

MINUTES of the meeting of Local Admissions Forum held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 28th July, 2005 at 7.00 p.m.

Present:	Local Education Authority	J.P. Thomas (Chairman), J. Stone (Vice-Chairman) and Ms. A.M. Toon
	Church Representative	Mrs. L. Johnson (Roman Catholic Church)
	Headteachers	(none)
	School Governors	Mr Ross (Primary Schools)
	Parent Governors	Mrs. C. Woolley (Secondary Schools)
	Local Community Rep	(none)

In attendance: Councillor D.W. Rule M.B.E.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from J. Barry, H. Lewis, A. Marson, Mrs. V. Pawsey and Mrs. J. Powell.

13. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Mrs. L. Johnson substituted for P. Shannon.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES

The Forum noted some minor editorial amendments to the minutes published in the Agenda. The following amendments were also agreed:

- That Councillor D.W. Rule (Cabinet Member – Children’s Services) be listed as ‘In Attendance’.
- That the penultimate paragraph in minute number 7 be amended to reflect the point that current future pupil estimate indicate that Wigmore High School will not be able to accommodate all known catchment area children during the next five years.
- That minute number 11 be amended to reflect that the Bishop of Hereford’s Bluecoat School be required to make available, to parents applying to the school on request, details of its scoring mechanism along with the up-to-date list of eligible Christian groups.

RESOLVED: That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 11th July 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. INFORMATION FOR PARENTS BOOKLET

The Forum considered the composite prospectus, 'Information for parents booklet 2006-07', for the admission and transfer of pupils into primary and high schools which had been deferred from the last meeting. A copy of the booklet was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that the 'Information for parents booklet 2006/07' had been amended to reflect the decisions made by Cabinet on 14th July 2005 regarding denominational transport. The principal changes to the booklet were:

- Details informing parents that contributions for denominational transport were required for the first two children attending a church school, with any subsequent children being entitled to free bus travel whilst the other children remained in receipt of transport.
- Details relating to the criteria for free and partial contribution denominational transport on low-income grounds.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that families who were in receipt of free medical prescriptions would also be eligible for free denominational transport and information regarding this would be added to the booklet before it was published.

The Catholic Church representative reported to the Forum that she had tested the new arrangements with sixteen families on low incomes to see if they would qualify for free or reduced contribution denominational transport. She continued that out of sixteen families identified nine had matched the necessary criteria but seven had not.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that any family with an income under £15,000 per annum was eligible to apply for housing and council tax benefit which if a family was in receipt of either would entitle them to help towards the cost of denominational transport. He suggested that those seven identified low income families who currently did not fulfil the necessary criteria for help with the costs towards denominational transport should be prompted to investigate their eligibility for housing and council tax benefit so they could receive free or reduced rate denominational transport if they fulfilled the necessary criteria for the appropriate benefits. He also informed the Forum that it would be possible for families to make an appeal should they not fit the stated criteria.

A view was expressed that annual checks should take place concerning the eligibility for those pupils in receipt of help towards the cost of denominational transport to ensure that fraudulent claims were not being made.

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

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Forum that point 9 of the admissions policy for the school had been amended since the last meeting to include some additional information.

A view was expressed that the admissions policy for the school was still in breach of paragraph 3.12 of the School Admissions Code of Practice. In particular points 4,6,7,11 and 12.

The Head of Policy and Resources highlighted that the recommendation made at the last meeting had put the onus onto him to meet with the school to address the

problems with its admissions policy. He informed the Forum that it was his intention to arrange a meeting with the school's governing body in the new term to address the issue.

A view was expressed that voluntary aided schools, as their own admission authority's, had been breaching DfES School Admissions Code of Practice. If these problems were not resolved within the next year the Forum should consider recommending that the Council approach the Schools Adjudicator to deal with the issue.

The Head of Policy and Resources stated that he would work with St. Mary's RC High School and all other voluntary aided schools to address the identified problems and that if there were still breaches of the Code next year then serious consideration would be given to moving the problem to the Schools Adjudicator to resolve.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that he believed that the problems could be resolved through the Diocesan Board of Education so that a standard approach could be resolved including the higher prioritisation of those children in the looked after system and with special educational needs.

The Forum agreed that clear training should be provided to all school governors on admissions.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the 'Information for parents booklet 2006/07' be approved;

(b) if in twelve months time the admissions policies of voluntary aided schools did not fulfil all the necessary criteria as outlined in the School Admissions Code of Practice then serious consideration would be given to allowing the Schools Adjudicator to resolve the issue;

and

(c) the LEA arrange for training to be given to all school governors on school admissions.

17. APPLYING FOR A PLACE IN HIGH SCHOOL

The Forum considered the format of the simple guidance notes in relation to admission of children into high schools at age 11, which had been deferred from the Forums last meeting. A copy of the guidance notes was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Forum that the guidance notes had been amended since the last meeting to reflect the decisions taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 14th July 2005 in relation to denominational transport. He reported that additions were going to be made to section seven of the guidance notes to reflect the fact that those families who received free medical prescriptions would also be eligible for help towards the cost of denominational transport.

The Forum believed that it would be beneficial for parents to have included contact details for organisations where independent help and advice could be sought regarding the application process to high schools. Therefore the Admissions and Transport Manger agreed to include contact details for the Advisory Centre for

Education.

RESOLVED: That the 'Applying for a place at High School in Herefordshire 2006/07' document be approved.

18. STANDARD APPLICATION FORMS FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2005/06

The Forum considered the layout of the common application form (SA1) to be used for the co-ordinated secondary transfer arrangements for September 2006, which was deferred from the last meeting. A copy of the SA1 form was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Forum that Note 4 would be amended to reflect the fact that those families who received free medical prescriptions would also be eligible for help towards the cost of denominational transport.

Forum Members suggested a number of minor editorial changes which were accepted by the Admissions and Transport Manager.

RESOLVED: That the format and contents of the SA1 common application form for secondary education for 2006/7 pupil transfers be approved.

19. LATE ITEM/ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Forum that the Council had been approached by the DfES and asked to take part in a consultation in relation to the development of new code of practice guidance booklets for school admissions and appeals.

The Admissions and Transport Manager proposed sending copies of the draft documents to Forum Members for their views on the booklets before he presented the Council's formal response in October 2005.

RESOLVED: That copies of the draft Code of Practice booklets on School Admissions and Appeals be sent to Forum Members for comments to be received to the Admissions and Transport Manager by 30th September 2005.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN