

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2016 FROM 7.05 PM TO 8.16 PM**

Councillors

Richard Dolinski

Beth Rowland

Diocesan Representatives

David Babb

Church of England Diocesan Representative

Parent / Governor Representatives

Edward Hunter

Emmbrook Junior School

Representatives from the Local Community

Schools Representatives

Sue Runciman

Shinfield St Marys Junior School

Celia Thatcher

Grazeley CE Aided Primary

Also Present

Luciane Bowker

Democratic Services Officer

Piers Brunning

Service Manager Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

26. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Patricia Cuss and Nicci Morris.

27. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 June 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following typing corrections;

- On page six on the fourth bullet point where it says 'A Headteacher reported that it was more cost effective to use the school's own budget to meet the child's need **then...**' It should read '**than**'.
- On pages six and seven, bullet points 14 and 15 where it says '**Costumer** Services' it should read '**Customer** Services'.
- On page eight where it says '**Reish** Green site' it should read '**Ryeish** Green site'.

Matters arising

With regards to Floriat Trust's choice of name for the new school in Shinfield:

Sue Runciman, Headteacher at Shinfield St Mary's Junior School reported that the motto of Shinfield Infant School is '*Everyone shining in their own field*', and the new school originally decided to call itself '*Shining Fields*' following a request that they did not include the word 'Shinfield' in their name. Now that they were given this information, the name has been changed to 'Silver Meadows'. However, there was a period of anxiety around this that could have been avoided if they had had more information.

It was suggested that the Local Authority intervene in the future to make sure that new schools' choice of name does not cause confusion with other schools and nurseries in the area.

The Chairman, David Babb advised that it was up to the governing body of any given school to choose their own name.

Piers Brunning, Service Manager Policy, Strategy and Partnerships confirmed that there had been some controversy with their choice of name and a final decision had taken longer than expected. It had now been agreed that the new school would be called Silver Meadows.

Piers reported that Floreat Trust was experiencing financial problems. Piers explained that small primary schools often did not have enough resources to support the large number of staff involved in a trust arrangement. The Local Authority was not part of this agreement, the DfE was responsible for trusts.

The Forum was informed that the school did not open in September and the Local Authority was seeking an alternative provider.

28. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. CONSULTATION ON 2018/2019 ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES

The Forum considered the report which was set out on agenda pages 11-20 and the appendices attached to it. Piers Brunning, Service Manager, Policy, Strategy & Partnerships presented the report.

Piers pointed out that the main change proposed to the admissions arrangements for voluntary controlled and community schools and co-ordinated admissions schemes for 2018/19 was the move towards an entirely online process. The proposal to introduce a paperless process was driven by the 21 Century Council agenda in an effort to deliver good value for money.

Piers noted that it was expected that some families may need help and this would be offered by customer services.

The Chairman asked what was the percentage of online applications received this year. Piers was not sure of the exact numbers but stated that this was high, probably over 60%. Piers informed that the number of publications was reduced this year as more people were encouraged to use online services.

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

- Councillor Rowland was concerned about the gap between the wealthier and the poorer families. She would like to know how people would know that they had to make an application online. Piers replied that the admissions team had already moved to customer services and would be helping people that weren't able to fill in online applications.

- Sue Runciman was concerned that schools had not been consulted about this. She reported that schools made allowances and helped children that were not able to do their homework online. Schools often helped parents when necessary.
- The Chairman stated that if a mistake was made in the application process with families that used the customer services, it would be difficult to argue the case if this came to a school admission appeal.
- Celia Thatcher, Grazeley CE Aided Primary Headteacher expressed concern that this would put additional pressure on the Local Authority, as it would create extra work to support families that may need help.
- Sue Runciman suggested that libraries may be able to offer advice and help to the community.
- Councillor Rowland was concerned about people with English as a second language as they may find this process more difficult.
- The Chairman stated that the help offered by customer services would be good for people that struggled to fill in forms.
- Piers reminded the Forum that this proposal related to 2018/19 arrangements.
- Councillor Dolinski stated that any transitions to new systems were likely to encounter difficulties in the first year, but he was confident that there would be enough people to help.
- Celia Thatcher stated that it would be helpful to spread the message to other Headteachers, so that the information could be shared with parents.
- The Chairman noted that the legislation did not specify if applications should be on paper or online. He questioned the legitimacy of denying a paper copy to parents if it came to a legal challenge. It remained to be seen how this would work in practice, but he was supportive of the idea.
- Piers pointed out that people were used to doing very many transactions online already.
- Edward Hunter asked if the Local Authority intended to link this with the Citizens Advice Bureau. Piers stated that the Local Authority supported their role and they may be able to help people to fill in their forms.
- Councillor Dolinski believed that libraries would play an important part in this process. He reported that Wokingham was increasing the libraries opening hours.
- It was noted that it would be a positive outcome if as a result of this people were more encouraged to visit the libraries.

David Babb pointed out that the date on page 13 of the agenda should be changed. Where it said *'The consultation runs from 9 December 2016 to 3 February 2017'* it should say *'The consultation runs from 9 December 2016 to 31 January 2017'*. Piers agreed that some dates contained in the report needed amending.

Piers stated that another significant change was the proposal that a fresh application would have to be made every academic year in order to continue on the waiting list. This was because sometimes people forgot to notify school admissions that they no longer wished their child's name to remain on the waiting list. It was hoped that this would speed up the process.

The following comments were made in relation to this proposal:

- The Forum asked how would be parents be informed of this change. Piers stated that parents would be informed when applying.
- David Babb recommended that the Local Authority wrote to parents to let them know that they needed to fill in a new application form to remain in the waiting list.

- Celia Thatcher worried that some parents may forget to apply.
- Sue Runciman confirmed that in her experience there could be problems with parents not realising that it was their responsibility to do certain things.

Piers reported that there may be an increase in the admission number of some primary schools in the Earley and Woodley areas. The schools involved were: Highwood, Beechwood, Loddon and Aldryngton.

There were difficulties in expanding the site at Aldryngton Primary due to its location. Aldryngton shared part of the site with Maiden Erlegh and the entrance was in a quiet residential road. There was ongoing work with architects and transport consultants on the feasibility of the project.

Piers informed that Maiden Erlegh was considering expanding its sixth form to accommodate pupils from Maiden Erlegh Reading.

Councillor Rowland asked what was meant by the statement on page 14 which said that there was sufficient capacity for all Earley resident children across all Earley schools. Piers explained that although there were sufficient places in the schools, the Local Authority could not reserve places in schools. There was also an issue with the location of certain schools, in that although the school building was located within the Wokingham boundaries, in practical terms the school was more accessible to Reading residents.

Piers explained that in view of these difficulties, the Local Authority was proposing to overlap the designated areas of Whiteknights into Radstock and Loddon into Aldryngton. Piers was still to speak to the schools involved. This proposal was subject to consultation and would only come into effect in 2018. David Babb reminded Piers of the timescales for the consultation process.

Piers tabled an updated paper relating to *home address*. Piers informed that the Local Authority conducted a number of checks to verify residency, including examining council tax, electricity bills and other records. However, there was still a challenge with people that rented a property for a limited period of time in the designated area of a particular school in order to obtain a place and then moved out. This type of fraud was very difficult to catch and to prevent.

David Babb stated that most Local Authorities did everything they could to minimise fraud, but no system would ever be completely fool-proof.

In response to a question Piers stated that this issue related to a small number of people. It was also important not to discriminate against people in rented accommodation.

Piers stated that the Local Authority would withdraw the place if it found out that the application had been fraudulent. It was clarified that a withdrawal could only take place up to the end of the first term, after that it was not in the best interests of the child to be moved to a different school.

Piers stated that there were no concerns with the split living arrangements.

Piers stated that it was hoped that mid-year applications would also be done entirely online in the future. There was ongoing work with Capita to develop this process. Also, it may be necessary to change the foundation process to mention 33 hours childcare.

Members of the Forum pointed to a grammatical mistake on page 32 of the agenda. There were also various issues with dates which Piers agreed needed correcting.

David Babb informed that it was quite likely that Sixth Form arrangements would not be included in the new School Admissions Code. However, it was not known when the government would announce a new Code.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

30. OWN ADMISSIONS AUTHORITY PROPOSALS

The Forum considered the report containing own admission authority proposals on pages 101-136 of the agenda.

David Babb stated that Earley St Peters CE was proposing to simplify its criteria; this had been suggested by the Diocese. He also informed that the Diocesan guidance was that there should not be church criteria as church schools should cater for everyone. However, the Diocese could not force schools to follow this guidance. It was up to the governors to decide on the criteria, but they were obliged to consult with the Diocese first.

David Babb informed that it was recommended that aided schools have a designated area; not having a designated area had created issues in the past.

David stated that schools should be encouraged to have their admissions criteria easily available on their websites. The schools adjudicator had pointed out that this was not always easy to find and school should make it easily available.

Councillor Rowland asked if children of staff had any priority in the application process. David explained that governing bodies could give priority to the children of certain staff as this was permitted by the School Admissions Code. David mentioned that there were known cases where children of staff were able to obtain a place but that children of the clergy could not be given priority simply because they were children of clergy resident in the catchment area.

Piers pointed out that this criterion was helpful when trying to attract teachers to an area where there may be a shortage of teachers of a certain subject for example.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

31. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for 11 January 2017.

The Forum discussed the membership and questioned if it was necessary for both Celia Thatcher and Sue Runciman to attend the meetings, given that they represented the same type of school. Piers felt that it was valid to have them both attending as it provided him with valuable feedback.

It was agreed that the Forum should seek to have a representative from one of the academies. Luciane Bowker would contact academy Headteachers about joining the Forum.

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