

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services
DATE	28 January 2016
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT	Early Learning and Childcare Nursery Admissions Policy
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/16/004
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Committee about administrative improvements to the nursery admissions process and to seek approval to update and amend the nursery admissions criteria to bring it in line with the primary school admissions criteria.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee note the administrative changes agreed to improve the customer experience and approve the proposed changes to the Local Authority nursery admissions criteria.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Legal Services provided advice on the proposed changes in the policy to ensure the adjustments take account of the requirements of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980; Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000); Additional Support for Learning Act (2004); Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

There are no resource, personnel, property, equipment, sustainability and environmental, health and safety implications as a result of this report.

The proposed changes to the criteria will bring the policy in line with the primary admissions criteria.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 The Nursery Admissions Policy was last changed in 2007. The policy and processes have remained fit for purpose but it was agreed that the policy should be reviewed and updated to take account of recent legislation and the Service's commitment to presumption of mainstreaming for all pupils in local authority schools and early years settings.

5.2 A short life working group which included parent and primary head teacher representatives met during October to consider and review the Nursery Admissions Policy. The brief was to consider the policy using the new corporate framework of improving customer experience, improving staff experience and making better use of resources and to make recommendations to the Education and Children's Services Directorate Leadership team (DLT) for proposed changes and adjustments.

5.3 The working group recommended that the policy be updated to align it more closely with the provisions for presumption of mainstreaming in the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000. A number of administrative changes were also recommended to improve the use of resources and the customer experience. These proposed changes were approved by the Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and have been incorporated into the 16/17 nursery admissions process. These include:

- The presumption that children with additional support needs will be supported, where possible, in their local nursery;
- Parents will be asked for proof of residence when applying for a nursery place in the same way that they are required to do when children apply for a primary place.
- Children returning to the nursery for a second year (pre-school year) in the same nursery will no longer be required to make a new application. The nursery admissions system can do this automatically. Parents wishing to change their child's nursery will be expected to apply for a new place.

5.4 In addition the working group suggested revised guidance should be issued to schools to:

- ensure classes are composed in mixed age, gender and ability groups;
- take account of parental needs in recognition of the principles behind the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014; and
- introduce a clearer process to allow schools to maximise the number of available nursery places by providing guidance on managing and supporting parents who accept a nursery place and then do not use it.

This guidance was issued to schools for the start of term in January 2015

5.5 The Working Group also reviewed the nursery admissions criteria. The current nursery admissions criteria were originally agreed when the legislation changed in 2007. The criteria were not, at that time, aligned to the primary school admissions processes. To avoid confusion for parents it was agreed that the nursery and primary admissions criteria should be aligned and brought up to date to take account of the legislation including the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and Guidance; The Children Scotland Act 1995; Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000; and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

5.6 The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states that ' where an education authority's arrangements for placing children in schools under their management give any priority to siblings attending such schools, those arrangements shall not discriminate between siblings belonging to the area of that authority and siblings belonging to the area of another authority.' Therefore it is recommended that the nursery admissions criteria be adjusted to align it with the primary admissions criteria including adjusting the sibling rule.

5.7 The Primary Admissions Policy

The Primary Admissions Policy prioritises places as follows:

- (i) Residence within zone
- (ii) Family – either brother or sister are already in attendance and will continue to be at the school at the time of admission
- (iii) Childcare – families have childcare in the school zone
- (iv) Other

5.8 The current nursery admissions criteria are as follows:

Band 1: All children assessed as 'in need' defined in the Children Scotland Act 1995

The "Professional Support for Application to Nursery" form must be completed to determine whether a child meets the criteria. Please see appendix 3.

Band 2: All applications for children continuing in the same nursery

Priority will be given to the following in descending order:

- In zone pre-school year continuers (i.e. deferred entry to Primary One);
- Out of zone pre-school year continuers (i.e. deferred entry to Primary One);
- In zone ante pre-school continuers; and
- Out of zone ante pre-school continuers.

Band 3: All other applications from children resident in the City

Places will be allocated in the following descending order:

- In primary zone oldest first;
- Out of primary zone but in secondary/ASG zone oldest first; and
- Out of secondary/ASG zone oldest first.

Band 4: Children who are resident outside the City

Places will be allocated to Aberdeenshire children once children resident in the City have been allocated places according to the criteria of Point 3 Bands 1 – 3. For children resident outside the city boundary, the address of a child minder or carer within the city does **not** entitle the child to a nursery place.

5.9 The proposed nursery admissions criteria are as follows:

Band 1: All children continuing in the same nursery. Priority will be given to the following in descending order:

- In zone ante pre-school continuers;
- Out of zone ante pre-school continuers;
- In zone pre-school continuers (i.e. deferred entry to Primary 1);
- Out of zone pre-school continuers (i.e. deferred entry to Primary 1)

Band 2: All children assessed as ‘in need’ defined in the Children Scotland Act 1995. The “Professional Support for Application to Nursery” form must be completed to determine whether a child meets the criteria.

Band 3: All applications for children who are currently attending a ‘Me 2’ place defined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Band 4: All applications for children in primary school zone, oldest first.

Band 5: All applications for children who have a sibling in the school parents are applying for, in accordance with section 23(3A) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

The sibling criteria will only come into effect when children have a sibling in nursery or primary 1-6 at the time of application. Siblings from split families, although not residing at the same address, can apply under these criteria.

Band 6: All other applications from children resident in the city.

Places will be allocated in the following descending order:

- Children who have childcare in zone
- Children out of primary zone but in secondary/ASG zone, oldest first
- Children out of secondary/ASG zone, oldest first.

Band 7: Children who are resident outside the city.

For children resident outside the city boundary, not including children with a sibling (as they will come under band 5), the address of a child

minder or carer within the city does not entitle the child to a nursery place. Places will be allocated oldest first.

The full Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy is attached for information.

6 IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience - The parent council representatives have advised us that the administrative improvements and the adjustment to the criteria will make it easier for parents to understand the policy. Aligning both nursery and primary admission criteria has a clear logic for parents but also ensures parents are clear from the outset that admission to an out of zone nursery does necessarily mean that children are entitled to a primary school place.

Improving Staff Experience - The proposals will reduce the administrative burden on school and centre staff.

Improving our use of Resources - The changes make more effective use of the nursery admissions electronic system, improves efficiency and the speed with which applications will be processed and parents advised of their offer.

Corporate - The policy links to the city ambition to be a Smarter city and the Integrated Children's Services and Early Years Collaborative aims to ensure that all children have the best start in life. The proposed adjustments should ensure that children with additional support needs are able to attend local nursery provision with their peers and that with the pressure on early learning and childcare spaces we make more effective use of available spaces.

Public - the policy will be of interest to parents with young children. The proposed changes to the criteria should ensure children with additional support needs are supported to attend their local nursery and for families who are applying for an out of zone nursery where they already have a child at that school.

An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) has been completed and is attached

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

There minimal risks associated with the proposed changes. If approved there may be an opportunity to promote the changes as a significant improvement for families in the city.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and Guidance
Children Scotland Act 1995
Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000
Education (Scotland) Act 1980
The Inclusion Implementation Plan

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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