

**OFFICER REPORT TO SELECT COMMITTEE
FOR SCHOOLS & COMMUNITIES**

**RESPONSE TO PRE-CONSULTATION SURVEY ON
ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR SEPTEMBER 2007**

14 JUNE 2005

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

In view of the responses to the pre-consultation survey, do we want to consult on a change of admissions criteria for September 2007?

1. BUSINESS CASE:

1.1 On 28 September 2004 the Executive agreed that there should be no change to the admissions criteria for the September 2006 intake but that officers:

- i) should utilise the forthcoming Admissions Roadshows to canvass the public about changes they may wish to see to admissions policy at some future date and,
- ii) should continue to work with schools and Phase Councils on future options.

1.2 The optimum approach in both policy (admissions criteria) and operational (type of preference system) have been debated at length by the Select Committee for Children & Young People, the Executive and the full County Council. The strength of feeling both for and against change has been considerable since proposals for change were first initiated in September 2003.

1.3 In view of the comments received during the consultation process in 2003-04 and from parents during the Admissions Roadshows, the Phase Council and headteachers, in the Autumn Term 2004 a pre-consultation survey was designed outlining 11 options and circulated to all relevant stakeholders in the admissions process in January 2005 with a closing date for response by 11 February 2005. The pre-consultation survey is attached in Annex I.

1.4 Members will be aware that the County Council's admissions policies only apply to its 209 community and 27 voluntary controlled schools. The 100 voluntary aided and 35 foundation schools decide on their own admissions policy although

some may take the County Council's policy into account when setting their criteria.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE REPSONSES TO THE CONSULTATION:

2.1 There was a good response to the consultation (644 in total) from:

- 246 parents
- 232 school governors
- 98 headteachers
- 68 others, including teachers

An analysis of the total responses from all the respondent groups (Annex II) shows certain trends:

4 criteria are the most popular.

1. Siblings
2. nearest school
3. feeder schools
4. ease of transport, walking / cycling routes.

2.2 Out of those the only criterion we currently use to prioritise admissions to schools is siblings.

There is also a slight majority indicating:

- i) a preference for keeping flexible catchment areas and
- ii) having an equal ranking system.

There are however some **conflicting views** from the various stakeholder groups: For example

1. Parents preferred fixed catchment Areas (admission priority areas) whilst headteachers and school governors wanted to keep flexible catchment areas (admission priority areas*)
2. Parents and governors wanted an equal ranking system* whilst headteachers and school staff wanted to keep a first preference first system.

* NB. One cannot have an equal ranking system if we keep flexible catchment areas.

A key issue is therefore the weight we give to the views of different stakeholders.

2.3 Results have also been analysed by:

- i) Individual stakeholder groups (Annex III)
- ii) The different phases of education (Annex IV)
- iii) Borough / district (Annex V)

In addition a list of comments relating to other criteria which could be considered for prioritising admissions to schools is attached in Annex VI.

2.4 A clearer picture emerges when we look at the totals of combined strongly agree and agree responses, compare them with the totals of combined

strongly disagree and disagree responses and then subtract one total from the other

The table below (Fig 1) compares what we do now and what people have said they would like.

Fig. 1

Statements / Options		RESPONDENT GROUPS					Summary of total responses
		Status quo (current policy)	Parents (246)	HTs (98)	GB (232)	Others (68)	
Siblings	1	✓	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Siblings by distance	2	X	N*	N	N	N	N
Fixed C.A.	3	X	N	N	N	N	N
Flexible C.A.	4	✓	N	Y	Y	N	N
C.A. takes priority over siblings	5	X	N	N	N	N	N
Feeder schools	6	X	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Nearest school walking distance	7	X	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Nearest school by straight line	8	X	N	N	N	N	N
Ease of access by transport	9	X	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
First preference first	10	✓	N	N	N	N	N
Equal ranking system	11	X	N	N	N	N	N
			*Y means that when we subtract the combined strongly disagree / disagree from the combined strongly agree/agree, we still get a total of 40% or above *N means the total is less than 40%.				

This confirms the statement in paragraph 2.1 that there are 4 criteria that people feel should be used to prioritise admissions to schools:

1. Siblings
2. nearest school by walking distance
3. feeder / linked schools
4. ease of access via public transport or safe walking / cycling routes.

Of these 4 criteria currently only the siblings criterion is used to prioritise admissions to school.

2.5 Key findings

There is a mismatch between what we are doing now and what the majority of the stakeholders consulted in this survey say they want.

Those consulted also did not show overall strong support either for the use of the current system of flexible catchment areas, or for the use of an equal ranking system as an alternative to the first preference first system in future. However, there were some differences in stakeholder views on both of these, headteachers preferring the former and parents the latter.

What does emerge clearly however is that overall those consulted preferred the 4 criteria outlined in paragraph 2.1.

3. FURTHER RESEARCH:

3.1 Case Studies

Some modelling has been undertaken and will be ready to be tabled at the Select Committee meeting on 14 June.

4. OPTIONS:

4.1 There is sufficient evidence in the above results that there is a mismatch between stakeholder views and the current policy. There are therefore grounds for proceeding to a full consultation if Members would wish to do this. The options for further consultation would include:

- a) Consulting on all 11 statements / options again as we did before in the pre-consultation survey outlining the pros and cons of each criterion.
- b) Consulting only on the 4 most popular criteria that have emerged from the pre-consultation survey as outlined in paragraph 2.1.
- c) Consulting on keeping a first preference first system versus an equal ranking system.

If the Members of the Select Committee agree that a further consultation is desirable, they may wish to consider which one or more of the options a) through c) above they may wish to recommend to the Executive. Our view is that we may not need to consult on all 11 options, so that b) or c) would be preferred.

5. PROPOSED METHOD OF CONSULTATION:

5.1 We will produce wherever possible a primary and secondary case study for each borough / district where there are community / voluntary controlled schools that are oversubscribed. We will choose schools that generate the most concerns over admissions. This will show in particular communities what would happen if the 4 criteria above were applied.

5.2 We will convene focus groups by borough / district centred around the case studies so people are aware of the consequences of any change at local level.

5.3 We will model wherever possible a comparison between a first preference first and an equal ranking system if it is decided to consult on this.

5.4 We will seek partners who will help us in this consultation, to assist with the preparation of local case studies using geographical information systems, to ensure the consultation reaches a wide range of stakeholders and to guide us on ensuring that the process is properly representative.

5.5 We will present the outcome of any research on change to the Select Committee, the Executive, the Phase Councils and the Admissions Forum with a recommendation for the September 2007 admission round.

6. TIMESCALE

6.1 Depending on the decision of the Select Committee and the Executive we will:

- i) select a partner for this work by June 2005
- ii) complete and publish all relevant documentation for consultations in July and August 2005
- iii) establish focus groups and consult widely with all relevant parties from September – December 2005
- iv) report back to all relevant groups on the outcome of the consultation between January – March 2006
- v) determine an admissions policy for the September 2007 admissions round by the statutory date, 15 April 2006.

Responsible: Anne Macavoy

Accountable: Ms Anna Wright

Consulted: parents, school governors, headteachers, teachers

Informed:

Sources/background papers: Report to Executive of 28 September 2004
