

Bridgend County Borough Council

**Approved minutes of the
Bridgend Admission Forum meeting
held on 23 May 2022, via Teams**

Local authority representatives

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

Group Manager - Business Support
Principal Officer - Business Strategy and Performance
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 A Slade
Mrs R Dixon (RDi)
Mrs K John (KJ)
Mr J Tarran (JT) – Vice-chair

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

Parent governor representative

Mr W Bond (WB)

Croesty Primary School

Additional members

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.

Apologies had been received from RG.

RD advised the members that Dr C Smith was no longer a councillor, following the recent local elections. Cllr Jon-Paul Blundell would be invited to join the membership of the forum for 2022-2023.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022 and matters arising

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Membership of the forum

DD presented a document detailing the confirmed membership of the forum for 2021-2022. However, RD reiterated that Dr C Smith was no longer a councillor, following the recent local elections and, consequently, Dr Smith's membership of the forum had now ended.

RD advised that, when invited to join the membership of the forum for 2022-2023, Cllr Jon-Paul Blundell would have the option to be a local authority representative, as the Cabinet Member for Education, or a community representative.

DD advised that Mrs Anne Robertson, Director of Schools for the Archdiocese of Cardiff, had accepted an invitation to join the membership of the forum commencing in September 2022.

JT advised that Ms Rebecca Morteo had been appointed as the Acting Diocesan Education Lead for the Llandaff Diocese and it was agreed that DD would extend an invitation to join the membership commencing in September 2022.

The members agreed that invitations to join the membership should be extended again to all parent and community governors during 2022-2023.

The members considered whether to extend invitations for non-core membership, for example, to groups that may represent the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, and foreign nationals who have come to the UK to work in local NHS services. DD advised the members that the proportion of school admission applications for pupils from these groups was extremely small. DD suggested that consideration be given to the higher and increasing numbers of pupils who are refugees and asylum seekers, particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. RD suggested contact with the Welsh Refugee Council and it was agreed that DD would make enquiries of this organisation.

4. Bridgend Admission Forum Annual Report 2020-2021 update

DD thanked JT for his assistance in securing the required information from the voluntary aided schools and confirmed that the final report had been provided to Welsh Government.

DD advised that the report was being translated into Welsh and would be published on the local authority's website.

5. Local authority School Admissions Policy 2023-2024 update

DD advised that there had been responses received to the consultation on the proposed school admission arrangements for 2023-2024. Cabinet had approved the policy in March 2022. Therefore, the local authority had complied with the legislative requirement that the arrangements be 'determined' by 15 April 2022.

RD advised that the draft arrangements for 2024-2025 would be presented at the forum's next meeting and the intent was for the draft policies for the voluntary aided schools to be presented for discussion at the same time.

6. School places and admissions report – spring term 2022

RD commended the information within the report.

DD explained that the report provided a range of admissions-related information and served to assist the forum to discharge its responsibilities, which include monitoring compliance with the arrangements for school admissions as detailed in policy.

DD highlighted that the information in the report related only to schools for which the local authority is the admission authority. Activity was required to acquire and integrate information from the voluntary aided schools.

DD advised that, due to timing, the report focussed on the offer day positions for the majority of the admissions rounds. A future report would present the final positions by reflecting all late applications.

DD highlighted the following points:

- Regarding changes in the number of Part-time Nursery places available for January and April 2022, DD explained that variation year-on-year is inevitable given the factors that determine the number of such places. This is explained in the School Admissions Policy. The factors that determine the number of Part-time Nursery places at any school are the physical size of a school's nursery accommodation, the published admission number for statutory-age pupils, as the local authority does not admit more Full-time Nursery pupils than the published admission number, and the number of Full-time Nursery pupils already on roll. If there are no Part-time Nursery places available but the Full-time Nursery number is low, the local authority consults with the school on whether it is appropriate to convert some of the unfilled Full-time Nursery places to Part-time Nursery places, for that year.
- While 16% of Part-time Nursery applications for January and April 2022 were late applications, it was hoped that there would be a reduction in late applications for the next admission round, as the closing date had been extended to 31 August 2022.
- Around 13.9% of the Part-time Nursery applications for January and April 2022 were refused in that no offer of an English-medium school could be made. However, 4.9% were applications where no second preference school had been selected. It was noted that 25 of the 44 applications for places at Welsh-medium school had to be refused, which was over 50%. RD highlighted that the local

authority is actively examining means to increase the number of Welsh-medium nursery places for the future.

- The data for the Year 7 secondary admission round for September 2022 was the offer day data, as late applications would continue to be processed up to 31 August 2022.
- There had been no change in the number of available places, as published admission numbers were unaltered.
- Once again, places at Bryntirion Comprehensive School had been oversubscribed, but there had been only five applications for which no offer of any place could be made, which was due to no second preference school having been selected.
- For 16% of the applications, the first preference school was not the catchment school. Applications in respect of pupils residing out-of-county accounted for 4% of the total number of applications, with these applications being primarily for Porthcawl Comprehensive School.
- The data for the Reception admission round for September 2022 was the offer day data, as late applications would continue to be processed up to 31 August 2022.
- There had been no change to the number of available Reception places.
- Of the 1041 applications for English-medium Reception places, there had been only six for which no offer of a place at any school could be made on offer day, which had been the consequence of either no second preference or no third preference school being selected.
- For around 13% of the Reception applications, the first preference school was not the catchment school. Places at Coety Primary School and Coychurch (Llangrallo) Primary School had, once again, been oversubscribed. Places at Litchard Primary School had also been oversubscribed, evidencing the ongoing pressure on places in this geographical area.
- Places at West Park Primary School in the west of the county had been oversubscribed, but there was significant unfilled capacity at the other primary schools in the area.
- All first preferences for Welsh-medium Reception places had been met.
- There had been 69 applications for Year 3 places at Llangewydd Junior School for September 2022. Two years ago, there had been over 100 applications for the available 90 places, evidencing the difficulties presented by fluctuating birth rates.
- The offer day for the Full-time Nurse admission round for September was 16 May 2022, so very recent.

- There had been a small reduction in the total number of Full-time Nursery places available across the county, which can occur in consequence of schools changing the accommodation they use for nursery pupils; also moving from a straight nursery class to a mixed class with Reception pupils can have a bearing.
- Places at nine English-medium schools had been oversubscribed, which was the largest number ever experienced. The allocation process had been particularly difficult due to the number of oversubscribed schools in the northeast, with many applicants selecting those schools as either a first, second or third preference. This is a manual process currently for the local authority and three staff had worked for an entire day to complete and check the allocations for just these nine schools.
- Despite the oversubscription, overall, just under 96% of applicants received an offer of a place at their first preference school, with 98.7% of applicants receiving either their first, second or third preference school.
- A significant number of applicants did not select their catchment school as their first preference; however, this was not unusual for nursery applicants, as many parents apply for schools that may be close to where they work, or close to where family members reside.
- There had been 25 applications from out-of-county residents, which is usual as Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council does not offer Full-time Nursery places, only Part-time Nursery places. As a result, every year, some applications are received for Full-time Nursery places in Bridgend with the children usually moving to Reception places in Neath Port Talbot the following year.
- There had been no refusals of applications for Welsh-medium Full-time Nursery places.
- Section 6 of the report provided a range of information, evidencing compliance with policy requirements.

DD advised that the next report would contain data and information on in-year admissions and transfers and admission appeals.

RD highlighted that data is not routinely shared between RCT and Bridgend on the number of out-of-county applications and this would be extremely helpful. Also, to have an understanding of when Tonyrefail Comprehensive School might be heading for oversubscription, given that parents residing in the Abercerdin area can apply for places at that school. CC advised that places at Tonyrefail Comprehensive School were oversubscribed. CC agreed to provide data on the number of pupils on roll in RCT schools who reside in Bridgend and RD agreed that Bridgend will reciprocate.

CC enquired whether Pencoed Comprehensive School was at capacity for Year 7 in September 2022 and DD confirmed that there were still places available.

KJ enquired how parents would find out where places are available if they have their preferences refused and when transport would be provided. DD advised that for the

Reception admission round for September, the local authority enabled parents to record preferences for three schools, rather than two, as oversubscription at some schools was anticipated. If the local authority could not meet the first preference, the application was automatically included in the process to allocate places at the second preference school and the same for the third preference school, if necessary. There had been only six applications for which no offer of a place at any school could be made on offer day, which had been the consequence of either no second preference or no third preference school being selected. The notification letters explain that they should contact the local authority to discuss the situation. When they contact us, we listen to what may be important to them and how we may be able to assist them. We must take great care to ensure we process new requests in the appropriate order. For example, a parent who has received a refusal at all three preferences must be prioritised for a place at another school before a parent who did not record a second or third preference. Shortly after offer day, places at alternative schools were agreed for all six children. The position regarding transport depends on a range of factors and the individual case. For example, if none of the preferred schools were the catchment school, there would be no entitlement to transport to any other school.

RD explained that if the first preference school were to be the catchment school, and it was refused, and a place was offered at the second preference school, transport would be provided if the qualifying distance was exceeded and if the second preference school was the next nearest school to the catchment school. If the second preference school was not the nearest school to the catchment school, there would be no eligibility for transport. So, the provision of transport is determined by several factors.

7. School admissions – children from Ukraine

RD outlined that, initially, the position as regards school admissions had been quite challenging.

Public Health Wales had advised admission authorities that families arriving from Ukraine needed to be screened for tuberculosis and the message was that no child should be permitted to attend school if they had not been screened for tuberculosis and received medical clearance. Our concern was that admission legislation did not permit us to hold the processing of an admission application.

The current advice is that children up to the age of all can attend school prior to screening, if they feel well, but pupils over the age should have medical clearance before attending school. However, it has been stressed by Public Health Wales that screening could not be mandated, which has added further complexity. Parents are being advised of this when we process applications and offer places. We are advising parents to register with a GP so that the child can be referred for screening by the health board. Unfortunately, there appears to have been some difficulties in terms of communications with GPs. GPs have been undertaking some screening of these children and have not realised that specialist TB screening is required. So, matters in some cases have been more complicated than expected. When communicating with schools regarding the admission of a child, the local authority has been setting out the position as regards when the child should be allowed to start attending.

DD explained that several hosts have challenged the delay in children starting at school until the screening outcome is known. DD highlighted, and CC concurred, that comments from some member at the recent ADEW Admissions Group meeting suggested not all local authorities had interpreted the Public Health advice regarding TB screening in the same way. The Welsh Government representative had committed to raising some of the points made. DD advised that the communication from Public Health Wales indicated that the position as regards TB screening and school admission would be reviewed on a four-weekly basis.

DD explained that Welsh Government had confirmed that the admissions legislation and admitting authorities' policies apply as for all other applications, and these children do not have a general 'exception' status. Some hosts had expressed strong disagreement with this position. Also, several hosts had completed the admission applications and sent these to the local authority, but these could not be processed, as confirmed by Welsh Government. We need an application from a parent. Several hosts have also challenged this requirement.

DD advised that 19 applications had been received to date, from parents. Three nursery applications that were a mixture of Part-time and Full-time. Eight were applications for primary school places from Reception to Year 6, and eight applications for secondary school places. Of the eight applications for primary school, six had been refused as places were not available at the requested schools, which were Coety, Tremains, Penybont and Croesty Primary Schools. Places at alternative schools had been offered. One had been accepted. Decisions on the remaining alternative offers were awaited. DD confirmed that parents are being made aware of the voluntary aided schools and that they may contact those schools directly.

DD advised that of the eight applications for secondary school places, five were applications for places at Porthcawl Comprehensive School. Six of the applications related to pupils in Year 10 and Year 11. As the educational levels of each child are not known, this is challenging for schools. Applications for Year 11 had presented challenges given that this is the final GCSE year, pupils were already taking their exams and were only attending school when they had an exam. Advice and guidance had been offered to the parents.

Most families that had arrived to date were being hosted in Porthcawl and it was known that more families were due to arrive in the Porthcawl area. DD advised that the number of general enquiries from hosts was significant, and it was clear that many more families would be arriving. While it appeared likely that there would be a greater degree of geographical spread, most families were currently in the Porthcawl and Coety areas.

DD explained that when there is an admission decision, the school is made aware of the assessment procedures in place for English as an Additional Language pupils and the role of the Education Engagement Team in supporting EAL pupils. Therefore, Education Engagement Team is also being advised of all admissions.

DD advised that there had been contact from one family who had not arrived under a hosted scheme, but under the visa scheme. The parent had applied for a place at Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School, but a place had been refused. The parent has asked DD to represent her in an appeal against the refusal and DD had explained that

this was not possible. At the recent ADEW meeting, a few local authorities were reporting appeal registrations by Ukrainian families. There will need to be consideration as to how these families are supported to navigate an appeal process.

DD advised that at the recent ADEW meeting, the highest number of applications for Ukrainian children were reported by Monmouthshire and Carmarthenshire. Also, at the meeting, Welsh Government confirmed the need for fortnightly reporting of the number of applications. The representative from Newport reported frustrating delays in the establishment of local TB screening. Several representatives reported that, in their authorities, all communications and liaison with the Ukrainian families was being handled by a set of co-ordinators and family engagement officers, and these arrangements were working well. In consequence, their admission teams needed only to make an admission decision and nothing more.

RD advised that the latest information was that 65 Ukrainian individuals were expected in Bridgend, and this was expected to increase. School places for the children was just one part of the support package for the families.

8. ADEW (Association of Directors of Education in Wales) Admissions Group update

DD advised the members of further items discussed at the recent ADW Admissions Group meeting.

- The Welsh Government representative had advised that there was progression towards consultation on the new School Admissions Code and the new School Admission Appeals Code. The documents were being translated into Welsh. Consultation would likely be in 2022-2023. Although there had been a suggestion that the members of the ADEW Admissions Group could see an advance copy of these documents, nothing had been made available.
- The Welsh Government representative had advised an amendment to the School Information regulations has been laid. While it had yet to be formalised, it would formally remove the requirement for production of the annual composite prospectus in hard copy.
- The Welsh Government representative had advised that virtual admission appeal hearings could continue up to 30 September 2022, but after that date, they must revert to face-to-face. This was because the COVID-19 emergency legislation that permitted virtual appeals would be ending on 30 September 2022. Welsh Government intended to seek feedback on the conduct of appeal hearings during the pandemic and a survey would be likely. It was noted that England is already consulting on a permanent change to allow virtual appeals, and while that may come in Wales, it will not be seamless.
- There had been an interesting discussion on waiting lists for in-year admissions applications that had been refused. DD advised that it was clear that practice in terms of waiting list management varied across Wales. In Bridgend, the policy and practice are to put the child on the waiting list for the school for a period of three months. However, it was clear that some authorities do not operate a

waiting list in respect of in-year admission requests and parents are required to re-apply if they wish to continue to pursue a place at the school. DD stated the practice in Bridgend had not presented any difficulties. CC advised that the operation of a waiting list in RCT had not caused any difficulties and the waiting list proved useful in filling places as soon as they become available.

- There had been an interesting discussion on medical-related oversubscription criteria. It seemed that most local authorities have ceased to use such a criterion at all. Most of those who do use such a criterion appear to wish to cease its use. CC advised that RCT has never employed a medical-related criterion and there was no intention to sue such a criterion in the future. DD advised that medical reasons for a place at a particular school are being claimed more frequently by parents, but the necessary evidence requirements are rarely met. At the ADEW meeting, the representative from Monmouthshire has stated that they had removed the medical oversubscription criteria from their policy but had reinstated it after criticism from an appeal panel.

RD highlighted that the return to face-to-face admission appeals would cause difficulties as many panel members may not wish to participate in face-to-face hearings any longer. Panel members are volunteers. Not having to travel and being able to participate from home has been beneficial. The members acknowledged that there are also benefits for parents in presenting their cases from the comfort of their own homes. There was general disappointment that these factors, as well as the difficulty with suitable venues and expense, would arise again.

9. Any other business

No matters were raised for consideration.

10. Date of the next meeting

The date for the next meeting was agreed as 27 September 2022, at 2pm.

RD thanked all attendees for their attendance and contributions.