

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM  
HELD ON THURSDAY 17 JUNE 2010 FROM 7.00PM TO 9.00PM**

*Present:-*

**Local Education Authority Representatives:**

Beth Rowland and David Chopping

**Diocesan Representative:**

David Babb, Church of England Representative

**Parent Representative:**

Phiala Mehring

**Representatives from the Local Community**

Patricia Cuss – *Early Years Forum*

**Schools Representatives**

Jean Bateman – *Grazeley CE Aided Primary School*

Peter Lewis – *The Bulmershe School*

Elaine Stewart – *Aldryngton Primary School*

Hilary Winter – *The Piggott CE Aided Secondary School*

*Also present:*

*David Armstrong, Policy and Schools Access Officer*

*Piers Brunning, Service Manager, Children's Services Infrastructure Development*

*Steve Clarke, Tribal Consulting*

*Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer*

*Sue Riddick, Lead Admissions Officer*

*Rachael Wardell, Head of Children's Services Strategy and Partnerships*

**54. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed by Beth Rowland and seconded by Phiala Mehring that David Chopping be appointed as Chairman of the Forum for the remainder of the 2009/2010 academic year.

**RESOLVED:** That David Chopping be appointed as Chairman of the School Admission Forum for the remainder of the 2009/2010 academic year.

**55. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed by Beth Rowland and seconded by David Chopping that Phiala Mehring be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the remainder of the 2009/2010 academic year.

**RESOLVED:** That Phiala Mehring be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the School Admission Forum for the remainder of the 2009/2010 municipal year.

**56. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 10 March 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **57. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Colonel WD Cowan, Paula Montie, and Sharon Jhheent.

## **58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were made by Forum Members:

- Phiala Mehring, governor of St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary School and The Forest School
- Beth Rowland, governor of South Lake Primary & Highwood Primary Schools

## **59. UPDATE ON INFANT TO JUNIOR TRANSFER SEPTEMBER 2010, ENTRY TO PRIMARY 2010/2011 AND PRIMARY TO SECONDARY TRANSFER SEPTEMBER 2010**

Sue Riddick introduced the report as set out on Agenda pages 6 to 13 which detailed information regarding the allocation of places for:

- children entering infant/primary schools into Foundation Stage 2, (Rising 5's) in September 2010;
- children transferring from infant to junior school in September 2010;
- children transferring from junior/primary to secondary school;
- year 9 children transferring to alternative schools due to the closure of Ryeish Green School.

The Forum was reminded that the Local Education Authority, (LEA) operated a coordinated admission scheme with other LEA for admissions to secondary school, but this system was not yet in place for applications for primary education although it would be for admissions in 2011/2012.

Under the coordinated secondary arrangements, parents completed a single Common Application Form, (CAF) via their home local authority, the information was shared with other appropriate Admission Authority and parents received a single offer. In contrast, with primary admissions, parents could apply separately to their home Admission Authority and Admission Authorities for schools outside of their home area. In theory this meant that it was possible to receive multiple offers for places from different Admission Authorities. It was clarified that for admissions to the 2011/2012 academic year onwards the coordinated system would be applied to primary admissions also.

The Chairman referred to decision taken by the General Manager for Children's Services to approach three schools, The Colleton Primary School, The Hawthorns Primary School and Lambs Lane Primary School to admit a limited number of children above the schools published admission number. Rachel Wardle clarified that the measure was a temporary one to meet demand for the 2010/2011 academic year and that the schools that had agreed to admit above their admission numbers would either have additional temporary classrooms or planned extensions would be augmented. Discussions between the Council and the schools concerned were ongoing.

Hilary Winter commented that the additional demand for places in the North of the Borough would eventually impact upon the Piggott Secondary School as the Colleton Primary School fell within the designated area for the Piggott.

In response to a question, the Forum was informed that a number of factors had lead additional demand for places. Data on births had indicated a decline in the number of children in previous years, but it was thought that this had been offset by greater than predicted movement into the area and a reduction in the number of parents opting for independent education.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **60. DRAFT LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORT TO THE OFFICE OF THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR**

The Forum considered a report, (Agenda pages 14 to 34) which set out the draft return of the Council to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The Panel was informed that the Council was obliged to produce the report annually by 30 June following a template supplied by the Department for Education. The draft had been brought to the Forum for information and to allow for comment.

In introducing the draft, Sue Riddick commented that a large number of people and organisations had contributed in supplying information and she paid special tribute to the co-operation given by Voluntary Aided schools within the Borough.

Hilary Winter, Headteacher of the Piggott CE School referred to the comments of the Council in respect of admission arrangements that had been determined by 15 April 2010 for implementation in September 2011 and specifically the comments made in relation to admission arrangements for the Piggott CE School. She commented that whilst she fully understood the obligation on the Council to refer matters of apparent concern she did feel that some of the comments were slightly unfair and set out the context of the School's actions with respect of the matters set out on Agenda page 24.

In the discussion that followed, Sue Riddick and Rachel Wardell commented that it was accepted that the School Admission Code could be interpreted in different ways and a key motivation in bringing these issue to the Adjudicator's attention was to seek clarification.

Further discussion took place regarding the interpretation of paragraph 1.18 of the School Admissions Code which set out the criteria by which schools could admit above their published admission number and its applicability to year groups other than the first form of entry. Peter Lewis raised the question of whether a school might be able to make an in year reduction to its published admission number in the situation where year groups were not being fully allocated. This could have significant cost implications on school budgets. It was felt that clarification could be sought on this issue.

David Chopping commented that questions within the return related to largely historical data that by the time it was submitted was quite often out of date and so was limited accuracy. He questioned whether it was possible to add additional comment if there had been substantial changes in data from the period asked about within a particular question.

Sue Riddick commented that a proscribed template had to be followed in completing the return, but the possibility of making additional comments could be explored further.

**RESOLVED:** That the report and comments made be noted.

## **61. SECONDARY ADMISSIONS REVIEW**

The Forum considered a report, (Agenda pages 35 to 55) which set out work undertaken to date by the Secondary Admissions Review Board in reviewing:

- the Council's criteria for admission to secondary school;
- options for possible changes to the Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh designated areas; and
- options for possible changes to the designated areas for secondary schools within Wokingham town and the southern areas of the Borough.

Steve Clarke, on behalf of Tribal Consulting, introduced the report and the various options for change to the Forum. He commented that the report had been previously considered by the Secondary Admissions Review Board on 10 June 2010 and that following Member endorsement of the consultation proposals, wider consultation on the proposals would take place around the period from the end of July to end of September 2010.

The Forum was updated that following the Coalition Government's announcement of the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, it was now considered premature to undertake further work on educational needs arising from the possible submission of the Council four proposed Strategic Development Locations.

The Forum was reminded that the review had been undertaken within the context of the high levels of achievement by schools within the Borough, high levels of demand for places and a system that was operating close to capacity. Both the existing secondary admissions criteria and school designated areas had been inherited by Wokingham Borough Council from Berkshire County Council in 1998.

The Forum was taken through the reasoning behind each of the possible suggested options for change to the existing secondary admission criteria as follows:

- 1) *That if a change is made to a designated area; the siblings in the former designated area continue to have priority:*
- 2) *that sibling priority be widened to:*
  - a) *any sibling within 3 miles of the school by radial distance or*
  - b) *any sibling living within any designated area for any Wokingham school. If B(2) is adopted, criterion E would be removed and there would not be the need for transitional protection in recommendation a;*
- 3) *that designated areas or shared areas remain the main criterion for allocating places after siblings*
- 4) *that a collective view be expressed on the merits of random allocation as a tie-breaker*
- 5) *that the linked school criterion(F) be removed from the scheme*
- 6) *that the single-sex/coeducational criterion(G)be removed from the scheme*

The Forum then considered consultation proposals on a number of changes to existing designated areas. It was clarified that in principle they should be designed so as to best

reflect where population was located and reflect boundaries such as major roads and railway lines. Designated areas could not simply be drawn on the basis of a circle round a particular school.

Following the review of designated areas it was suggested that consultation take place on the option of amending the designated areas of Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh Schools and secondary schools for the Wokingham Town area and south west of the Borough. The conclusions of the review and the reasoning behind the proposals were set out in detail within Annex C, (pages 42 to 51) and Annex D, (pages 52 to 55).

With regard to the Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh designated areas the Forum was informed that in summary it was proposed to consult upon the option of bringing those parts of Lower Earley currently within the designated area of the Bulmershe School and the Holt/Forest Schools into the designated area of Maiden Erlegh School. The reasoning behind this option was that it would create a designated based upon the community of Earley and Lower Earley. However, as it was recognised that there would be an excess of potential pupils within the designated area criteria, two tie breaker options were set out based upon random allocation and a geographical or distance based tie breaker. Finally designated area pupils who were unable to secure a place or siblings outside of the designated area would be given priority for an alternative school, effectively creating a shared designated area.

In addition to these possible changes the Whiteknights area of Earley would be reallocated to the Bulmershe designated area.

Peter Lewis commented that he had sat on the Secondary Admission Review Board and that from the perspective of the Bulmershe, the proposals had the effect of on the one hand lowering the number of potential pupils at Bulmershe, but on the other to potentially increase numbers. He commented that it was important to have a clear picture of the demand for places at Wokingham schools from pupils living within Reading Borough and the effects of the possible changes on the social economic mix of pupils.

It was also reported to the Forum that the Reading Admission Forum had considered the proposals and had emphasised the need for east Reading residents to continue to have access to neighbouring Wokingham Borough Council provision.

With regard to proposed consultation on possible changes to designated areas of secondary schools within the Wokingham Town and areas to the south west of the Borough, the Forum was advised that the possible options were:

- 1) a combined designated area for Wokingham and the South West;
- 2) a limited reduction in the designated area for the Holt/Forest to ensure all could be admitted
- 3) no change with a variation to 3b to remove the Lower Earley area;

Steve Clark commented that future unknowns could be an argument for the status quo, but pointed out the need to address adjudicator concerns about the suitability of current arrangements.

During discussion of the proposals, no objections were made to moving ahead with wider consultation on the options.

Steve Clark also raised the issue of the number of possible preferences available to parents as part of the secondary admission process. Currently Wokingham operated a system of three preferences, but a number of other local authorities including Reading Borough Council and Slough Borough operated a system whereby parents could list a maximum of four preferences. The reason behind this was to take account of parental preferences for selective schools and to seek to increase parental preference. It was suggested that the option of moving from three to four preferences could be added as an option within wider consultation if it was felt appropriate by the Forum. Members of the Forum supported this proposal.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) The Forum supports wider consultation upon the options contained within report;
- 2) That the consultation includes the option of increasing the number of maximum parental preferences for admission from three to four.

## **62. CUSTOMER SERVICE FEEDBACK ON ENTRY TO PRIMARY; INFANT TO JUNIOR AND PRIMARY TO SECONDARY ADMISSIONS**

The Forum considered a report, (Agenda pages 56 to 69) which set out customer service feedback from parent's in respect of their experiences of the admissions process. Questionnaires had been circulated via the on-line admissions process and as part of application packs.

Sue Riddick commented that the Forum had previously asked for information on parent feedback and report that in general the feedback received had been positive. Feedback received had drawn attention to a number of areas of possible improvement relating to on-line admission service, but it was highlighted to the Forum that on-line system was operated by a third party provider, Capita. Improvements were scheduled, but emphasis was presently being given to alterations required as a result of moving to a co-ordinated primary admissions programme.

Various members of the Forum commented that they were pleased with the feedback received, but that they were conscious of the need to ensure that work involved in collating the information did not become too onerous for Officers. After discussion it was felt that reporting on a three year period would be adequate unless any major issue came to light in the interim.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) the report and consultation responses be noted;
- 2) future reporting take place on the basis of a three year reporting period.

## **63. SCHOOL PREFERENCE ADVICE SERVICE**

The Forum considered a report, (Agenda pages 71 to 84) which set out the work of the School Preference Advice Service. The Forum was reminded that the role of the service was to provide free and impartial advice to families within the Borough who were applying

for admission school. Since 2008, it had been a legislative requirement to provide a Choice Advice Service, (known locally as the School Preference Advice Service).

Sue Riddick commented that demand for the service was growing and feedback from schools and customers who had used the service was good.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**64. UPDATE ON IN YEAR ADMISSIONS ACROSS THE BOROUGH**

The Forum considered a report, (Agenda pages 85 to 88) which set out an update on numbers in schools by year groups and in year admissions.

Various members of the Forum noted the information within the report concerning moves into the area and asked whether any similar information was available on moves out of the area. Peter Lewis commented that he felt it would be helpful if data on in year school admission could be included with the Schools' Census information. Sue Riddick indicated that the practicalities of these suggestions could be looked into.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**65. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The dates of future meetings of the Forum on 23 November 2010, 15 February 2011 and 15 March 2011 were noted.

**66. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES IS URGENT**

Rachel Wardell informed the Forum that to date, no reply had been received from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth to the letter setting out the Forums concerns relating to the status of Looked After Children within Catholic schools. It was intended to follow the letter up.

*These are the Minutes of a meeting of the School Admissions Forum*

*If you need help in understanding this document or if you would like a copy of it in large print please contact one of our Team Support Officers.*