

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 2 November 2016

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON 14 JUNE 2016 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.35 PM**

Councillors

Richard Dolinski Beth Rowland

Diocesan Representatives

David Babb Church of England Diocesan Representative

Governor Representatives

Edward Hunter Emmbrook Junior School

Representatives from the Local Community

Patricia Cuss Early Years Forum

Schools Representatives

Nicci Morris
Celia Thatcher
Sue Runciman

Hillside Primary School
Grazeley CE Aided Primary
Shinfield St Marys Junior School

Also Present

Piers Brunning
Luciane Bowker Service Manager Policy, Strategy and Partnerships
Democratic Services Officer

18. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Celia Thatcher, Grazeley CE Aided Primary School representative.

19. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Beth Rowland was appointed Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2015/2016 academic year.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Forum was informed that a training session had not been organised for this meeting because the new School Admissions Code had not yet been released. Also, the Fair Access Protocol was in the process of being revised, once this was ready it would be brought to the Forum for discussion.

A training session would be organised in due course once the new code was adopted.

21. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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22. ANNUAL REPORT TO OFFICE OF THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR

Piers Brunning, Service Manager Policy, Strategy and Partnerships invited the members of the Forum to engage in a discussion of the main items of the Local Authority Report to the Schools Adjudicator. A template of the report was set out in Agenda pages 15-28.

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Piers went through the questions in the template and during the discussion of the report the following points were made:

- The report was being completed and would be ready for submission by the end of June;
- The Forum agreed that there were no concerns relating to the admission arrangements for Looked After Children (LAC) or previously LAC;
- There were also no concerns over the admissions of children with disabilities. Piers informed that the Local Authority was in the process of setting up two new specialist units, one in Emmbrook for ear impairment and one in St Crispins for Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
- The Headteachers present described the increasing difficulty in obtaining Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) for children, even when they believed their needs were very severe. This was disappointing as it took a long time for staff to prepare the cases. A Headteacher reported that it was more cost effective to use the school's own budget to meet the child's needs than go through the process of applying for a statement, which was a lengthy process with no guarantee of success;
- The Forum noted that it was also difficult to secure funding for children who were just below the level to secure an EHCP;
- Members expressed concern that going forward, schools would not be able to meet the needs of children within the current arrangements of reduced funding for Special Educational Needs;
- Members agreed that the co-ordination of admissions had worked well, the Local Authority provided this service to most schools in the Borough;
- David Babb stated that the government was aware of the issue of multiple offers (where schools co-ordinated their own admissions). This was not a problem in Wokingham at the moment because Wokingham co-ordinated the admissions process for most schools in the Borough. David also stated that it was much easier for parents to apply just once rather than having to apply to several different schools;
- Members noted that there was potential for children to be out of school for longer if the co-ordination arrangements weren't managed by the Local Authority;
- David Babb knew of other authorities that had stopped co-ordinating the admissions for schools who were now going back to being the central point of co-ordination because this was a better system;
- It was disappointing to note that some parents were still reluctant to put down more than one preference in their applications, particularly in the Earley area. It would be helpful if parents in the Earley area considered putting Earley St Peters as one of their preferences to avoid being diverted to schools much further away;
- Piers reported that there was less pressure for secondary school places this year. This was due to a number of factors, for example the opening of Maiden Erlegh Reading, Bulmershe improvements and the new secondary school in Arborfield;
- Regarding the school admission appeals process, most schools in the Borough used the services provided by Wokingham Borough Council, as a traded service;
- Piers informed that there were ongoing discussions within the Council about splitting the Admissions team into two. Part of the team would move to the Customer Services department to deal with the operational aspect of admissions; the other half of the team would be involved with the more strategic side of admissions;
- The Forum expressed great concern about the idea of splitting the admissions team. It was felt that the system worked very well as it was. Members feared mistakes could

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- be made by inexperienced officers in Costumer Services and it would be the schools who would have to deal with the consequences;
- Members emphasised that some of the parents' queries over the phone were very complex and it took a long time to train admissions officers;
 - Piers stated that going forward people would be encouraged to use the online services more. Piers admitted that there were risks in this strategy, but new ways of working were being explored;
 - Members were informed that there had been significant changes in staff within the admissions team. Notably, the retirement of Sue Riddick represented a great loss of expertise. Piers stated that the senior officers were relatively stable and no changes were expected at that level;
 - It was noted that there were a number of new schools being created in the Borough. These schools would be academies which were their own admission authorities. Piers was confident that the academy trusts were experienced and would be compliant with the proper admissions processes;
 - The Forum noted the ongoing issue of monitoring fraudulent residence or the use of gamesmanship to obtain school places. The Earley area was of particular concern, the Local Authority was looking at ways in which to write a policy to deal with this situation;
 - Piers affirmed that once a place had been offered to a child, it was very difficult to withdraw it. Also there was no legislation to stop people from moving after the allocation of a place, the address was only relevant at the point of application;
 - Some Members expressed frustration with the current position on summer born children to delaying their entry to school. This had an impact on the school's budget and it also prevented other children from joining the school. David Babb informed that this was one of the areas that was going to be reviewed by the new Admissions Code, as the government recognised there were issues with the admissions of summer born children;
 - Some Headteachers had noticed that when parents weren't offered their first preference of school they were more likely to delay entry in the hope of obtaining their first preference in the next year;
 - Headteachers stated that if a number of parents decided to delay their child's entry to school, this could have severely implicate the school's budget;
 - Patricia Cuss stated that some summer born children were not emotionally ready to start school and would benefit from delaying their entry, and this should also be considered;
 - Piers stated that there was concern that by delaying entry to school, these children would not receive their entitlement of 12 years of statutory education;
 - David Babb stated that there could be a consultation before the draft code was written;

The Forum agreed that it had been useful to be able to discuss and contribute to the report before its completion and submission.

RESOLVED That the final report be included in the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

23. ALLOCATION OF PLACES FOR 2016/17 ACADEMIC YEAR

The Forum received the Allocation of Places for 2016/17 Academic Year report which was set out on Agenda pages 29-49.

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Piers stated that the main area of concern was Key Stage 1 as there was a very small number of surplus places in the Borough. New places had been created but more places were needed.

This year a lot of parents were unable to secure a school place at Lambs Lane Primary School. Piers believed this was the result of long term development now bringing in new families into the area.

A new school was being created in Shinfield in the Reish Green site; this would create 30 school places. Members asked what name was going to be given to this new school and suggested it should not include '*Shinfield*' so not to cause confusion with Shinfield St Mary's CE Junior School and Shinfield Infant & Nursery School. Piers informed that it was Floreat Trust who was responsible for this new school and they could choose their own name.

Beth Rowland stated that Emmbrook School was disappointed that the admissions prediction relating to their new intake in September was not very accurate. They had in fact received a lower number of applications than the number anticipated by the LA. This had implications in their budget planning.

David Babb explained that it was very difficult to predict admission numbers as there were too many variables.

Piers reported that there were sufficient surplus secondary school places this year. The opening of the new secondary school, Bohunt had created additional school places. Although there was surplus secondary school capacity this year, it was believed these places were needed for the next few years and the LA had to be prepared for it.

Edward Hunter pointed out that Bohunt only needed to create 75 places, however Emmbrook was having to cut back on already established numbers.

It was noted that Emmbrook was going to have a new Headteacher, this created uncertainty for parents. It would take a few years for the new Headteacher to build up trust with parents. This would affect Emmbrook's admission numbers.

Piers stated that the admissions numbers varied year on year.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

24. CURRENT SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS

Piers reported that it was possible that Loddon Primary's designated area may need to be changed, but this was not certain yet.

David Babb informed that he believed that the new Admissions Code would address two issues in particular:

- In-year co-ordination schemes and
- Summer born children admission

The Forum was in agreement that there were no concerns for the admission arrangements for 2018/19, but there could be many changes in 2019/20.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

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25. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates for planned future meetings of the Forum up to 2016 be noted as follows:

- 2 November 2016 – nearer the time the Officers would liaise with the Chairman to decide if there was enough business to conduct this meeting.
- 11 January 2017