

Bridgend County Borough Council

Minutes of the Bridgend Admission Forum meeting at Civic Offices on 14 October 2019

LA Representatives

Mr R Davies (RD) Chair	Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Mrs D Davies (DD) Cllr Mr C Smith (CllrCS)	Principal Officer, Knowledge and Learner Support

School Representatives

Mr John Tarran (JT) Vice chair	Headteacher, Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales Primary School
Mrs Sharon Jayne (SJ)	Headteacher, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr
Mr Jeremy Evans (JE)	Headteacher, Heronsbridge School
Mrs Kathryn John (KJ)	Headteacher, Brackla Primary School

Governor Representative

Mr W Bond (WB)	Croesty Primary School
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Also present at the meeting

Ms C Christy (CC)	Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
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1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from AK and AS.

2. Election of chairperson and vice-chairperson for the 2019-2020 academic year.

RD and JT were proposed as the Chair and Vice Chair. The proposal was approved by all forum members present.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2019

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

4. Matters arising

DD informed members of how capacity in Bridgend school is monitored using a capacity spreadsheet (shown on screen to members). The spreadsheet can be used to highlight certain pressure points, for example certain year groups or areas.

KJ raised a query regarding the nursery admission number of 87 for Brackla Primary School. DD advised that the nursery capacity and published admission

number (PAN) are different. The overall nursery capacity based on 2.3m² per nursery-aged pupils is 87; the PAN for statutory-aged pupils is 45. Accordingly, the local authority will offer 45 full-time nursery places, with the remaining nursery capacity being utilised for part-time nursery places.

RD advised members of the task being led by the School Modernisation team, which is examining how schools are using their accommodation. RD explained that the mandated capacity calculation takes into account areas designated as classbases for the determination of pupil places, not ancillary areas, such as libraries or ICT suites. Currently, no schools in Bridgend are completely full, but there are pressures in certain areas and in certain year groups. RD commented that it is unfortunate that housing estate developers appear to suggest to potential house buyers that there are no issues at all with school places.

JT queried whether voluntary aided (VA) schools and Welsh-medium schools are included in the considerations of overall capacity within Bridgend. RD advised that the local authority does not attempt to persuade parents to accept certain schools but puts forward all the facts and potential options. Where a place at a preferred school has to be refused, the local authority routinely offers the next nearest school for which it is the admitting authority. However, where the parents/carers indicate a reference for a faith-based or Welsh-medium education, then the local authority offers information regarding those options. The local authority is under a statutory duty to promote Welsh-medium education to parents.

DD advised that the local authority would be seeking updated information from VA schools on their capacities. RD commented that if the PAN of a VA school has increased or decreased, the local authority will need to understand and consider the reasons.

CC advised that Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority is experiencing capacity pressures.

JT, KJ and RD highlighted that capacity issues are quite frequently raised and discussed at Team Bridgend meetings.

DD highlighted that parents are frequently reporting to the local authority that a school guaranteed their child a place when the family undertook a visit to the school, or that the school indicated that there would be 'no problem' with securing a place. In such instances, the local authority has to check with the school what the nature of any comments made were. All school representatives at the meeting were of the view that such assertions by parents/carers would be a misrepresentation of the general comments that a school would make and it is the normal practice for parents/carers to be referred to the local authority for information on and decisions on school places.

5. Update on 2018-2019 AY in-year admissions and September 2019 admission rounds

DD provided the following information:

Reception

- There were 1,122 on-time applications and 304 late applications.
- DD outlined how the handling of late applications has changed; broadly, all on-time applications are considered for the national offer date and all late applications are considered in order of date received, after the national offer date.
- There were 20 reception refusals; 50% of those were for Coety Primary School.

Junior, Year 3

- DD highlighted that places at Llangewydd Junior School were oversubscribed for the first time.
- The PAN for Llangewydd Junior School is 90, whereas the combined PAN for Cefn Glas and Bryntirion Infant Schools is 106.
- A total of 98 applications were received - 85 on-time and 14 late.
- There were 9 refusals. All 9 cases were appealed; 1 was upheld at Stage 2, on the basis of the child's circumstances.
- DD explained that an increase to Llangewydd Junior School's PAN has been investigated; however, the PAN of 90 is correct for the school. DD also noted that based on the current numbers in Cefn Glas and Bryntirion Infant Schools, this issue is not anticipated to arise again in the next few years.
- JT asked how many incatchment pupils were refused. DD explained that the 9 who were refused were all in catchment but the applications were all late; if the applications had been on-time, all would have received a space.

DD provided information on the efforts that have been made to notify parents of deadline dates.

Secondary

- There were 1,527 applications – 1,265 on-time and 266 late. DD highlighted that a high proportion of the late applications were received significantly later than the deadline.
- There were 5 refusals which were all for Bryntirion Comprehensive School. However, after the offer date, some parents/carers informed us that they were accepting places at Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School, so the local authority was able to offer those places to pupils who had previously been refused.

There was discussion regarding the co-ordination on admissions with VA schools and RD outlined that a concern had been raised, which would mean that future liaison would be reduced.

JE informed the members that Estyn are removing judgements on schools next year. There may be a decrease in parents choosing schools that Estyn have previously assessed as 'excellent'.

Full-time Nursery

- There were 1,340 applications – 1,127 on-time and 213 late.
- There were 26 refusals, of which 18 were for Coety Primary School.

In-year admission/transfer applications

- In 2018 – 2019 there were 1,227 applications, of which 293 did not proceed.
- OOC in-year admission/transfer applications for secondary schools accounted for 47.84% of the secondary total; the primary proportion was being calculated.

JT asked if the local authority asks applicants for a reason on the in-year admission/transfer, commenting that parents do not generally speak with him before they put in an application. DD explained that the question does appear on the application form; however, it is hard to enforce completion on a hardcopy form. DD advised that it will be a mandatory field in the future on-line form.

Admission Appeals

- Appeals have increased substantially.
- There were 66 appeals for the 2018 – 2019 academic year, of these 15 were upheld by appeal panels.
- DD advised that in consequence of appeal panel decisions, one year group in Pencoed Primary School is now significantly over PAN.

6. Preparation for the part-time nursery allocations for January and April 2020.

DD advised that part-time nursery places will be offered in the first week of November 2019. DD explained the process of allocating part-time places and that there would be appropriate liaison with headteachers. .

7. Draft Starting School Prospectus 2020 - 2021

DD advised that the draft prospectus is based on the policy, but is couched in more user-friendly language for parents/carers.

DD asked the members if they would like to see the prospectus before it is published and all members agreed that it need not be agreed by BAF before publication.

RD referred to the current legislative requirements regarding publication and provision of the prospectus. RD sought a view on the stance within RCT and CC advised that RCT is Welsh Government will change the requirement for publishing and distributing a hard copy prospectus due to the cost implications.

8. Draft School Admission Policy 2021 – 2022

DD explained that the policy is being drafted. No significant changes are proposed but there will be extensions to some sections and some additional aspects within the School Admissions Code will be included. The draft policy will be distributed for comments, one complete.

9. Preparation for September 2020 admission rounds

DD informed the members that the Year 6 letters to parents have been distributed to schools. DD explained there has been a redevelopment of the online form based on feedback we received the last year.

10. The need for admission applications

DD advised that the local authority had become aware of some children being placed on roll by schools, by school staff, without the parents/carers ever having submitted an application to the local authority. In one school, there were seven such pupils in the full-time nursery. DD has highlighted that school staff must check that the local authority has accepted an application and offered a place and not accept a parent/carer's assertion that this is the case. RD informed the members that the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support has reinforced this message to schools. RD explained how allowing children to start without an application can affect the admission appeals process.

RD explained that the statutory code states that if a person of authority, for example, a headteacher, allows a child to start at a school, the local authority cannot remove the pupil.

11. Online school admissions

RD highlighted the benefits of the system and thanked DD for her efforts in ensuring its successful implementation.

12. Offer dates

JT queried the arrangements for the national reception offer date, as last year the date was in the Easter holidays. The date was confirmed as 16 April 2020. JT explained that the VA schools will be on holiday and it will be necessary for arrangements to be made for staff to come in to post the letters or he would need to post the letters from home.

DD advised is looking whether, in the future, it will be possible to issue notification letters via My Account. This would enable compliance with the offer date easier, as the delivery dates for post cannot be guaranteed.

13. Heronsbridge Special School admissions

JE informed members that any admissions for Heronsbridge Special School go through Kathryn Morgan, Principal Educational Psychologist. JE noted that he is received phone calls and emails from parents and from schools' additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCo) about admitting children into Heronsbridge. Parents are being told at reviews that their child needs a special school / provision, so they expect to receive this.

DD explained that all pupils in Heronsbridge School should have a statement of special educational needs, although it is known that this is currently not the case.

14. Update on the review of the School Admissions Code

RD informed members that Welsh Government is proposing to make alternations to the School Admissions Code. No draft proposals have yet been published.

RD referred to the WG communication regarding sixth-form admissions and it is known that this could be one of the proposals. WG is challenging local authorities on their practise of allowing schools to manage their own sixth- form admissions. No authorities are known to be in support of a change to the practise. RD informed the members that the local authority does not have the resources to handle sixth-form admissions nor the ability to decide on who should receive a place when performance is a criteria.

15. Learner Travel Policy – consultation

RD informed members of the Learner Travel consultation opening that today for 12 weeks. Rd outlined some of the proposals:

- Changes to statutory distances (2 miles for primary / 3 miles for secondary)
- Removal of sixth form transport, apart from faith and Welsh education
- Removal of escorts on transport where it is 8 seats or less, except if pupils have ALN/medical concerns

RD explained the role of escorts – they are there to notify the driver of any concerns or safety issues, not to provide help or intervention with the pupils. The Inclusion Service will play a role in deciding if an escort is required where pupils have identified ALN.

RD explained the reasons why it is proposed to remove nursery transport for all schools, including faith and Welsh-medium schools. RD mentioned that there are safety concerns for younger and smaller pupils. A number of concerns from parents have been received, as children are falling asleep on transport. RD informed the members that Bridgend is one of the only local authorities that provides transport for nursery pupils.

16. Any other business

No additional matters were raised.