior Admissions Officer reported that Committee Services was in the process of compiling a pool of suitable persons from which such panels could be constituted.

The Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning emphasised the major advantages in locating the admissions function with school organisation within the same office including an increase in efficiency and effectiveness. As both teams were quite small their close physical proximity also provided increased resilience.

At the request of a Member the Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning reported on those areas within Central Bedfordshire which were, or would be, experiencing major demand for school places.

NOTED

the oral report on the disaggregation of the Admissions Service.

CBAF/12/6 **Future of the Admissions Forum**

Members gave consideration to the future of the Admissions Forum mindful of the absence of a statutory basis for its existence. The Chairman, whilst acknowledging the growing 'academisation' of the education sector commented that the meetings of the Admissions Forum provided an opportunity for different types of school to come together and for the discussion on various issues to be held in public. He stated that, given the current high level of change, he was in favour of the Admissions Forum continuing.

In response a Member referred to the continual low representation at Forum meetings and, whilst willing to carry on, queried to what purpose future meetings would have.

Another Member commented that she had found the meetings useful and that they kept her updated.

However, the Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning stated that there were alternative mechanisms in place for discussion, consultation and dissemination including area planning meetings and engagement with the Children's Services Directorate. The Senior Admissions Officer added that data could be included in the 'Central Essentials' and 'Governors' Essentials' e-publications.

A Member referred to Luton's Admissions Forum and described how it had been effective in influencing major admissions changes that had been proposed by a local academy. However, another Member commented that local headteachers had themselves expressed concern at the academy's proposals, had worked to influence them and would have done so whether the Luton Forum had existed or not. She went on to comment that Central Bedfordshire's Admissions Forum lacked powers and was severely restricted in its impact as a result. She added that other mechanisms existed for discussion and consultation.

The Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning set out the procedure undertaken by Central Bedfordshire regarding the review of proposals and the consultation process that was required. He also reminded the meeting of the growing number of academies in Central Bedfordshire and how this contrasted with authorities such as Hertfordshire where there were a relatively low number of academies and admissions forums had been retained.

Whilst acknowledging that there was a strong case in favour of discontinuing the Council's Admissions Forum meetings the Chairman favoured further investigation and consultation before any final action was taken.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Senior Admissions Officer contact those local authorities which have retained admissions forums and establish why they have done so and, by examining the last three agendas for their forum meetings, what they are considering at the meetings;**

- 2 that the Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning send a letter to all members of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum setting out the nature of the discussion on the future of the Forum and seeking their views on the way forward;
- 3 that a copy of the Forum's Terms of Reference be circulated with the letter referred to in resolution 2 above.
- 4 that the note referred to in the resolution under minute CBAF/12/4 be circulated with the letter referred to in resolution 2 above.

CBAF/12/7 **Date of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED

that the next meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum be held as and when required.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 4.45 p.m. and concluded at 5.46 p.m..)

Chairman.....

Dated.....