

DEVON LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM

14 July 2011

Present

Church of England Diocese
Mrs Mabin (Chairman)

Academy Schools
Mr Bishop

Community Schools
Mr Lovett

Children In Care
Ms Booth

Devon Association of Governors
Mr Rogers

Roman Catholic Diocese
Ms Blyth (RC Diocese)

Community
Mr Juby

Neighbouring Authorities (Non Voting)
Mrs Jago (Cornwall Council)
Mr Pollock (Somerset County Council)

Observer
Ms Slow (CoE Diocese)

Apologies

Ms Bailey, Ms Butler, Mrs Boote, Councillor Channon, Councillor Davis and Mr Evans, Mr Jones and Mr Tancock

81 Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

RESOLVED

(a) that Councillor Channon be elected Chairman for the ensuing year;

(b) that Mrs Mabin be elected Vice Chairman for the ensuing year.

(Mrs Mabin in the Chair)

82 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2011 be signed as a correct record.

83 LAF Composition, Membership and Appointment of Secretary

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (CS/11/13) on the composition of the Forum pending the passage through parliament of the Education White paper (including the draft revised admission and appeal codes).

The diocesan representatives each expressed their willingness to continue to serve on a form of this Forum.

RESOLVED

(a) that the County Solicitor be appointed Secretary of the Forum;

(b) that nominations relating to parent governor and service representation be sought and filled in advance of the next meeting of the Forum;

(c) that the Cabinet be advised that in line with other neighbouring Authorities this Forum wishes to continue on a non statutory basis, to help ensure effective liaison with neighbouring local authorities on admission arrangements, promote effective partnership working with Academy, Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools together with parent and diocesan representation; and to champion fair and equitable admission arrangements for parents and children in Devon and advise the Local Authority accordingly and authorised to make representation directly to the Schools Adjudicator as necessary;

(d) that the detailed composition of the Forum, its remit and powers be further considered at the next meeting by when the Education Bill will be expected to have received royal assent.

84 Draft Admissions and Appeals Codes

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/05) on draft revisions of the School Admissions and School Admissions Appeal Codes for consultation with the intention that they would be in force in early 2012. The report detailed the main thrust of the revisions and some of the Local Authority's concerns and potential benefits.

RESOLVED that the implications of the revisions be discussed further with the Local Authority, Devon Association of Primary Heads, Devon Association of Secondary Heads and Devon Association of Governors for a further report to the next meeting of the Forum regarding any potential implications to Devon's admissions arrangements for 2013 onwards.

LAF Working Group: Response to Draft Codes

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/06) on a proposed detailed response (appendix 1 of the report) by a small working party of the Forum on the draft revised school admission and appeal codes. This was subject to approval by the Forum before submission to the DfE.

Discussion points by members included:

- The preference by some academies to allow all popular and successful schools to increase their published admission number which was felt by the academy representative to be self-limiting in time in terms of 'market forces' and other factors. Other members referred to the strategic role of the authority, the impact on other local schools which could reduce parental 'choice' in the wider sense, impact on disadvantaged families and possible health/safety concerns.
- The question relating to the proposal to remove the requirement for local authorities to co-ordinate in year applications was discussed. The academy representative referred to the academies acting as their own admission authorities in wanting to retain control notwithstanding the need for partnership and coordination from the local authority. The working party had indicated that the removal of in-year coordination had the potential to remove checks and balances currently in place to protect the interests of vulnerable families and children.
- The continued need to raise awareness amongst pre-school parents about the admission process and timetable in view of the number of late admissions still being received (although reducing) affecting in general the more disadvantaged parents, on which the Chairman on behalf of the Forum has previously made representation to the DfE calling for a national campaign in view of the common closing date for primary admissions. This was now more pertinent with the demise of the Devon Choice Advice Service which had been previously available to support vulnerable families through the process. Following this previous correspondence the DfE had responded, referring to this consultation on the admission/appeal codes as an opportunity to put forward concerns. It was therefore opportune for the Forum to remind the DfE of its concerns and re-iterate the value of a national campaign.

RESOLVED that the draft response to the draft revised school admission and appeal codes be approved and submitted by the Chairman on behalf of the Forum subject to the following amendments/addition:

(a) in question 4 'do you support the proposal to remove the requirement for local authorities to co-ordinate in-year applications?' change the working party draft answer from 'Not Sure' to 'No';

(b) that the DfE be reminded of the Forum's previous request to initiate a national campaign to inform all pre-school parents about the admissions process and in particular the importance of expressing their preferences prior to the closing date, through a covering letter to accompany the consultation response which highlights this issue.

86 Year 11 Admissions and Devon Personalised Learning Service (DPLS) Admissions Policy

The Forum noted the report of the Secretary (EL/11/07) on the admission policy and arrangements to the Devon Personalised Learning Service. The impact of the policy would be clearer in the Autumn term and performance data and information would be reported to the next meeting of this Forum.

87 Annual Review of Admissions for 2011 Admissions Round

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/08) on secondary and primary allocations for September 2011. Appendix A to the report provided the published data by the DfE relating to preferences met by the LA and by region.

To date Devon's secondary schools had offered 93.2% of parents their highest ranked school with 98% of parents being offered a place in a preferred school; and for primary 95% of parents were offered their first preference and 98.5% offered a place in a preferred school. Devon's figures for secondary schools compared favourably against the national averages of 84.6% and 95.6 % respectively.

The proportion of online applications for secondary and primary was respectively 97% and 96%, which was also very encouraging and equal first nationally in terms of secondary online applications.

The Forum congratulated the admissions team for these excellent results.

88 Admissions Data from Academies

The Forum noted the report of the Secretary (EL/11/09) on actions to ensure that the data sharing protocol, already in place between the Local Authority and Academies, was amended to facilitate the provision of admissions information in respect of academies. This would allow the Forum to undertake its statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of in-year admission arrangements across Devon.

89 Support for Admissions Process

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/10) on a review and additional support for the Admissions Team and Integrated Solutions Team in view of the increased workload and responsibilities with the introduction of the co-ordination of in-year admissions. The appendix to the report detailed some of the errors which had occurred as a result of the increased responsibilities and work load for the admissions team with its limited capacity. Other local authority representatives confirmed that their authorities were experiencing similar problems. The Forum also noted that additional resources had been allocated to the Integrated Solutions Team with the support of the Cabinet Lead Member (Schools and Learning).

RESOLVED that the issue be referred to the Cabinet with a view to increasing the staffing accordingly within the Admissions Team.

90 Single Offer Point and Admission to Reception

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/11) on the new requirement under a 'single offer point' for children to be admitted to full time education at the beginning of the September term after a child's 4th birthday. Any variation from that for part time education or deferred entry until statutory school age was a matter of parental choice which could not be legally limited by schools.

A further report would be made to the Forum on take-up of part-time and full-time places across the County at the next meeting.

91 Admissions to Grammar Schools: Testing Before Preference: Update

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/12) on options for the timing of tests for a grammar place before expressing a preference in accordance with the draft admission code. It was proposed that as far as possible, a common test date across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth should be agreed, preferably in early September. Admission officers would be consulting with the local authorities accordingly and the Head teacher of Colyton Grammar School had indicated that he would also be similarly consulting fellow heads from these local authorities. This would affect admissions from 2013-14.

RESOLVED that parents be advised of the outcome of tests before expressing preferences and the introduction of a common test date (preferably in early - mid September) across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth be supported.

92 Education Transport Policy - Update

The Forum noted the report of the Secretary (EL/11/13) on changes for 2011 discretionary school transport policy. The policy for 2012 would be subject to consultation at www.devon.gov.uk/admissionarrangements from December 2011 to 1 March 2012.

93 Local Authority Annual Report to the School's Adjudicator

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EL/11/14) on the Local authority's statutory annual report to the Schools Adjudicator (appendix A and B) covering arrangements of all schools and academies and the effectiveness of co-ordination of admissions for 2010/11.

The Forum has an option to submit its report to the adjudicator independently of the local authority.

RESOLVED that an annual report from this Forum be not submitted for 2010/11 (in view of the representations in respect of the proposed revised admission and appeal codes) but consideration of the formation of a working party to consider a Forum annual report on admission arrangements for 2011/12 be considered at the March 2012 meeting.

Dates of Meetings 2011

Thursday 17 November 2011 at 10.30 am at County Hall.

(NB Secretary to consult on a date for March 2012)

The Minutes of the Forum are published on the County Council's Website at:-
http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/learning/schools/admissions/admissions_forum.htm

The meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 12.15 pm