

MINUTES of the meeting of Local Admissions Forum held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 9th November, 2006 at 7.00 p.m.

Present:	Local Education Authority	J.P. Thomas (Chairman) and Ms. A.M. Toon
	Church Representative	Revd. I. Terry (Church of England) and Ms. L. Johnson (Roman Catholic)
	Headteachers	(none)
	School Governors	Mr Ross (Primary Schools) and Mrs B. Glasspoole
	Parent Governors	(none)
	Local Community Rep	(none)

In attendance: Councillor D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member – Children and Young People)

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Stone, A. Marson, P. Shannon, Mrs C. Woolley, Mrs. C. Shaw and P. McKinnie.

14. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Ms. L. Johnson substituted for P. Shannon.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. REVISED SCHOOL ADMISSION AND SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEAL CODE OF PRACTICE CONSULTATION

The Forum were advised on the proposed Codes of Practice on Admissions and Appeals and asked for their comments to be fed into the consultation period which was set to conclude on 1 December 2006.

The Admissions and Transport Manager explained that all Admission Authorities would have to 'act in accordance' with the new Codes of Practice once they were formally approved. This was an increase in direction from the Government as previously Admission Authorities were only required to 'have regard to' the current guidance on school admissions and admission appeals.

The proposed new guidance would require some church schools in the County to amend their over-subscription criteria to remove unfair practices. For example, under the new Code it would now be unlawful to allocate places at a school on the basis that a relative or sibling had attended the school in the past or if a child's parents were an employee or governor at the school in question.

Also Faith schools would now be required within their published admission arrangements to make it clear how religious affiliation or commitment was to be measured. It was noted that there may be some difficulties to overcome in terms of developing clear and transparent ways to rank faith school applicants, particularly for Church of England schools as a higher proportion of children are baptized to this faith than others.

Members were informed that the new Code had new requirements of the Forum, in particular the Forum would be required to prepare an Annual Report. Many of the required elements of the report were already complied by the Forum but new categories included:

- The ethnic and social mix of pupils attending schools in the area of the authority and the factors that affect this;
- The extent to which admission arrangements serve the interests of looked after children, children with disabilities and children with special educational needs, and;
- How well the hard to place pupil protocol has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol.

It was suggested that this report be taken by the Forum in the Autumn of each year.

In response to a question about how the social class of school pupils would be ascertained for the purposes of the report, the Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that the Acorn Data Assessment tool would be used.

A query was made on how admission numbers for schools were configured. It was explained that DfES guidance was followed which required the measurement of each school's accommodation to be assessed so that the total capacity of the school could be set. However, the formula from the DfES did not work out a schools capacity to a single place but instead provided a range, for example 100-110, from which the schools total capacity should then be set. This was done through consultation with the schools themselves with the aim for each school to be big enough to provide places for all school age children in its catchment area. This was then approved by the Forum at its summer meeting each year.

It was noted that Voluntary Aided schools with low admission numbers were potentially susceptible to a higher number of appeals and the subsequent cost this endured. It was suggested that Herefordshire Schools Forum could decide to set aside money to pay for appeals to all schools in the County.

It was noted that the co-ordinated admission arrangements saw over 90% of the County's children being awarded their first preference school.

With regard to free school transport being provided to all schools within 2 miles for primary school children and 6 miles for secondary school children the Forum felt that this particular rule would have more effect in an urban area than in rural Herefordshire. The Forum urged that feedback be given to the DfES urging them to increase the distances for free transport for those pupils living in rural areas.

The Admissions and Transport Manager added that a late addition had been made to the Education Act so that free transport for low income families to denominational schools will be provided up to a distance of 15 miles.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the comments made by the Forum regarding the new Codes of Practice be forwarded to the DfES before the end of the consultation period on 1 December 2006.

and;

(b) If any admission authority fails to amend its oversubscription criteria in line with the revised School Admissions Code by 31st May 2007, the Local Admissions Forum refers the issue to The Schools Adjudicator.

18. VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOLS RESPONSE TO THE DFES LETTER DATED 17TH AUGUST 2006

The Forum noted which voluntary aided schools had amended their admissions policies following DfES intervention.

The Admissions and Transport Manager reported that following a series of letters from the local authority and now a letter from the DfES a number of schools had amended their admissions policies so that top priority was now given to children in the looked after system. In addition to the five schools named in the report the following five schools had amended their policies since the publication of the Forum agenda:

- St Josephs RC Primary School
- Kingsland C.E. Primary School
- St Michael's, Bodenham, C.E. Primary School
- Llangaron C.E. Primary School
- Whitchurch C.E. Primary School

It was noted that there were still five schools in the County who did not concur with the advised admission arrangements but they were all expected to make the alterations in the near future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.21 p.m.

CHAIRMAN