

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON 6 JUNE 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Parent / Governor Representatives

Fiona Hayward St Teresa's Catholic Primary

Representatives from the Local Community

Patricia Cuss Early Years Forum

Schools Representatives

Ben Godber
Amanda Woodfin
Sue Runciman
Celia Thatcher

Bohunt School
The Bulmershe School
Shinfield St Marys Junior School
Grazeley CE Aided Primary

Also Present

Luciane Bowker Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place) Senior Specialist

9. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Sue Runciman, Shinfield St Mary's Junior School Headteacher was appointed Vice-chairman of School Admissions Forum for the remainder of 2017/18 academic year.

In the absence of the Chairman Sue Runciman chaired the meeting.

10. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from David Babb, Louisa Gurney and Councillors Prue Bray and Graham Howe.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below and signed by the Chairman.

That the spelling of the Bohunt School Headteacher be corrected to read Ben Godber.

Matters arising

Online applications

Sue Runciman stated that she had asked children's centres to be available to help parents that needed assistance with online applications, and that they had agreed to do so.

Sue Runciman suggested that the term 'pack' should not be used in relation to online applications as this could be confusing to parents.

Sibling criteria

Ben Godber asked for clarification in respect to bullet point nine on page seven of the agenda which stated that the Local Authority had been asked to review the admission arrangements for Bohunt School in relation to the sibling criteria.

Piers Brunning, Strategic Commissioning (People and Place) Senior Specialist agreed to look into it and report back.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS 2018 REPORT

The Forum considered the report which was set out in agenda pages 11-66.

Piers Brunning informed that the number of applications for primary school places had declined markedly (-3%) compared to 2017/18. This reflected the reduction in the number of children born to Wokingham resident mothers in the year 2013/14 feeding into the 2018 Reception cohort compared to earlier years. This was despite very high levels of house building in the borough bringing additional children in.

Piers Brunning stated that due to this decline every school cluster had capacity, something that had not been seen for some years. Overall 10% of Reception places were unfilled. This had helped ensure that a high proportion of first preferences were achieved and fewer children required home to school transport. This was positive for parents but challenging for the schools with lower numbers.

Piers Brunning explained that this decline in primary numbers was a national phenomenon and not exclusive to Wokingham.

Piers explained that the only area where surplus figures did not reach double figures was Woodley (9 surplus places). Woodley was an area that had seen high levels of housebuilding in recent years and current roll projections indicated further work may be required in this area.

Piers informed that secondary numbers had risen significantly (3% or 49 offers), this led to a 7% surplus capacity overall.

Piers stated that while both north and south planning areas had surplus capacity, in the north this was only 1.5% of capacity. However, there were significant levels of admissions of students from Reading from outside the cross-board designated areas, so this did not necessarily indicate that additional capacity was required in the near future. The southern area had significantly more surplus levels.

Piers pointed out that it was likely that Wokingham Borough would have had insufficient places on offer day without Bohunt School. The new school had brought in some students from outside the borough and Wokingham Borough resident students who would otherwise have attended out of borough schools, but it is unlikely the combined effect would have been 81 fewer applications (the deficit achieved by subtracting the number of allocations on offer day from the current total of Year 7 places, less Bohunt's 240 places).

Piers Brunning informed that the most affected secondary schools with unfilled places were Forest and Emmbrook.

During discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- It was expected that demand for primary school places would increase, especially in view of the high number of new house builds;

- Wokingham was a place that tended to attract young families.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

14. DRAFT REPORT TO THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR 2018

The Forum considered the Draft Report to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) which was set out in agenda pages 17-32.

Piers Brunning stated that the Council was required to submit a report to the Schools Adjudicator every year by 30 June. The report contained in the agenda was based on a template issued by the OSA. The report enabled the OSA to get a snapshot view of the functioning of the admissions system and of the view of local authorities on what school admissions perceived to be key issues.

Piers Brunning invited the Forum to consider the current drafting, propose changes and contribute their views to areas where drafting had yet to commence.

Piers Brunning stated that some of the themes were repeats from previous years, but there seemed to be a particular interest this year in relation to Looked After Children (LAC) and previously LAC and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Sue Runciman was surprised with the definition of 'in-year' in the bottom of page 21. Piers Brunning agreed to question it with the OSA;
- Sue Runciman stated that she would be interested to read the final report and see the examples of good and bad practice;
- Piers Brunning stated that the report would be available online;
- Members of the Forum did not agree with the answers given to the questions in relation to the provision of education to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Members unanimously agreed that there were insufficient specialist places in the borough for children with disabilities;
- Amanda Woodfin stated that she had received 6 children in Year 7 with significant SEN, for whom there were no Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP), who in her opinion should have had EHCPs, it was difficult to support these children. In response to a question Amanda stated that the primary settings where these children came from (which was cross border between Reading and Wokingham) were aware of their needs but perhaps did not have the resources to apply for an EHCP, especially in view of the fact that it was now very difficult to meet the threshold for obtaining an EHCP;
- Patricia Cuss stated that SEN children were often identified at Early Years settings, but it was a struggle to get the right level of support. In her opinion even when funding was granted, this was so minimal that it was not worth applying for;
- Sue Runciman stated that it was not cost effective for a primary schools to send a member of staff to a number of meetings knowing that it was very unlikely that they would obtain the support that was needed (unless the needs were severe), the threshold for getting an EHCP was very high and this was discouraging primary schools from applying;
- Patricia Cuss stated that SEN children were just about managed at Early Years stage because the staff levels at Early Years was higher, but 'just managing' was not good enough and she was very concerned that such children would struggle in the next phase of their education;

- Piers Brunning asked if the support needed was for diagnosis and placements and whether there was a role in getting additional support for getting children ready for the next phase of education;
- Sue Runciman stated that children who were known to have additional needs and could not access the normal curriculum, needed to be assessed differently, therefore within the settings there needed to be a provision of places that did not impact in the child's emotional needs as well as their ability to develop to be happy individuals. In the context they were in, inevitably these children would become unhappy and their behaviour would be likely to worsen as a result. They become unsettled and sad as they saw the growing gap between themselves and their peers;
- Sue Runciman stated that she had a child coming into her school whose needs meant that she should not be placed in a mainstream school, however there was no available place for this child in a specialist school within the borough; this meant her school would face significant challenges in being able to meet this child's needs;
- Amanda Woodfin stated that it was important to have early diagnosis and support;
- Patricia Cuss stated that she had a child in her establishment who she knew needed help. This child was on the waiting list to be assessed by Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), however the waiting list was 18 months;
- Patricia Cuss pointed out that by not meeting the needs of SEN children at an early stage, the difficulties would increase as the child got older;
- Members agreed that more specialist spaces in schools such as Addington and Foundry were needed, and that in the absence of such places, settings such as Foundry College and Addington should be given extra support in enabling them to do outreach work with schools in the area, supporting them in meeting the needs of individuals for whom mainstream settings might not be appropriate;
- The Forum concluded, with concern, that children were being inappropriately placed in mainstream schools, there was insufficient support for schools and insufficient places in specialist schools;
- The Forum felt that this issue should be taken through the relevant channels to raise awareness of the problem. Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CSO&S) were going to invite CAMHS to one of their meetings, and that there may be an opportunity to pass on the Forum's concern to CSO&S; (*Subsequently Luciane Bowker advised that it may be more effective to submit a report outlining the concerns mentioned above to the Health and Wellbeing Board*)
- Patricia Cuss noted that in the past parents did not want their child labelled with a statement, however parents now seemed to want a label so that help could be provided.

In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that the Local Authority had sought legal advice in relation to the Published Admission Number (PAN) and found that PANs only apply for the normal year of entry (Year 7) and not for subsequent years. However, the expectation was that schools would admit up to their PAN in all subsequent year groups.

Ben Godber explained in response to part of the report that Bohunt School had grown but the Local Authority had failed to provide the additional funding that had been agreed. Bohunt had set a PAN of 180 and was due to be funded for 180, but when only 109 places were filled the Local Authority said that it was immoral to fund it for 180 bearing in mind the surplus spaces in other schools, and the school agreed to have its funding reduced to 150, subject to a review if the numbers grew rapidly. However, when the school became full the Local Authority refused to give the initially agreed guaranteed funding to 180, and that was the reason the school had refused to admit to 180. Piers Brunning agreed to amend

the answer in relation to PAN to take into account Ben Godber's comments and the context of the school.

In response to a question in relation to the advantages in the Local Authority coordinating in-year school admissions to Piers stated that if the Local Authority were not to coordinate admissions there was nothing stopping well informed parents from applying to several schools and holding on to places until they made a decision. This would disadvantage less informed parents.

The Forum expressed concern that the Fair Access Protocol (FAP) had not yet been agreed. The following comments were made in relation to FAP:

- Secondary schools were being consulted about FAP but it had not yet been agreed;
- Sue Runciman believed that the FAP for primaries also had not yet been agreed, although there had been some discussion about it and she believed that it was in hand;
- Amanda Woodfin stated that in the past there used to be regular FAP meetings, which sometimes discussed managed moves, she thought they were useful meetings;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning informed that school admissions was now under a generic customer services delivery team. This was as a result of recent re-organisation changes within the Council, there was no longer a dedicated school admissions team with a dedicated manager;
- Members were concerned that the generic customer services delivery team would not be experienced enough to pick out applications that should go to FAP;
- Piers Brunning pointed out that FAP only applied to a small number of children for whom a place could not be offered through the normal procedure, for example for twice excluded children;
- Amanda Woodfin was concerned that without a FAP schools might end up having to take on an unfair amount of challenging children;
- Piers Brunning explained that the parents' legal right to express a preference for a school was unconstrained;
- Piers Brunning stated that due to the recent re-structure within the Council it was not clear where the support for FAP was placed.

Piers Brunning stated that there had been an issue in the Earley area in that there had been insufficient places for children within their designated area. These children were disadvantaged in applying for other local schools because they were outside the designated areas of the next closest school. Piers asked the Forum for their views in respect of adding a criteria to address such cases. The general feeling of the Forum was that it would not be fair to add a criteria for these cases.

In response to a question Piers Brunning confirmed that there was no legal requirement for parents to inform/ register with the Local Authority in respect of home educating their children. Piers stated that education was compulsory but going to school was not. Members of the Forum were surprised with this information which did not seem to them to sit well with either Children Missing Education or Safeguarding policies. Luciane Bowker informed that the CSO&S had received a comprehensive report about Elective Home Education at its meeting on 23 January 2018 which was available in the Council's website.

Members pointed out that some parents used elective home education as a way to avoid permanent exclusion. Sue Runciman also pointed out that it was very challenging for schools when parents who had elected to home educate their children, finding themselves

unable to do so and becoming disillusioned with the process, decided to reintroduce them, or even introduce them for the first time, into schools who then have the challenge of ensuring accelerated progress for their child – this was another reason for the surprise expressed by professionals that a registry of home educated children did not exist.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report to the Schools Adjudicator 2018 would incorporate the views of School Admissions Forum mentioned above;
- 2) School Admissions Forum would put forward their concerns in relation to SEN provision in the borough through the appropriate channels.

15. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH DRAFT PRIMARY STRATEGY 2018 TO 2028

The Forum considered the Draft Primary Strategy report which was set out in agenda pages 33-66.

Piers Bunning informed that the consultation would be open online to primaries from 7 June 2018. The online version was slightly different from the report contained in the agenda.

Piers Bunning informed that this was a 10 year plan, taking into account the large scale development plans within the borough. Following the national programme of housing development, the Council had taken a decision to invest in large scale developments instead of a high number of smaller scale developments. The thought process behind it was that it was more effective to create the necessary infrastructure such as roads, schools and associated community facilities to a few large sites rather than having to do it to many small sites.

Piers Bunning stated that as part of the development plan two new primary schools had already been built: Floreat Montague Park (which had opened in 2016) and Shinfield West (due to open in September 2019). Two other primary schools were on course to open in 2020, one in the Matthews Green site and the other in the Arborfield site.

Piers Bunning stated that the impact of new homes was critical to the viability of new schools and neither the number of new homes nor the number of children who will live in them could be known when the decision to let building contracts was given. Therefore, the Council must have plans both for managing schools that are built too early and if additional capacity is required.

In response to a question Piers Bunning stated that the 10 year plan was based on the best evidence and guidance available, however it was expected that this would fluctuate within a band. Around two thirds of the number of houses that are planned to be built in the borough are to meet the additional housing needs that come of the household projection (from the Office of National Statistics) based on the population projection. The population projection for primary school children is flat, but despite that the number of new houses will increase, two thirds of those houses are expected to maintain the number of children in the borough.

Piers explained that the projections took into account the life cycle of a household, which was considering when people tended to have children and when people tended to move out to downsize.

Piers Brunning stated that another consideration was the calculation based on affordability of houses for people working in Wokingham.

In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that birth data was used for more immediate plans, and the Office for National Statistics data were used to build the longer term plans. GPs data was part of the information received from the Office for National Statistics.

Fiona Hayward noted that some of the new houses were likely to be occupied by families splitting up who needed an additional house.

Piers Brunning stated that there was a degree of wariness in any projection because of many variables that could change the numbers.

Fiona Hayward asked Piers Brunning whether or not the data that could be made available by GP's surgeries could be helpful in refining projections and estimates; Piers Brunning replied that in the past this type of data had indeed been used, but the disadvantage to it was that families moving out of the area often did not inform their GPs that they were doing so, they simply re-registered with a new GP, rendering such data unreliable.

Piers Brunning informed that the Council was nearly ready to sign the contracts for the new primary schools to be built, there was a lengthy pre-contract process that had to happen. The new school in Matthews Green would include a community centre and the school in Arborfield would include a large all weather pitch which would also be used as a community facility.

Piers stated that the Arborfield School was going to be a two form entry primary school with the option to go into a third form entry if and when needed, with no fixed timetable. The Matthews Green School was going to be built as a single form entry initially, but it had planning consent for a second form entry.

Piers pointed out that Woodley had been identified as an area of risk, with 1000 new houses being built. Wokingham was known as an area that was attractive to young families looking to re-located to.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

16. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates for planned future meetings of the Forum to be noted:

- 12 November 2018
- 30 January 2019

Members asked to change the date of the meeting on Monday 12 November 2018 to Wednesday 14 November 2018. *Subsequently Luciane Bowker confirmed the change of date.*