

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

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

PRESENT

Local Authority:	Cllr M A G Versallion	Chairman/Executive Member for Children's Services
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools:	Ms C Neale	Governor, Dunton VC Lower School, Dunton and Wrestlingworth VC Lower School, Wrestlingworth
	Mrs A Phillips	Headteacher, Streetfield Middle School, Dunstable
	Mrs J Woodthorpe	Headteacher, Campton Lower School, Campton
Church of England Diocese:	MR R Garrard	Diocesan Representative, Diocese of St Albans
Apologies for Absence:	Ms W Anderson-Welsh Mr S Fell Mr P Harpin Mrs F Image Mr J Kemp Squadron Leader T Sellers	
Officers in Attendance:	Ms L Braisher	- Admissions Manager
	Mr L Manning	- Committee Services Officer

CBAF/11/8 **Minutes and Matters Arising**

Matters Arising – Future of the Admissions Forum

Further to minute CBAF/12/6 discussion took place on the outcome of the investigation and consultation on the future of the Forum. In response to a query the Admissions Manager reported that only three members of the Forum had responded to the letter sent by the Head of School Organisation, Admissions and capital Planning setting out the nature of the discussion on the Forum's future and seeking views on the way forward. All three respondees had stated that they favoured the continuation of the Forum.

A Member suggested that, as a compromise way forward, meetings of the Forum be called on an 'as and when' basis.

It was suggested that schools be contacted to establish their views and whether they wish to nominate representatives to the Forum. In response the Admissions Manager explained that, before doing so, it would be necessary to

revise the Forum's Terms of Reference to reflect the change in its status and role and the increasing 'academisation' of schools in Central Bedfordshire. In connection with this matter the Committee Services Officer stated that the term of office for some members of the Forum had actually finished earlier in the autumn but that until the Terms of Reference were revised, and the role of representatives clarified, it would not be possible to take action to appoint their successors.

The meeting considered the viability of the Forum with debate focusing on its purpose and value and the alternatives available. The Admissions Manager explained the Forum was no longer a statutory body and, apart from facilitating discussion between its members and providing an additional means by which information could be circulated, it had no other role. She added that information was already disseminated to interested parties through other means such as 'Central Essentials'.

Consideration turned next to the decision at the last Forum meeting to contact those local authorities which had retained their admissions forums to establish why they had done so and what matters were considered at their meetings. The Admissions Manager reported that Luton Borough, Hertfordshire County and Cambridgeshire County Councils had retained forums but that Bedford Borough Council had not. Attendance at the Luton and Hertfordshire forums was known to be good and the issues discussed reflected those that used to appear on agendas for Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum meetings. A Member commented that Hertfordshire was still responsible for the majority of its schools and this could, therefore, have an impact on whether the role of its Admissions Forum was regarded locally as having value. In response to a query the Admissions Manager stated that the types of issues appearing on the sample agendas of other council's forums were those that used to be considered by this Authority's Admissions Forum.

A Member then referred to changes in admissions practices being adopted by different schools in Dunstable and queried how the Council was dealing with the matters raised. In explanation the Admissions Manager stated that the schools concerned were Academies and the Council could only offer advice to them regarding issues such as age range, capacity and admissions. She added that a body such as the Forum was not required to deal with these changes.

Arising from the discussion the Chairman stated that he believed that Members did not wish to see the Forum discontinued prematurely.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 25 June 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record;**
- 2 that no further action be taken at present with regard to the discontinuation of the Admissions Forum.**

CBAF/11/9 **Consultation on Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - 2014/15**

The Admissions Manager introduced the consultation document on the proposed changes to the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools from 2014/15. A copy of the consultation document and the accompanying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document had been circulated with the agenda. The meeting noted the consultation period would last between 12 November 2012 to 21 January 2013.

The Admissions Manager drew Members' attention to the criteria that would determine applications when schools were oversubscribed. One such criterion would see the removal of defined catchment areas and the introduction of the measurement of the straight line distance from the school site to the pupil's home address to determine which children lived nearest to the school and therefore received priority.

The Admissions Manager stated that copies of the consultation and FAQs documents had been circulated to all schools, teachers, parents and carers, diocese and neighbouring local authorities. Posters advertising the consultation had been placed in public spaces such as supermarkets and community centres and press releases issued. The documents were also available on line. The aim would be to obtain as wider range of viewpoints as possible. The Admissions Manager stated that 12 responses had been received to date.

Consideration turned to the proposed adoption of the straight line distance criterion. In response to a query by the Chairman on the possibility of a 'cross border' impact as a result of adopting this criterion the Admissions Manager acknowledged that a child resident across the border in another local authority could be awarded priority. Other Members expressed concern at this outcome and also referred to examples where local children within Central Bedfordshire could be disadvantaged.

A Member sought clarification regarding the admission of Service children to a school which had reached its published admission number (PAN). She queried if the school could exceed its PAN rather than the Council provide transport for the children to take them to a school which had not yet reached this figure. In response the Admissions Manager explained that Service children could be admitted to the catchment school where they were next on the waiting list and the school could accommodate them. The set infant class size ratio of 30 children to one teacher did not apply for children of Service families as those children were regarded as an exception under the infant class size regulations.

The Admissions Manager offered to send Members an example of the straight line distance criterion in operation, which had been produced by the Council's GIS team, if they wished to see this for their school.

A Member referred to the major impact of recent and forthcoming changes to school admissions in Dunstable and Houghton Regis which she felt to be the driver behind the proposed open admissions system for schools throughout

Central Bedfordshire. She queried whether adopting an admissions policy solely for those towns would be more suitable. In response the Admissions Manager stated that, as an example, parents living in Houghton Regis applied for their children to attend schools in Harlington and Leighton Buzzard so it was difficult to restrict the impact of what was happening in Houghton Regis and Dunstable to those towns. Further, it could be difficult to administer two different policies.

The Member then expressed concern regarding some schools becoming academies so that they could move from a three tier system to a two tier system and extend their age ranges. She felt that this could give rise to confusion for parents. However, the Admissions Manager felt that such moves actually increased choice and the adoption of the open admissions system would allow for the shift to a two tier system. Further, removing catchment areas eliminated the problem of them being out of date once a new system was in operation. She also stressed that the changes were only in the form of proposals and it was uncertain what the final response would be to the consultation document.

Following further expressions of concern by Members that Community and Voluntary Controlled schools would be disadvantaged by the proposed changes the Admissions Manager stressed that the aim was to allow more freedom of choice for parents by removing catchment area boundaries.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding the modelling of cross border impact of the straight line distance criterion the Admissions Manager stated that some work had already been done. She stated that, under the system, some Central Bedfordshire children could attend schools in other local authorities and some children living outside Central Bedfordshire could attend its schools. The Admissions Manager confirmed that the open admissions system would not guarantee that parents would have their child admitted to the school of their preference.

In conclusion the Admissions Manager advised that drop-in sessions on the proposed changes to school admission arrangements would take place at Priory House, Shefford at 4.30 p.m. on 4 December, Watling House, Dunstable at 4.30 p.m. on 11 December and at Greenleas Lower School at 4.30 p.m. on 17 December.

NOTED

the consultation document and FAQ sheets on the proposed changes to the Schools Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools from 2014/15.

CBAF/11/10 **Date of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED

- 1 that the next meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum be held during the last two weeks of March 2013 at a date and time to be agreed following consultation with Members of the Forum;**
- 2 that consideration be given to starting the above meeting at 8.30 a.m. to assist those Members whose commitments prevent attendance at a later time of day.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 4.30 p.m. and concluded at 5.50 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated