

MEETING MINUTES: 28th November 2011, 5pm

HARPENDEN PARENTS GROUP, HERTS COUNTY COUNCIL OFFICERS & COUNCILLORS TERESA HERITAGE & BERNARD LLOYD

Venue: Card Room, Royal British Legion, 21 Leyton Road, Harpenden, AL5 2HU

Present:

■■■■■ (HPG) ■■■■

■■■■■ (HPG) ■■■■

Teresa Heritage (County Councillor) [TH]

Bernard Lloyd (County Councillor) [BL]

Pauline Davis (HCC Planning Officer) [PD]

■■■■■ (HCC Planning Officer) ■■■■

■■■■■ (HCC Strategy & Policy Officer) ■■■■

Apologies:

■■■■■ (Chairman of HPG)

■■■■■ (HPG)

Francis Button (Herts CC, Education & Skills)

■■■■■ (Senior School Planning Officer) ■■■■

■■■■■ (Admissions Officer)

1. The **actions from the previous meeting** held on 28th September 2011 were reviewed. Notes on actions completed are as follows:
 - ACTION – ■■■■ to confirm dates of Heads meetings. ■■■■ To feedback from the next meeting and then to confirm that HPG are invited to the subsequent meeting (with date + details of that meeting). **No information available – action to remain**
 - ACTION: ■■■■ to forward over current forecast numbers immediately & then to update HPG with the new forecast in October. **PD stated that HCC's October forecast data was not yet available but would be provided when available – action to remain.**
 - Action for the HPG to verify numbers and to check all children included are Harpenden residents. – **Work in Progress**
 - ACTION – ■■■■ confirmed he would send through a calendar of timings for the 2012/13 application process. **Calendar was received by HPG and has been uploaded to website.**
2. **Primary schools 2012 - Contingency plans in case free school does not get off the ground, results of Highways survey and forecast data**

HCC's latest forecast for the demand for 2012 primary school places is 457, which exactly matches the number of available school places is 457 (based on continued temporary expansion at The Grove Infants of +15 to take it to 90 places and at St Dominic of +30 to take it to 60 places). ■■■■ requested the updated forecast as numbers collected by HPG over the summer indicated a higher demand for places than HCC's forecast. HCC stated that the October forecast was not available yet and they would forward it through as soon as it was available.

TH asked if HCC took into account the last minute influx of families into Harpenden as has occurred in recent years. HCC indicated that they did not have a method for factoring this into their forecasts which are based on children registered with GPs and that they do not plan for a surplus of places / margin.

■ asked about the sibling data that is being collected by the schools. HCC stated that it was showing that 2012 was a normal sibling year with figure <50% of places. However it was agreed by all that numbers were only dependent on parents replying and could be inaccurate and under-forecasting.

HCC stated that they had been reviewing the feasibility of expanding the existing schools in Harpenden including a review of planning constraints, visiting the schools and discussions with Heads. As part of the exercise they had been undertaking highways surveys. HCC did not have the results of the surveys as several are outstanding (due on 2nd December). The surveys had included Redbourn and Wheathampstead.

BL stated that he'd been working with a parents group at Wood End to reduce traffic congestion by restricting parking around the school. HCC confirmed that they were aware of this and had included it within their highway survey. BL confirmed he was concerned about school places in the North of Harpenden.

PD stated that the results of the feasibility study would not be made public but would be used if the demand for places exceeded 457. This would only be known after the online application system closes in January 2012. HCC were unable to confirm if they were considering expansion option in the areas of the town where there had been problems accessing local schools in 2011 (e.g. north and central Harpenden). PD indicated that they would look at where the pinch points were and see if the local schools could be expanded, although this may not be possible.

PD confirmed that HCC was planning as if the free school was not there as there was no funding agreement in place yet.

3. Harpenden Free School

HCC, the councillors and HPG have met with the Free School to discuss their plans. HCC stated that although they had met with the free school they were unable to confirm many details about the Free School. For details of location, admission criteria, when applications could be received etc they want to refer parents directly to the free school. HCC have included it in their leaflet and a link on their website to the free school's website. ■ indicated that the Free School was collecting expressions of interest from parents and had informed them that they had over 100 to date.

HCC stated that the Free School was not included in their on line application system yet and it was highly unlikely that it would be as it had not entered into a funding agreement yet. ■ stated that if there were no plans in place by mid-Feb HCC would be unable to include the Free School in their allocations.

PD indicated that the Free School would need to go through a statutory consultation period to answer the question 'are you happy to enter into a funding agreement?' PD thought it was unlikely to be before January and needed to be >4 weeks. The timing of the consultation would be decided by the Free School.

HCC and the councillors had been told by the Free School that it would open in 2012 with, at the very least, 30 reception places in temporary accommodation by current artisans nursery. Parents were referred directly to the Free School for confirmation of plans.

HCC were unsure if or when the Free School would be inside HCC's coordination for allocating school places. It is possible that if this does not happen that parents could receive dual offers. ■■■'s opinion of the impact of the free school in 2012 is that it would provide more options to parents but there would be late resolution for primary school places. For example, if the Free School collects applications directly (as Independent schools do) and allocates places then parents who have already been allocated a place by HCC may change to the Free School hence making a place at a local community school available through the continuing interest process. This could be a slow process and mean a lot of movement over the summer term and holiday.

■■■ had discussed the Free School admissions criteria and confirmed they were in draft and unfinished. The criteria included an inner zone of 1 mile around the school which would be subject to random allocation and then an outer zone including areas beyond Harpenden within which would also be random allocation, although not offering a sibling connection for those in the outer zone. ■■■ warned that the admissions criteria were not finalised and the Free School should be approached for more details.

■■■ asked if there was a cut-off time beyond which in HCC's view it was not feasible to open the Free School for 2012. HCC indicated there was no cut-off date.

■■■ asked if, in the circumstance that the Free School had available places, HCC would allocate pupils to the Free School if they had not ranked it in their preference list (i.e. make non-ranked allocations (NRAs) to the school. ■■■ confirmed that if the Free School was inside HCC's coordination they could but that HCC had not reached a decision as to whether they would.

BL strongly stated his disagreement with placing any NRA at the Free School given that the ethos of the school was different to a local community school. ■■■ and ■■■ strongly supported this objection to placing NRA at the free school and stated that this was an issue of great concern to HPG. The group hoped the Free School would attract enough pupils to avoid such a situation.

4. Primary Schools 2013 and beyond

TH asked about forecasting and school place planning for 2013 and whether the temporary expansions at The Grove and St Dominic would become permanent. HCC stated that the current proposal was that the temporary expansions at St Dominic and The Grove would not continue in 2013 and they would both revert to their original 30 and 75 places respectively. PD indicated that the Free School meant that there was a great uncertainty.

TH stated that recent discussions with a member of the PCT revealed that both Luton & Dunstable and Watford Hospital maternity wards are extremely busy so future demand may remain as high as it is currently.

5. Nursery School applications - 2012

■ asked HCC to clarify the notification procedure for parents wanting to find out if they had been allocated a nursery school place for 2012. ■ confirmed that the application system was on-line but that no email would be sent to parents with the allocation information. Instead HCC would send reminder emails just before allocation day that parents need to log onto the online system and check the result. Parents will only have one week to accept the place. A leaflet from HCC detailing the system will be posted to all children registered with a GP.

6. Fraudulent applications for primary schools in 2012

■ asked HCC if they would undertake address checks for successful applications to over-subscribed schools. HPG indicated that one member had eventually been offered a place for her son at Roundwood following such checks over the summer. HCC said they would do the checks but they would not start until after continuing interest rounds and the appeals due to staff availability.

7. Consultation of admissions criteria for 2013 onwards

■ stated that there would be a consultation on the revised admissions criteria. The twins rule (5a) has been removed as the new School Admissions Code will allow HCC to allocate both twins to a school even if it results in a class with 31 pupils. There will also be an increase in the number of schools that parents can include in their preference list from 3 to 4. Consultation is from 3rd January to end February 2012 and is restricted to the changes made by HCC. For the consultation period in 2013 the process commences in the summer period 2012...if the HPG have any proposals re changes we should raise these June/July time 2012.

8. Secondary Schools

■ asked HCC about plans for new secondary school places. TH confirmed that following the Education Act 2011, all new schools are to be academies or free schools. HCC are reviewing forecasts of demand compared to available school places to identify locations in Herts with a deficit. This information should be published in Spring/Summer 2012.

Date of next meeting: to be confirmed but following closure of applications.