



**Children & Young People Overview &
Scrutiny Committee
8 December 2011**

**Report from the Director of Children
& Families**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Update on Provision of Full Time Nursery Places

1.0 Summary

This report responds to matters raised by members of the Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 6th October 2011. Members requested that a further report be presented setting out:

1. The outcome of the consultation with Brent schools
2. The views of the schools forum
3. Projections for the provision of places for vulnerable children aged two years old, including the expected demand and the use of children's centres as a natural provider
4. Safeguards to ensure the most vulnerable children are able to access places for 3 and 4 year olds
5. Information on the number of disadvantaged children in Brent and the number of full time nursery places available for them
6. An overarching perspective of the development and implementation of the policy for full time early years places including the embedding of safeguards and how an equal opportunity of access would be ensured.

2.0 Background and Chronology

- 2.1 During 2008, the Council was a pathfinder for the extension of the free entitlement to early years provision from 12.5 to 15 hours. This was to be universally introduced for all children from September 2010. In addition the Government wanted all councils to develop and implement a new Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) to underpin the delivery of the extended free entitlement.
- 2.2 The development and implementation of the EYSFF offered an opportunity to review the way full-time places (FT) were currently funded and offered in Brent. Government grant only funded part time (PT) places so the additional

costs of full-time places had to be absorbed within the Dedicated Schools Grant. This effectively meant that other schools in Brent would receive less funding in order to subsidise the cost of FT provision.

- 2.3 Work commenced later in 2008 on drafting options for the continued funding of FT places. The Schools Forum were fully consulted as the work progressed and a report was taken to the Executive in February 2010.
- 2.4 The decision made by Executive in February 2010 was to provide a mix of PT and FT places across the sector with FT places being based on need.
- 2.5 Following the Executive's decision, work commenced on the development and implementation of the new policy. The Executive agreed on 15th October 2010 to delay implementation until September 2012 to accommodate parental consultation. This consultation was carried out in December 2010 (see Appendix A for summary of parental responses).
- 2.6 In the course of 2011, an alternative proposal was developed to offer PT places only in light of the anticipated growth in demand for 2 and 3 year old places across the early years sector. This proposal was taken to the Schools Forum on 22nd June 2011 but was not supported.
- 2.7 Work then re-commenced on the implementation of the original Executive decision of February 2010. An Early Years Funding sub-group proposed that schools should still use their own local admissions criteria to allocate a nursery place and that a two stage process be introduced as follows,
 - Stage 1: Schools select nursery children using their local admissions criteria
 - Stage 2: Children selected via Stage 1 would be eligible for a funded FT place if
 - They live in Brent
 - A parent met any one of the six free school meals criteria
- 2.8 Consultation took place on the two stage process in October 2011. Only 7 schools with FT places responded to the consultation. Some of the main feedback was as follows.
 - i) Most were happy to manage the process locally and merge it with normal admissions practice
 - ii) There were some concerns regarding the additional administration arrangements
 - iii) Advice would be required on validating eligibility claims including providing some examples of relevant documents.
 - iv) Guidance would be required on dealing with appeals.
- 2.9 Appropriate changes have been made to the nursery admissions form template to accommodate Stage 2 and some schools have sought assistance from the council on changes to their administrative arrangements. Whilst the response from the consultation was low the feedback was helpful and officers

will address their issues and provide appropriate advice over the next few months to support the process.

- 2.10 In light of this new policy a number of FT place schools have decided to change to PT provision only from September 2012. The full impact of these changes will not be known until January 2012.
- 2.11 Nursery education is non statutory and therefore the admissions process is managed entirely by the schools who can set their own admissions criteria. This tends to follow the admissions criteria used for statutory age children (i.e. from reception age). The council offered assistance to community schools regarding a suitable template for an application form and schools are free to decide how best to use this template as well as develop any translations as necessary.
- 2.12 As nursery provision is non statutory there is no right of appeal to the Council open to parents should a school not offer an applicant a place. Parents would need to appeal directly to the school who would deal with the matter under their own rules and procedures.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Responses to the specific requests arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th October 2011 are provided below.

Outcome of the consultation with Brent schools

- 3.2 Consultation on the proposals with Brent's schools took place in the autumn of 2009 with the outcomes presented to the December 2009 Schools Forum. The outcomes were:
- a. It should be delayed for a year to allow admissions and eligibility processes to be developed
 - b. Parents need to be consulted and informed of the proposals so they can assess the implications
- 3.3 The outcome of the consultation with schools in October 2011 is set out in Section 2.8 of this report.

The views of the schools forum

- 3.4 Over the period from April 2009 to June 2011, the Schools Forum was consulted on the development and implementation of a new policy for the allocation and funding of FT nursery places in schools. Their views are contained in section 2 above.

Projections for the provision of places for vulnerable children aged two years old, including the expected demand and the use of children's centres as a natural provider

- 3.5 Based on the latest GP lists Brent has 4,971 2 year olds resident in the Borough. The number of these children who would be deemed vulnerable is more difficult to assess against the proposed criteria (eligibility for free school meals) that the government are currently consulting on. The new scheme will commence in September 2013 and will offer eligible children 15 hours of free childcare integrated with early education.
- 3.6 To gauge the level of eligibility, the number of children resident in the most deprived parts of Brent can be used as a proxy.

Age Group	Total population per GP list	Population in most deprived areas
Age 2	4,971	2,926

- 3.7 The analysis suggests there could be around 3,000 eligible 2 year olds. Mindful of the government's intentions, the Head of Integrated and Extended Services introduced a strategy at the beginning of 2011 to improve the quality of PVIs and childminders to ensure the sufficiency of supply for September 2013. At a minimum the government propose that only 'good' and 'outstanding' Ofsted rated providers should offer the 2 year old provision. In addition 'satisfactory' rated providers will need to demonstrate a commitment to improving their quality.
- 3.8 Children's centres as a natural provider will have to meet the quality requirements outlined above. Currently the three council based centres have the following Ofsted ratings:

- Willows: Satisfactory
- Tree Tops: Good
- Harmony: Good

- 3.9 The latest 'refresh' of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) estimates the number of available PVI childcare places to be 5,330, excluding schools. Around 2500 of these places are taken up by 3 and 4 year olds accessing the 15 hour free entitlement. In addition, there are around 950 'baby' places for Under 2s. This leaves 1880 places that could be available for disadvantaged 2 year olds. A comparison with the potentially eligible 2 year olds indicates a shortfall of around 1000 places as follows:

1. Available PVI places (all ages)	5,330
2. Less	
a. 3 and 4 year old places	-2,500
b. Baby places	-950
3. Available places	1,880
4. Potentially eligible 2 year olds	2,900
5. Potential shortfall in places	1,020

3.10 There are childminder vacancies that would augment the available places to reduce the shortfall. However, this provision is not popular with many parents and will require considerable additional training of childminders.

Safeguards to ensure the most vulnerable children are able to access places for 3 and 4 year olds

3.11 The current number of FT places is 1,120 across 4 nursery and 25 primary schools based on the summer 2011 census. It is not possible to predict the future number of places as schools are currently deciding whether to offer these places from September 2012. It is known that a number of current FT place schools have decided not to offer these places from September 2012. The best estimate at the time of writing this report is there will be less than 1,000 FT places on offer.

3.12 The table below summarises the possible eligible 3 year olds using a proxy measure of vulnerable children.

Age Group	Total population per GP list	Population in most deprived areas
Age 3	4,658	2,720

3.13 The analysis indicates that there will not be sufficient places to cater for the potentially eligible children

3.14 The proposed admissions process will require schools to validate applications where a parent has indicated on their application form they are eligible for one of the Free School Meal eligibility criteria. The termly school census will reveal the numbers of eligible children so the council will have an overview as to how many FT places have been taken up. Given the way the proposed admissions process will be applied, safeguards to ensure the most vulnerable children only receive a FT place are built into the process through the eligibility criteria.

Information on the number of disadvantaged children in Brent and the number of full time nursery places available for them

3.15 This information is provided in the previous section.

An overarching perspective of the development and implementation of the policy for full time early years places including the embedding of safeguards and how an equal opportunity of access would be ensured

3.16 A perspective on the development and implementation of the new policy is provided in the earlier paragraphs.

3.17 A key focus of the Integrated and Extended Services team is to ensure that parents are aware of their entitlement to a free PT early years place at either a school or a PVI provider. This supports the council's statutory duty under

the 2006 Childcare Act to ensure the sufficiency of places to meet the demand.

- 3.18 Where a child is not accessing a PT place the parent would be made aware of their entitlement as well as where an available place might exist in the PVI sector based on the Children and Families Information Service's database. Parents would approach schools directly should they want a place in a school and schools would make the parents aware of whether they offer PT or FT places. FT places are not funded in the PVI sector.

Background Papers

- 1) 15 February Executive Report – Introduction of Early Years Single Funding Formula and Changes to the Allocation and Funding of Early years Full Time Places.

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Outcomes from the December 2010 Parental Consultation on changes to the allocation of nursery places in Brent.

A consultation was carried out last autumn between 27th October and 17th December to seek views on changes to the allocation of full time nursery places. The proposal was to offer full time places based on need and deprivation. The launch of the consultation was through the Brent Magazine. The survey was available via the consultation web pages, paper surveys were available on request, with sample copies sent to schools. Posters and fliers were produced and circulated to raise awareness of the consultation, and distributed widely. Copies of the posters and fliers were sent to all schools, Brent Libraries, the One Stop Shop's, doctors' surgeries and medical centres and faith centres. Information was circulated to the voluntary sector via BRAVA. Copies of the posters, fliers and surveys were sent to Brent Private and voluntary Nurseries.

The consultation was overseen by Brent's consultation team, and completed surveys were collated and analysed.

A total of 73 survey responses were received;

39 paper surveys
34 on line surveys

The following questions were asked

- 1. Please indicate in what capacity are you responding as a parent or carer**
 - a. The highest responses were from parents/carers who either had a full time place, or who were looking for a place.
 - b. 23 people (32.4%) who responded to this question currently had a free full time place for their child.
 - c. 39 (55%) were looking for a nursery place for their child.

- 2. Do you feel we have clearly explained to you the proposed changes?**
 - a. 44 people (71%) thought it was explained well, but a significant number 18 (29%) were unsure.
 - b. Comments received include
 - i. 'Full time free nursery places should be available to all children'
 - ii. Part time spaces are an inconvenience'
 - iii. Nursery places should be allocated on proximity to the school.
 - iv. What about working parents not on high wages but having to pay the full costs of nursery places?

- 3. If you were to meet the criteria would you have concerns about being offered a full time place in a private nursery if a school place is unavailable?**
- a. 22 (37.3%) would have concerns, but 37 (62.7%) would not be concerned
 - b. Comments include
 - i. 'Cannot afford private fees'
 - ii. 'It needs to be clear if the place in the private nursery is free or not'
 - iii. 'I would prefer a place in a school'.
- 4. Do you have any concerns about your child not being eligible for a full time place under the new proposals?**
- a. 45 (72.6%) had concerns, but 17 (27.4%) were not concerned.
 - b. This question received the highest number of comments which included concerns expressed that working families are disadvantaged.
 - c. Affordability of childcare is a problem identified by several respondents. Several comments that parents currently accessing a full time place for their child, or looking for a place in the future would not be eligible.
- 5. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?**
- a. 33 (45.2) wanted to comment and 40 (54.8) skipped this question
 - b. The comments focussed on the perceived unfairness of the proposal, and the specific impact on working families.
 - i. 'All children should have fair access, not right to discriminate'.
 - ii. 'To have children close together is a matter of personal choice, but is not necessarily linked to deprivation'.