

## **ADMISSIONS FORUM**

Meeting: 10 October 2001

At: 6.00 pm

### **PRESENT**

Councillor Paul Porgess (Chair) in the chair

Councillors David Brailsford

Councillor Colin Foster

Councillor Mary Loftus

Councillor Jim Siddelley - (Representing Stockport MBC)

Mrs M Brown - (Representing the Primary Headteachers' Consortium)

Mrs M Mellor - (Representing Governors)

Mrs S Noakes - (Representing the Chester Dioceses)

### **1. MINUTES**

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 10 March 2001 were approved as a correct record.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

All Councillors in attendance declared a general interest as Governing Body representatives in schools in the Borough.

### **3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Paul Carter, Martin Lockery (Salford Dioceses in Schools Commission), Janice Cahill (Head of the Pendlebury Centre) and Margaret Regan (Shrewsbury Dioceses).

### **4. CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP OF THE ADMISSIONS FORUM**

The Chief Executive's representative reported that the following change in membership had been agreed at the Stockport MBC Council Meeting held on 2 October 2001:-

Councillor Jim Siddelley replaces Councillor Mark Weldon

### **5. THE ANNUAL CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2003/2004**

The Chief Education Officer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing consultation proposals relating to Admission Arrangements at maintained infant, primary and secondary schools for the 2003/2004 academic year.

In line with the statutory requirements for admission authorities to review their relevant area every two years, all schools would be asked whether or not they wished to continue with the current arrangements previously agreed two years ago. The purpose of the relevant area was to describe the geographical area in which consultation on admission arrangements must take place with other schools/admission authorities. For community/voluntary controlled/CE voluntary aided schools in Stockport, the schools priority area had been determined as the relevant area. In practice, this meant that the LEA's relevant area was the totality of its schools priority areas. Voluntary Aided Catholic School Governing Bodies would each determine that the Parish(es) which their school was established to serve, be the relevant area.

Further details of proposals in relation to primary schools, secondary schools and voluntary aided schools together with a planned timetable, were also detailed in the report.

Members of the Forum generally agreed that it would be sensible to retain the current arrangements with regard to relevant areas.

**RESOLVED** - That the Executive be advised to authorise that the Chief Education Officer carry out the Annual Consultation on Admission Arrangements 2003/2004 as detailed in the report.

## **6. CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS**

The Chief Education Officer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which detailed the consultation proposals, published by the DfES, on School Admissions and Exclusion Appeal Panels. Both documents had been published on 5 September 2001 alongside the White Paper entitled 'Achieving Success'. The forthcoming Education Bill would provide a legislative opportunity for any necessary statutory changes resulting from the proposals. In this respect, the exclusion related proposals were mainly concerned with intentions announced previously by the Secretary of State. The admission related proposals contained some substantial and important new elements as well as an attempt to 'tidy up' some areas of ambiguity in the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. The proposals were mainly concerned with improving co-ordination of admission arrangements building on the Secretary of State's guidance in the Code of Practice on School Admissions.

The main changes proposed on the consultation on school admissions were detailed within the report and a series of questions were submitted to the Forum on the following key subject matters. The Forum was invited to respond to the following questions:-

### **(i) Co-ordinating Admissions**

- Should the LEA be required to co-ordinate admissions processes in place allocation in the manner proposed?
- Should voluntary aided schools be able to apply their own criteria and feedback the results to the LEA before the allocation takes place?

The Forum commented that although the current system wasn't perfect, it was effective. Reservations were expressed with regard to the perceived lack of resource implications together with possible problems of co-ordination with neighbouring LEAs/admission authorities.

### **(ii) Parental Preference**

- Should the law be clarified as proposed?

The Forum agreed that multiple preferences were fairer to parents and also fairer to the children and therefore the law should be clarified as proposed. (Further issues were raised with regard to representation on the Forum of minority ethnic groups. It was also suggested that a representative of the Director of Social Services could be of benefit to the Admissions Forum).

### **(iii) Admission forum**

- Should the Admissions Forum be mandatory?
- Should the Forum have an advisory role to which admission authorities must have regard?
- Is the proposed membership appropriate?

The Forum agreed that Admissions Forums should be mandatory and that the Forum did have an advisory role to which admission authorities must have regard. It was also agreed that the proposed membership was appropriate, as it only deviated slightly from the current structure.

### **(iv) Abolishing the Standard Number**

- Should the Standard Number be abolished?
- Should the Admission Limit Number reflect the number indicated in the New Capacity Assessment Formula?
- Should admission authorities have the flexibility to set high or lower numbers and should they be required to state a justification when consulting on a latter case?

The Forum commented that the implications of the formula were not yet fully understood but the general principle was supported. Additional comments were made about the need for a balance between the Local

Authority's duty to provide efficient education, whilst taking account of parental needs to maximum extent possible, consistent with this duty.

(v) Objections to the Adjudicator

- Should the law be changed to ensure those who have a right to be consulted have the right to object even if they were not consulted?
- Should community and voluntary controlled schools have the right to object about proposed arrangements at foundation and voluntary aided schools?
- Should objection rights be extended in other ways?

The Forum commented that the law should be changed to ensure a right to object to all those who had a right to be consulted whether or not these were actually consulted.

With regard to the remaining questions, the Forum recognised a number of difficulties which could arise should Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools have the right to object to the proposed arrangements at foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools.

(vi) Annual Consultation and the area for Consulting Others

The Panel were set the following questions:-

- Should Admission Authority schools be allowed to consult every alternate year, unless changes were being proposed or the arrangements had been subject of an objection?
- Or should the LEA consult on behalf of Admission Authority schools every year?
- Or should relevant areas be reviewed before the Admissions Forum become a statutory body?

The Forum commented in general that they could see benefits in both approaches but reiterated that the current practices worked well within the Stockport area. The need to review the relevant area before the Admissions Forum becomes statutory was felt to be unnecessary.

(vii) Other Matters

The Forum was invited to comment on other matters raised by the DfES which could be the subject of further specific consultation at a later stage.

Discussion ensued with regard to primary school admissions together with the implications of leaving places open for the period of one year. The Forum commented on the need to give consideration to what happened to the child at the end of the year period if they missed the foundation stage. It was noted that the current local practice, which allowed parents to defer entry for one term was preferable in terms of child development, integration into a class and resource implications.

The consultation on exclusions posed the following questions:-

- How can the interest of the school community be best represented before the Exclusion Appeal Panel?
- How can the LEAs ensure Panels, constituted as proposed, were assembled in a timely fashion?

The Forum commented on their general desire to ensure children's return to school. In addition, the Forum expressed their approval to the idea of having Panel membership containing people who had a background or experience in classroom management but that they should include staff working in schools in other authorities. Local authorities should work together in order to promote objectivity and fairness. It was recognised that this would require a greater degree of co-operation.

The following questions were set with regard to Governing Body Pupil Discipline Committees:-

- Is fifteen days fixed term exclusion the right starting point for PDC meetings?

## Admissions Forum - 10 October 2001

- How should parent representations on exclusions less than fifteen days be dealt with - in writing only or should meetings be required if the parent requests it?

The Forum commented that all fixed period exclusions, of any length should be reported to the Governing body at least termly and to the LEA immediately. Pupil Discipline Committees normally should not be required to hold a meeting to review the decision for exclusion aggregating to less than 15 days in one term (unless there is the loss of an opportunity to sit a public exam).

Parents should have the right to make written representation about a fixed term exclusion of any length and should also have the right to attend a PDC hearing and put their case if they are dissatisfied about an exclusion of any length.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Admissions Forum be submitted to the Chief Education Officer for consideration for inclusion in the Authority's response.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm