

**Minutes of a meeting of the School Admissions Forum held on 15 June 2011 at
Building 3, Saltisford Office Park, Warwick**

Present:

Jonathan Baker, Shipston High School
Cllr Peter Balaam
Lisa Cooper, Admissions, CYPF, WCC
Andrew Clay, Ash Green School
Emma Ford, Legal Services, WCC
Fay Ford, Legal Services, WCC
Mark Gore, CYPF, WCC
Alison Livesey, Parent Governor Representative
Richard Maybey, Democratic Services, WCC
Robert Morrissey, Long Lawford Primary School
Chris Mulley, Church of England Diocese
Craig Pratt, Admissions, CYPF, WCC
Chris Smart, Parent Governor Representative
Cllr Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder (Child Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Schools)
Paul Williams, Democratic Services, WCC

1. General

The Chair, Jonathan Baker, welcomed new attendees to the Forum, including Robert Morrissey, head teacher at Long Lawford Primary School, Emma Ford from Legal Services and Richard Maybey from Democratic Services.

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Carolyn Robbins and Alison Foster

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Alison Livesey – as a Governor of Newbold Riverside School

Chris Mulley – as a parent of a year 8 pupil and as a Governor of Wolston St Margaret's C of E Primary School

Chris Smart – as a Governor of Southam College and Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the School Admissions Forum held on 21st March 2011

The following amendments to the minutes of the last meeting were requested:

Alison Livesey to be removed from the list of “new attendees”, as she has been a member of the Forum for over 2 years

Chris Smart's declarations to include his status as a Governor of Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School

The final bullet point under paragraph 9 on page 5 to be replaced with:

- § What Position is in Terms of Code
- § Feedback from Cabinet on the Items Put Forward

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chair.

(4) Matters arising

Cllr Heather Timms stated that the Overview & Scrutiny Board has not yet considered the request for a Task & Finish Group to look at Free School Meal pupils at selective schools. The Forum would be kept informed of any progress.

The recommendation of the Schools Admissions Forum about the 2012-13 admission arrangements was agreed as part of the report that went to Cabinet on 14 April 2011.

Mark Gore agreed to bring a more detailed report to the Forum to consider selection arrangements in the south and east of the county.

2. Secondary offers for 2011

Craig Pratt presented the report, which outlined the secondary non-selective places in Warwickshire for 2011. It was indicated that there should be no children in Warwickshire that are unplaced.

The Forum noted the report.

3. Primary Expansion Programme

The Forum noted the report which outlines the approach made to increasing capacity within Warwickshire's primary schools. Schools have been approached to look at where expansion can be made with or without the need for capital investment.

With reference to the third recommendation, it was clarified that schools hosting Speech and Language Units receive a reduction in their PAN. However, there is a need for clearer guidance on how many placements are available at each of these units and how the Local Authority will operate them going forwards.

The Forum noted the report.

4. Results of the 11+ selective education survey

Having presented the survey results, Craig Pratt asked the Forum if it would like further statistical analysis in order to understand the reasons for low take-up of selective education opportunities.

Those in favour of further analysis suggested it would be useful to understand:

- § Why some parents did not know that their children could sit the 11+
- § Why some children did not want to take the test
- § If the new testing arrangements (from schools to testing centre) are affecting applicant numbers
- § If geographical variations have an effect on application rates
- § If there is still a perception of selective secondary schools being a middle-class choice
- § What the drivers and barriers are for parents choosing selective education
- § If there is any prejudice in the selective system, given the low rate of Free School Meal pupils at Grammar schools

Councillor Heather Timms suggested that a Task & Finish Group may be a more appropriate method of understanding these issues. This would also allow other issues to be explored, such as the experience of other authorities who have moved to test centres, and for discussions with feeder primary schools.

Chris Smart questioned why such an exercise is necessary, and stated that parents should be left to choose whichever school system they prefer.

Alison Livesey stated that the Forum and the Local Authority should be aiming to improve all schools, not just selective schools.

The majority view was that the Forum would support a Task & Finish Group to look at this matter. Mark Gore suggested further consideration is given to how the exercise should best be undertaken to ensure the outcomes are qualitative.

5. Schools moving to Academy status

The Forum noted the latest status of those schools that have embarked on the process of converting to an academy. It was noted that Polesworth School and the Nuneaton Academy are not purchasing an admissions service, and that certain schools are going to run their own admissions appeal service.

The Forum noted the report.

6. Primary offers for 2011

Craig Pratt introduced the report, which outlined the current vacancy situation across Warwickshire, and explained that the figures are subject to change and won't be finalised until the end of July.

There are a small number of vacancies in Nuneaton, and it was explained that some parents in Bedworth only picked one preference, leading to places being offered further away.

Robert Morrissey stated that different messages are being received by schools about places and vacancies, and there is a need for greater clarity.

Craig acknowledged that this had been a difficult year for admissions, and that improvements are planned for next year, including a new phone system and a review of staffing levels and support.

The Forum noted the report.

7. Impact of school transport charges on admissions

Members of the Forum discussed whether the policy to exclude denominational schools from free transport could be seen as discriminatory

Chris Mulley suggested it would be fairer for the Local Authority to fund transport to the nearest qualifying school, and if parents decide to send their children to a different school, they should only pay the remainder.

Officers explained that the cost of school transport varies across the county, but on average it is around £660 per pupil. The increase in transport charges is a move to charging full cost.

Councillor Heather Timms stated that this policy should be looked at in the context of needing to save £60m over the next 3 years. However, schemes will be put in place to assist deprived families and a monthly payment scheme will help families in their budgeting.

The Forum noted the report.

8. Admissions booklets 2012

Craig Pratt circulated final copies of the Secondary School admissions booklet for information.

Members stated that the Forum should be given opportunity to review both the Secondary and Primary School admissions booklets, prior to their publication.

Officers acknowledged this and stated that electronic versions would be circulated to the Forum in advance for future years.

The Forum agreed to consider the booklet at a future meeting to allow members more time to review it.

9. Annual Report to the Ombudsman

This item was deferred to a future meeting

10. Consultation on changes to the Admissions Framework (with reference to items 11 and 12)

The Forum discussed various proposals within the Department for Education's Draft School Admissions Code document. Comments included:

- 10.1 No requirement on Local Authorities to co-ordinate in-year admissions
This proposal was welcomed, but it should be acknowledged that the Local Authority still has a requirement to support parents in accessing information and signposting them to the relevant bodies
- 10.2 Allowing popular and successful schools to increase their PANs
This proposal met with differing viewpoints. Concerns were expressed about the effect this would have on other schools in the local area, especially the less successful schools. Difficulties were predicted around school-place planning. Without the need to consult on proposed increases, the current lines of accountability would be lost and clarity is needed over who will judge capital allocations. An opposing view was that the availability of more places in these schools would support parental choice, and it would not necessarily require capital for building more capacity as some schools have existing space that is used for other non-learning activities.
- 10.3 Pupil Premium
It was noted that giving admission priority to children in receipt of the Pupil Premium could have an effect on access to local schools by local families. Children who qualify for the Pupil Premium need to be identified early, so they gain full benefit from their entitlements.
- 10.4 Priority to children of staff
This proposal was not welcomed. It was noted that there was one school in Warwickshire that used to adopt this principle, before the Local Authority asked them to change.
- 10.5 Objections to admission arrangements
While the consolidated Admissions Code document will include all admission arrangements for all schools, including Academies, there is no ability to check whether Academies are properly implementing the Code.
- 10.6 Appeals Code
Concern was raised that changing the timing of the appeals procedure may cause uncertainty for parents, as the final stage of the process would be very close to the start of the new September term.
- 10.7 Three stage process
The proposal for a 3-stage appeals process with a requirement to make comparisons between schools may put extra pressure on the presenting officer, who is often the only panel member with the necessary knowledge to make those comparisons.
- 10.7 Removal of statutory Admissions Forums
Discussion took place around the future of the Warwickshire School Admissions Forum should the statutory duty be removed.

After a vote (4 in favour, 1 abstention, 1 against), it was agreed that the Forum should continue on a voluntary basis if the statutory duty is removed, and the Forum should review its terms of reference to reflect changing admission arrangements.

13. Timetable of work

The Forum agreed to consider the proposed timetable of work at its next meeting, with the addition of a review of terms of reference for a voluntary admissions forum.

14. Dates and provisional items for future meetings

Mark Gore and Craig Pratt agreed to review and confirm the dates of future meetings.

The September meeting is to include the election of Chair and Vice-chair.

15. Any other items

Chris Smart stated that the current pressure on primary school places in Warwickshire is likely to be replicated in secondary schools in around 7 years time. He advised the Local Authority to start working on an approach to mitigating this risk as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 6.15pm

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Chair