

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.11 PM**

Diocesan Representatives

David Babb Church of England Diocesan Representative

Representatives from the Local Community

Patricia Cuss Early Years Forum

Schools Representatives

Louisa Gurney Woodley CE Primary

Also Present

Luciane Bowker Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning Strategy and Commissioning Specialist

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

David Babb was elected Chairman of School Admissions Forum for the remainder of 2017/18 academic year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Beth Rowland was appointed Vice-Chairman of School Admissions Forum for the remainder of 2017/18 academic year.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Fiona Hayward, Ben Gobler, Amanda Woodfin, Sue Runciman, Celia Thatcher and Councillors Kate Haines and Beth Rowland.

The Chairman stated that it would be good if a secondary school governor representative was able to join the Forum. Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Elections Specialist would try and recruit a volunteer to join the Forum.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 January 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. WOKINGHAM SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2019/20

Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist addressed the Forum and informed that the report related to the 2019/20 school admission arrangements.

Piers Brunning explained that the arrangements incorporated changes to the designated areas of two Earley primary schools that were part of the arrangements determined by the Executive in 2017 for the 2018/19 year that were removed following an adverse School Adjudicator decision in July 2017. These changes were to ensure that Earley resident children were more likely to secure a local school place.

Piers stated that the proposed changes were as follows:

The changes to designated areas proposed were:

- That the designated area of Loddon Primary School be extended to include that of Aldryngton Primary School. The designated area of Aldryngton Primary School would remain unchanged from that established in the original 2017/18 and amended 2018/19 arrangements.
- That the designated area of Whiteknights Primary School be extended to include that of Radstock Primary School. The designated area of Radstock Primary School would remain unchanged from that established in the original 2017/18 and amended 2018/19 arrangements.

Two further changes from the 2017/18 arrangements were:

- a tightening of the definition of “residency” to minimise “gaming” of the admission system to secure places by short term moves from permanent homes and;
- to make it clear that when a child (who has not yet reached the age of statutory education) starts a Reception class the parents can decide if that child should attend on a full or part time basis.

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

- In relation to the parents’ right to decide if a child who has not yet reached the age of statutory education should attend on a full or part time basis, David Babb was of the opinion that some wording around agreeing on a sensible arrangement with the Headteacher should be included. David was worried that parents could decide to send their children to school at a time that was convenient for them and not necessarily in the best interest of the child;
- Patricia Cuss agreed that this issue created difficulties, especially because different schools had different approaches;
- Louisa Gurney believed that schools should offer full admission from the first day of school, however some schools had different arrangements;
- David Babb stated that it was illegal for a school not offer full time education if that was the parents wish;
- Louise Gurney stated that in her experience most parents that requested part time had been sensible and been able to come an agreement with the school;
- David Babb stated that the Department for Education (DfE) was looking to make it more explicit to schools that it was illegal to have different year groups starting school one day after the others;
- Louise Gurney stated that it was difficult for schools to monitor school attendance of children who were not yet at statutory school age;
- Piers Brunning stated that the Schools Adjudicator had determined that the 2018/17 admissions arrangements were deficient due to inadequate consultation. Piers explained that consultation was required by law, this had been done mainly via the website and it was considered that it was not publicised enough. Going forward the service would ask schools to inform parents of any consultations;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that there had been no responses to the consultation to the proposed changes in the Early designated areas;
- David Babb suggested that the changes be highlighted in the prospectus so that parents could be made aware of the changes;

- With respect to Early Years, Piers Brunning informed that the service was considering setting out a consultation in relation to giving priority to parents who opted to take up the 30 hours free childcare;
- Piers Brunning stated that the introduction of the 30 hour free childcare for working parents had not resulted in the closure of providers as it had been anticipated;
- David Babb pointed to a typing error on page 15, where it said *By September 12* it should say *By September 11*, Piers would correct it;
- In relation to the timing of entry to Primary Education (page 43 of the agenda) David Babb stated that it would be helpful to state *first school day in September*, to make it clearer;
- In relation to the right to part time education (when a child had not yet reached the statutory age for education) David Babb emphasised that some wording around having a discussion with the Headteacher should be included. In relation to this issue the following concerns were raised:
 - Members wondered what would happen if the parents and the Headteacher could not come to an agreement?
 - What would happen in relation to funding if a part time child was not at school on the day of the census?
- Patricia Cuss stated that some of the school arrangements around part time start were historical;
- Patricia Cuss stated that most parents were receptive to the idea of children going to school full time as a lot of children were already attending pre-school;
- Members noted that the arrangements were mostly similar to the previous year;
- Piers Brunning stated that the Local Authority had been asked to review the admission arrangements for Bohunt in relation to the sibling criteria, however as an academy the school was its own admissions authority;
- David Babb stated that there was much debate around the sibling criteria in other Local Authorities too. In his experience it had been mostly decided that it was not fair to give priority to siblings living outside of the catchment area as this could disadvantage children who lived in catchment;
- Piers Brunning explained that debates around sibling criteria happened periodically; and
- Louisa Gurney stated that most parents knew they were taking a risk by sending their children to a school not in their designated area.

The Forum considered an email (attached to the minutes) which was sent by Sue Runciman, who was unable to attend the meeting but wished to submit her comments in relation to the proposals. The following points were made in relation to her comments:

- Piers Brunning felt that parents would not be disadvantaged by the online school application system;
- Louisa Gurney stated that in her experience when her school introduced online payment many disadvantaged families came into the school office for help as they found the process daunting;
- Piers Brunning stated that some parents already received help to fill in paper applications, and the same level of help would be offered to fill the form online;
- David Babb stated that it was important to be careful when giving help and advice to parents filling in their school applications as wrong advice could cause a successful appeal;

- Members agreed that help with school admissions applications should not be offered by schools. However, schools should be able to tell parents where to go for assistance;
- Piers Brunning stated that the online system was consistent with Wokingham Borough Council's priorities;
- Louisa Gurney worried that disadvantaged families may fail to submit applications for secondary school;
- Piers Brunning stated that the application form would be available through many devices, including smart phones;
- David Babb stated that it was important to make it clear to parents that where references were made to the *application pack* this meant an online pack, and this pack should be sent to parent with enough advance;
- Members discussed the timing of receiving the school offers and agreed that parents were not disadvantaged by finding out the school allocation at different times in the day.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) School Admissions Forum strongly requests that the Local Authority remind all schools of their legal requirement to offer **a full time or part time** education to children who have not yet reached the age of statutory education at the start in a Reception class;
- 2) School Admissions Forum recommends that it is made clear to parents that school admissions packs are available online only and that the pack should be made available before the application process opens;
- 3) School Admissions Forum recommends that it is made clear to parents where they can obtain assistance in filling in the online application form.

Email from Sue Runciman is attached for reference

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates for planned future meetings of the Forum up to 2019 were noted:

- 6 June 2018
- 12 November 2018
- 30 January 2019

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Term Dates

Piers Brunning explained that it was not yet clear who would undertake the task of setting out term dates under the new 21st Century Council re-organisation. Paul Senior, Director for People Services had spoken to Piers about it and stated that he had noted that this was something that School Admissions Forum normally discussed. Piers was seeking the views of Wokingham's School Admissions Forum regarding this suggestion.

David Babb stated that he had participated in nine different School Admissions Forums when they were compulsory and none of them had been involved in setting out term dates. He pointed out that legally schools had to offer 190 school days to pupils, and schools that were their own admission authorities could arrange their term dates as they wished.

Piers Brunning stated that historically in Wokingham term dates had not been submitted to Executive, this had always been an officer decision and there was no statutory process around this.

Members were in agreement that parents expected some co-ordination in setting out term dates. It could cause problems for schools and families if there was no co-ordination, however all were in agreement that this function was not something they should be discussed at School Admissions Forum.

School Admissions Forum

David Babb stated as School Admissions Forums were not statutory not all Local Authorities still had them. In view of the fact that Sue Riddick's post had not been replaced and there was an issue with Officers' capacity he asked if this Forum should be continued.

Piers Brunning informed that had conversations with the current Interim Assistant Director for Education and the Interim Director of People Services and they were of the opinion that Wokingham should continue to have a School Admissions Forum.

Louise Gurney asked where the discussions around school admissions would take place if not at School Admissions Forum. Piers Brunning believed they would occur at political level.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) School Admissions Forum would not consider matters in relation to school term dates;
and
- 2) Wokingham's School Admissions Forum questioned the continuity of the Forum in view of the recent restructure and reduced staff levels in the Local Authority.

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