

Essex Admission Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Essex Admission Forum held at 2.00 pm at County Hall, Chelmsford on 7 July 2010

Membership/Attendance

Representatives of the following:

Schools (9)

Community Schools (2)

Mr B Pead

* Mrs J Woodham (Vice-Chairman)

Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools (1)

Mr P Tidmarsh

Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools (2)

Vacancy (primary)

* Mr Antony Schular (secondary)

Foundation Schools (2)

* Mrs T Boothman

Mr J Hartley

Academies (1)

Mr Steve Leverett

Selective Schools (1)

Dr P Jones (substitute for Mr K Jenkinson)

Religious Bodies (2)

* Mrs B Harris (RC Diocese of Brentwood)

* Mrs E Marshall (Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford)

Parents (2)

* Mr O Richards (Primary)

* Mr R Carson (Secondary)

Community Representatives (7)

County Councillors (4)

* Cllr R G Gooding (Chairman)

* Cllr Mrs M A Miller (substitute for Cllr Mrs M Hutchon)
Cllr R A Pearson

Cllr S Castle

Looked After Children (1)

Cathryn Adams, Narrowing the Gap Officer, Essex CC

Children with Special Educational Needs (1)

Ms A Stanford, Manager, Statutory Assessment Service, Essex CC

Neighbouring Local Authority (1)

Ms H Cole (London Borough of Redbridge)

* Present

The following were also present: -

Mr D Brown	Adviser
Mr S Noor	Planning and Admissions Manager
Mr D Jones	Secretary to the Forum
Mrs H Jordan	Essex Choice Adviser
Mr C Ismay	Governance Manager
Mrs J Dignum	Governance Officer

11. Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr David Brown, an adviser with a background of experience in education who would be leading a discussion later in the meeting on the future development of the Forum (minute 16 below refers).

12. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms C Adams, Ms H Cole, Mr J Hartley, Councillor Mrs M Hutchon (for whom Councillor Mrs M A Miller was substituting), Mr K Jenkinson, Mr S Leverett, Mr B Pead, Councillor R A Pearson and Mr P Tidmarsh.

13. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Variation in the Order of Business

It was agreed that agenda items 4 (Admission Forum Proposals for the Future) and 5 (Facilitated Session – Development of the Forum) should be considered together.

16. Admission Forum Proposals for the Future Facilitated Session - Development of the Forum

The Forum welcomed Mr David Brown, an adviser with a background of experience in education, who was in attendance to lead a discussion intended to help the Forum in planning its future role and direction.

Secretary's Report

Members began by considering a report (EAF/06/10) by the Secretary to the Forum which detailed the outcome of the review of other Admission Forums commissioned at the last meeting. It also identified the following questions which it was suggested could provide issues for consideration during the subsequent discussion:

- Should Forum meetings be scheduled in advance?
- Should a forward look be included on the agenda for each meeting?
- Would the Forum like to receive statistical reports on relevant issues (such as numbers of admission appeals, referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman and children admitted to schools under the Fair Access Protocol)?
- Would the Forum like the opportunity to undertake reviews on matters of interest or concern?
- Would the Forum like to make greater use of the internet to promote its business and if so, in what way?

In addition, the Forum's attention was drawn to a written statement submitted in advance by Mr Steve Leverett, the representative of Academies, who had been unable to attend the meeting. Copies of Mr Leverett's statement, which contained general comments regarding potential future developments in education and addressed the questions set out above, were circulated. Mr Leverett's comments were taken into account as part of the general discussion referred to below.

Facilitated Session

Mr Brown gave a short presentation setting out the current context in terms of educational provision, with particular reference to school admissions. It was anticipated that the recent election of a new government would herald a period of accelerated change and, although no specific information was yet available, some or all of the following could be expected to feature as part of any future proposals:

- A greater diversity of provision
- New providers and new governance arrangements
- Less central policy and direction
- Less central delivery (including less of a role for local authorities as admission authorities)
- Increased and changing partnership arrangements
- Challenges and/or opportunities

There would be an important role for the Forum in ensuring a full debate on any proposals by engaging in the associated consultation.

Mr Brown also commented on the issues raised in the Secretary's report, and asked Members to bear these in mind in their small group discussions.

The Forum then divided into groups to discuss actions and issues for the Forum in the short, medium and long terms. The groups reported back on their respective conversations and there was a general discussion, during which the following issues were identified:

- It may be helpful for the Forum to gather wider perspectives on admissions than it does at present. As part of this, the Forum should review its membership regularly to ensure that it has access to perspectives from each of the various communities within Essex. Whilst conscious of the

need to adhere to the statutory maximum membership size of 20, future consideration should be given to seeking representation from other groups such as service families and travellers. Consideration should also be given to seeking input from groups with no permanent representation on the Forum, for example by inviting them to contribute when items of particular interest to them are to be included on the agenda.

- Whatever model(s) of educational provision emerge in future, there is a continuing role for the Forum in ensuring the fair operation of admission arrangements, including compliance with the School Admissions Code. This may become increasingly relevant with the establishment of new schools, some of which may be operated by 'non-traditional' providers of education.
- There is an important role for the Forum in monitoring the effect of any new arrangements on fairness of access for children with special educational needs
- Consideration should be given to identify an effective means to enable the Forum to exercise its important statutory power to review admissions policies and raise objections where these are unfair.
- Subject to future consideration as to how this could be achieved, the Forum would be interested in undertaking reviews of matters of interest or concern. A number of possible topics were mentioned including whether the co-ordinated admissions system was being administered fairly, the impact on fair access of any policy to allow the closure of poorly performing schools and an investigation as to how the issue of 'parental choice' operated across the County.
- Whilst it would be essential to respond to any consultation which may be undertaken regarding the future role of forums, the consensus was that it would be inappropriate to engage in lobbying in advance of any definite proposals.
- It was agreed that there was currently no role for the Forum with regard to monitoring educational standards.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brown for attending the Forum and all present for their contribution to the meeting, which he believed had resulted in a number of positive suggestions for future action.

Resolved:

- (1) That meetings of the Forum be scheduled in advance.
- (2) That a Forward Look be included as a standing item on future agendas.
- (3) That the Forum be provided with access to appropriate statistical information, with further consideration to be given as to the most appropriate means of best way of making this available.

- (4) That the undertaking of reviews on matters of interest or concern be supported in principle, subject to further consideration of how best to achieve this, including the potential for use of electronic communications.
- (5) That the principle of making better use of the internet, whether to promote the Forum's work or to enable Members to remain involved in its work between meetings, be supported, subject to further investigation.
- (6) That the Forum undertake regular reviews of its membership to ensure that it has access to perspectives from each of the relevant communities within Essex.
- (7) That input be sought from groups with no permanent representation on the Forum's membership when issues of particular interest to them are due to be considered.
- (8) That work be undertaken to identify an effective means for the Forum to exercise its important statutory power to review admissions policies and raise objections where these are unfair.

17. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting should be held towards the end of November. Members would be advised of the date in due course.

The meeting closed at 3.25pm.

Chairman
30 November 2010

Appendix A**Essex Admission Forum
7 July 2010****Comments from Steve Leverett, Academies Representative**

“Clearly there are going to be major changes in education provision and the proliferation of individual admissions authorities with the Academies Bill passing through Parliament. It will be only more of an imperative to have common understanding and some form of co-ordination to ensure some kind of stability - whilst recognising the very nature of these changes in the pipeline.

Whilst it is unclear how the new proposals will pan out in Essex, we can presume that whilst the LA's role as an admissions authority will diminish - but to how much remains unclear - it will remain a major player for some time.

There will be a variety of proprietors of existing and new academies, working along side the current maintain provision. The AET will seek always to work with partners, including the LA, in securing coherent arrangements.

The fact that matters will become complex projects a danger that some may choose to withdraw (or even not participate) on the pretext of complexity and non-effectiveness of arrangements. It will be dangerous for the benefit of children's learning to allow this to happen. Therefore, in response to each of the issues raised under paragraph 7.3, my view is as follows:-

1. meeting should be scheduled in advance - a year plan would be beneficial
2. from above - a forward plan as a framework would assist in establishing clarity and stability - but all members' engagement will be an imperative if all are to feel involved in a worthwhile way
3. rather than receiving reports/statistics, consider enabling access to such data in an easy way via internet provision - obviously with no public access to any individual information (see below)
4. yes - an consider out-of-meeting activity ... again via internet/intranet facilities ... on-line forum exchange etc (see below)
5. ... indeed ... out-of-meeting on-line forums for exchange and debate ... contribution to business ... discussion and sharing without recourse to too many meetings, access to data, stats, reports etc ...

I would be happy to help out of the meeting with any of these issues ... from the AET perspective and from my own.”