

Councillor Amy Kennedy

King's House
Grand Avenue
Hove BN3 2LS

Mr Alex Bailey
Acting Chief Executive
Brighton & Hove City Council
King's House
Grand Avenue
Hove BN3 2LS

Date: 21 October 2008

Our Ref: BWO/EB

Your Ref:

Dear Alex

FRAUDULENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS APPLICATIONS

I would be most grateful if you could place this letter on the agenda of the next meeting of the Cabinet on Thursday 21st May. I also wish to speak to it.

Members of the Cabinet are undoubtedly aware that the issue of schools admissions continues to be a controversial and divisive matter for many families in Brighton & Hove.

While the problems experienced as a result of the changes to secondary schools admissions (the so-called "schools lottery" system) appear to be reaching some sort of equilibrium, regrettably it would seem that the city's primary education provision is now becoming as problematic in terms of competition for places at "preferred" schools.

A recent "baby-boom" across Brighton & Hove (coupled with a lack of existing primary provision) is now leading to horrendous difficulties and despair for many parents who are vulnerable to sharp practice under the current system.

For example, I have recently been contacted by a constituent, whom for the sake of propriety I shall refer to as Mrs X. I hope that the Cabinet will consider her story in their deliberations on the matters referred to in this letter. Her case is documented within recent local authority records, and I can provide further clarification in private session if required.

My constituent Mrs X and her partner received an eviction letter from the landlord of their rented family home in Osborne Road, Preston Park ward, in September 2008, just three weeks after she had delivered a baby by caesarean section. At the time, she was not only recovering from the surgery and the birth of her little boy, but also caring for her other two young children with help from her partner, who was working full-time as well in order to support her and the children while Mrs X was taking maternity leave.

The receipt of this eviction notice caused terrible stress to the family, and marred their enjoyment of the early days of their new baby boy's life, particularly as Mrs X suspected

that the sudden eviction was prompted by the landlord's wish that his child attend a popular (and at the time over-subscribed) local junior school.

When the eviction notice was served, the landlord's home address was (and remains) in an adjacent ward nearby to the home in Osborne Road then rented by Mrs X and her partner; the landlord's child attended a local infant school which could then not guarantee onward entry into the associated juniors for all infant pupils.

However, the residences in Osborne Road were within the "golden halo" catchment area of the popular junior school, and so my constituent Mrs X's family were forced to leave their family home for the sakes of pure expediency on the landlord's part in terms of getting his child a place at the school he preferred.

Mrs X's suspicion that the eviction was directly related to the landlord making a fraudulent claim of residency at the more "favoured" Osborne Road address (in order to be able to secure a place within the catchment area of his preferred primary school on the admissions form) was subsequently upheld following an investigation by this local authority.

The Osborne Road address (from which my constituent was evicted) that the landlord entered on the form for admission into his preferred junior school was indeed found out to be not his home address. Council investigations found that the property was empty at a time the landlord claimed residency, and thus the landlord's original application was rejected.

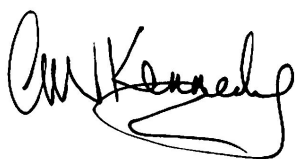
But no legal action has been taken against this landlord for his cynical and illegal behaviour, despite the fact that all schools admissions forms bear the caveat that "it is a criminal offence to provide false information on this form".

I know litigation is an expensive burden for the public purse to bear, and of course I am mindful of the need to spend public money prudently.

But given the fact that schools admissions are a hugely difficult issue for many parents in the city, and in the light of the very real human cost involved in the case of my constituent Mrs X, I am now calling on the Cabinet to seriously consider prosecuting the criminal activity of claiming false residency with the same vigour with which it pursues benefit fraud, in order to send a loud and clear message out to dishonest people that lying about their address in order to secure a place at a preferred school is as wrong as benefit fraud, and will be punished accordingly.

I would be grateful if the Cabinet could consider my request, and hope that they will feel able to support it.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Kennedy', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Amy Kennedy
Green City Councillor for Preston Park Ward
Brighton & Hove City Council