

HARROW ADMISSIONS FORUM

14 JULY 2009

Chairman:	* Reverend P Reece		
Councillors:	* Mrs Anjana Patel * 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		
Hindu School Representative:	(Vacancy)		
Church of England Diocese Representative:	* Reverend P Reece		
Catholic Schools Diocese Representative:	Mr Mike Pittendreigh		
Board of Deputies British Jews Representative:	(Vacancy)		
Primary Elected Parent Governor Representative:	* Mrs D Speel		
Secondary Elected Parent Governor Representative:	* Mr R Chauhan		
I-Foundation Representative:	(Vacancy)		
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**116. **Attendance by Alternate Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Alternate Members in attendance at this meeting.

117. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business to be transacted at this meeting.

118. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2009 be taken as read and signed as a correct record;

(2) the minutes of Special Meeting held on the 14 July 2009 be deferred until the next meeting of the Forum.

119. **Election of Vice-Chairman:**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Anjana Patel be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Forum for a period of one year.

[Note: The School Admissions (Local Authority Reports and Admissions Forums) (England) Regulations 2008 state that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall hold office until the next meeting which falls after the date which is a year after the meeting at which they were elected, and on ceasing to hold office shall be eligible for re-election].

120. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

121. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 17 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

122. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

123. **Report to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development, which included the information on the statutory requirement to annually to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) **on how well the admission arrangements in Harrow are working**. The information, which formed the basis of the annual report from the OSA to the Secretary of State, also included information on how fair access protocol was working locally and how school places were assigned in a fair and timely fashion.

In a response to questions, an officer advised that:

- due to time constraints the Forum did not receive copies of the report before it was submitted to the OSA. The Forum could submit its own report to the OSA if it felt that the system was not working;
- officers would circulate a draft copy of the report to Members of the Forum in future, which may require a special meeting of the Forum prior to its submission to the OSA..

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) in future, the Director of Schools and Children's Development circulate a draft copy of the report to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) to all members of the Forum and that, time permitting, it also be submitted to a meeting of the Forum prior to the report being dispatched to the OSA.

124. **Primary and Secondary Guides 2010/2011:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development, which advised of the work in progress on the Primary and Secondary Guides to Schools in Harrow 2010/2011. The booklets would be available for parents from 1 September 2009 along with application forms for entry into reception in September 2009 and 11+ and 12+ transfer to High Schools in September 2010. The booklets had been updated to include information on the change to the age of transfer and changes to the schools admission arrangements. Draft copies of the booklets were sent to Harrow schools in the week commencing 6 July 2009 for proof reading. In previous years schools only received the relevant sections of the booklets for editorial comments. This year schools were sent the entire booklet and were asked for any general comments.

An officer reported that draft copies had been circulated to the Admissions Forum Sub-Group for comment but that it had only made few remarks.

A member suggested that the information relating to the Moriah Jewish Day School might need amending, pending the outcome of a recent court case. An officer advised that the deadline for changes may not be met, and that a caveat to the information provided in the booklet could be included to note that the information provided was accurate at the time of publishing and that, for the most up-to-date policy, parents should contact the schools.

A member suggested that including information on the role of school's governors would help explain their involvement, and might also encourage more people to take up the position. Members agreed that, although a source of information about governors needed to be provided, the Primary and Secondary Guides were not suitable documents to contain such information, as governors took no part in the admissions process. The Chairman added that the booklets recommended contacting the individual schools for their relevant prospectus, where information about governors could be provided.

A member welcomed the inclusion of flowcharts and suggested that the flowchart in the Guide to High Schools be brought forward to page 5, as in the Guide to Primary Schools. The Chairman also extended his thanks on behalf of the Forum to the Admissions Service for all the work they had undertaken in producing the booklets.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the amendments suggested by members be incorporated in the final versions of the Primary and Secondary Schools Guides 2010/2011;

(3) further comments from members of the forum be submitted to officers by no later than Wednesday 22 July 2009.

125. **Confirmation of Addresses:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development, which advised the Forum on the current arrangements to confirm addresses for school places. The need to have a robust checking procedure had arisen following complaints from parents over false applications and from parents who had been unsuccessful in their applications. They had asked that all addresses be verified. The same officer commented that whatever procedures were put in place, if parents were determined to fabricate information, it would be very difficult to eradicate all fraudulent applications.

The primary document used for confirmation of address was a copy of the current Council Tax bill. In cases where tenants did not pay Council Tax, a tenancy agreement sufficed, although private agreements would not be appropriate. If further clarification was required, the electoral register would be checked, a driving licence requested or certain information sought from the Council's Housing Service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

126. **Rising 5, 11+ and 12+ Allocations for 2009/10:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development, which set out information about the allocation of places to Reception (Rising 5), 11+ Transfer and 12+ Transfer for the academic year 2009/2010. Information relating to primary schools indicated that the number of applications being granted their first preference was declining and information relating to high schools revealed a small increase in the numbers of applications for schools outside the borough.

A discussion took place between members regarding parents who had applied for their nearest four primary schools and had been offered none. A member reported that they had used their own address as a test and discovered that they would not have been offered any of their closest primary schools, and questioned the validity of a system where, in a populated urban area, parents could not be offered a place at schools which were within easy walking distance. Another member added that such instances had previously been investigated by the Admissions Service but the circumstances in those cases were different. It was questioned whether the number of preferences allowed on the application form could be raised from four to five. An officer replied that the problem was not specific to Harrow but was something that was affecting London and the South-East of England. The area around schools in which successful applicants lived was decreasing every year. As a result the Government had introduced two initiatives by which to better coordinate primary applications. The first was to co-ordinate in-year applications from September 2010 and for the school year 2011/2012 to co-ordinate intake to reception. Local authorities across London are currently developing draft schemes of co-ordination, with one recommendation being to allow applicants to make up to six preferences for admission to Reception. The officer reported that due to the high level of demand for some schools it was not possible to

give a guarantee that all applicants could be offered one of their local school and that finding an equitable system, given the population number and the differences in opinions over what was a reasonable distance to travel to school, was very difficult. The same officer added that a system for applicants to do their own home to school measurements would be available on the Harrow website in the Autumn term.

In response to a suggestion from a member about the how distance tie-breaker was measured, an officer reminded the Forum that there were other options open to the Council other than measuring the distance in a straight line, which the Forum may wish to consider.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) applications where parents were not being offered any of their four nearest preferred maintained primary schools be monitored and that a report on the numbers be provided to the Forum.

127. **Measurement of Distance from Home to School:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development, which advised of the current arrangements in place for measuring distance from home address to school. Information was provided to the forum for clarification following concerns raised by parents who were unsuccessful in gaining places at Newton Farm School because of the positioning of the school gates.

The Forum noted that:

- distance from home to school was measured in a straight line;
- the entry points used were those defined by the school;
- since the allocation of school places for 2009, all schools had been asked to confirm the official gates/entry points for the purposes of providing a new facility which would enable parents to calculate their own home to school distance;
- officers would be visiting all schools for further confirmation of official gates and entry points.

A member queried whether the official gates and entry points were something that could be defined by the Council's Planning Service. In response, the Chairman requested that legal advice be sought and that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Forum. The same member queried whether it would be practicable to assign the entrance of the main school building as the official gate and entry point. Another member replied that many schools did not have one main entrance to their buildings and that it was highly impractical to channel a high number of students through one entrance or exit.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the Director of Legal and Governance Services submit a report to the next meeting of the Forum on whether the Planning Service had any control over the official gates and entry points of schools.

128. **Planned Admission Numbers:**

An officer reported orally on planned admission numbers and informed the Forum who was responsible for monitoring this area of work. Since the School Organisation Committee was abolished in 2005, place planning had been under the control of the Council's Education Service. Information statutory proposals to change planned admissions numbers could be brought to the Forum for information purposes. The same officer confirmed that the Director of Schools and Children's Services would be asked which Council forum would deal with issues related to school place planning.

RESOLVED: That the officer response be noted.

129. **Deferred Entry to School:**

In response to a question from a member of the Forum, an officer stated that the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development would be responding to a question from a member of the public on deferred entry at the Cabinet meeting of 16 July 2009. The Chairman requested that a report on deferred entry be brought to the next meeting of the Forum as well as the response from the relevant Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED: That (1) the officer response be noted;

(2) a report on deferred entry, and the response to the relevant question asked at the Cabinet meeting of 16 July 2009, be brought to the next meeting of the Harrow Admissions Forum.

130. **Rising 5 Allocation:**
(See Minute 126).

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 6.15 pm, closed at 7.17 pm)

(Signed) REVEREND P REECE
Chairman