Minutes

For: Admissions Forum
Date: 1st December 2016
Time: 18:00 – 19:30
Location: The Tunmarsh Centre

Attendees:

Rev. Quentin Peppiatt – Lead Member for Children and Young People’s Services (QP)
Jane Moon – Deputy Director, Education and Skills (JM)
James Hourigan – Head of Access and Inclusion (JH)
Tracy Jones – Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)
Paul Halliwell – Head Teacher, St Bonaventure’s Catholic Comprehensive School (PH)
Simon Elliott – Head Teacher, Forest Gate Community School (SE)
Diane Barrick – Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School (DB)
Gael Hicks – Head Teacher, St Helen’s Roman Catholic Primary School (GH)
Sue Ferguson – Head Teacher, Ellen Wilkinson Primary School (SF)

Apologies for Absence
Gillian Dineen – Head Teacher, The Cumberland School
Ian Wilson – Head Teacher, Little Ilford Primary School
Asif Mahmood – Head Teacher, Roman Road Primary School

Minute Taker
Kiran Parkash Singh – Admission and Appeals Team Leader, Pupil Services

1) Introduction
QP opened the forum by welcoming the attendees and thanking them for their attendance. He explained that previously the forum was a requirement of the Department of Education’ Schools Admissions Code (pre 2012). It was seen as an opportunity to discuss some of the issues relating to admissions.

The recent versions of the Code were silent on the need for the forum. However with the emergence of free schools, academies and academy convertors, school admissions was entering a new era of more ‘own admission authority’ schools and it was important to ensure that schools and the local authority continue to work together.

There is no statutory basis for the forum but it is a means to discuss any issues
relating to admissions and to ensure admissions rules are being adhered to and guidance is being followed.

2) Agenda Items

**Agenda Item 1: Membership and Vacancies**

QP asked the forum whether they felt that the balance of the membership of the forum met requirements. Was it diverse enough in terms of representatives from each school type? There was also a need for a parent representative. SACRE could be approached to provide a representative as could Governors forum.

TJ added that it was important that the forum had representative from free schools and new academies as they have admission arrangements that differs significantly from the borough’s. E.G East London Science School and Chobham Academy. However none came forward to act as a representative on the forum.

DB asked if nurseries should have representation on the forum. TJ advised that they have been approached and should be on the forum membership.

**Decision**

School Representatives: The forum reviewed the current level of membership and agreed that the aim should be to have four representatives from each school type.

Parental representatives: The forum agreed that there should be three different types of representatives: Community, Voluntary Aided, and Academy. There should be two from each group – one each for a primary and secondary school.

**Action:** TJ to draw up list of candidates based on current membership and status.

**Agenda Item 2: Purpose**

QP confirmed that admissions forums were not statutory bodies. TJ advised that she had received feedback from the School’s Adjudicator regarding the need for an admissions forum and the scope for this forum was taken from the final version of the admissions code from under the last Labour Government).

SE suggested that where the scope says ‘consider’ it should be changed to ‘review and recommend changes if necessary’. This will allow the forum to scrutinise individual admission arrangements, to ensure they are complying with the admissions code, make recommendations and report back to the adjudicator if there are any instances of non-compliance.

JM asked if an own admission authority school planned to make changes to their arrangements, could the forum provide feedback as part of the consultation?

TJ – Yes, it could form part of a ‘soft consultation’.

SE felt that the scope and terms of references need to reworded to simplify and strengthen the forum’s position.
Decision
Times – All happy with the times of meetings.
Scope and Terms of Reference – To be revised focusing on specific areas of interest
Agenda – Any admission authority can submit an agenda item. They will need to contact TJ.

Action: TJ to redraft the scope and terms of reference for the next forum.

Agenda Item 3: Existing Arrangements
TJ explained that the current consultation period for admission in 2018 was drawing to a close.
Most own admission authority schools had adopted Newham’s arrangements. However some of the free schools such as East London Science School had arrangements that differed significantly.

At the moment the arrangements are compliant and schools are adhering to requirements of the admission code. For most schools Pupil Services are able to check and scrutinise their admissions to ensure that they remain compliant.

The main issue at the moment is on admission to nursery and the key focus of this forum needs to be on the arrangements for admission to nursery.

In terms of the arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools there had been previous discussions about catchment areas and the reintroduction of link primary schools for year 7 admissions.

Decision
Focus of forthcoming forums to be on:
- nursery admissions
- link primary schools
- catchment areas

Action: School representatives to speak to other schools in the groups they represent to put forward to be discussed in first full admissions forum.
TJ to conduct preliminary studies into catchment areas and link schools.

Agenda Item 4: Current Consultations
TJ advised that the London Design and Engineering UTC (LDE) are currently consulting on their arrangements for 2018. PH explained they were consulting on the following:

- lowering the admission age to include year 9 pupils
- prioritising admission for female pupils
- removing priority given to pupils in receipt of pupil premium

JM informed the forum that the authority was currently seeking legal advice on the plans to admit pupils into year 9. TJ advised that the authority is still waiting for a response from the Education Funding Agency and the deadline for responses for the consultation was 16 December 2016.
In addition co-educational schools in Newham were already working with an imbalanced male to female ratio. It was possible that the UTC’s proposed arrangements will further skew the gender split there currently was in co-educational schools.

**Decision**
A strong response was needed from the authority and the schools. We were not in support of the proposals and do not approve of any of the changes in the consultation.

**Action:** TJ to draft a response on behalf of Newham Association of Secondary Head Teachers (NASH) and the authority, to be signed off by JM and JH.

**Agenda Item 5: Awareness Raising**
TJ explained that information is available to parent/carers at the point of application. However there is a query as to whether the authority and schools offer enough information. Recently there had been a channel shift to push information being available on the Newham and school websites.

GH stated that schools faced difficulties with the push for online applications for secondary transfer. A lot of manpower and time had been spent supporting families to complete the online form.

TJ stated that online had been pushed by London Councils however this could be fed back to the Mayor as it is all part of the resilience agenda to help residents help themselves.

The forum raised a number of concerns relating to the Pan London process and the overall online process, relating to unhelpful user guides and lack of a mobile friendly application form.

TJ stated that she had challenged London Grid for Learning (LGfL), the organisation that manage the Pan London process. Each authority pays £17,000 per year to them for support, so why was there no app or mobile friendly version of the application form? The response given was that it was not cost effective.

QP proposed that JT and JM need to feedback to the next Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) conference.

DB stated that the online process had made it more difficult for schools to check applications and that parents have fed back advising it was easier to make mistakes when applying online. TJ responded schools could check applications on the Pan London site, however she will feedback at the next Pan London meeting.

QP – There is benefit in parents considering what they put as preferences given the number of applications for particular schools.

TJ advised Newham would benefit from an event for primary schools where parent/carers could attend to meet with schools in their local areas and receive information about the application process to demystify the experience.
SE stated that the composite prospectus need to be clearer and provide basic information. Does the authority work with residents?

TJ advised that that authority had carried out research with focus groups in the past who had been very clear as to what they feel is helpful in the booklet and what else they would like in the prospectuses. All wanted a hard copy, only Hackney and Newham provide a hard copy, every other authority in the Pan London process only provided an online copy.

The prospectuses are also reviewed and amended every three years

**Decision**
The authority to continue with hard copies of the prospectuses.
If members of the forum have any comments or suggestions for the prospectuses then they should feedback to TJ

**Action:** Comments to be discussed at next forum.

**Agenda Item 6: In Year Admissions (families moving to Newham outside the normal admissions rounds)**
TJ presented in year admission figures (weekending 25.11.2016) to the forum. On average around 65 new applications for a school place were being received by the authority each week. Numbers indicated sufficient school places in the borough but sometimes only in particular parts of the borough in schools with high numbers of vacancies. The DfE focus is on the overall position on vacancies.

After perusing the figures JM noted the issue over spaces required in Manor Park schools. JH further advised that the issue of siblings in different schools had also been raised at Primary Partnership Board. TJ explained how sibling priority worked. Whilst Pupil Services could still place siblings together in most cases the schools we could offer were not in the immediate vicinity.

JH advised that weekly analysis of the numbers was needed for more long term strategic planning and this was being discussed with the planning team.

QP queried if there were any concerns relating to admission to secondary school. TJ advised that whilst there was no major concerns, the forum should be aware that some schools feel they are being targeted with applications from vulnerable and challenging families as they have spaces. Maybe the forum needs to discuss some of the issues that are raised at Newham’s Fair Access panel.

JM stated that there are sufficient spaces in the borough across both primary and secondary schools with more coming on stream and need to ensure that spaces are filled

**Decisions**
None to be made

**Actions** – None required.
**Agenda Item 7: Special Educational Needs & Disability, Vulnerable Families and Children in Care**

SF commented that sometimes parents of children with SEND are not always aware of what is available in terms of support available and having sufficient information to make the right decision when applying for a school place.

Nothing to discuss regarding looked after children and vulnerable families.

**Decision**
None to be made

**Agenda Item 8: Fair Access Protocol**
To be discussed at the next Forum.

**Actions** – TJ to prepare agenda item for next forum concerning Newham's Fair Access Panel

**AOB**

TJ advised that currently the authority does not have a policy for transgender children. It was something to consider as it had been raised at a recent London Council's meeting as one local authority had received a number of applications. Currently there wasn't any legal guidance relating to transgender admissions to school.  
PH advised that Brighton have a policy and JM confirmed that Cornwall do also.

**Decision**
Forum to decide on the need for Newham to develop a policy.

**Action** – TJ and PH to develop a paper on transgender applications for discussion at a future forum.

**Main agenda items for next Admissions Forum**

Catchment Areas – 2019 Consultation  
Nursery Admissions  
Composite Prospectus  

Meeting Closed 19:40

End.