
Decision Session - Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services

8th September 2009

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

City of York Early Years Admission Policy

1. Summary

This paper:

- 1.1. Seeks approval to consult widely with a range of stakeholders and settings providing Early Years Places including maintained and independent schools, private and voluntary providers (including Mother and toddler groups), the Early Years and Extended Schools Partnership and parents. The purpose of the consultation would be to determine an updated admissions policy for Free Early Years places (including school nurseries) that ensures sufficiency of places whilst also meeting parents' needs as effectively and efficiently as possible.

2. Background

- 2.1. York's current Early Years Places Admission (including nursery admissions) arrangements have applied since 2003. Prior to that, the authority conducted an extensive consultation exercise with all stakeholders. At the same time elected members also agreed a set of guidelines on Admission for Free Early Years Places. These are attached at Annex 1.
- 2.2. These guidelines are based on equal opportunity principles, so that children are admitted according to fair, open and clear criteria. As nursery provision is non-statutory in nature, these guidelines are accepted as good practice only. Headteachers and providers are *advised* to follow them so that they have a way of making allocations fairly for all children who may apply for a place.
- 2.3. The current admission criteria enhances the ability of the Local Authority to meet its responsibilities in providing every place requested for three or four year old children in the City of York.
- 2.4. The local authority is also responsible for ensuring that vulnerable children are given a degree of priority in the allocation of places

3. Key Issues

- 3.1. Evidence suggests that those who start life at a disadvantage can benefit enormously from a high quality early years experience; the converse is also true. According vulnerable children priority within the Free Early Years Places

Admissions guidance would be consistent with the principles of the new Children and Young People's Plan. We propose to adopt the following definition of "vulnerability" as follows:

"Children, young people and their families whose circumstances suggest that they may be at a disadvantage relative to their peers. This may, for example, include those from ethnic minority or Traveller communities; those with complex needs; those who experience or witness domestic abuse; and those growing up in poverty, such as those receiving free school meals or living in areas of relative disadvantage or with parents who are seeking work. Some vulnerable children are "children in need", within the meaning of the Children Act 1989, and this group includes children with a statutory entitlement to additional help or support such as children with disabilities, Looked After Children and children in need of protection".

- 3.2. We therefore propose to consult on updating the guidance to include vulnerable children under the reference to 'social need', adopting the above definition of vulnerability. This change will help to ensure more consistent and coherent use of the guidance to ensure that 'vulnerable' children are considered as a priority alongside those identified with special needs.
- 3.3. The other key aspect of the guidance that requires possible revision, and which has been raised with us by several Headteachers and parents, is the reference to the fact that children should be admitted from *anywhere* within the City of York council area. The thinking behind this was to promote equality of access and to allow working parents to secure nursery provision close to their workplace. However, the policy has in some cases meant that local children are unable to access local schools, including schools already attended by their siblings.
- 3.4. In practice there are examples where it has proved problematic to create additional capacity for Private Voluntary or Independent (PVI) provision to deliver Free Early Years in line with parental requirements.
- 3.5. We therefore propose to consult with stakeholders as to whether to include other criteria within the guidance such as living within the catchment area normally served by the school and having siblings already attending the nursery/school.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. A limited 'interim consultation' has been recently undertaken with both Early Years providers (including schools with nurseries) and parents, relating to the Early Years and Primary admissions policy.
- 4.2. Interim consultation has taken place with Schools Admissions service, Early Years and Primary Schools in meetings held with Head teachers, and PVI sector.
- 4.3. A more comprehensive consultation is proposed as part of this report. This is attached as Annex 2. The results from this consultation will be fed back to the Executive member decision meeting in March 2010

5. Analysis

- 5.1. Results from the interim consultation suggested that 96% of providers and 57% of parents agree that the guidance should be updated to give priority to vulnerable children.
- 5.2. With regards to whether children should continue to be admitted from anywhere within the City of York Council, there is a diversity of opinion. The majority of parents living in the area where there is an over subscription of places believe that local children should be given priority whereas 30% of parents citywide wish their children to take up places anywhere in the city.
- 5.3. To ensure that the updated admissions policy meets the needs of as many parents and providers as possible, we propose to undertake a citywide consultation to determine future priority criteria. We are also open to other suggested changes, and believe it is right to allow all stakeholders an opportunity to suggest amendments.
- 5.4. Due to the current national focus on curriculum and research concerning Early Years/Primary admission arrangements, we further propose a phased consultation process pending future possible national changes regarding Primary admission arrangements. This consultation will focus on the admissions guidance for the Free Early Years Places only.
- 5.5. The findings of the consultation are to be reported back to the Executive Member for decision in March 2010. This will enable any required changes to be included in the Guide for Parents – Nursery, Primary and Secondary Admission 2010/2011 with implementation from the following academic year 2011/2012.

6. Corporate Objectives

- 6.1. This admissions policy will contribute to the corporate objectives by providing opportunities for local families to access world-class early education in order to help children begin to develop skills and high aspirations for the future.

7. Implications

- 7.1. **Financial** – This report does not carry financial implications.
- 7.2. **Equalities** – An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken following the consultation exercise; once the proposed revised guidance has been drafted. We will be consulting with a wide range of stakeholders which should ensure that consultation is undertaken with representatives from all 6 of the equality strands. The information will also be available in alternative formats upon request (e.g. other languages) to ensure full accessibility.
- 7.3. There are no HR, ITT, Crime and Disorder or legal implications arising from this report

8. Risk Management

8.1. There is a medium risk involved to all providers that parents do not use provision and that this in turn would affect the LA's sufficiency of childcare responsibility. However there is nothing to suggest that this is currently the case and this paper in initiating consultation does not in itself heighten risks to either providers, parents or the local authority.

9. Recommendations

Executive Member is asked to

- Initiate consultation with parents and providers of Early Years Free Entitlement using the attached consultation document
- Request feedback from that consultation at her March 2010 meeting to inform any proposed changes to the local guidance

Reason: To enable the views of parents and providers of Early Years Free Entitlement to inform any proposed changes to the local guidance.

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Report
Approved



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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex 1: Current Admissions policy for Free Early Years Places in York

Annex 2: Proposed Consultation Document for Admissions Guidance for Free Early Years Places