

A G E N D A

Local Admissions Forum

Date: **Thursday, 8th March, 2007**

Time: **7.00 p.m.**

Place: **Council Chamber, Brockington, 35
Hafod Road, Hereford, HR1 1SH**

Notes: Please note the **time, date** and **venue** of
the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

*Craig Goodall, Democratic Services, Tel:
01432 260445*

e-mail: cgoodall@herefordshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

for the Meeting of the Local Admissions Forum

To: Local Education Authority	J.P. Thomas (Chairman) J. Stone and Ms. A.M. Toon
Church Representative	Anne Robertson (Roman Catholic Church) and Revd. I. Terry (Church of England)
Headteachers	C. Barker (Community High School), H Hines (VA Primary School), A Marson (Bishop of Hereford & St Mary's RC Schools) and Julia Powell (Community and VC Primary)
School Governors	Mr A. Ross (Governor) and Mrs. B. Glasspoole (Bishops and St Mary's)
Parent Governors	Ms K. Fitch (Primary Schools), Mrs. B. Glasspoole (Bishops and St Mary's (LAF)) and Mr Ross (Primary Schools) and VACANCY (Special Schools)
Local Community Rep	Mr P McKinnie (Consortium of Special Educational Needs), Mr. S. McLurg (Looked After Children) and Carol Shaw (West Midlands Service for Travelling Children)

	Pages
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
To receive apologies for absence.	
2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES	
To receive any details of Member nominated to attend the meeting in place of a Member of the Forum.	
3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
To receive any declarations of interest by Members in respect of items on the Agenda.	
4. MINUTES	5 - 8
To approve and sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th November 2006.	
5. LATE ITEMS/ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
To consider any issues that Forum Members may wish to raise.	

6. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS CODE 2007	9 - 12
To advise on the revised School Admissions Code.	
7. CHOICE ADVISOR FOR HEREFORDSHIRE	13 - 16
To explain the role if the Choice Advisor in the admission process.	

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COUNTY OF HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD.

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COUNTY OF HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS CODE 2007

REPORT BY ADMISSIONS & TRANSPORT OFFICER

LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM

8TH MARCH 2007

Purpose

To advise the Committee of the revised School Admissions Code.

Financial Implications

Statutory implications for a Choice Adviser and greater support for children from low income families does involve additional cost.

Report

The elements of the new code that impact upon school admissions at maintained schools in Herefordshire are listed below. Some of these elements require action by some or all of our schools.

Note: for ease of future cross reference the paragraph numbering used below is the same as that found in the new Code.

2. Admissions authorities **must** ensure that their determined admission arrangements for 2008 comply with the mandatory provisions of the code.

1.6 Local authorities **should** establish a Choice Advice service. Choice Advice targets practical support and advice at those parents who are most likely to need extra help in navigating the admissions system. Choice Advice can be delivered flexibly using a range of models to meet local circumstances but local authorities **must** provide an independent service that is focused on the needs of children in the transition between primary and secondary school whose parents would normally find the admissions system harder to navigate.

1.23 Section 86(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires that in a normal year of entry, a child **must not** be refused admission to a school on the grounds of prejudice to efficient education or the efficient use of resources except where the number of applications for admission exceeds the admission number. Although there is an expectation that this admission number will continue to be applied as that year group progresses through school, it is permissible to refuse admission to it if circumstances have changed since it was a 'relevant age group' and admission of an additional child would 'prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources'.

1.45 A decision to refuse admission **must not** be made by one individual in a school. Where the school is its own admission authority the whole governing body, or an admissions committee established by the governing body, **must** make such decisions. Head teachers or other school officials **must not** give parents an expectation that their application will be successful, or tell them that their child has been given a place at the school, before an offer of a place has been made formally under the co-ordinated scheme. Case law has established that where there is evidence that parents have been told by a head teacher, or

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Andrew Blackman, Admissions & Transport Officer, 01432 260927

other school official, that their child will be given a place at a school, they can reasonably expect that the person making the offer had authority to do so. In these circumstances the admission authority **should** normally honour the offer, even though in fact it may not have authorised that person to make it.

1.87 The cost and availability of safe, reliable home to school transport is a concern for many parents. Home to school travel arrangements can have a disproportionate impact on low-income families, particularly those with several children. Admission authorities **must** explain clearly whether or not school transport will be available and, if so, to which schools and at what cost (if any). Local authorities **must** make information about school travel and transport options available to parents at least six weeks before parents apply for a school place. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 extends rights to free home to school transport to maintained schools and Academies for children from low income families (defined as those whose children are entitled to free school meals or who are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit). This will remove the lack of affordable transport as a barrier to choice for these families. Admission authorities **must** bring this information to the attention of parents. The position is different for primary and secondary schools:

a) For children of primary age, transport will only be provided to the nearest suitable school, but for those in low income families aged 8–11, local authorities **must** ensure that free transport is provided for children living more than two miles from the school.

b) For children of secondary age, local authorities **must** ensure that those from low income families have free transport to any one of the three nearest suitable schools, where the distance traveled is between two and six miles. Local authorities **must** also ensure that transport is provided to the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief where this is between 2 and 15 miles away.

2.13 In setting oversubscription criteria the admission authorities for all maintained schools **must not**:

a) Stipulate any conditions that affect the priority given to an application such as taking account of other preferences for schools. For example, by saying that priority will be given if all or some other preferences are for a school with particular characteristics (e.g. other schools are of a particular religious denomination). This includes criteria often described as ‘conditionality’;

b) Give priority to children according to the order of other schools named as preferences by their parents, including ‘first preference first’ arrangements;

c) Give priority to children according to their parents’ willingness to give practical support to the ethos of the school or to support the school financially or in some other way;

d) Give priority to children according to the occupational, financial or marital status of parents;

e) Give priority to children according to the educational achievement or background of their parents;

f) Take account of reports from primary or nursery schools about children’s past behaviour, attendance, attitude or achievement;

g) Discriminate against or disadvantage children with special educational needs or disabilities;

- h) Allocate places at a school on the basis that a sibling or other relative is a former pupil, including siblings who were on roll at the time of application but will have left by the time the child starts school;
- i) Take account of the behaviour of other members of a child's family, whether good or bad, including a good or bad attendance record of other children in the same family;
- k) Give priority to children whose parents are current or former staff or governors or who have another connection to the school;
- l) Give priority to children according to their, or their parents' particular interests, specialist knowledge or hobbies. This does not include taking account of membership of, or participation in, religious activities for faith schools providing this is consistent with this Code and guidance issued by the faith provider body/religious authority;
- m) Give priority to children based on the order in which applications were received;
- n) In the case of designated grammar schools that rank all children according to a pre-determined pass mark and allocate places to those who score highest, give priority to siblings of current or former pupils;
- o) In the case of schools with boarding places take account of a child's suitability for boarding.

2.43 As with all oversubscription criteria, those that are faith-based must be clear, objective and fair. Parents must easily be able to understand how the criteria will be satisfied. It is primarily for the relevant faith provider group or religious authority to decide how membership or practice is to be demonstrated, and, accordingly, in determining faith-based oversubscription criteria, admission authorities for faith schools **should** only use the methods and definitions agreed by their faith provider group or religious authority (see paragraph 2.47). It is good practice for the governing bodies of all faith schools that are their own admission authority and that are proposing to use faith-based oversubscription criteria to consult their religious authority before going out to statutory consultation with other admission authorities.

2.44 The governing bodies of Church of England schools that are their own admission authorities **must** consult their local Diocesan Board about the admission arrangements they are proposing for their schools before they go out to statutory consultation with other admission authorities, and they **should** follow the Board's advice.

2.45 The admission authorities for all faith schools are required to consult such body or person representing their religion or religious denomination as may be prescribed in regulations, in addition to consulting other admission authorities, about their admission arrangements. Such religious authorities may refer an objection to the Adjudicator about the arrangements at schools of their faith.

2.46 Published admission arrangements **must** make clear how membership or practice is to be demonstrated in line with guidance issued by the faith provider group or religious authority. Whatever method is used it **must** be clearly objective and transparent and therefore any reference requested **must** be in writing.

2.47 Religious authorities may provide guidance for the admission authorities of schools of their faith that sets out what objective process and criteria may be used to establish whether a child is a member of, or whether they practice, the faith. The admission authorities of faith schools that propose to give priority on the basis of membership or practice of their faith

should have regard to such guidance, to the extent that the guidance is consistent with the mandatory provisions and guidelines of this Code.

3.1 In dealing with applications for school places outside the normal admissions round, whether in-year or at the start of a school year which is not a normal point of entry to the school, admission authorities **must** comply with parental preference unless one of the statutory reasons for refusing admission applies. Such applications **must** be considered without delay, and a formal decision either to offer or to refuse a place **must** be made and notified to the applicant, advising them of their statutory right of appeal when a place cannot be offered. Applicants **must not** be refused the opportunity to make an application, or told that they can only be placed on a waiting list rather than make a formal application.

3.11 Admission authorities **must not** refuse to admit children in or outside the normal admission round on the basis of their behaviour elsewhere, unless the child has been subject to two permanent exclusions. They also **must not** refuse to admit a child thought to be potentially disruptive, or to exhibit challenging behaviour, on the grounds that the child is to first be assessed for special educational needs. The law disapplies the normal principle that parents' preferences are complied with only in the 'twice excluded' situation. If, following admission, a child is found to be seriously and persistently disruptive, the school may consider disciplinary action in the normal way, including temporary and, ultimately, permanent exclusion procedures. A child with challenging behaviour may also be disabled as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and require reasonable adjustments to be made for them in the school or require particular support for any special educational needs.

3.13 Exceptionally, outside the normal year of entry, and where an application is made outside arrangements covered by an In-Year Fair Access Protocol, admission authorities may decide to refuse to admit a child with challenging behaviour even though there are places available, on the grounds that admission would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. This will normally only be appropriate where a school has a particularly high concentration of children with challenging behaviour or previously excluded children and one or more of the following exceptional circumstances exists, namely that the school:

- a) Required special measures or has recently come out of them (within the last two years);
- b) Has been identified by Ofsted as having serious weaknesses or requiring significant improvement and therefore given 'notice to improve';
- c) Is subject to a formal warning notice;
- d) Is a Fresh Start school or Academy open for less than two years; or
- e) Is a secondary school where less than 30% of children are achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*–C, or a primary school where fewer than 65% of pupils achieve level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in both English and mathematics for four or more consecutive years.

Recommendation

That, all admission authorities comply with the new School Admission Code.

CHOICE ADVISER FOR HEREFORDSHIRE

REPORT BY ADMISSIONS & TRANSPORT OFFICER

LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM

8TH MARCH 2007

Purpose

To explain to the Committee the role of the Choice Adviser in the admission process.

Financial Implications

There is a cost to the employment of this additional member of staff. In the present financial year the DfES has offered a grant of £18,000.

Report

Herefordshire have appointed Carol Weston as Choice Adviser. Carol started in post on Monday 12th February 2007. In line with DfES guidance, outlined below, Carol is line managed by the Parent Partnership section within the Children & Young People's Directorate and therefore "independent" of the Admissions & Transport Department.

Choice Advice – Guidelines for Local Authorities

Introduction

1. All children of all backgrounds, race or religion, must have the same degree of access to good quality schools. Children must not be disadvantaged because their parents have difficulty in accessing the information they need to make a choice of school or because their parents do not, for whatever reason, engage with the process of applying for a school. In order for all children to have the best chance in life, it is essential that their parents and carers have the information they need to make decisions about which schools to apply for and, where they need it, support in making the application.
2. The transition between primary and secondary school can be one of the most difficult times for families and children. Most parents and carers recognise the critical importance of getting a place in a secondary school that will meet their children's academic and developmental needs, is easy to travel to, and where their children will be happy and want to attend.
3. Admission arrangements can often appear complex and this Code makes clear the importance of ensuring straightforward procedures that are easily understood and that all families can access and navigate. Whilst the majority of families, armed with information about the schools in their area, are able to navigate the system successfully and gain a school place that meets their requirements, there are a number of families who will still find the system difficult to understand and challenging to operate. There are also a small number of parents who, for one reason or another, are unable or unwilling to engage with the process. This tends to happen more frequently in the most deprived communities and puts the children affected at a significant disadvantage.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Andrew Blackman, Admissions & Transport Officer, 01432 260927

4. In order to ensure that these children are able to attend a school that will meet their needs and have the opportunity to realise their full potential as all children should, the Government has provided funding for local authorities to establish an independent Choice Advice service in their area. Choice Advice will enable those parents who find it hardest to engage with, and navigate, the admissions system to make informed decisions about which schools will best meet their child's needs.

Statutory duty to provide support for parents

5. Section 42 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 amends section 81 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to place a duty on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to all parents with children of school age in their area, when they are deciding which schools they want to send their children to. Choice Advice is one way that local authorities can discharge this duty for more disadvantaged parents at the secondary school transfer stage.

Choice Advisers

6. The primary aim of Choice Advisers is to empower those parents who may struggle with the admissions system, to make informed and realistic choices of which secondary school to apply for in the best interest of their child. Choice Advisers do not take decisions for parents and cannot guarantee a place at a particular school, but the service will place these families on a level playing field with all other families when making the important decision of which secondary schools to apply for.
7. The role of Choice Advisers **is to** help families optimise their choices using all the information to hand as detailed below, and use local knowledge of what individual schools have to offer to ensure parents are more likely to get the best place for their child. Where appropriate, this will include information about schools, which might be in different local authority areas with additional advice covering local authority school admission regimes and individual schools' admission criteria.
8. Choice Advisers are expected to know about:
 - a) How the **co-ordinated admissions** system works in their own, and neighbouring, local authority areas when schools in that area might be available to the child to attend.
 - b) **Admission policies** for the appropriate community, voluntary aided, foundation, Trust, independent and boarding schools and Academies, which might be available to the child to attend.
 - c) **Performance and value-added data** for appropriate schools.
 - d) **The Ofsted report** of the last inspection of the school.
 - e) **Admissions data** from previous years including the number of applications received, number of children admitted and success rate of appeals.
 - f) The **school's own description** of their offer contained in their prospectus and their online School Profile, including their ethos and any special facilities.
 - g) **Special needs and disability policy and provision**, drawing on the knowledge and experience of local parent-partnership services.

- h) Details of the curriculum offer including the **school's specialism** in the case of Specialist Schools.
 - i) **Times of the school day** and **term dates** including any knowledge of proposals to change the pattern of education provision.
 - j) **Transport details** including financial assistance to help with the cost of travel to and from school and home–school distances.
 - k) Details of **school uniform policy** and how families can obtain financial assistance to help with the cost.
 - l) **E-admissions** and online applications.
9. Local authorities **should** make Choice Advice available to families living within their boundary irrespective of where their children attend primary school. Where a family requiring support is identified at a primary school in one local authority area and they reside in another, local authorities **should** work together to ensure that the family receives Choice Advice from the most appropriate source. This is very likely to arise in large conurbations covered by a number of authorities.
10. It is widely recognised that those working in local authority admissions teams have an important role to play in advising parents about school places and for most families, this, coupled with the information available about school places and the process, is sufficient enough to enable them to confidently choose which schools to express a preference for. Some families, often the most disadvantaged, require extra support and want this to be from a professional. Every local authority **should** provide Choice Advice for families in their area who need it. Local authorities have the flexibility in deciding how best to deliver their Choice Advice service locally, but **must** provide an independent service that is focussed on the needs of children in the transition between primary and secondary school whose families would normally find this process difficult to negotiate.
11. The independence of the service gives assurances that there is no conflict between the need of the local authority to allocate places at its schools and the advice parents receive. Local authorities can secure the independence of the service in a variety of ways for example, by contracting it out to the voluntary sector or incorporating it into the Children's Information or Parent Partnership Services. Where local authorities deliver the service through drawing together existing transition programmes or through their admissions team, in order to avoid any conflict of interests for the individuals, they **must** ensure as a minimum, that the Choice Advisers are not in the same management chain or reporting lines as the local authority's admissions staff. They must also satisfy themselves that the advice on offer is genuinely independent and includes impartial advice on all relevant local schools, including those not within the local authority's own area as appropriate. Whatever model local authorities choose, they **must** ensure that the Choice Advisers work closely with the admissions staff and schools to ensure the effective sharing of information, so that parents are offered the most appropriate advice and support they need.
12. These guidelines are intended to help local authorities develop their own approach to Choice Advice in a way that best suits their local needs. Further guidance on establishing an independent Choice Advice service, example delivery models, information on training and accreditation, and an outline person-specification and job-description are available on the Choice Advice website at www.dfes.gov.uk/choiceadvice. This also includes case studies of good practice

taking place around England.

Targeting Choice Advice

13. Nationally, research shows that around 6% of parents with children transferring to secondary school are not interested in choosing a school. This often means that there is a small group of children who do not have a secondary school place when they leave primary school and some are allocated a place that is not suitable. Traditionally these children are at the greatest risk of slipping through the net and disappearing from the system. These are the families that Choice Advisers will target and focus their advice on and they **should**, where appropriate, offer one-to-one support.
14. The Choice Advice service **should** also support disadvantaged families in maximising the likelihood of their successfully securing a place in the school that will best meet their children's needs.
15. The service **should** be made available to all members of the family who have responsibility for the child and want extra support, including fathers and mothers and those who are not normally resident with the child, as well as any adults with caring responsibility. Wherever possible, the child **should** be included in any discussions and provided with appropriate advice so that they are able to express an informed view about their future school place.

Quality Assurance

16. Parents must have confidence in the advice they receive and will need to know that it is unaffected by any potential political or administrative considerations at play in the local authority or local schools.
17. There are measures in place to secure the independence of the Choice Advisers, in particular through:
 - a. a clear status as an independent professional, accredited through the Support and Quality Assurance network;
 - b. an online forum at www.dfes.gov.uk/choiceadvice, where Choice Advisers can access support and advice about issues and share best practice; and
 - c. evaluation of the impact of the service, including analysis of parental satisfaction data.

Recommendations

That (a) the role of Choice Adviser be noted;

and;

(b) all admission authorities and all schools be advised of this new role.