

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2012 FROM 7.00PM TO 9.05PM**

Present:-

Local Education Authority Representatives:

None present

Diocesan Representatives

David Babb

Parent Representatives:

Phiala Mehring

Representatives from the Local Community

Anita Birtles – *Early Years Forum*

Captain Rob Gisby – *Arborfield Garrison*

– *Other Faith Groups*

Schools Representatives

Peter Lewis – *The Bulmershe School*

Elaine Stewart – *Aldryngton Primary School*

Jean Bateman – *Grazeley CE Aided Primary School*

Also present:-

David Armstrong, Policy and Schools Access Officer

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

Brian Grady, Strategic Commissioner, Children, Young People and Families

Tricia Harcourt, Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That David Babb be elected as Chairman of the School Admissions Forum for the remainder of the 2012/13 academic year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Hilary Winter be appointed as Vice Chairman of the School Admissions Forum for the remainder of the 2012/13 academic year.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 March 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Hilary Winter (The Piggott School), Beth Rowland (Local Authority Representative), Pauline Helliard-Symons (Local Authority Representative).

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION STRATEGY 2013-15

The Forum received and considered a report giving an update on the development of the Primary School Provision Strategy for 2013-15.

Brain Grady presented the report and explained that there had been extensive consultation with parents and the wider community over the last six months about the Strategy for providing the additional school places that will be required for 2013/14. Having identified 'hot spots' of rising pupil numbers and pressure on schools within some parts of the Borough for the 2013/2014 academic year, the Strategy was prepared following the significant consultation process which included public meetings and workshops in the affected areas. Out of that process, local consultation groups have been set up to continue the communication on each proposal.

The Strategy has been adopted by Executive, and on 18 December at a Special Executive meeting the Action Plan with more details of the proposals to create 150 new places for 2013/14 will be considered. These are:

- a new school in Charvil, run by The Piggott School
- a new school on two sites in Wokingham Town at Smiths Walk and Winnersh Farm; although no providers have yet come forward;
- an extra class at Shinfield Infant School
- additional provision at Grazeley Primary School – negotiations continuing
- primary provision at Oakbank School

Brian Grady reported that a lot of work has been going on at senior officer level over the last few months, with construction firms who would be able to provide buildings rapidly in time for 2013 entry.

In answer to Members' questions Brain Grady made the following points:

- if a new school is created it has to be set up by an academy or as a free school and there have not been many providers coming forward;
- the Evendons Free School group are looking to set up a primary school, but this is not in one of the identified 'hot spot' areas;
- in relation to links with adjoining Local Authorities, Reading have sufficient plans in place, but there are concerns about schools being swamped by people from adjoining areas. The key relationship is with Reading where a lot of work is being done at secondary level; information is also being shared with Hampshire;
- at secondary level, maintaining the viability of Oakbank and Emmbrook will be critical; a secondary strategy is being prepared and two experts have been called in to help;
- the increase in primary pupils will have an impact at secondary level in a few years, and we are working to make sure there will be sufficient capacity;
- there is a cross border admissions group, which has discussions on sub regional working; although Hampshire does not have much interest in the situation in the north of their county as it is not one of their problem areas;
- there is less money from Central Government for new school buildings, with 'kit built' schools being the new trend, which although basic have some good designs;
- parents, particularly those in the 'hotspot' areas, are being kept informed by various means: a Facebook network; email distribution lists set up following consultation events; information sent via schools; press coverage; additional consultation sessions before applications are submitted;

Comment was made that it seems parents are confused and will be applying for places without knowing where places are available. Brian indicated that parents will be told about

the situation. Also that some parents are assuming that they may get their transport costs provided, but Brian indicated there would be no change to the current policy. The Authority was looking to develop more local schools which should reduce the need for transport.

RESOLVED: That the report on the Primary School Strategy be noted.

7. CONSULTATION ON 2014-15 ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND COORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES

The Forum received and considered a report setting out the proposed consultation on the 2014/15 proposed changes to the admission arrangements for voluntary controlled and community schools and the co-ordinated admissions schemes set out on Agenda pages 26 to 33 which will be included in the consultation.

The local authority's consultation on the proposed admission arrangements for 2014/15 will take place for a minimum eight week period which will be concluded by 1 March 2013. The consultation will be extended to schools, admission authorities within the relevant area, adjoining local authorities, the Diocesan authorities, parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen and any other persons within the relevant area who in the opinion of the admissions authority have an interest in the proposed arrangements.

David Armstrong explained the rationale for the proposed changes to be included in the consultation which were as follows:

Oversubscription Criteria

Criterion B – Serious, medical, physical or psychological grounds for admission

This is used in exceptional cases and the proposed revision is to include 'social need'.

There were no objections from the Forum in relation to the inclusion of 'social need' in Criterion B

Criterion F – Denominational Grounds – Primary Schools only

This criterion applies only to applications for Voluntary Controlled primary schools and is the lowest specific criterion. The Oxford Diocese and schools involved have taken the view that the ethos of these schools is to serve the whole of their communities. The proposed revision is to delete this criterion.

There were no objections from the Forum in relation to the proposed deletion of Criterion F

Criteria C and E – Sibling Criteria for Primary Schools

There had been strong views expressed by a small group of parents that priority be given to all siblings whether they were in the designated area for the school or not. This would involve deleting Criterion E – Siblings not living in the designated area – and in Criterion C deleting the phrase "whose permanent home address is in the school's designated area and"

Although this would prevent the problem of siblings being allocated to different schools, this would mean that some siblings would have priority over first or only children living in the designated area. These children would not have priority for admission to any other school and may be disadvantaged if they were not able to access their local school. There were also strong views to keep these criteria.

The changes to the sibling criteria have not been included in the draft consultation, but such a change has not been ruled out. The possibility of the changes has been included in the consultation to promote discussion by all interested parties.

There were no objections from the Forum in relation to the proposed inclusion of the possibility of changes to the Sibling Criteria C and E in relation to Primary Schools for discussion.

Admission Numbers

No changes are proposed at this stage. The suggested increase to school places in 2013/14 will be consulted on separately.

Designated Areas

No changes to individual schools' designated areas are proposed, but the consultation includes proposals to combine designated areas into a single shared area for:

- The Colleton Primary and Polehampton CE Infant and Junior Schools
- Walter Infant, St Paul's Junior, Wescott Infant and Westende Junior Schools

If the proposals to expand primary school provision in Winnersh and Shinfield/Spencers Wood areas, are approved, modifications to current designated areas may be necessary.

There were no objections from the Forum in relation to the proposed shared designated areas

Co-ordinated Schemes

There are no major changes proposed to the schemes apart from changes to the dates, which are set out on Agenda pages 30 and 31. It is proposed to retain the local scheme for coordinated in-year applications for all schools. There may be re-wording of the arrangements for changes of preference, but this is subject to a Schools Adjudicator adjudication on a related case in another Local Authority. The facility for online acceptance for online applications will be included.

There were no objections from the Forum in relation to the proposed changes to the Coordinated Admissions Schemes.

RESOLVED That the proposed changes to the Admission Arrangements for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools, and the Co-ordinated Schemes for 2014/15 as set out on Agenda pages 27 to 32, be included in the consultation.

8. ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

The Forum received and considered the copies of the admission arrangements, submitted by the following voluntary aided schools and academies, some of which would be subject to further changes:

- All Saints CE Aided Primary – draft only, further changes to be included
- Earley St Peter's CE Aided Primary – draft only, further changes to be included
- Sonning CE Aided Primary - draft only, further changes to be included
- Shinfield St Mary's CE Aided Junior School
- The Piggott School

The other schools' policies are still being prepared and will be circulated later.

RESOLVED: That the submitted admission arrangements for Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies be noted.

9. FUTURE ROLE OF THE ADMISSIONS FORUM

David Armstrong pointed out that there was no longer a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to have a School Admissions Forum and some Authorities have abolished their Forums. Brain Grady indicated that he had seen the usefulness of the Forum and felt that its valuable role as a place for communication and challenge should continue, possibly with increased local engagement and cross boundary working.

Members were asked for their opinion on keeping the Forum, but possibly in a different format. Comments made were as follows:

- need to engage with free schools and academies;
- there is expertise within the membership which should not be lost;
- the discussions with representatives of other groups on wider strategic issues are valuable;
- the ability to raise specific issues which are then discussed and resolved has been important for the Garrison families;
- as Early Years representatives we value the opportunity to be involved in discussions and preparation of plans. Early Years settings are where parents have first contact and we work closely with them, so it is useful to understand what is happening.
- Headteachers report back to their groups and are interested in having more information on new plans;
- the breadth of discussion and opportunity to challenge is important; the group provides a wider view;
- the possibility of joint meetings with neighbouring authorities was suggested; or having an event for Forum members across the sub-region.

Peter Lewis announced that he was retiring as Headteacher of Bulmershe School at the end of this term, so he would suggest to the Secondary Heads Federation that the new Headteacher, Emma Reynolds, should be his replacement on the Admissions Forum. He was thanked for his contribution to the Forum.

10. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The dates for meetings of the Forum for the remainder of the municipal year were noted as follows:

- 13 February 2013
- 13 March 2013

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

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