

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held in the Seminar Lecture Theatre, Sessions House, County Hall Maidstone on Tuesday, 12 July 2011.

PRESENT: The Reverend N Genders (Chairman), Mr G Cooke (Vice-Chairman), Ms R Chinnadurai, Mr P Dalton, Mrs S V Hohler, Mrs E Watson, Mrs J Young and Mr K Burleton

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw (Head of Admissions & Transport) and Mr G Rudd (Assistant Democratic Services Manager)

APOLOGIES: Mr G Chisnell, Mr F Green, Col J Gunnell, Mr J Stanley, Mr J Watt and Mr G Wetherell

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2010
(Item 2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. Matters Arising
(Item 3)

(1) Mrs Hohler referred to paragraph 36(1) which should have been included as an agenda item for the meeting.

(2) Mr Rudd apologised for the omission and confirmed that this item would be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

3. Local Authority Report to the Adjudicator (includes numbers of Fair Access Placements)
(Item 4)

(1) Mr Bagshaw introduced the Local Authority Report to the School Adjudicator and referred to some of the points being made. He invited the Members' views and comments.

(2) Mr Bagshaw also advised the Members that proposed changes to the Admissions Code would remove the requirement for the Local Authority to issue a report to the Adjudicator.

(3) Mr Bagshaw referred to the Fair Access Protocol and reported that there did not seem to be disproportionate placements so the protocol would appear to be working quite well.

(4) The Forum noted the contents of the report

4. Update on Admissions Schemes/Issues with reallocation and Appeals
(Item 5)

(1) Mr Bagshaw tabled a report and advised the Members that he proposed to change the determined scheme for the secondary school admissions reallocation process. He reported that the intention would be for the Local Authority to carry out the first round of allocations and then delegate the authority to schools to carry out the reallocation of further places. The schools would send a copy of the offers to the Local Authority to comply with the legal requirements of the Admissions Code.

(2) Mr Masters suggested that a standard letter be sent to all secondary schools from Mr Bagshaw's School Admissions Team. Mr Bagshaw agreed to this proposal.

(3) Mr Bagshaw also advised the Members that he was hoping to have the same arrangements in place for the primary school admissions scheme reallocation process. He reported that primary school headteachers had experienced a lot of problems with being unable to reallocate the places.

(4) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that he thought that it was likely that he would be able to implement these changes but that he did need to be aware of the requirements of the Admissions Code.

(5) The Forum noted the contents of the report.

5. Briefing on Proposed changes to the School Admissions and Appeals Codes
(Item 6)

(1) Mr Bagshaw referred to the Consultation Response Form on changes to the Codes. He commented that whilst the new proposed codes might seem straight forward they were brief and lacked detail and were open to misrepresentation. The footnotes made reference to the Statutory Regulations

(2) Reverend Genders enquired whether the Forum should also be responding. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that there were no restrictions on who could respond but that any response would need to be done by the closing date of 19 August 2011.

(3) Mr Bagshaw commented that the new codes were more school focused than parent focused. An example being the proposal that popular schools should be allowed to expand. He expressed the view that whilst it might be appropriate at times to do this he did have concerns about future base planning with other schools at risk of closure.

(4) Reverend Genders agreed that the market forces approach in the code would be a disaster for planning and providing quality education access across the County. He strongly refuted the proposal. Mr Dalton agreed and felt that the current arrangements tended to mean there would be at least one community school in the area. Mr Burleton made the point that expanding popular schools was not always a good idea. He felt that they could become too big and then less popular. Mr Cooke had some sympathy with the view that parents should have the opportunity to have

the best education they can and expressed the view that PANs were being ignored through the appeals process so why not regulate it and allow expansion. However he agreed there needed to be a balance in this proposal

(5) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that regulations regarding the duty to coordinate In Year admissions had been relaxed. Although some beneficial safeguards had come out of the process it had proved to be very difficult to administer. Mr Dalton agreed that there had been some benefits from this whilst Reverend Genders and Mrs Watson felt that a middle way was needed with some of the coordination back with the schools.

(6) Discussion took place in respect of the proposal to allow schools to give priority to applications for children of staff in their over subscription criteria. Mr Bagshaw had refuted this idea as being wholly unfair. Reverend Genders accepted that from the schools point of view it might be a good idea for them but that there were other categories of employment who might have as much of a claim to receive priority. Mrs Watson did not think that it was important to schools and that staff should not be coming just to get their children into the school they work at. Mr Cooke shared Mr Bagshaw's views whereas Mrs Hohler could see some benefit in the proposal. Mrs Chinnadurai was not keen as it would not be popular with parents and could be seen as a lack of transparency

(7) Mr Dalton referred to the paragraph relating to the expansion of grammar schools and felt that a small rise of 1-2% would be acceptable but if significantly different this could have a big impact elsewhere which could harm those schools and their future. Mr Cooke again accepted that there needed to be a balance but Kent supported selective education. Reverend Genders referred to the top 25% entering grammar schools not 26% or 27% and felt that doing so turned the grammar schools into no more than comprehensive schools. Mr Dalton agreed that if it was not the quartile then the expansion of grammar schools was detrimental. Mr Cooke confirmed that he was not looking at increasing the 25% but that if the grammar schools expand they should be able to do so proportionate to the cohort. Mr Masters advised that coordination on any expansion was vital to safeguard the future of schools. He agreed with the concerns previously expressed that part of the difficulty arose when appeal panels put non selective pupils into grammar schools. Mrs Chinnadurai was concerned that a two tier system would arise even in primary education. She felt that some parents were able to "flex their muscles" often to the detriment of other parents. In her view market forces in education was not the answer to the increase in quality of teaching and learning.

(8) Mr Masters referred to the question relating to the deadline date for objections to the Schools Adjudicator being moved from the 30 July to the 30 June. He agreed with Mr Bagshaw's support for this proposal.

(9) Reverend Genders sought Mr Bagshaw's view on how other Local Authorities were responding to the questionnaire. Mr Bagshaw was aware that a few more Local Authorities were less keen on the In Year Admissions procedure than before. He felt that there was still a lot of discussion taking place on the proposals and that other Local Authorities seemed to have similar issues to those that he had raised. Reverend Genders felt that the proposals were more suited to London Authorities.

(10) Mr Willis referred to the new timetable for lodging and hearing appeals. He expressed his concern that moving the timetable to later dates made transition

harder and that parents needed to know sooner what schools their children were going to.

(11) Reverend Genders asked what view the politicians were taking in the County and whether the MPs were aware of the implications of the proposed changes. Mrs Hohler confirmed that County Councillors were working towards the approach of using the Kent MPs on other issues and could do the same with this. Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that he sat on the working group with senior members of the DFES and that they did take notice of the comments that Kent put forward.

6. General discussion about Schemes of Education in light of the changing education *(Item 7)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that the Schemes of Education within Kent came about following the introduction of comprehensive schools in the 1960s/1970s. However Kent had also retained its grammar schools. He referred to the broader landscape and the fact that 73% of the grammar schools make no reference to Schemes of Education in their admissions criteria. He also advised that none of the comprehensive schools refer to Schemes of Education in their admissions criteria. The Forum was also advised that only 3 of the Foundation Schools make reference to them.

(2) Mr Bagshaw sought the Forum's view on whether the Schemes of Education should remain.

(3) Mrs Hohler commented that the County Council's home to school transport policy was also complicated by the existence of Schemes of Education.

(4) Mrs Hohler advised the Members that in the 1960s schools in the various areas eg Romney Marsh were asked whether they wanted to become comprehensive schools. Mrs Hohler added that she would like to consult on this issue again to get a level playing field. Mrs Hohler also advised the Members that the County Council has decided to take out the provision of free home to school transport to grammar schools just because the child is suitable for a place at a grammar school.

(5) Reverend Genders also referred to the change in education with the impact of academies and free schools. He felt that Schemes of Education should no longer have a place in the Local Authority's admission arrangements.

(6) Mr Bagshaw explained that the Local Authority would need to consult by the end of the year and therefore September 2013 would be the earliest that reference to the Schemes of Education could be removed from oversubscription criteria. He also advised that it would be necessary to look more closely at areas where this would have an impact on the provision of education in parts of the County, eg west Kent, where schools take children from outside of the County. He was concerned that changes could have an affect on the pattern of how places are offered. However he agreed that with the impact of academies this would be the right time to look at the issues created by the Schemes of Education.

(7) Reverend Genders sought the Forum's views on what it wanted to do about making reference to Schemes of Education in the community schools admissions arrangements.

(8) The Forum was unanimous in its view that reference to the Schemes of Education should be removed from Community and Voluntary controlled schools oversubscription criteria.

(9) Mrs Hohler advised the Forum that this would need to be consulted on and then taken to Cabinet for a decision. The Forum supported this action and encouraged the Local Authority to begin this process as soon as possible. Mr Bagshaw noted the Forum's support.

7. Future of the Admissions Forum *(Item 8)*

(1) Reverend Genders referred to the Education Bill and advised the Members that there was no obligation to have a Forum and that the increase in the new style academies had made it harder to meet the categories specified in the Admissions Code. He added that morally he believed there was good reason for the Forum to continue.

(2) Mr Bagshaw supported this view and felt that the Forum was a useful and appropriate place to bring views for consideration.

(3) Mrs Hohler also felt that it had a useful role to play but that meetings should only be held when there were relevant items to be discussed.

(4) Mr Burleton reported that he found the Forum a useful way of accessing Mr Bagshaw's views on admission issues

(5) Reverend Genders agreed with this point and confirmed that the Diocese found it useful to hear the views of other admissions authorities and schools.

(6) Mr Dalton also supported the retention of the Forum as a counter balance for free market moves.

(7) Reverend Genders acknowledged that the Forum did not have any power but that it at least gave the opportunity to air a variety of views.

(8) Mr Bagshaw advised the Members that the Admissions Code maintained a Local Authority policing role and therefore the Forum would be good at defining what is reasonable in this instance.

(9) The Members were unanimous in their view that the Kent Schools Admissions Forum should continue.

8. Any Other Business
(Item 9)

Independent Appeal Panels

(1) Mrs Young updated the Forum on the successful use of the grouped appeal stage in respect of three grammar schools, one from each area in Kent.

(2) The Forum noted Mrs Young's comments.

9. Date of next meeting
(Item)

(1) Reverend Genders, Mr Bagshaw and Mr Rudd to liaise regarding the date of the next meeting. Mr Bagshaw advised that there would need to be a meeting in October 2011.

(2) Reverend Genders advised Members that if they had any issues they wanted raising at the Forum meeting they should liaise with himself, Mr Bagshaw or Mr Rudd to enable a meeting to be convened.