

Bridgend County Borough Council

Minutes of the Bridgend Admission Forum meeting at Civic Offices on 11 April 2019

LA Representatives

Mr R Davies (RD) Chair
Mrs D Davies (DD)

Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Principal Officer, Knowledge and Learner Support

School Representatives

Mr J Tarran (JT) Vice chair

Headteacher, Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales
Primary School

Mr A Slade (AS)

Headteacher, Porthcawl Comprehensive School

Mrs S Jayne (SJ)

Headteacher, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr

Mr Jeremy Evans (JE)

Headteacher, Heronsbridge School

Governor Representative

Mr W Bond (WB)

Heronsbridge School

Also present at the meeting

Ms C Christy (CC)

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Ms K John, Ms A Keller and Cllr Charles Smith.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2018

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

3 Admission Forum Annual Report 2017-2018

DD and RD presented the main aspects of the report.

DD referred to the reasons for deferred admission being implemented, as appropriate, for in-year admission/transfer requests. These were to facilitate an opportunity for the school and the applicant to address any issues (if applicable) and minimise disruption for the school and its pupils.

DD referred to the importance of consistency when deciding whether to defer an admission. DD explained that the approach has to accord with the statutory School Admissions Code 2013, which states that an admitting body may defer admission if it deems that 'immediate admission is not required'. If the application is made in consequence of a change of residence or if the local authority is satisfied that there are issues of vulnerability, the local authority will admit immediately. While primary schools are often willing for any pupil to be admitted and to start immediately, the local authority

will always be mindful that this presents an inconsistency in approach and, therefore, will consider all such cases very carefully.

JE asked what the process would be if the applicant requested a special school, other than Heronsbridge School. DD explained that there is a separate policy and procedure for admission to special schools and specialist provisions.

JE informed members that there had been an increase in deregistration from faith schools, for elective home education, and speculated that there may be external services being offered to these children.

4 Issues arising from admission appeal hearings – for information and consideration

DD informed the forum members that there had been an increase in appeals, with 19 occurring from November 2018 and up to the date of the meeting. DD explained that Years 3 and 4 were particular pressure points within the county, as well as there being pressures on all year groups in certain geographical areas.

DD explained that a significant number of appeals involved applications that had been made for sibling groups where the parental preference was for all the children to be placed in the same school, but not all could be accommodated.

DD informed members of the comments made by admission appeal panel members regarding the published admission number (PAN) for Pencoed Primary School. Panel members had expressed a view, on more than one occasion, that the headteacher's use of the corridor space known as 'The Learning Plaza' as a classroom should result in that space being formally included in the capacity calculation, which would accordingly increase the PAN. DD explained how the school was using the accommodation and the reasons why there is no proposal to include this area in Part 4 of the capacity calculation for the school.

There was discussion regarding the growth in housing and population within the county and the resulting pressures on school places, particularly for in certain geographical areas.

JT stated that the nursery numbers in Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales Primary School are very low - 15 pupils against a capacity of 30. RD and DD advised members that nursery and reception numbers are generally lower across the county this year, which will be primarily due to variation in the birth rate.

5 School Admissions Policy 2020-2021 – update for information

RD confirmed that the policy had been approved by Cabinet.

6 School Admissions Policy 2021-2022 – to seek views on any matters requiring consideration

Members were asked to give consideration to this matter and pass any views to DD.

DD advised that the policy needs to be strengthened in terms of the position regarding gypsy and traveller children and lessons from the implementation of online admissions can be reflected.

RD and DD referred to communications received from Welsh Government reinforcing that it is an admitting body's responsibility to administer post-16 admissions. The present arrangements in the county and the implications of change were discussed. CC advised

that the approach in RCT local authority mirrors the current Bridgend approach. Forum members were in agreement that the current approach is effective and there was no support for a change in approach. DD advised that the ADEW Admissions Group will continue to consider the issue.

7 School published admission numbers (PANs) – proposed changes for consideration

RD informed members that there would be a change in PAN for some schools. Oldcastle Primary School and Mynydd Cynffig Primary School's PANs have been increased to 60. RD also informed members that there will be a formal review of PANs in 2020; however, this would not likely give rise to major changes. AS highlighted that increasing the PAN of a school can clearly have a detrimental effect on the surrounding schools and asked that this be taken into full consideration in any review.

8 Proposed school term dates for 2021-2022 – for consideration

It was agreed that published term dates, as at 5 April 2019, would be distributed after the meeting.

JE informed members that there may be an extra inset day.

9 Review of school catchment areas – update

RD informed members that the local authority is commissioning a review of catchment areas and the implications on transport. The local authority will be considering if moving boundaries will have a positive effect for over and undersubscribed schools.

10 Online school admissions - update

DD informed members of a number of technical issues that had arisen. One of the major problems had been multiple applications submitted by parents who were waiting for a confirmation email, and reapplying when they did not receive one. DD also explained the consequences of there being no date of birth validation within the electronic application. While this functionality had been requested, it had not been possible to implement this and a significant proportion of applicants had recorded an incorrect date of birth for the child. This had resulted in a huge investigative task for the team and, in most cases, applicants had to be contacted for confirmation of date of birth.

DD advised that more applicants in the reception and junior admission round had requested paper applications than had been the case for the secondary admission round.

With regard to the secondary admission round for September 2019, DD advised that 1,266 applications were received on-time and included in the allocation on the national offer date of 1 March 2019. By 11 April 2019, receipt of late applications had increased the total number of applications to 1,454. DD highlighted that the local authority is expecting circa 1,850 applications, so a large number were still to be received.

DD advised that the closing date for reception/junior applications for September 2019 was 15 February 2019. As at the date of the meeting, 1,108 reception applications had been received and 90 junior applications had been received.

11 Capacity and admissions across the county - update

DD explained that Years 3, 4 and 6 were pressure points in the county as well as certain geographical areas. It was agreed that DD will present information at the next meeting regarding capacity monitoring.

12 School admissions for the child of refugee families being resettled in the Bridgend county borough

DD informed members that one additional refugee family was being resettled in the county and the child had been admitted to the local primary school.

13 Any other business

No additional matters were raised.

14 Date of next meeting

Agreed that members will be contacted at the start of the autumn term with suggested dates.