

Meeting:	Harrow Admissions Forum
Date:	1 December 2008
Subject:	Feedback from School Admission Arrangements Working Group
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements, Director Schools and Children's Development
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Anjana Patel, Schools and Children's Development
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1: Please see appendix A and B at agenda item 10 (starting at page 27 of the agenda) Appendix 2 – Please see appendix C at agenda item 10 (starting at page 47 of the agenda)

Section 1: Summary

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

Recommendations:

To note the outcome of the review of the Working Party on high school oversubscription criteria.

To decide whether to adopt the recommendation of the Working Party to consult on distance as the only option.

To agree the consultation arrangements on proposed admission arrangements to apply to Harrow community primary and high schools for the school year 2010-11.

Reason: To meet the statutory requirement to consult before determining admission arrangements.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Harrow is required to consult before determining its admission arrangements.

The 1998 Act (as amended by the Education Act 2002) also requires each LA to establish an Admissions Forum to provide a vehicle for admission authorities and other key interested parties to get together to discuss the effectiveness of local admission arrangements.

The Harrow Admissions Forum has a role to consider current admission arrangements to assess how well they serve the interest of local parents and children.

1. ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

In October 2008 the Cabinet agreed the strategic approach to school re-organisation and established a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) to provide advice and guidance on proposals and options for school organisation. A range of Focus Groups were engaged to work in conjunction with the Reference Group. The Harrow Admissions Forum set up a Working Group specifically to review co-educational community high school admission arrangements.

The Working Group met on a number of occasions and developed a set of underlying principles for the review, as follows:

- Compliance with the code of practice.
- Encourage parents to stay in Harrow
- Achieve a balance so there is perceived fairness and equity across the borough.
- Act on the commitment made to review high school admission arrangements at the time of change in age of transfer.

The following options were considered:

1. No change

The current arrangements were considered to be liable to legal challenge as they would not be deemed to be fair and equitable because:

- Some primary schools have dual links.
- One high school is oversubscribed by children from its feeder primary schools.
- One high school only has one single linked school.

2. Minimise change by retaining links but adjusting where current links not working effectively

This option was considered at great length but there were major difficulties in developing a model that was fair, equitable and would gain the support of parents and schools.

3. Abolish links and change to:
 - distance
 - random allocation (lottery)
 - banding

Lottery and banding had been ruled out following the early soundings exercise.

The Working Party felt that distance offered a fair, equitable and stable option both for now and the future.

At the meeting on 3 November 2008, Forum Members received an interim report from the Group. Since then the Group has had two further meetings and has now concluded their review. Initially, it was considered that there should be two options for consultation.

1. Distance from home to school measured in a straight line.
2. A revised links model.

A number of models were developed for the Working Group's consideration. In addition the Group received independent legal advice about using linked schools as an oversubscription criterion. Specifically, advice was sought on how to develop a link school model that:

Meets the requirements of the School Admissions Code of Practice.

Is in line with legal advice.

Would limit the likelihood of legal challenge.

Is sufficiently robust to meet the challenge of change (ie new housing developments, expansion/contraction of school population, etc.).

The Working Party considered a number of linked school models that had been developed, based on distance from primary school to high school, and which could meet a legal challenge. However, the Working Party did not believe it was possible to develop a single model that would gain the support of parents and schools. The Working Party was concerned about the disruptive impact of changes and the knowledge, based on previous experience, that any change to long established links was going to be extremely unpopular.

It also proved exceptionally complex to establish underlying principles or a clear rationale to support why a particular school's link should change.

The reasons for this were as follows:

- The outcome of the early soundings exercise was that only a small number (ie 4.7%) of respondees supported linked high school over distance. However, when asked if they would still want a linked school system if links changed, over 50% of respondees indicated they would not support any change to established links.
- Independent legal advice was clear that dual links are likely to be challengeable. This meant that the current system would need to be changed.

- To ensure that all high schools had a potential intake that matched their planned admission number, a number of primary schools would need to change to a new linked high school. The Working Party considered the disruptive impact of change and was aware that changes to long established links is going to be very unpopular.
- Because primary schools have differing intakes, it was not possible to develop a linked school system that ensured all high schools had a potential intake greater than their planned admission number.
- Demographic changes means that links will need to be reviewed constantly resulting in disruption and insecurity. This would lead to instability with links changing to meet circumstances.
- Independent legal advice is that linked schools will only be acceptable when high schools do not fill all their places via the feeder criterion. At least some children must be placed in the school because they live in close proximity. This means that Park High school would need to reduce the number of linked primary schools.
- The Working Party took account of an exercise undertaken using only distance on the 2008 high school transfer group. This showed little impact on the number of successful first preference applications ie 1556 with linked schools and 1549 with distance. What was shown was that 106 pupils (6%) who would have been offered the linked school using links, would not have been offered places if distance were used. In many cases, these pupil were offered a more local (and in some case a higher preference) school.

RECOMMENDATION: In light of the above, the Working Party agreed to recommend to the Harrow Admission Forum that there should be a single option for consultation, namely, distance from home to school measured in a straight line.

This means that the proposed admission arrangements for co-educational high schools for September 2010 would be:

1st priority	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER
2nd priority	AGREED MEDICAL CLAIMS
3rd priority	SIBLINGS ATTENDING THE SCHOOL AT THE SAME TIME (excluding students at the sixth form)
4th priority	DISTANCE FROM HOME TO SCHOOL MEASURED IN A STRAIGHT LINE

Any new admission arrangements for September 2010 will apply to two year groups:

- Children in year 6 in September 2009 who will be transferring to year 7 in September 2010
- Children in year 7 in September 2009 who will be transferring to year 8 in September 2010

CONSULTATION

WHEN

- Consultation on admission arrangements will take place between 8 December 2008 and 13 February 2009.

WHO WILL BE INVOLVED

- All Harrow governing bodies and schools
- Parents
- Community groups
- Neighbouring LAs

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATION

- Report to all Harrow governing bodies and pro-forma response forms.
- Information/pro-formas provided for schools to use with parents.
- Schools' normal communication channels (ie newsletters, parents evenings, etc).
- Harrow People magazine January 2009.
- Harrow website.
- Officer attendance at meetings.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Performance Issues

There are no performance issues arising from this report.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: John Stansfield	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 25.11.08		
Name: Rosemarie Martin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 25.11.08		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Madeleine Hitchens, Manager Place Planning & Admissions – 020 8424 1398 madeleine.hitchens@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: N/A: