

Bridgend County Borough Council

Approved minutes of the Bridgend Admission Forum meeting held on 13 January 2022, via Teams

Local authority representatives

Mr R Davies (RD) – Chair
Mrs D Davies (DD) - Secretary
Cllr Dr C Smith (Cllr Smith)
Ms R Garner (RG)

Group Manager - Business Support
Principal Officer - Business Strategy and Performance
Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration
ALN (Additional Learning Needs) Lead Early Years,
Cognition and Learning and CMMI (Complex Medical
and Motor Impairment)
Childcare Team Manager

Ms B Davies (BD)

School representatives

Mr J Tarran (JT) – Vice-chair

Mrs R Dixon (RD*i*)
Mrs K John (KJ)
Mr A Slade

Headteacher, Archdeacon John Lewis Church in
Wales Primary School
Headteacher, Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr
Headteacher, Brackla Primary School
Headteacher, Porthcawl Comprehensive School

Parent governor representative

Mr W Bond (WB)

Croesty Primary School

Also present at the meeting

Ms C Christy (CC)

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

RD welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

There were no apologies.

2. Election of the Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary for the 2021-2022 academic year

There was discussion regarding the number of meetings per academic year and all present agreed that two per year should be maintained.

RD, JT and DD were proposed as the Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary. The proposal was approved by all present. RD, JT and DD accepted the positions for the 2021-2022 academic year on the basis of the commitment of two meetings for the year.

3. Membership of the forum

DD presented a paper providing background information on the requirements regarding the membership of admissions forums, and proposals for the forum's membership for 2021-2022, for formal ratification.

The maximum number of members representing community and voluntary controlled schools was being maintained. It was highlighted that the forum continues to have no representatives from the dioceses. JT continued to represent the voluntary aided (VA) schools and it was noted that there can be up to three VA representatives.

DD outlined the actions that had been taken to increase the number of parent governor members and for community representatives to join the membership. A letter had been sent to all parent and community governors inviting expressions of interest, but none had been received. Fortunately, WB had been willing to continue as a parent governor member. Following discussion, it was agreed that Cllr Smith was a representative of the community, and this would be reflected in the membership accordingly. With new members RG and BD, the number of local authority members for 2021-2022 would be four, with a maximum of five being permitted.

The appointment and re-appointments as proposed, with the change of Cllr Smith as a community representative, were ratified.

DD recommended that the forum consider identifying and appointing other individuals who would not be core members, but who could make beneficial contributions. As an example, DD advised that Mr Jeremy Evans, Headteacher of Heronsbridge School, had ceased to be a core member in consequence of permitted maximum numbers under each category. However, Mr Evans could be invited to be a non-core member.

With regards to diocesan representatives, CG advised that the Rhondda Cynon Taf Admission Forum has a representative from the Roman Catholic diocesan office in Cardiff but no Church in Wales representative. It was agreed that DD would make enquiries of the Roman Catholic diocesan office in Cardiff and JT would contact the Church in Wales diocesan office in Llandaff regarding potential future representation on the forum.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2021 and matter arising

The minutes of the meeting were approved as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

5. Role of the forum and draft work programme 2021-2022

DD presented a paper to members and outlined that its purpose was to serve as a reminder of the role of the forum and recommend a plan of work to ensure all responsibilities are discharged.

DD highlighted that as the first meeting in 2021-2022 was taking place in January, which was the spring term, the references to a spring term meeting would need to be would now be relate to a summer term meeting.

DD advised the members that the work plan was intended to ensure an appropriate level on focus, not just on matters of policy, but how policy had been put into practice.

DD highlighted that the local authority is only one of the admission authorities in Bridgend and the forum has an overarching role and responsibilities in respect of admissions in Bridgend, specifically in terms of monitoring and ensuring that admission authorities comply with the relevant legislation and statutory codes. Therefore, the forum should consider how it could discharge those overarching responsibilities and it was proposed that the work plan and the proposed contributors would be one suitable means as the plan was based on the VA providing similar information to that provided by the local authority. In discussions, it was acknowledged that the forum needed to strengthen information flows such that it receives and considers the draft admissions policies of all the VA schools, as a key element of the consultation, and receive reports evidencing the application of the policies in practice.

It was agreed that JT would initiate discussions with colleagues in the VA schools, followed by a meeting between JT and DD to discuss specific arrangements.

6. Draft Bridgend Admission Forum Annual Report 2020-2021

DD reminded members that admission forums need to produce an annual report and provide a copy to Welsh Government. To facilitate this, Welsh Government provides a report template each year. DD highlighted that the annual report has to be published.

DD referred members to the draft report for 2020-2021 and advised that the draft had been provided to Welsh Government following a request for an advance report.

As the report should cover all admission authorities in Bridgend, there were gaps in the information in the draft relating to VA schools, which needed to be addressed. After discussion it was agreed that the focus would be in relation to the determination of the admission arrangements and it was agreed that DD would contact the VA schools to seek the outstanding information, with support from JT.

For future years, it was proposed and agreed that the report should have a re-balanced focus in all respects. It should initially be drafted to reflect the local authority's information, considered by DD and JT, and then be sent to the VA schools with a request that they add their information to the content of certain sections.

There was discussion regarding the section of the report relating to co-ordinated admission activity and DD provided additional background information. DD highlighted that some parents/carers whose children are in receipt of dual Year 7 offers from the local authority, for Bryntirion Comprehensive School, and from Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School, often do not advise the local authority of which offer is being

accepted until the end of the school summer holidays. This can result in offers on refused places being communicated to parents/carers only a few days before the start of the school year.

CC outlined that a similar situation occurs in RCT. However, the schools involved provide the local authority with a list of all the pupils that have applied for Year 7 places and indicate how many places will be offered. There is, therefore, early identification of parents/carers who have applied to more than one admission authority.

Cllr Smith raised a concern regarding the implications for the parents/carers of pupils wishing to attend Bryntirion Comprehensive School. Cllr Smith expressed strong support for early co-operation between the local authority and Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School, and communication with parents/carers where there had been dual offers, with the aim of offering places for pupils on the waiting list as early as possible.

There was discussion on the merit of considering a policy requirement for parents/carers to confirm within a specific time frame whether an offered place was being accepted. It was noted that this is known to be the practice of some other admission authorities in Wales. However, capacity to process such communications would be a concern as well as whether any sanction would be admissible in law in the event of a parent/carers failing to comply. It was agreed that this would be discussed with colleagues in Legal Services.

It was noted that the data in the draft report indicated that VA schools had accepted applications over the published admission number (PAN). The precise reasons for the PAN being exceeded were not known. It was highlighted that the published admission number reflects the capacity of the school to safely accommodate children. All admission authorities are under the same requirements and duties as regards capacities and admission numbers, which should be reflected in admission policies and practices. Admissions over PAN are appropriate in specific circumstances.

The members approved the report, acknowledging that there would be some amendments based on the discussions.

7. Local authority draft School Admissions Policy 2023-2024

DD advised members that a few minor changes were being proposed, aimed at improving clarity or to reflect existing practice within the policy. Dates for admission rounds and eligible birth dates had been rolled forward, as necessary.

The principal proposed changes were outlined as:

- inclusion of additional information regarding instances where there may be provision of false or misleading information in a school admission application;
- the cessation of deferring admissions for any in-year admission/transfer applications, regardless of the circumstances; and
- a slight increase in the admission numbers for Bryncethin Primary School, Llangynwyd Primary School and Porthcawl Primary School.

The reasons for each proposed change were discussed. The need to strengthen the policy wording in respect of provision of false or misleading information was accepted,

given the implications of places for oversubscribed schools being offered when they would not have been offered if the correct information has been provided. However, a slight variation to the wording was proposed and agreed.

DD reminded members of the background to the introduction of admission deferment for in-year admission/transfers and the circumstances in which deferment applied. DD referred to the forum's discussions and decisions for the 2022-2023 on admission deferment. DD informed members of legal advice that as the local authority is the admission authority, deferment could not be a discretionary decision for schools. Additionally, deferment was highly unpopular with parents and was having a significant detrimental effect on the school attendance of those pupils to which it was being applied. RD advised members that the practice had already been ceased for 2021-2022 admissions, following discussions with headteachers at a Team Bridgend meeting. The decision had been taken in recognition of the detrimental impacts, compounding the impacts of the pandemic in respect of lost learning,

Community and VA school members highlighted concerns regarding the reasons for some transfer requests and the level of background information provided to schools. It was considered that an advance notification to the current requested school may have merit in some cases, so that discussions could take place. DD highlighted that an admission authority is under a legal requirement to process an admission application. There had been no occasions when deferring an admission and seeking the opportunity for discussions between the current school and the parent had resulted in a transfer request being withdrawn.

With regard to information provided to schools, DD advised members that actions were underway to enable the full application to be provided to the receiving school. However, the application form may not contain any information suggesting any difficulties or issues having arisen. It was confirmed that once the admission decision is made by the local authority and communicated to the school, the receiving school is in a position to contact the current school as part of gathering relevant and appropriate information in preparation for the child starting.

RDi suggested an updated flowchart be provided to schools for in-year admission/transfers and RD confirmed this could be actioned.

Members agreed the cessation of the practice the removal of deferment for the 2023-2024 policy.

The minor changes to PANs were approved.

DD confirmed that the policy would be distributed for consultation, as required by legislation, such that the admission arrangements for 20213-2024 would be fully determined by 15 April 2022.

8. Draft admissions policies for voluntary aided schools 2023-2024

Policies for three of the five VA schools had been received, for consideration by the forum. It was noted that the local authority should receive all policies, being a key consultee under the legislation. The forum should also be afforded the opportunity to

consider the proposed arrangements of all VA schools, given its overarching role in school admissions in the county.

It was noted that some of the policies were extremely concise. Following discussion, it was suggested that VA schools could give consideration to adopting sections of the local authority policy each year, to ensure their policies are comprehensive. It was acknowledged that the proposed policy for Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales Primary School already reflected that approach.

It was agreed that JT would discuss the matter with his colleagues in VA schools, highlighting the content and consultation requirements upon all admission authorities.

9. Any other business

KJ requested a Pupil Services structure chart with explanations of roles and the current division of the schools between officers. DD confirmed that this would be actioned.

KJ raised a concern that if a Pupil Services Officer allocated for school is not available, difficulties can arise in terms of queries being dealt with. DD highlighted that the team is very small, with only 2.0 full-time equivalent officers, so when there are absences for any reason, this can have a significant impact on operations. Due to part-time roles and working patterns, there may be days when there is only one officer working. However, DD advised that the officers Pupil Services Officers are in mirrored roles and can deal with enquiries in respect of any school, although for the purpose of building detailed knowledge and relationships, there is a nominated lead officer for each school. The allocation of schools to officers was also rotated regularly to ensure a common knowledge. DD was available as much as possible for queries from any school on any matter.

BD highlighted that some parents had expressed difficulties with the early closing date for the Part-time Nursery admissions round. DD explained that the concern had been recognised and it had been addressed in the 2022-2023 School Admissions Policy. The opening date for the admission round was on the same day as the Full-time Nursery admission round, but the closing date for the Part-time Nursery admissions round, for places in January and April 2023, had been extended from March to the end of August 2022.

DD referred to the changes made after consultation on the 2022-2023 School Admissions Policy, to ensure it was explicit that there are no catchment areas for Welsh-medium schools. Separate oversubscription criteria had also been included for Welsh-medium schools. RD confirmed that the Welsh-medium schools were satisfied with the changes that had been made and no further issues had been raised for proposed consideration by the forum.

10. Date of the next meeting

No specific date was agreed but the plan for a meeting in the last spring term was acknowledged.

RD thanked all attendees for their attendance and contributions.