

Meeting:	Nursery Admissions Working Party
Date:	9 th November 2009
Subject:	Review of nursery admissions
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements, Director of Schools and Children's Development
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Anjana Patel, Schools and Children's Development
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report provides members of the Working Party with clarification from the Harrow Admissions Forum on their terms of reference and also feedback from the survey of nursery headteachers on nursery admission arrangements.

Recommendations:

The Admissions Forum is requested to:

1. Note the Group's Terms of Reference
2. Consider the outcome of the survey of nursery headteachers
3. Agree the recommendations on page 4 for consideration by the Harrow Admissions Forum.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To ensure Harrow's nursery admission arrangements are fair, transparent and co-ordinated.

Section 2 – Report

Background

Following the meeting on 9 July 2009, the Harrow Admissions Forum was asked to provide members of the Working Party with a clear definition of their terms of reference. At the Forum Meeting on 21 October 2010, the following was agreed:

In recent years the authority has reviewed both Rising 5 and high school admission arrangements. Nursery arrangements have not been reviewed since 1997. Now is considered a suitable time to look at nursery arrangements to determine whether the criteria still meet local needs or whether they should be revised. Members of the Working Party should focus on:

1. The oversubscription criteria, including the tie-breakers.
2. Whether the current administrative arrangements are working in the best interest of children and families.

Current situation

Members of the Working Party requested officers to undertake a survey of nursery headteachers to find out:

- What is working well?
- What is not working well?
- How are schools administering applications?
- Where there is oversubscription ie number of applications
- Are there issues to do with full-time / part-time provision?
- Are there any things that need to be changed?

As there were only two weeks between the Working Party meeting and the end of term, it was agreed that the survey be undertaken at the start of the new term. A questionnaire was circulated to all nursery headteachers on 2 September 2009. Headteachers were asked to respond by 23 September 2009. As it is appreciated that the start of term is a busy time for headteachers, four reminders about the importance of completing the questionnaire were sent. Up to the time this report was written, there was a 50% response rate to the survey.

The following table provides an analysis of the survey responses and highlights the themes arising from the survey.

Q1 What is working well in relation to admission to nursery class in your school	Good communication between parents and schools Personal/direct contact between schools and families Easy for local families to apply
Q2 What is not working well	Parents completing more than one form No co-ordination to resolve duplicate applications and second/third preferences Sibling links

Q3 What is working well across the authority	Good communication between schools
Q4 What is not working well across the authority	Multiple applications leading to possible multiple offers No consistency of information provided / timetable (ie availability of application forms, closing/offer dates)
Q5 oversubscription	See appendix 1
Q6 Issues about full-time/part-time/am/pm provision	Points were raised about the range of provision Having to manage a variety of options.
Q7a Are the current oversubscription criteria appropriate	Yes 5 No 6 Other 3
Q7b What changes do you think should be made	Priority should be given to: Children Looked After SEN (through SENARS referral) Siblings
Q8 Application process	No common themes
Q9 Other comments	Common timetable Application process should be co-ordinated Process for dealing with multiple applications Central web-base for nurseries with vacancies

Although not raised specifically in the survey response, the issue of the tie-breakers for nursery admissions has been the subject of concern for a number of years. The current tie-breakers are:

1. Children whose first language is not English
2. Children whose parent(s) are in receipt of Income support.

The above tie-breakers have been in place since 1997 and were introduced following consultation with Governing Bodies of Harrow schools during the Autumn 1996 Term. The rationale behind the revised criteria was to support children within the most disadvantaged sections of the community. The basis of this lay in research undertaken by HMI which pointed to the need to address a deficit in educational attainment amongst those young children who do not speak English as a main language at home.

The main criterion for admission to nursery remains date of birth (ie older children are offered places before younger children). The tie-breaker is only applied in those rare cases where there are two children with the same date of birth but there is only one place remaining in the nursery.

Whilst the tie-breakers were relevant at the time they were agreed in 1997, neither of these is considered to be appropriate for the future. The number of children in Harrow schools whose first language is not English has grown and is currently 51%. Also other benefits / tax arrangements have been introduced to help a wider range of families (eg family tax credits) which means that income support is no longer the main determinant of deprivation.

A more relevant tie-breaker of distance from home to school measured in a straight line is proposed for the Working Party's consideration.

In light of the above, the Working Group is asked to consider making the following proposals to the Harrow Admissions Forum for their consideration and possible inclusion in the consultation on Admission Arrangements for the 2010/11 academic year.

Recommendations

1. The nursery headteachers group, to agree and publish an annual timetable for nursery admissions
2. To obtain formal sign-up to this timetable from all nursery headteachers
3. Nursery headteachers to agree and draw up a draft protocol for dealing with multiple applications.
4. To submit the draft protocol through the Foundation Stage Heads Group for agreement and then ratification by the Harrow Admissions Forum
5. To give consideration to adding a Frequently Asked Questions item about admission to nursery class in the "Playing is Learning" booklet issued to all parents when children start nursery.
6. To change the tie-breaker where there are two children with the same date of birth to distance measured in a straight line from home to school.

Financial Implications

EMMA STABLER TO COMMENT

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

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

*Delete the words "on behalf of the" if the report is cleared directly by Myfanwy or Hugh.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Madeleine Hitchens, Manager, Place Planning & Admissions
Service 020 8424 1398

Background Papers: N/A.

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES