

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 28 June 2011

PRESENT

Local Education Authority:	Cllr M Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools:	Mrs 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 Slade	Diocesan Representative, Diocese of St Albans
Academy:	Mr J Kemp	Vice-Principal, All Saints Academy, Dunstable
Parent Governor:	Mr I Robinson	Parent Governor, Caldecote VC Lower School, Upper Caldecote
Local Community:	Mrs D Day Squadron Leader T Sellers	Virtual School Headteacher, Central Bedfordshire Council (representing Looked After Children) RAF Henlow (representing the Armed Forces)
Apologies for Absence:	Ms W Anderson-Welsh Mrs P Cotton Mr S Fell Mrs F Image Mrs A Phillips Mr B Sear 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/11/1 **Election of Chairman**

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

CBAF/11/2 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/11/3 Election of Chairman for the Meeting

As there had been no nominations for either the post of Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the current municipal year consideration was given to the election of a Chairman for the current meeting. Again no nominations were forthcoming and so, with the full agreement of those Members present, and for the purpose of facilitating the Forum's business, it was proposed that the Committee Services Officer be elected Chairman.

RESOLVED

that the Committee Services Officer be elected Chairman of the Forum for this meeting only.

(Mr L Manning in the Chair)

CBAF/11/4 Minutes and Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 22 March 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CBAF/11/5 Update On 2011 Admissions and Appeals

The Forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which provided an update on admissions and appeals with regard to the September 2011 admissions round.

A Member referred to the process regarding the admission of a Looked After Child to a school outside of the normal admissions round. She stated that, contrary to the impression given in the report, this did not have to be at the direction of the local authority acting in the role as the corporate parent as the school was required to accept such children. However, the Head of School Support stated that it was sometimes necessary to direct the school if it refused to accept the pupil in accordance with the Fair Access Protocol.

Members of the Forum noted that, with regard to online applications, neighbouring authorities had reported a significant increase in the number of online applications by removing or limiting the number of paper applications

issued. The Admissions Manager stated that if a parent did not submit an online application a paper application would be sent. In response to a Member's query the Admissions Manager stated that if an in-year application was received for a year 4 or year 8 place parents would automatically be sent an application for phase transfer.

Members referred to the issue of children of Armed Services personnel who were the subject of late or mid-term applications to schools and queried the level of flexibility that was available in the system to enable them to be admitted. In response the Admissions Manager stated that the Council would approach a school to discuss the issue but would have full regard to the school's position. The school would not be forced to accept a child and if a place could not be offered an alternative school would be identified.

The exceptions which could result in the admission number for a school being exceeded were discussed and the Admissions Manager agreed to amend the exception relating to 'looked after' children.

Further discussion then took place regarding means to encourage online applications. The Admissions Manager stated that middle and upper schools would be encouraged to promote online applications. A PDF version of the paper application form would be available for schools to download. Following a request by a Member the Admissions Manager undertook to ensure that the term 'Looked After Child' was clearly defined on the form to prevent any misinterpretation by members of the public.

NOTED

- 1 those schools where the published admission number has been exceeded and the reasons for this;**
- 2 those schools where it has not been possible to accommodate all catchment area children;**
- 3 the school preference and online data;**
- 4 the appeals information.**

CBAF/11/6 Local Authority Report To The Office Of The Schools Adjudicator

The Forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services on the Council's annual report to the Schools Adjudicator. The meeting noted that local authorities were required under The Schools Admission Code and The School Admissions (Local Authority Reports and Admissions Forums) (England) Regulations 2008 to submit a report on the admission arrangements for schools in their area to the Adjudicator by 30 June each year.

A copy of the annual report, which was in draft form, was attached at Appendix 1.

Members worked through the draft annual report and the following items were raised for discussion:

a) Section 1 – Infant Class Sizes

A Member referred to the class size problem experienced at Thornhill Lower School and the school's associated recruitment difficulties and queried if the Council had offered assistance. The Head of School Support explained that whilst the Council could signpost measures which could be taken it would be the school's responsibility to take any remedial action. The school had been advised of this. The Admissions Manager added that the necessary arrangements regarding class sizes had been discussed with the school some time before the problem had arisen. It was noted that the school would reorganise its classes for September 2011 to ensure class sizes were not breached again.

With regard to the consultation document issued by the Council on its proposed admission arrangements a Member commented that she was unsure whether school governing bodies had the opportunity to discuss these. She asked that they be sent directly to the chair of the governing bodies. The Admissions Manager undertook to do so starting with the next round of consultation.

b) Section 1 – Admission Appeals

A Member drew the attention of the Forum to the information contained in the column titled 'headcount of pupils' in Appendix A. She pointed out that the data used originated from the January 2010 census.

c) Section 2 – Admission Arrangements

Members were advised that some uncertainty existed regarding the numbers of service children that could be expected following the arrival of new units at RAF Henlow. The Admissions Manager explained that early notification of numbers once these were known would be helpful and asked that this information be sent to herself and the Senior Admissions Officer and they would ensure it was passed on to the planning team.

The meeting was informed that, with regard to accessibility plans for children with disabilities, if the school was a Diocesan school, a copy of the plan would have to go to the Diocese before funding could be approved from the Access Initiative and not the local authority as stated in the annual report. The report would need to be amended to reflect this.

d) Appendix A

A Member reminded the meeting that Hitchmead School and Sunnyside School had merged to form Ivel Valley School. The Appendix would need to be amended to reflect this.

RECOMMENDED

that the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services approve the Council's draft annual report to the Schools Adjudicator subject to the amendments set out in the preamble above.

CBAF/11/7 Information For Parents For 2012 Admissions

The Forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services on the proposed advice and guidance made available to parents regarding the school admissions process and the manner in which it was made available to parents. Members' comments and approval were sought.

The Senior Admissions Officer stated that, for the phase transfer in September 2012, it was proposed that parents would not automatically be given a paper application form. Instead, and in order to encourage online applications, parents would be sent a leaflet on how to apply online for a school place with details of the catchment area school and including information such as the dates and times of open evenings. Only a small number of paper applications would be sent to schools to be made available to those parents or carers who did not have internet access. A composite prospectus would still be produced and made available on the Council's website and in hardcopy form on request.

The meeting noted that the information to be published reflected the main areas for which applications were received; the first being a booklet, leaflets and application forms in respect of the transfer of children from lower school to middle school and from middle school to upper school, the second being a booklet and application form in respect of children starting school. Members were advised that it had not been necessary to amend the in-year admissions information booklet and application form as this had already been done during the last academic year.

To assist Members copies of all draft documents had been attached as appendices to the officer's report with the exception of those leaflets relating to transfer to middle school and upper schools which had been marked to follow. Copies of these two outstanding appendices were circulated at the meeting. Members noted that an error had occurred on the leaflet for the transfer to middle school and the age range for children transferring to upper school had been included by mistake. The Senior Admissions Officer stated that this would be rectified before the leaflet was printed.

RESOLVED

that the proposed advice and guidance to made available to parents by the Council regarding the school admissions process, as set out in Appendices A-G of the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services, and the manner in which it is to be made available,

be approved subject to the amendment of the age ranges on the draft leaflet for transfer to middle school.

CBAF/11/8 **Consultation On Changes To The School Admission And School Admission Appeals Codes**

The Forum considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which sought Members' views on proposed changes to the School Admission Code and the School Admission Appeal Code. The meeting noted that the consultation had opened on 27 May 2011 and would close on 19 August 2011. Subject to the passage of the Educational Bill 2011 it was planned to bring the new Codes into force in early 2012 and apply them to admissions for September 2013.

To assist Members in their deliberations the Admissions Manager introduced each of the proposed key changes. Discussion took place in particular on the following:

Key Changes to the Admissions Code

a) **Removal of in-year co-ordination**

Overall the Forum felt the proposed removal of the current requirement on local authorities to co-ordinate in-year admissions to be a retrograde step as co-ordination simplified the process for parents. Concern was expressed that an absence of co-ordination could lead to vulnerable children becoming 'lost' in the system and left without a school place. However, comment was made that this requirement had only been in place for approximately a year. Its removal would not see a total absence of co-ordination as the system previously in operation could be reintroduced. In response, the Admissions Manager reminded the meeting that problems had arisen with the previous system because some schools had failed to follow the correct procedures. She suggested that should this key change be adopted by the government officers would seek approval from the Forum to approach schools and ask if they would wish the Council to continue providing a co-ordinated in-year admissions process.

b) **Changes to Published Admission Number (PAN)**

The meeting noted that the proposed change would mean that schools would no longer need local authority approval to admit pupils in-year above the Published Admission Number (PAN) and that, during the normal admissions round, it was proposed to remove the requirement to consult on an increase on PAN. The Admissions Manager commented that whilst the proposed changes would enable popular schools to expand there was concern regarding the impact of a reduction in pupil numbers on neighbouring, less popular, schools. In response it was suggested that if successful schools acted sensibly then the impact on neighbouring schools could be managed.

(c) Infant class size exceptions

Members noted the proposal to add two new categories to the list of exceptions which permitted an infant class to be over 30 and removed the requirement for the class to revert to 30 at the end of the year in which the excepted pupils entered the class. Concern was expressed that this measure could lead to the general erosion of the class size limit and comment passed on the need to remember why such class size limits existed for younger children.

(d) Giving admissions priority to children attracting the Pupil Premium

With regard to the proposal that Academies and Free Schools be permitted to give priority in their admission arrangements to children attracting the Pupil Premium the meeting noted that there were two separate Pupil Premiums and that the proposal referred to that under which pupils were awarded free school meals and not that relating to the children of military personnel.

It was noted that further guidance was expected on this item.

(e) Children of school staff

In respect to the proposal to allow children of staff at a school to be included as an oversubscription criterion the meeting noted that the definition of 'staff' would lay with the admission authority. Concern was expressed that this could lead to discrimination against children based on their parents' occupations. The Forum felt that greater clarification was needed from the government on the definition of 'staff'.

Other Changes to the Admissions Code

(f) Admission of pupils with challenging behaviour

Members of the Forum noted that the protection from admitting pupils with challenging behaviour appeared, for those schools in an OFSTED category or with below floor level standards, to have been removed. It was proposed that the governing body of any school with a high proportion of children with challenging behaviour could refuse to admit a challenging pupil. It was noted that this had the potential to increase the number of pupils placed through the Fair Access Protocol and would require the local authority to clearly define a 'high proportion' of children with challenging behaviour.

(Note: At this point the Diocesan representative for the Church of England Diocese of St Albans left the meeting. Before doing so, and mindful that this was the last Forum the representative was to attend, the Admissions Manager, on behalf of the Forum, thanked him for his contribution and efforts over the years. In response the representative thanked the Admissions Manager for her work and the help she had provided).

Key changes in the Education Bill

The meeting considered the proposed removal of the requirement on local authorities to set up Admissions Forums. Members were reminded that they had been advised of this proposal at the last meeting of the Forum (minute 10/31 refers) when they had expressed a preference for its continuation. However, it was acknowledged that this matter would need to be reconsidered once the Bill had become law. A Member commented that he had recently attended a meeting of Cambridge County Council's Admissions Forum and its Members had voted in favour of its retention.

RESOLVED

that the Forum's comments to the proposed changes to the School Admissions Code and the School Admission Appeals Code be included in the Council's response to the consultation.

CBAF/11/9 **Dates Of Future Meetings**

The Forum considered possible dates for future meetings. Members were advised that the autumn meeting was preferably held in late October or early November. Members were also advised that the half term break would take place during the last full week in October.

The possibility of holding meetings at a later time of day was raised but the Forum was reminded that the start time of 8.30 a.m. had been chosen to enable business to be conducted as early as possible so headteachers could return to their schools by mid-morning.

RESOLVED

that the next meeting of the Forum be held on Tuesday, 1 November 2011 at 8.30 a.m.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 8.30 a.m. and concluded at 10.15 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated