

## **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SHADOW COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM** held in Room 13, Priory House, Chicksands on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

**Present:**

David Brandon-Bravo	Sqn Ldr Michelle Ramsden
Pauline Cotton	Rob Robson
Councillor Mrs Fairbairn (Chairman)	Ben Sear
Shawn Fell	Ray Slade
Steve Morrow	

**Also in Attendance:** Sigrid Hillman – Community Development Officer

**Officers:** Mrs Bonwick, Mr Goldsmith, Mrs Hobbs, Mr Mills, Dr Modi and Mr Shevlin

### **10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor N Costin, Anne Phillips, Chris Spurgeon, Nick Sharpe, Frances Image, Wendy Anderson-Welsh.

### **11. MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2008**

**RESOLVED** to approve the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum held on 10 December 2008 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

### **12. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Members received a report summarising changes arising from the new regulations and School Admissions Code, that came into force on 10 February 2009, in relation to (a) the membership of the Admissions Forums and (b) their roles and responsibilities.

The Forum currently had 15 appointed members and the maximum size remained at 20. To comply with the new regulations the following changes to the membership were suggested:

- the vacancy for one lower school headteacher representing foundation and trust schools be made available to a governor or headteacher of any lower school in Central Bedfordshire

- the place for one upper school headteacher representing the Church of England Diocese should be removed as it exceeded the revised requirement for only one nominee from each religious denomination
- to have two voluntary controlled school representatives (governors or headteachers)
- that there be one representative of a local academy, which would be the All Saints Academy in Dunstable, due to open in September 2009
- to have one additional parent representative (the Forum at present had one parent governor), which was optional under the Forum's terms of reference which allowed between one and three.

The proposed revised membership details were tabled at the meeting. It was noted (a) that Ben Sear, the current parent governor, met the revised criteria for a parent representative; and (b) that a new community and voluntary controlled upper school head teacher would need to be recruited in place of Rob Robson as Samuel Whitbread Upper School was taking trust status on 1 April 2009.

Members were advised that the revised membership would need to be approved by or on behalf of the Central Bedfordshire Executive.

The Forum noted information from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) about the power of an Admission Forum to produce a voluntary annual report to the Schools Adjudicator and the format such a report might take. It was expected that Admission Forums be involved in the production of the local authority's own statutory annual report, or at least have had sight of it before it was sent to the Schools Adjudicator.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the Central Bedfordshire Executive be recommended to amend the Forum's membership as recorded above in order to comply with The School Admissions (Local Authority Reports and Admission Forums) (England) Regulations 2008 and the revised School Admissions Code which both came into force on 10 February 2009.
2. that the changes to the role and reporting procedures of Admission Forums included in the revised School Admissions Code and their impact upon the Forum's terms of reference be noted.
3. that the Forum agrees to provide input to the statutory annual report of the local authority on admission arrangements, rather than to produce a separate report of its own.

## **13. REVISED SCHOOL ADMISSIONS CODE**

Members received a report which set out the changes to the revised School Admissions Code provided by the DCSF. The changes relevant to the proposed admission arrangements for 2010 were:

- Applications Forms. Parents must not be required to attend the school in person to collect a form or be required to return their completed application form to the school. The advice from the DCSF was that this must not be the only option open to parents
- Prohibition of oversubscription criteria. Governors have no discretion over the admission of children with statements of special educational needs (SEN). The standard admission policy for community and voluntary (VC) controlled (VC) schools had been amended accordingly and schools which were their own admission authority had been asked to ensure that this was clearly stated in their policies
- 2010-2011 admissions – co-ordination during normal admission round. For upper school and academy admissions parents would continue to apply to their home Local Authority (LA)
- In-year applications from 2010. LAs must co-ordinate all in-year applications for parents in their areas from the 2010-2011 academic year onwards
- Main obligations of Co-ordination Regulations. The regulations would apply to the 2011-2012 admissions round and not to the 2010-2011 admissions round. This would need to be considered when agreeing the arrangements for the co-ordinated schemes for the 2010-2011 academic year as the statutory dates would not apply to that academic year
- Waiting List. From September 2009 each admission authority must maintain a waiting list for at least the first term in the academic year of admission. Schools which were their own admission authority had been advised
- Objections to the Schools Adjudicator. Objections to admission arrangements should be referred to the Schools Adjudicator by 31 July
- Appendix 4. Admission authority must publish their determined admission arrangements on their web site for the whole year. LAs must publish by 1 May the determined admission arrangements of all schools and must publish a notice in local newspapers providing details of where the determined arrangements might be viewed. A composite prospectus must be published by 12 September, including the application form.

**NOTED** the main changes to the revised School Admissions Code.

#### **14. CONSULTATION PROCESS AND RESPONSES**

Members received a report regarding the consultation process and the responses received. The consultation in respect of the arrangements for the September 2010 academic year took place between 2 January and 28 February 2009.

A total of 15 responses had been received, 10 from lower schools, 3 from middle schools, 1 from the combined school and 1 from a parent.

**NOTED** the outcome of the consultation and the responses received.

#### **15. STANDARD ADMISSIONS POLICY 2010 – COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS**

The Forum received a report advising Members that no comments to the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools had been received during the consultation process. The Forum at their meeting on 10 December 2008 had noted the proposed changes for September 2010.

Members were advised that the LA would apply the following criteria, in rank order, to decide the order in which places would be allocated when there were more requests from parents/carers than the number of places available:

- all 'looked after' children
- pupils living in the catchment area
- 'very exceptional' medical grounds
- siblings
- any other children

If there were more children with an equal right to admission to the school than the number of available places, the tie break would be the distance the pupil lives from the school, measured in a straight line, using the LA's computerised measuring system, with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

It was suggested that for admissions in September 2011 the admissions criteria might be amended to enable siblings of pupils living in the catchment area to have a higher priority than other pupils living in the catchment area. As this would be a significant change to the policy, this would need to be consulted upon. Members agreed that this was a sensible option and that it should be considered in relation to the 2011 admissions.

**RESOLVED** to approve the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools.

#### **16. ADDITIONS TO THE STANDARD ADMISSIONS POLICY - COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS**

Members received a report on the additions to the Standard Admissions Policy for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. The following four schools had requested additions for September 2010:

- Eaton Bray Lower School
- Alameda Middle School
- Woodland Middle School

- Redborne Upper School

The additions had been agreed with Officers at Central Bedfordshire and had been consulted upon.

Members were advised that discussions were taking place with the Church of England Diocese, in relation to those schools that had a faith criterion and to determine how that faith should be assessed.

**RESOLVED** to approve subject to advice from the Church of England Diocese, the additions to the Standard Admissions Policy for those schools listed in Appendix A to the report.

#### **17. ADMISSION NUMBERS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS – SEPTEMBER 2010**

Members received a report that set out the proposed admission numbers for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. The following schools had requested a change to their admission number for September 2010:

- Beaudesert Lower School
- Cranfield Lower School
- Kingsmoor Lower School

Caddington Village School had requested an increase from 15 to 25 to their admission number for Year 5, to enable the school to have sufficient financial flexibility to employ a full-time teacher for an additional class and to enable them to admit all catchment area children. The headteacher of Streetfield Middle School had expressed her concerns to Officers that the proposed increase would impact on admissions to her school.

Roecroft Lower School's admission number would be 30 as the building of the replacement school had been delayed due to the economic climate.

It was noted that Vandyke Upper School had not yet confirmed its Year 12 admission number.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1) to approve the proposed admission numbers for those schools listed in Appendix A to the report, subject to the admission number for Roecroft Lower School being amended to 30
- 2) that the request to increase the admission number for Year 5 at Caddington Village School not be supported for the reasons stated in the report.

**18. CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR UPPER SCHOOLS AND ACADEMY 2010-2011**

Members received a report on the proposed scheme for co-ordinated admission arrangements. The closing date for applications was based on a proposed national closing date of 31 October. Although this date would not come into effect until the 2011 admissions round, it was suggested that this be applied to the 2010 admission round as it was only a few days earlier than the current closing date.

Members were made aware of the minor changes that had been made to the scheme.

**RESOLVED**

- 1) to approve that the closing date for application be 31 October
- 2) that parents have the option at phase transfer to return their application form to their child's current school or to the local authority
- 3) that all in-year applications be submitted to the local authority
- 4) to approve the co-ordinated scheme for 2010-2011.

**19. CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS – PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2010-2011**

Members received a report on the proposed scheme for co-ordinated admission arrangements. The closing date for middle and lower school applications was based on a proposed national closing date of 15 January. Although this date would not come into effect until the 2011 admissions round, members agreed that the 15 January closing date should be applied to the 2010 admissions round. It was recognised that the change would mean parents taking up a nursery place in January would not know whether their child had a place in the reception year in September. The advantage of setting the 15 January as the closing date would ensure that late applications, e.g. parents moving into the area, were dealt with during the normal allocation process.

Parents applying for a primary school place during the 2010 admissions round would be required to submit their application to the LA in which the school was located. However this could result in parents receiving one offer of a school place from Central Bedfordshire and another from Bedford Borough. Officers suggested that a joint approach between the two councils be agreed to ensure that two school places were not offered. This suggestion would also be put to the Bedford Borough Council Admissions Forum for approval. Members agreed that joint working with Bedford Borough Council was a sensible option.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1) that the closing date for both middle and lower school applications would be 15 January for the 2010 admissions rounds
- 2) that parents have the option at phase transfer to return their application form to their child's current school or to the local authority
- 3) that lower school applications be submitted to the local authority
- 4) that subject to the agreement of the Bedford Borough Admissions Forum, the School Admissions Service adopts a joint approach to the admissions process across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough
- 5) that all in-year applications be submitted to the local authority
- 6) to approve the co-ordinated scheme for 2010-2011.

## **20. CONSULTATION ON ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS SEPTEMBER 2010 – FOUNDATION, TRUST AND VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOLS**

Members received a report on the foundation, trust and voluntary aided (FTVA) schools' consultation processes on admissions arrangements for September 2010. St Mary's Catholic Lower School had not consulted on their proposed admission arrangements for September 2010 as there had been staffing issues at the school. Advice would need to be sought from DCSF about this situation.

The admission arrangements for the All Saints Academy would be approved by the Secretary of State as part of the Funding Agreement.

Appendix A to the report set out the various issues that had been raised with 21 schools. There were a number of instances of non-compliance with the Code of Practice and the Governing Bodies of those schools had been asked to review their policies before determining their admission arrangements. These arrangements were due to be determined by 15 April 2009, with notification to consultees of the arrangements within 14 days of that determination. If the policies still did not comply with the Code by then, then the local authority was duty bound to object to the Schools Adjudicator. In particular there was concern that John Donne Voluntary Aided School's criteria gave siblings a higher priority than parish children which was inconsistent with the LA's catchment area policy.

## **NOTED**

- 1) the areas of non-compliance with the School Admissions Code, as set out in Appendix A to the report
- 2) the proposed admission numbers for the schools set out in Appendix B to the report
- 3) to note any actions required in respect of St Mary's Catholic Lower School.

**RESOLVED** to support the actions of the local authority in clarifying any necessary issues with the DCSF should a referral to the Schools Adjudicator be necessary.

## **21. ADMISSIONS ABOVE THE PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBER**

Members received a report advising of the responses from the consultation process on admissions above the published admission number. Only 2 responses were received that specifically related to the exceptions. Members were advised that no changes to the exceptions were proposed.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1) to approve the exceptions, which may result in the admission number being exceeded
- 2) that foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools be invited to adopt the exceptions.

**NOTED** the comments received from the 2 lower schools.

## **22. DETERMINATION OF ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS – SEPTEMBER 2010**

Members received a report, tabled at the meeting, outlining the requirement on admission authorities to give notice, within 14 days of determining their arrangements, to their local authority, to other bodies consulted and to any parents who had responded to the consultation. A copy of the determined admission arrangements must be published on the admission authority's website, where it had one, for the whole of the offer year, unless the arrangements were amended.

Local authorities must publish by 1 May on their websites the determined admission arrangements for all schools and academies along with a notice in the local newspapers.

**NOTED** the requirements for determining the admission arrangements.

## **23. ADMISSIONS IN SEPTEMBER 2009**

Members received a report, tabled at the meeting, on the role of the Forum in considering how well admission arrangements serve the interest of children and parents within the local authority's area. This included considering how actual admissions relate to the admission numbers published.

Members noted in particular that Parkfields Middle School was oversubscribed every year. The head teacher expressed concern that over a number of years the number of children turned away could have been avoided had the school been permitted to build new accommodation and expand.



He was advised that this would need to be considered by Central Bedfordshire as the new local authority.

Forum members asked whether a view would be taken on maximum class sizes or on maximum numbers in a year group. Officers responded that, to date, Bedfordshire County Council had aimed to keep class sizes to around 30 but there was always a need for some flexibility; the numbers in a year group would depend on the accommodation in the school. Officers suggested that in future the traditional class size of 30 may change and there could be a variety of teaching methods and class sizes, depending on the activity. There was a need to look at the overall pupil teacher ratio in each school.

Officers at Central Bedfordshire were looking at the Building Schools for the Future project as this would transform learning over the next several years.

**NOTED** those schools where the published admission number had been exceeded and the reasons for this.

#### **24. UPDATE ON APPEALS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2009**

The Forum received a report updating Members on the appeals arrangements for 2009 admissions. From 1 April 2009 Central Bedfordshire would have a statutory duty to administer admission appeals for the community and voluntary controlled schools in the Central Bedfordshire administrative area, and on behalf of the foundation and voluntary aided schools which chose not to receive delegated funding to administer their own appeals. This service would be a shared arrangement with Bedford Borough Council until 1 September 2009 and it would be hosted by Bedford.

A brief summary of the changes to the current Admission Appeals Code was tabled at the meeting.

An annual report on the appeals received would be submitted to the Forum later in the year. The local authority is required to report to the DCSF on the number of appeals from 1 September 2008 – 31 August 2009 in January 2010.

#### **NOTED**

- 1) the arrangements for the School Admission Appeals for the period 1 April to 31 August 2009
- 2) the DCSF summary of changes to the revised School Admissions Appeals Code
- 3) that an annual report would be considered by the Forum later in the year.

**25. IN-YEAR FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL**

Members were advised that the In-Year Fair Access Protocol would need to be reviewed as it had been in place for over a year. The current Protocol would continue within Central Bedfordshire after 1 April 2009. This would be reviewed by the Head Teacher Review Group and a report would be considered at the next Admissions Forum meeting including the implications of the new Code for September 2009.

**RESOLVED** that the current Protocol should continue from 1 April 2009 and that a further report be considered at the next meeting.

**26 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Squadron Leader Michelle Ramsden would resume her role of the Forum, which had been covered by Flight Lieutenant Elizabeth Griffiths, but in her absence Sigrid Hillman, the RAF Henlow Community Development Officer, would substitute.

**27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the date of the next meeting would be 24 June 2009 at 8.30 am in Room 14 at Priory House, Chicksands.

As it was the last meeting that Councillor Mrs Fairbairn would be chairing, Members thanked her and wished her well in the future.

Chairman