

HARROW ADMISSIONS FORUM

3 NOVEMBER 2008

Chairman:	* Reverend P Reece (Church of England Diocese Representative)		
Councillors:	Mrs Anjana Patel * Dinesh Solanki * Bill Stephenson		
Community School Representatives:	<u>Governor</u> (Vacancy)	<u>Primary</u> * Sue Jones	<u>Secondary</u> * Janice Howkins
Jewish School Representative:	Mrs D Palman		
Roman Catholic School Representative:	Mike Murphy		
Church of England School Representative:	Mrs S Hinton		
Catholic Schools Diocese Representative:	* Mr Billiet		
Primary Elected Parent Governor Representative:	* Mrs D Speel		
Secondary Elected Parent Governor Representative:	* Mr R Chauhan		
Harrow Council for Racial Equality Representative:	Julia Smith		
Early Years Development Partnership Representative:	* Helena Tucker		
Children's Services Representative:	(Vacancy)		

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**84. **Attendance by Reserve Members:****RESOLVED:** To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.85. **Declarations of Interest:****RESOLVED:** To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members of the Forum arising from the business to be transacted at this meeting.86. **Arrangement of Agenda:****RESOLVED:** That all items be considered with the press and public present.87. **Minutes:****RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2008 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.88. **Matters Arising:****RESOLVED:** That there were no matters arising.

89. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rules 16, 14 and 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution) respectively.

90. **Feedback from School Admission Arrangements Working Group:**

The Forum received the report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development which set out the feedback from the School Admissions Arrangements Working Group on the high school oversubscription criteria. The Service Manager for Place Planning and School Admissions reported that the aim was to develop a single model for high school admission arrangements which would be equitable and robust. 634 responses from an 'early sounding' exercise were received, although the replies did not reflect an equal response from all schools. The Working Group had also sought legal advice as it did not feel that the models arrived at met the specific legal criteria to satisfy the adjudicator. Problems were associated with trying to establish a cluster that met all the needs of the schools and parents. It was questioned as whether it was possible to establish a model that met everybody's requirements, or whether an existing model could be adapted to achieve this.

A member commented that the agreed model must stand up to judicial scrutiny as, in his view, parental objections to admissions arrangements had increased. A member of the forum stated, that some primary schools, although not directly feeder schools, had extended non-formal links with secondary schools which proved to be very successful. The member added that, in her opinion, some cluster systems did work well and that the biggest challenge remaining was maintaining consistency with admissions arrangements. Another member expressed her concern that, due to the amount of regulations, strictly adhering to one regulation could be detrimental to another, and questioned whether there was a London-wide consensus on which admission arrangement were most equitable. The Service Manager for Place Planning and School Admissions replied that Harrow and Richmond were the only two boroughs in London that favoured Link Schools over distance in the admissions arrangements, although Richmond did extend its Link School arrangements to schools outside of their borough. A member responded that admissions arrangements were rarely a concern when schools were undersubscribed, but due to Harrow schools suffering from the pressures of over-subscription the arrangements were frequently called into question.

The Service Manager for Place Planning and School Admissions concluded that views would be welcomed on how to involve the community in consultation on admissions arrangements and that Harrow People Magazine had been approached with a view of carrying an article.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

91. **Office of the Schools Adjudicator Review of School Admission Arrangements:**

The Forum received the report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development which set out the Office of the Schools Adjudicator's Review of School Admissions Arrangements. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions reported that the revision was a thorough exercise that evaluated all of the schools in the country. A number of admissions arrangements, including those for Harrow community schools were deemed to have breaches of a technical nature that needed to be addressed:

1. Children with a statement of special needs must be admitted to a school whether the school had places or not. Harrow had previously placed children in public care before those with a statement.
2. Placing children attending a link school before those children in public care or with a statement of special education needs was also not permissible.

There were also a number of comments on the admission arrangements for Harrow voluntary aided schools. In cases where there was no definition of admissions arrangements submitted, the authority offered a default version which satisfied the Office of the Schools Adjudicators criteria.

A member questioned whether the distance from home to school was measured accurately as many schools had more than one entrance. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions replied that only a default measurement was applied if one was not defined, but that in all other cases the measurement was taken from the home to the nearest school entrance. It appeared that most community schools had multiple entrances, whereas most of the voluntary aided schools had one

entrance. Once the ratified versions of arrangements had been received they would be forwarded to all parents who had applied to the respective schools.

In conclusion, a Member of the Forum extended his congratulations to the Admissions Service for following the admissions code with great diligence.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

92. **Review of Information Request on In-year Application Form:**

The Forum received the report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development which set out a review of the information requested as part of the application process for an In-Year Primary / Secondary School Place. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions reported that the review had come about from a request from the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development. The review concerned the requesting of information that was not used as part of the application process but was deemed to assist the schools in admitting the children after the application process had been completed. The Portfolio Holder was concerned that the collection of the information could be seen to be discriminatory. The information requested in question was:

- How long the child had lived in the UK?
- Which Languages are spoken in the (your) home?
- Does the (your) child speak English? If yes, say how well.

A member responded that their school used the information in a wholly positive manner. She added that as it placed the child in the most suitable class and would lower the pressures associated with starting a new school. Another member added that the information would help the school make appropriate use of resources and aid with communication. The member concluded that the inclusion of the questions ensured a level of consistency across the borough and it should not be viewed in a negative light. A Member, in agreement, suggested the inclusion of the questions on a separate sheet to the main application form, so that it was apparent that they would not be used for adjudicating. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions replied that, in her experience, supplementary forms were often ignored or discarded.

A Member of the Forum commented that, with reference to the agenda item concerning the Officer of the Schools Adjudicators review of admissions arrangements, where they had suggested the removal of information unrelated to any oversubscription criteria, the In-Year application form might be subject to the same ruling. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions replied that the OSA did not assess the In-Year application.

A member commented that by having such questions on the form, those parents who were better educated or 'knew how to potentially play the system' could use the issue of the question's inclusion to launch an appeal, should their child not be accepted at a school of their choice. Another member suggested requesting the information on the acceptance form, once the place had been allocated. The Service Manager of Place Planning and School Admissions replied that the Admissions Service rarely receive the acceptance forms back.

After a discussion on whether the Forum should remove the questions from the In-Year application form or whether to feedback information on the discussion of the Forum, it was decided that legal advice should be sought before a decision was made.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) Legal advice be sought regarding the inclusion or removal of the questions, as raised by the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development and the advice be reported back to the panel.

93. **To Respond to a Query from an Admission Forum Member About a Child Not Allocated a Local School:**

The Forum received the report of the Director for Schools and Children's Development which set out a response to a question from a member of the Forum about a child not allocated a place at a school local to their residence. The member outlined the particulars of the case and queried whether an arrangement could be put in place to stop this happening to applicants not within a specific catchment area or who find themselves at the top of the priority list, yet find themselves passed over for admission by higher priority cases. A Member replied that three of his constituents had faced the

same situation, only because they had not applied for the four schools nearest to their residence. He added, that although he was sympathetic to the cases, the applicants are advised to apply to their nearest school, and make use of all four preferred options. He concluded that if the applicants do not make use of all four options then they face the risk of not being offered a school close to their residence, about which is very clear in the guidance issued. The Chairman added that when using the on-line application process, a warning is issued to the user if they do not fill in all four options.

In response to a members question about whether the priority list could remain frozen, a member replied that such a practice would be secondary discrimination.

The Chairman concluded it was not the principle that was being called into question but rather that the forum were acknowledging that the system could not guarantee that applicants would be successful if applying for schools outside of their catchment in favour of those within the catchment area. The Forum also acknowledged that applicants were offered a preference, rather than a definitive choice.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

94. **Any Other Business:**
Panel Members agreed that personal contact details could be circulated amongst members of the Forum.

The next meeting of the Harrow Admissions Forum was provisionally agreed as 24 November 2008 at 6.00 pm.