

MINUTES of the meeting of Local Admissions Forum held at Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford, HR1 1SH on Thursday, 8th March, 2007 at 7.00 p.m.

Present:	Local Education Authority	J.P. Thomas (Chairman), J. Stone and Ms. A. Toon
	Church Representative	Rev. I. Terry (Church of England) and Ms. L. Johnson (Roman Catholic)
	Headteachers	C. Barker (Community High School) and A Marson (Bishop of Hereford & St Mary's RC Schools)
	School Governors	Mrs. B. Glasspoole (Bishops and St Mary's)
	Parent Governors	(none)
	Local Community Rep	Mr P McKinnie (Consortium of Special Educational Needs)

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

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ms A Robertson, Mr S McLurg, Mrs J Powell and Ms C Shaw.

20. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Ms L Johnson substituted for Ms A Robertson.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. MINUTES

The Forum noted that the fourth bullet point in Item 18 'Voluntary Aided Schools Response to the DfES Letter Dated 17 August 2006' should read 'Llangrove C.E. Primary School' and not Llangaron C.E. Primary School.

RESOLVED: That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 9th November 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. LATE ITEMS/ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In response to a question the Admissions and Transport Manager updated the Forum on the outcome of the co-ordinated admission scheme for secondary school transfers which allowed parents to express three preferences of secondary school.

Members were informed that on the day places were offered 90% of parents had been awarded their first preference school and 98.5% of parents had been awarded one of their three stated preferences.

So far requests for admission appeals had been received for the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School; Fairfield; St Mary's and Whitecross.

Primary School places were to be awarded on 26th March 2007.

Members of the Forum expressed their pleasure at the high number of parents who had been awarded one of the three stated preferences.

24. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS CODE 2007

The Forum was advised of the revised School Admissions Code.

The Admissions and Transport Manager highlighted the elements of the new Code that would need addressing in Herefordshire. A summary of these elements was provided in his report contained in the agenda papers.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Whilst it was accepted that no one teacher or staff member had the authority to offer school places to parents the issue was raised of the difficulties that could be experienced with this at Church Schools where officially places can only be awarded by the schools respective Admissions Committees.
- It was noted that Herefordshire already provided free transport to any one of the three nearest schools to children of secondary school age from low-income families.
- In order to fit in with the mandatory elements of the new code a number of faith schools were reviewing their oversubscription criteria. Those schools whose over subscription criteria remained in breach of the code could be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.
- The new code also required faith schools to have clearer guidelines available on how the religious aspect of a child's application was to be assessed and ranked by the school in question.
- The Church of England was set to introduce a new ranking system for school applications but it was anticipated that there would be difficulties separating the applications of those children fulfilling the basic and medium level requirements for a Church place.
- It was highlighted to the Forum that a Fresh Start school or Academy open for less than two years could refuse to admit a child with challenging behaviour.
- If a parent asked to take a tour of a school before making an application, but the required year group was full, it was acceptable for a member of staff to host the parent but explain that the school was full at the current time; so if an application was made it would have to be refused.
- It was noted that those schools who acted as their own admission authorities could decide to implement a lottery system to award places even if the local authority rejected the idea for its community schools.

- St. Mary's RC High School was considering the introduction of a lottery system to award places after it had applied the faith and sibling elements of its over subscription criteria.
- Concern was expressed about the using a lottery system to award school places in a rural area like Herefordshire where, outside the city, alternative schools were often some distance apart.
- It was clarified that school places for those children whose family were moving into the County were not awarded until proof of the families move had been received and not more than six weeks in advance of the proposed start date.

25. CHOICE ADVISOR FOR HEREFORDSHIRE

The Forum was informed about the role of the Choice Advisor in school admission process.

The Admissions and Transport Manager introduced Carol Weston the new Choice Advisor for Herefordshire to the Forum.

It was explained that Choice Advisor was employed to assist parents with the school application process at primary and secondary school levels. One of the principle aims of the Choice Advisor was to identify and assist those parents who would have difficulties finding their way through the school application and admission process. It was important to note that the Choice Advisor needed to act impartially and was not there to make decisions on behalf of parents but rather to provide them with all the necessary knowledge and information to make an informed choice.

In response to a question it was clarified that if a parent failed to submit an application form for a school place altogether then it was possible that the child concerned may not even be able to obtain a place at their catchment school. In order to avoid this situation occurring the Choice Advisor informed the Forum that she intended to be proactive within the school community so that families who could potentially have problems with the application process could be identified and appropriate assistance provided.

A Member of the Forum suggested that information should be provided to Herefordshire's resident Polish community that Roman Catholic schools in the UK are not fee paying schools as in Poland.

Another Member of the Forum stated that it was important that the same assistance was made to Travelling families who resided in the County.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the role of the Choice Advisor be noted;

and;

(b) all admission authorities and schools in Herefordshire be advised of role of the Choice Advisor.

Before the meeting closed both the Chairman and the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) announced that they were standing down from the Council at the next election so this would be their last meeting at the Local Admissions Forum.

The Forum thanked the Chairman and the Cabinet Member for all their assistance performing their respective roles and wished them luck for the future.

The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

CHAIRMAN