

# Minutes

**For:** Admissions and Place Planning Forum – Extraordinary Meeting

**Date:** 31 October 2019

**Time:** 16:00 – 18:00

**Location:** Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

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**Attendees:**

**Chair**

Councillor Julianne Marriott: Cabinet Member for Education (JM)

**Local Authority Officers**

Peter Gibb: Head of Access and Infrastructure (PG)

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

**Clerk**

Kiran Parkash Singh: Pupil Services

**Representatives: Maintained primary schools**

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School

Sue Ferguson: Head Teacher, Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

**Representatives: Maintained secondary schools**

Anthony Wilson: CEO Newham Community Schools Trust

**Representatives: Academy primary schools**

Paul Harris: CEO Tapscott Trust

**Representatives: Academy secondary schools**

Peter Whittle: Associate Principal, Langdon Academy

**Faith Representative: Church of England schools**

Matt Hipperson: Head Teacher, St. Luke's Church of England Primary School

**Representative: Single sex schools**

Charlotte Robinson: Head Teacher, Rokeby School (boys only)

**Looked After Children Representative: Virtual School**

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

**Representative: Free Schools**

David Perks : Head Teacher, East London Science School

## Apologies

Andrew Seager: Head Teacher, Stratford School Academy

Quintin Peppiatt: New Vision Trust

Geoffrey Fowler: Principal, London Design and Engineering UTC

Ian Wilson: Head Teacher, Little Ilford Primary School (Chair of Newham Association of Secondary Head teachers - NASH)

Simon Elliott: CEO Community Schools Trust

Diane Rochford: Executive Head, John F Kennedy Special School

Shirleyann Jones: Head Teacher, St. James' Church of England Junior School

Gael Hicks: Head Teacher, St Helen's Roman Catholic Primary School

Jo Aylett: Edith Kerrison Nursery

## Key

Secondary Head Teacher – SHT

Primary Head Teacher - PHT

APPROVED

## Action Points

### **Summer Term Open Days**

Newham Association of Secondary Heads to discuss holding additional open days in the summer term

### **LB Newham letter to Pan London Board**

JM to write to Chair of London Inter-Authority Admissions Group to increase promotion of naming six preferences.

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## **1. Introductions**

Chair introduced herself and asked the other members of the forum to do the same.

JM thanked everyone for a productive last meeting. She acknowledged that there are schools in the borough that take a disproportionate number of new arrivals and alternative allocations, and it is important that the local authority looked into how it could support these schools.

JM explained that there was no agenda for today's meeting. The purpose for the meeting was to continue discussing whether there was a need to change how the London Borough of Newham processes alternative allocations. At the previous meeting held on 11 September 2019 a number of different alternative options were explored. The forum agreed to narrow down the available options to;

- *Option 5 - Proportional distribution and home to school distance*  
*Allocated shared on a proportional basis with places available being set using a percentage share of pupils based on vacancies set against school published admission numbers.*

The meeting today was to gain the forum's view on the pros and cons of option 5 and whether the local authority should consider changing the current alternative allocation process.

PG outlined what the current process and new options are. He introduced the local authority's paper providing background and further information, including modelling work undertaken to demonstrate how option 5 would work in real terms.

The forum then compared the current process and new proposal against different criteria that will need to be taken into account before any change was considered.

## **1. Code Compliant**

PG explained that option 5 was potentially compliant with the School Admissions Code however, there was a potential for challenge from parents who may have to travel further. In addition, the proposal had been checked with the London Borough of Newham's legal services who have confirmed that it is compliant but have raised concerns about the impact on school admission appeals (may result in more successful appeals). In addition they were concerned that it was untested, as they were unaware of any other local authorities using a similar process.

TJ added that as advised at previous forums, there was a recent objection lodged to the Office of Schools Adjudicator (OSA) about the current admission arrangements, primarily regarding children living in Manor Park, not being able to gain a place at a local secondary school and having to travel further to school. The new proposal will result in some children

having to travel even further than they do under the current process.

A SHT asked what the outcome was. TJ advised that the objection was not upheld by the OSA but they did understand the concerns of the complainant. However it was possible for another objection to be lodged by the same person for 2021 admission if there is a change.

A PHT asked if there was a legal limit about how far children should travel to school. TJ advised that there wasn't however, based on guidance on travel assistance it was generally recommended that children below 8 should not walk more than 2 miles, and 3 miles for children above the age of 8. The maximum distance a child may be placed via the current process was 3.5-4 miles. This would be from Manor Park to schools in the south of the borough.

A SHT stated that distance will always be an issue as applicants who apply late will have to travel further to school, so distance is not a new concern and should not be a barrier to change.

A PHT asked if the proposal was for both primary and secondary admissions. TJ advised it was for both however it was still to be determined whether it would apply to both normal and in year admissions or solely to the former.

## **2. Child Focussed**

TJ explained that essentially the new process would mean that it would be possible for late applicants having a wider range of schools to be allocated and being offered a place at a closer school than those who applied before the closing date.

A SHT suggested that it was important to consider all children as part of this process and not just children without a place. Schools with higher number of places remaining may struggle to remain sustainable which will impact on children on roll at the school.

In addition to this, under the current process schools with places available later in the academic year were admitting the bulk of late arrivals in the borough which was having an impact on academic outcomes.

Another SHT added to this point stating that it would become increasingly difficult for schools with low roll numbers to be able to fully support and educate children on their rolls without the overall funding additional children will bring. The current process was unfair on these schools.

A PHT asked how the new proposal will impact children from multiple births. TJ added that that was another issue. The admissions system used by the local authority will have to be able to run an algorithm to identify those and that they are placed accordingly.

## **3. Fair and Transparent**

A SHT suggested that the current process was not fair to all schools with places available and some schools were receiving more alternative allocations. TJ advised that this needed to be balanced against the need for places. Some secondary schools had taken bulge classes therefore it followed that they would get more alternative allocations. Taking this year as an example TJ added that all schools were full by the summer and that most schools are full in year 7.

A PHT asked if this was more of an issue for secondary schools than it was in primary. TJ advised that it was, however it was important to bear in mind that any change would be for both.

A PHT also added that the gender split was also important as it would mean that single sex schools with places available may not always get more children if there were more unplaced children of a gender that the school with places did not admit.

A SHT raised a point about place planning. Were the local authority putting in more bulge classes when there wasn't a demand for them? TJ responded that it wasn't the case this year as all bulge classes were needed for places.

JM added that it was an important point. The local authority needed to ensure that bulge classes should only be put in when there was a demand which would ensure that there wasn't an oversupply of places.

#### **4. Reasonable for all parties**

JM asked the forum to consider whether it was reasonable to expect some on time applicants to travel further (as would be the case under the new proposal) but late applicants do not. Casework and complaints received by the local authority demonstrated parental concerns about their children having to travel further to school. Under the new proposal this would only increase.

A SHT head teacher added that the proposed system was not reasonable. There have already been concerns raised about children in Manor Park not being able to get into local schools based on home to school distance. Under the current alternative allocation process, they are being allocated place also based on distance. The current system reflects the oversubscription criteria. The cohort of pupils are treated in the same way.

Under the proposed system children will be treated differently at the alternative allocation stage, as they are now being placed based on a different criteria. They could argue that they are being treated differently which could result in potential legal challenges.

In addition you could potentially have children living next door to each other being allocated different schools (one further than the other) when places could still be available at the closer school.

They also added that the new proposal would not be reasonable for primary school children who would have to travel further and potentially walk past schools that have vacancies (more primary schools than secondary).

A further question was asked that in cases where preference could not be met, instead of allocating an alternative school would it be better to write to those parents and advise which schools have places and invite them to submit an application?

TJ replied that this was not possible as on national offer day we would have children without a school place and there was no guarantee that parent/carers will respond in a timely manner, or may not apply at all.

A SHT added that the current process was fair and reasonable, however there was a need to factor in schools with vacancies and notify applicants of these applicants.

PG advised that the local authority did advise the applicants who have been allocated an alternative school after national offer day, of all the schools that still had places remaining, and gave them the opportunity to apply for these schools.

A SHT stated that on time applicants will not be disadvantaged as they will still be able to apply for other schools that have places available after national offer day. However a PHT pointed out that the letter will only be sent once late applicants had been placed, meaning that the pool of schools to select will be limited. On time applicants could miss out on being allocated a closer school that had places available at the time they were placed, but no

longer do as they were offered to late applicants.

## 5. Operationally Deliverable

PG advised the forum that the new proposal could be implemented into the current admissions processes, however, whilst it will not be the overriding reason not to consult on a new process, it was important to acknowledge the impact on resources and staff.

The greater issue was how to explain the new process to the residents (both by LA officers and primary school staff), so residents would fully understand how their children were being allocated a place. If there is not clear understanding, potentially there would be an increase in the number of appeals. Presenting officers will need to explain to panel members and appellants how their child was allocated a place. A SHT added that it wasn't just about understanding but also a matter of fairness in the eyes of panel members and appellants.

A SHT responded however that appeal hearings could also be an opportunity to advise parents of which schools still have places.

Another SHT stated that it was becoming increasingly important that parents start to make informed decisions and made use of all six preferences that they could name.

A PHT added that primary schools were the main point of contact for parents. Schools face difficulties explaining the current process to parents, and to advise them to name six preferences. It would be further challenging trying to explain why they were allocated a school when there is one closer with a place. A letter or other form of communication will not work as most parents will have difficulty understanding.

TJ stated that the new proposal will have to be clear and that a high level of detail will be required. PG added that there was also the concern that if it wasn't clear, the OSA would raise a concern.

TJ further added that the local authority was required to promote walking to school, the new process could potentially discourage it.

The forum then considered written comments from members of the forum who were unable to attend.

A multi academy trust representative stated that the new proposal was not suitable for primary and was overly complicated.

A SHT advised that the local authority should keep with the current process as it was widely used across other local authorities.

A SHT commented that the new proposal was not in the best interest of the children.

The forum then discussed what options could be considered to promote undersubscribed schools, encouraging parents to make more informed decisions and utilising the opportunity to name six preferences.

TJ advised the panel that it could be possible to include a leaflet/letter from the schools with places available after national offer day that could be sent to parents when advising which schools have places available. More information about the schools with places available may lead to applicants requesting to change the school they have been allocated.

A PHT suggested that maybe secondary schools could attend the year 6 parents meeting where they could promote their school or provide leaflets that could be given to parents before they name their preferences. It would be another opportunity for schools to promote

themselves.

JM added that parents needed to make informed decisions and having more time to make those decisions could help. Holding secondary school open days in the summer term whilst the children are in year 5 had been previously discussed and should be considered further.

She also added that she would work with TJ to write to the Chair of the London Inter-Authority Admissions Group to strengthen the advice about naming six preferences on the eadmissions website.

In closing remarks JM thanked the forum for their opinion. The local authority will take into account the advice of all attending members of the forum that the process should not proceed further, and that current arrangements should remain unchanged. It is therefore not expected that further action will be taken to change the arrangements.

JM thanked everyone again for a productive meeting with everyone acknowledging that some schools are more affected by alternative allocations than others and appreciates that forum members were here to achieve the best outcomes for all Newham children. The discussions about alternative allocations had been useful in highlighting some of the issues some schools face. The local authority will keep this under review and will follow up on the agreed action points to support all Newham schools.

Meeting Closed 18:00

End.