

Minutes of a meeting of the School Admissions Forum held on 22 September 2011 at Building 3, Saltisford Office Park, Warwick

Present:

Jonathan Baker, Shipston High School (Chair)
Cllr Peter Balaam
Kate Edwards, Catholic Diocesan Schools Commission
Emma Ford, Legal Services, WCC
Mark Gore, CYPF, WCC
Richard Maybey, Democratic Services, WCC
Collette Naven-Jones, CYPF, WCC
Craig Pratt, Admissions, CYPF, WCC
Cllr Carolyn Robbins
Chris Smart, Parent Governor Representative
Peter Thompson, CYPF, WCC

1. General

(1) Election of Chair and Vice Chair

No nominations were received. Jonathan Baker agreed to Chair this meeting. Elections will be carried over to the next meeting.

(2) Apologies for absence

Fay Ford (replaced by Emma Ford)
Peter French
Alison Livesey
Robert Morrissey
Janet Neale (replaced by Peter Thompson)
Graham Robinson
Cllr Heather Timms

(3) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Chris Smart declared a personal interest as a governor of Southam College and Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School.

(4) Minutes of the meeting of the School Admissions Forum held on 15 June 2011

Subject to replacing the words "panel member" to "person present" at point 10.7, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chair.

(5) Matters arising

Mark Gore stated that the report to consider selection arrangements in the south and east of the county was still in progress.

Regarding the issue of low numbers of Free School Meal pupils applying for Grammar school places, officers agreed to consider how a Task & Finish Group might be established.

2. Timetable of work / terms of reference for a voluntary School Admissions Forum

A draft timetable of work was discussed, which outlined the regular items that a voluntary Forum could address through the year, including changes to the pattern of school provision.

Kate Edwards highlighted that there was no mechanism in the timetable for the Forum to consider objections to a school's proposed admissions policies. In order for the Forum to support formal objections to the Schools Adjudicator, it would need to be convened towards the middle or end of May.

It was agreed that the Forum's scheduled meeting in June 2012 be bought forward to May 2012.

3. Local Authority report submitted to Schools Adjudicator

Members considered the report, which confirms to the Adjudicator that Warwickshire complies with the terms of the Admissions Code. Peter Thompson stated that the only issue was around the In-Year Fair Access Protocol, which is being revised to address practical concerns about timeliness of placements and the formula to identify schools.

Observations from members included:

- § The authority's response does not provide any comment on the effectiveness of the protocol, as requested
- § The figures within the report suggest a high overall number of placements compared to the number of places considered
- § Generally, schools are taking places, but there are some notable exceptions that the authority could investigate

It was confirmed that the authority will be meeting its requirement to provide a Choice Advice service via a part-time member of staff working independently of the admissions service. Officers agreed to make this aware to the Portfolio Holder.

4. Number of primary and secondary school application packs sent out / 11+ forms received

Collette Naven-Jones stated that all parents of children eligible for secondary school had been sent an information pack and 11+ registration forms.

The authority had received around 2,000 completed forms, in line with expectations. Invitations for testing had been sent out for two dates in October, to be held at test centres.

Parents of pre-school children have been informed of their eligibility for primary education, and information packs will be sent accordingly. The authority is also targeting parents of children who don't attend pre-schools. Telephone applications are being promoted, alongside the popular web-based process.

Discussion took place about the default search settings of the web-based application system, which can limit the number of schools that appear in the results. Officers agreed to make enquiries with the IT developers to widen the default criteria.

5. Warwickshire's revised In-Year Fair Access Protocol

Officers introduced a draft of the revised protocol, which will be subject to formal consultation with schools. A final version is likely to go before Cabinet for approval.

Members welcomed the addition of Principle 8, which allows for pupils returning to an area where they have previously attended a local school to be re-admitted under terms of the Protocol.

It was also welcomed that the ambiguity has been removed from the principle that parental preference should come first, when places are available.

6. Primary Expansion Programme

Peter Thompson introduced the report, stating there is significant pressure on primary school places in the south and east of the county.

Accurate forecasting systems, based on live birth data and new housing projections, show that this pressure is likely to continue at a steady rate over the next 7 years.

The report outlines planned expansions to primary schools, which will be managed via an increase in admission numbers and, for some schools, an expansion of their building capacity.

Responding to questions about implications on capital spending, officers stated:

- § Uncertainty around central government's capital review means the authority is likely to prioritise capital spending on areas of basic need
- § This will likely be with primary schools rather than secondary schools, given the pressure on places
- § However, the authority does have a fully managed capital programme, and spending on secondary schools for repairs may be financed via PFI schemes

It was confirmed that references to 'possible' expansions in the report apply to schools where local variables could have an effect, such as planned housing developments.

In response to a statement that reception funding could be affected if a planned admission number was not divisible by 30, officers said that the authority is seeking to avoid this wherever possible and develop strategies to overcome the funding issue.

7. Schools moving to Academy status

Craig Pratt updated members on the current number of Secondary schools in Warwickshire that have converted to Academy status (14 of 38).

Of these, only two Academies have not yet bought in to the authority's Admissions Service (Nuneaton Academy and Studley High School). A greater number have not yet bought in to the authority's Admissions Appeals Service.

Officers agreed to consider writing to Academies in order to remind them about the arrangements they need to put in place for appeals.

It was discussed whether an Academy representative should attend the Forum in future. Emma Ford confirmed that, in law, at least one representative from an Academy may attend the Admission Forum.

Officers noted a request that any future updates on Academy conversions should also include updates on school federations.

8. Response to proposed changes to the School Admissions/School Appeals Codes

Members noted the response and discussed the likely release date of the revised Codes.

Kate Edwards stated that the consultation has yielded substantial feedback from responders, who are seeking more clarity within the Codes. This is likely to delay the release of the revised proposals from September 2011 to November/December 2011.

9. Dates and provisional items for future meetings

The next meeting was scheduled for 13 February 2012. Agenda items to include:

- § Election of Chair and Vice Chair
- § Consultation for entry in September 2013
- § First preferences for primary / junior / secondary applications
- § In-Year Admission applications processed to date
- § Children admitted under the In-Year Fair Access Protocol
- § Appeals processed to date
- § Effectiveness of new In-Year Fair Access Protocol
- § Primary Expansion Programme
- § Draft primary and secondary prospectuses / 11+ registration leaflets
- § Admissions Code, Appeals Code and Education Bill
- § Update on Task & Finish Group to look at low numbers of Free School Meal pupils applying for Grammar school places

The meeting closed at 18:00

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Chair