

MINUTES of the meeting of Local Admissions Forum held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 11th July, 2005 at 4.00 p.m.

Present:	Local Education Authority	J.P. Thomas (Chairman)
	Church Representative	Ms. L. Johnson (Roman Catholic Church), Rev. I. Terry (Church of England)
	Headteachers	A Marson (Bishop of Hereford & St Mary's RC Schools)
	School Governors	(none)
	Parent Governors	(none)
	Local Community Rep	Vanessa Pawsey (Consortium of Special Educational Needs), B. Straker (West Midlands Service for Travelling Children)

In attendance: Councillor R.M. Wilson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from J. Barry, Ms. J. Powell and Mrs C. Shaw.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Ms. L. Johnson substituted for P. Shannon and B. Straker substituted for Mrs. C. Shaw.

3. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor J.P. Thomas be appointed Chairman of the Local Admissions Forum for the ensuing year

Councillor J.P. Thomas took the Chair.

4. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor J. Stone be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Local Admissions Forum for the ensuing year.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th July, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. OUTCOME OF PARENTAL APPLICATIONS FOR YEAR 6 PUPIL TRANSFERS TO HIGH SCHOOLS IN SEPTEMBER 2005

The Forum was informed about the outcomes of parental applications for Year 6 pupil transfers into high schools for September 2005, including details of appeals.

The Admissions and Transport Manager reported to the Forum that formal admission appeals had now taken place. He reported that out of 33 appeals 9 had been upheld.

He further explained that the new system of 3 preference applications had produced a considerable improvement in the number of parents satisfied with the allocated school for their child. He reported that 93.4% of parents had received their first preference of school and that 98% of parents had received a place at one of their 3 declared preferences and to date there had been no recorded complaints about how applications had been administered.

The report included a table detailing schools and their respective Published Admission Numbers (PANs) and the number of children on their waiting lists. The Admissions and Transport Manager highlighted the five schools with waiting lists and explained that these waiting lists would remain open until the start of school in September 2005 until all allocated places had been accounted for and currently there was no Year 6 pupil in Herefordshire without a high school place for September 2005.

The Forum discussed the outcomes of Year 6 transfers to high schools. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- Concern was expressed that admissions to Haywood High School were falling some way short of its PAN.
- Concern was expressed that a handful of children living in the catchment area for Wigmore High School had not been admitted to the school and at least three non-catchment children had been admitted.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that schools were provided to serve their catchment areas. However, this year Wigmore had received a number of high priority cases which had seen some catchment children miss out on a place. He informed the Forum that in the light of falling rolls Wigmore High School would not be extended, as there would be places available at other schools in the County for those not admitted to Wigmore. He stated that he believed there were enough places to accommodate all catchment area children over the next 5 years.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that the Children's Services Directorate was likely to be performing a review of school catchment areas within the next 18 months.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. AMENDMENTS TO SCHOOL PLANNED ADMISSION NUMBERS

The Forum considered changes to the PANs at Fairfield High School and Bodenham

Primary School.

The Admissions and Transport Manager reported that the construction of a new teaching block at Fairfield High School had led to a new net capacity assessment being performed which resulted in a revised PAN of 70. He informed the Forum that this new PAN had been used for the current Year 6 transfers.

The Forum were told that Bodenham Primary School wished to increase its PAN from 15 to 17 following its amalgamation with the catchment area for the recently closed school at Hope under Dinmore.

The Admissions and Transport Manager stated that the PAN increases were reasonable.

A view was expressed that as Herefordshire was moving into a position of falling rolls PANs should be falling and not increasing.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the Planned Admission Number for Fairfield High School be raised to 70;

and

(b) the Planned Admission Number for Bodenham Primary School be raised to 17.

9. APPLYING FOR A PLACE IN HIGH SCHOOL

The Forum considered the format of the guidance notes in relation to admission of children into reception class at 4 years of age and the transfer of pupils into high schools at age 11.

The Admissions and Transport Manager reported that since the publication of the Agenda some minor editorial changes had been made to both the 'Starting School' and 'Applying for a Place at High School' documents and he circulated copies of the updated documents.

Some further minor editorial changes were proposed:

- Inclusion of a telephone number for parents to ring for more information on the 'Applying for a Place in High School' document.
- Addition of an explanatory paragraph on denominational transport.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that the Children's Services Directorate looked to Teachers at primary schools to identify and assist parents who may need help in completing high school applications. He also informed the Forum that the 'Information for Parents' booklet was available in Braille and other languages on request.

The Admissions and Transport Manager commented that the resources were not available to perform presentations at all primary schools in Herefordshire to explain and help parents with the secondary school application process. It was agreed that it would be beneficial if schools held their own workshops on the secondary application process as a way to help parents who may have problems understanding the process.

The Head of Policy and Resources advised the Forum that if a request was received for a child to attend a denominational school for which there was no suitable school available in Herefordshire, for example a Muslim or Jewish school, then the Council would be liable to provide transport to the nearest suitable school.

RESOLVED: That the 'Applying for a Place at High School in Herefordshire 2006/07' and 'Starting School' documents, as amended, be approved.

10. STANDARD APPLICATION FORMS FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2005/06

The Forum considered the layout of the 'common application form' to be used for the co-ordinated secondary transfer arrangements for September 2006 (SA1), and the 'common application form' for primary co-ordination (PA1), also for September 2006.

Regarding the SA1, Members of the Forum felt that it was necessary to state the full amount a parent would be liable to pay under the new arrangements for denominational transport. The Forum believed that the parents needed to know exactly how much they were committing themselves to financially when they applied.

The Head of Policy and Resources agreed that it would be beneficial to include the agreed amount parents would need to contribute towards transport to denominational schools and that he would submit some new wording to the Forum once the final arrangements for denominational transport had been resolved by Cabinet.

The Forum commented that a section should be added to the SA1 regarding banded children. It was agreed that this would be examined at the next meeting of the Forum.

The Forum had discussed agenda item 9 'Information for Parents Booklet' before considering this item. In that discussion it had been agreed that an additional meeting of the Forum needed to be held soon once Cabinet's decision on denominational transport was known. It was therefore proposed that revisions to the SA1 form should be considered at this meeting as well.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the format and contents of the 'common application form' for primary schools for September 2006 be approved;

and

(b) the format and content of the 'common application form' for secondary schools be considered further at the next meeting of the Forum.

11. INFORMATION FOR PARENTS BOOKLET

The Forum discussed the composite prospectus 'Information for Parents 2006/07' for the admission and transfer of pupils into primary and high school.

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Forum of various changes which had taken place since the previous edition. The most significant of these changes related to denominational transport and the over-subscription criteria employed by the Council for community and voluntary controlled schools which had been amended to include pupils who received banded funding and those pupils who

had been adopted.

The Forum was also informed of other minor editorial changes and Forum Members suggested a number of further minor changes in addition to the changes highlighted by the Admissions and Transport Manager.

The Church School Headteacher representative stated that the revised denominational transport policy had implications for the admissions policy for the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School and called for the introduction of the new policy to be delayed until 2007.

The Forum was advised that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee had called-in Cabinet's decision on the new denominational transport policy, halting the decisions implementation. The Scrutiny Committee was due to meet soon to consider the matter. Cabinet would then meet to consider any recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee and whether it wished to modify its original decision.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) informed the Forum that the policy on denominational transport had been reviewed and revised as it had become apparent that the Council was at risk of legal challenge. If the implementation of the new policy was delayed for another year the Council would remain vulnerable. That was why the Council wanted to introduce the new policy as soon as possible.

The Head of Policy and Resources stated that he was happy to amend the 'Information for Parents Booklet 2006/07' in light of the final decision of Cabinet.

The Catholic Church representative commented that if Cabinet did decide to implement the new policy on denominational transport for the 2006 admission round, then the information within the booklet was inadequate. She felt that the booklet needed to contain information on:

- How to apply for denominational transport
- Low income criteria for subsidised denominational transport
- Timescales to apply for denominational transport

The Chairman suggested that, in order to resolve the wording concerning denominational transport, the Forum should meet once the final decision of Cabinet had been made.

The Forum then discussed the admissions policy for the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School.

A view was expressed that priority 3 of the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School admissions policy was in breach of section 4.14 of the School Admissions Code of Practice as the definition of a Christian Church was not explicit. Parents did not therefore have all the required information to make an application as required by the guidance.

The Church School Headteacher representative stated that if the parents of a child were active worshippers then they would be aware of which Christian groups were eligible under the schools admissions policy. He also commented that he felt it was inappropriate to publish an evolving list as part of the schools admissions policy.

The Head of Policy and Resources suggested that an addition be made to the schools admissions policy stating that an up-to-date list of all eligible Christian groups was available from the school on request.

The Forum then discussed the admissions policy for St. Mary's RC High School.

A view was expressed that points 6,7 and 11 of the school's admissions policy were in breach of section 3.12 of the School Admissions Code of Practice as they could disproportionately disadvantage families who had recently moved into the area especially those who were ethnic minorities, travellers or refugees.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported to the Forum that the admissions policy was not satisfactory in the long term. He had written to the Governors of the school regarding their admissions policy and had been informed that they were minded to modify their policy. He informed the Forum that ethnic diversity at the school was in line with the average for the County's high schools.

It was proposed that the LEA should consult with the Diocesan Education Authority regarding the admissions policy of St. Mary's RC High School.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the consideration of the 'Information for Parents 2006/07' booklet be deferred until the next meeting of the Local Admissions Forum;

(b) the admissions policy for the Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School be amended to include a sentence informing parents that a list of eligible Church groups was available from the school;

and

(c) the LEA consult with the Diocesan Education Authority regarding the admissions policy of St. Mary's RC High School.

The meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.

CHAIRMAN