

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL ADMISSIONS FORUM
HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2016 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.25 PM**

Councillors

Ian Pittock

Beth Rowland

Diocesan Representatives

David Babb

Church of England Diocesan Representative (Chairman)

Parent Representatives

Phiala Mehring

Parent Governor (Vice-Chair)

Representatives from the Local Community

Schools Representatives

Emma Reynolds

Bulmershe School

Also Present

Sue Riddick

School Admissions Lead Officer

Luciane Bowker

Democratic Services Officer

10. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Patricia Cuss.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 December 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Phiala Mehring on the basis that she was a governor at the Forest Academy School.

Sue Riddick, School Admissions Lead Officer announced that this was her last meeting of the Forum as she was retiring from the Council at the end of March. David Babb, Chairman of the Forum thanked Sue for all her help with the School Admissions Forum over the years.

13. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

Sue Riddick introduced the Admission Arrangements for Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies report which was set out on Agenda pages 11-52. The report contained information of consultations issued by the admission authorities for voluntary aided schools and academies where known.

Sue commented on the proposed school arrangements which had been brought to the Forum at the last meeting:

All Saint's CE Aided Primary School

- Sue recommended greater clarity regarding the timetable for hearing school appeals.

St Teresa's Catholic Primary School

- The wording around children being admitted outside of their age group was confusing and needed reviewing;
- Criteria 2 and 7 were not clear if they included pre-school children;
- Amalgamation of criteria 3 and 4 was proposed;
- The definition of practicing Catholics needed was clearer;
- It is recommended that waiting lists would close at the end of the academic year and parents would have to re-apply for the following academic year in order to continue on the waiting list.

Evendons Primary

- The school was advised to reword the third paragraph relating to 'walking to school' to say 'expected to be in the vicinity of the school';
- Sue had corrected a few typo errors;
- It was suggested that it would be a good idea to give an indication to parents of the likelihood of obtaining a place at the school.

Forest School

- Sue suggested that the reference to the requirement for Year 11 exam results should be published in the school's website and signposted in the policy;
- Sue was concerned with the proposed change in catchment area as there was an expectation that places would be offered to local children. Also, given that it was a single sex school, there was a correlation to the allocation of places at the Holt. Phiala Mehring, Forest School Governor explained that the change had been introduced in an effort to ensure the school remained full and financially sound. David Babb suggested that the school included in its marketing literature the statistics of how many boys had been admitted who were from Bracknell and Reading, this would give parents and indication of the likelihood of obtaining a place at the Forest;
- Sue commented on the tie breaker, the distance from the school and the medical grounds, as these had been amended.

Members suggested that it would be helpful to include a space in application form for 'single sex' preference. The Chair advised that as applications are received from out of the Borough residents this was not necessary on the application form, the onus must be on parents advising their reasons for choosing the school when expressing a preference for the school.

The Forum was informed that the following schools had commenced consultation on the proposed admission arrangements for 2017/2018 since the last meeting of the Forum: St Sebastian's CE Aided Primary School; The Piggot School and Oakbank School. The proposed changes and Sue's comments to the schools is described below.

St Sebastian's CE Aided Primary School

The school proposed a simplification of its oversubscription criteria by reducing the number of criteria from 9 to 7, removing the criterion relating to living in the ecclesiastical parish and whose parent worships at a Christian church and the criterion relating to siblings whose parents worship at St Sebastian's Church creating a general sibling criterion (4). The school has revised the wording of its medical and social grounds criterion (2) and promoted its denominational criterion for parental worship at St Sebastian's Church (3) above that of siblings at the school (4). Further changes included a revision to

the wording for summer born children requesting out of normal age group admission, its ethos and split residency.

Sue had replied to the school advising that she supported the revisions as the new criteria were fair and clearer. Sue questioned whether priority should be given to parental worship at St Sebastian's Church above that of having a sibling at the school or living in the ecclesiastical parish as this could be viewed as a barrier to local families considering a place at the school.

Sue considered the revised wording of criterion 2 on medical and social ground appropriate.

Sue advised the school to revise the wording relating to the admission of children outside their normal age group to ensure compliance with the Code.

The Piggott School

The academy was proposing an additional criterion: C – the children of staff at the Piggott school where that member of staff is the legal parent and guardian of that child, has a permanent contract to work at the school and where that member of staff has been employed at the school for 2 or more years at the time of application or the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post within a demonstrable skill shortage.

This criterion is placed after 'siblings inside designated area' and before 'children living in designated area'.

Amendment has also been made to summer born children requesting to work out of normal age group.

Sue suggested that if parents were applying under criterion C this should be made clear on the application form. Sue also pointed out that the school admissions team telephone number should be 0118 974 6146.

Oakbank School

The academy was proposing changes to its arrangements to bring it in line with CfBT School's Trust school admission arrangements. This included a reduction of in the number of oversubscription criterion from six to four, including the removal of criteria relating to children of Founders and staff at the school and the removal of the school's designated area with places offered according to the radial distance between home and school.

Sue made a number of comments on the proposals:

- The policy referred to Annex 1 of the Supplemental Funding Agreement of the school and this should be accessible to view by parents via the website;
- The timetable for applications and information about acceptances would be described in the local authority's' guide to school admissions, however someone living in a different area such as in the Reading Borough Council area, may have different timescales to accept a school place for example;
- Sue questioned what was the requirement for children outside their normal age group and to whom should such information be forwarded to;
- Sue pointed out that in-year applications must be made through Wokingham Borough Council (not the LA) as parents outside the Borough might misunderstand this;

- Sue advised that the published arrangements should be published on the school's website as well as in the prospectus so that it could be easily viewed by parents;
- Criterion iv seemed to be missing an element on the second line after "measured by". From "priority" this related to the tiebreaker and it was suggested this was headed as such. It was also suggested, a new paragraph for the sentence "in the unlikely event that two or more children live at the same address..." There seemed to be duplication with the wording "blocks of flats are treated as one address...". "Addresses in private roads will measure from the footprint of the property" to "not adopted by the Highways team" must be removed as this is not used for the tiebreaker;
- Sue recommended more robust residency requirements;
- There was some confusion in the tiebreak section, and Sue advised the school to review and strengthen the wording;
- Sue recommended the school to amend the waiting lists specification and suggested that the school may want to give consideration to closing any waiting lists on 30 September for year 10;
- There was some duplication in the two paragraphs relating to the arrangements for admitting students to other year groups.

Members were informed that the consultation period would finish by 28 February and the full determined arrangements would be published on the schools' websites by 15 March 2016.

It was noted that a general response in the form of an email to all who had responded to the schools' consultation would be sufficient as a way of informing the outcome of the consultation.

David Babb commented on a case relating to another local authority where the Schools Adjudicator had said that schools should be clear about their policy regarding 'split addresses' in their literature.

David informed that it was expected that the new School Admissions Code would require school consultations to take place every 4 years rather than the current 7. It was noted that the report contained a list for reference of schools that were not consulting this year and the last time they had carried out a consultation.

David Babb asked for a timetable of reports to be considered at its next meeting. Members of the Forum stated that they wished the Forum to continue with Sue Riddick's successor. Members felt this was a valuable meeting and a good place to exchange information on the school admissions process. It was suggested that a training session be organised for the next meeting, especially in view of the imminent release of a new School Admissions Code and potential new Members to the Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted
- 2) A training session and timetable of reports be organised for the next meeting in June 2016.

14. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2017/2018

The Forum received a verbal report on the school admission arrangements 2017/2018. (The report had unfortunately been missed from the main Agenda but is attached to these minutes.)

It was explained in the report that the school admission arrangements addressed the local authority's statutory duty to ensure that all school places for maintained schools and academies (excluding special schools) were allocated and offered in an open and fair way and complied with the School Admissions Code and relevant regulations and legislation and supported the council's key priorities.

The proposed changes were:

- Clarification to oversubscription criterion B;
- Amendment to the residence requirements to meet oversubscription criteria D and E;
- Amendment to the wording relating to Crown Servants;
- Clarification to waiting lists;
- Proposal to increase the designated area of Nine Mile Ride Primary School;
- Proposal to prioritise two year olds attending school nurseries in the Foundation Stage 1 (F1) admission policy;
- Date changes to the co-ordinated schemes.

The Council had not received any responses or objections to the consultation; therefore the paper was going to be submitted to the 18 February Executive for approval.

15. OFFICE OF THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR ANNUAL REPORT SEPTEMBER 2014 TO AUGUST 2015

The Forum considered the Office of the School's Adjudicator's Annual Report to the Secretary of State which was set in Agenda pages 53-128. Sue Riddick explained that the report may be used by the government to influence changes to the School Admissions Code, therefore it was import to consider its findings.

Sue's cover report detailed the main findings of the report. During the discussion of the item the following points were made:

- The report found that converter academies and free schools should understand their responsibilities as own admission authority schools;
- Sue was of the opinion that new applications were only necessary for waiting lists of the next academic year where there were changes to the original application but that parents must advise that they wish to remain on waiting lists for the next academic year;
- The report found that the arrangement for sixth form still frequently contravened the Code. There continued to be misunderstanding about the general requirements that applied to admission to the sixth form. The Forum was advised that the area of sixth forms is likely to be revised in the next Code;
- The report found that admission arrangements for many schools that were their own admission authorities were unnecessarily complex and lacked transparency;
- The report also advised that the guidance provided for schools designated as having a religious character by the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination was o variable availability and quality;
- As widely reported in the press this week, the DFE is likely to reconsider who can make an objection to the arrangements for a particular school, possibly limiting it to those with proper standing for making the objection.

Members noted that the recommendations made this year were similar to previous years.

RESOLVED That: the report be noted.

16. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Forum noted the dates of future meetings (subject to Council approval on 18 February 2016):

- 14 June 2016
- 2 November 2016
- 11 January 2017

It was agreed that it would be useful to organise a training session with Sue Riddick's successor at the next meeting on 14 June 2016. The following items were suggested for the training:

- The school admissions process;
- The new School Admissions Code;
- The Fair Access Protocol.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Forum asked that Luciane Bowker, Democratic Services Officer contacted Junior Schools to try and recruit a representative to the Forum from that group of schools. Members stated that the School Admission Forum meeting would be useful to any governor, but it would be of particular value to those from schools that were their own admission authorities as the discussions provided a reliable source of information on the school admissions process for schools.

Sue Riddick expressed her appreciation of the work undertaken by the Forum as she felt it had been very helpful to exchange ideas over the years.

RESOLVED That: Luciane Bowker would contact Junior Schools and governors to recruit more Members to the School Admissions Forum.

Admission Arrangements 2017-2018 cover report
Analysis of issues - Admission Arrangements 2017-2018