

Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Thursday 22 February 2018 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Rosie Shimell
Councillor James Okosun
Councillor Catherine Rose
Councillor Kath Whittam
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:

OFFICER & Nina Dohel - Education Director
PARTNER Glenn Garcia - Head of Education Access 0-25 (Admissions)
SUPPORT: Dominic Herrington - Regional Schools Commissioner
Daisy May James - Supervising Social Worker and training lead
Kelly Henry - Access to Resources Manager
Helen Woolgar - Head of Service Permanence, Adoption
Julie Timbrell - scrutiny project manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 There were apologies for absence from Councillor Samantha Jury-Dada and Martin Brecknell. Councillor Rosie Shimell said she will be leaving early.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

- 2.1 There were no urgent items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 28 November 2017 and 6 February 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

5. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

5.1 The chair explained that this session will look at the distribution of school places in Southwark, seeking assurance that the distribution of school places is fair with equal outcomes for all children and making sure that, as far as possible, places at primary and secondary schools, meet the demands of children and parents. The objectives are to:

- Make an analysis of heat maps for Southwark primaries, using 2016/17 application data, which will show where children come from. The aim is to see if Southwark has enough places for 2018/19 and the distribution of places. Heat maps were enclosed with the agenda.
- Address fair admissions for all children, including those children with special needs.
- Consider provision of secondary school places.

5.2 The following presented:

- Dominic Herrington - Regional Schools Commissioner
- Nina Dohel - Education Director
- Glenn Garcia - Head of Education Access 0-25 (Admissions)

5.3 The Head of Education Access explained that Southwark has popular schools with 98% of parents getting their preference. Schools set the criteria and they are open to all children - not exclusively Southwark. In terms of provision there has been a fall in rolls at reception for the last three years; the council are planning carefully to avoid the possibility of over provision at primary. There is more of a squeeze on secondary school places; two secondary schools will come online in future years: Charter and Haberdashers.

- 5.4 The Regional Schools Commissioner said that Southwark schools are in the top 10 percent for secondary schools nationally and progress is very good in primary schools for disadvantaged children. Southwark is in a very good place. Admissions preferences statistics are also very good: a higher than average number of parents and children get into one of their top three preference of school.
- 5.5 The chair invited comments and questions. A member asked the Commissioner if academies and Free Schools are committed to facilitating Managed Moves to give children a new start. The Commissioner said he encourages schools to engage with the Fair Access Protocol. The member pressed the point by saying there is some anecdotal evidence that some Academies are not engaging. The Head of Admissions said there is a forum focused on Managed Moves and this is attended by all schools, often Deputy Heads, where officers and school representatives look at around 35 young people, many with additional needs, who could benefit from being moved to a new school and by end of the meeting the forum will have found places for all the young people.
- 5.6 The Commissioner was asked how parents' views on changes to Academy status are given weight. Commissioner said he will listen to parents, however he advised that the first port would be the school. He explained that if a school is struggling there will a range of options and advice which he will listen to - the local authority will usually have a position. He said his door is open and he will listen and take parents views into account in making a final decision.
- 5.7 If there are school closures how will this happen to ensure continuity of children's education and good stewardship of the resources? The Commissioner responded this did happen with the Southwark Free School. He worked with the local authority to move the children to new schools successfully. What happens to the site and school? The assets would revert to the local authority; if they hold the freehold. When the school funding agreement is terminated then the assets are transferred out of the hands of the Academy owner. If another school is needed they may use this site. Could this be opened by the Local Authority? No this must be a Free School or Academy.
- 5.8 Can you pick up on Admissions issues locally? The schools system is a mix of collaboration and competition and that means that some schools will be more popular and admission will be restricted by an admissions criteria which must be transparent and fair. The Commissioner said that the Independent Adjudicator would look at objections to admissions criteria. There is recent report on Kingsdale as a result of an objection. There was also an objection to Charter, however this was not upheld.

5.9 Parents in the north of Borough are unhappy with lack of top preference locally, with children having to travel south. The Commissioner said that he was not sighted with this level of detail. The Director said that there is sufficiency across the borough; it is not unusual for young people to travel. It is difficult to find space in the borough for new schools; there is a big regeneration site in Old Kent Road but it is not straightforward to build there because of the lay of the land. Southwark do have places in some Secondary Schools that may not be first choice – the council do want to see continual improvement in the schools' performance so they do become first choice.

5.10 The Commissioner was asked if there was more he could do to encourage more local access to local schools? He responded that schools have to have clear admissions criteria that is fair; distance can be used. The heat maps will tell a story. Schools decide what criteria to set. The Commissioner said the provision of local schools was often best left to local arrangements; there is system in place for this to happen and while he appreciates this has received criticism in some quarters his role was to enable this to work as well as possible. He commented that he did not want to overstate his role; Regional School Commissioners have been criticised in the past for overreaching their remit and powers.

5.11 Bacon's College have a random allocation policy which makes local access difficult. The Director said that this school is in Special Measures and there have been recent changes in governance which will lead to changes, and they are looking at the admissions criteria, however she added that the committee will no doubt appreciate that reviewing the admissions policy has not been the school's top priority.

5.12 A member asked about single form of entry schools and how viable they are? The Director said they tend to be the Catholic and Church of England schools, so the council will have to work with the diocese if the council would like them to expand. What about Catholic and Church of England admissions criteria? The Director said the council are working with primary schools on this issue, and it may well be in their interests to change this given the falling rolls in reception leaves schools more vulnerable to viability issues.

5.13 The Commissioner was asked what the local school challenges are and how can he enables schools to meet these? He said that he visits lots of schools. One thing he has seen that works well is a fresh start; when a school has been failing a new governing body and leadership team can enable the change that is needed. The other is schools working together; Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) enable this. In London recruitment and retention is an issue and schools are looking to collaborate on this. Funding is also a challenge.

- 5.14 When looking at conversion to Academy what engagement do you do to assist prior to forcing academisation? The Commissioner said that 70% of schools are choosing to voluntarily transfer to Academy status; 30% are forced. No school wants to fail and he will assist if approached by signposting schools to organisations, groups and networks of support and also the help available from the local authority. Prevention is the best approach.
- 5.15 What is work like with neighbouring boroughs for admissions? The Head of Admissions said the council do work closely when parents need places and officers will work hard to match pupils to school places, and that includes neighbouring borough schools. This will happen when the allocation of places is announced shortly and her team will have officers working on this immediately and intensively.
- 5.16 How confident are you that pupil premium is being used well, particularly the additional premium for looked After, Fostered and Adopted children? The Commissioner said he thinks it is getting utilized better and there is good work, research and a better evidence base of how to use this well. A member added that schools are obliged to report on use of pupil premium.
- 5.17 A member commented that there is tension between local authority providing admissions and an increasingly autonomous school system; the cumulative impact of individual schools' admission criteria means that there is inequity in the system for many local children. She added that both the Regional School Commissioner and Education and Skill Funding Agency (ESFA) are supposed to have oversight and address these circumstances, especially in areas close to borough boundaries, which can magnify problems. She added that this is particularly an issue for her ward, where there is a cluster of expanded primary places within 1 km of Kingsdale, however often local children can not gain access to this school through the admissions criteria Kingsdale use, but the children are too far from schools that use a distance criteria. She said the overwhelming desire from parents, generally, is for non-selective local schools. Paxton Secondary School was cancelled; what now happens to ensure those extra places are found for local children? Another concern is that for some schools governance is not outwards facing or transparent; with the parent governor role tokenistic.
- 5.18 The Commissioner reiterated that he was wary of over emphasising his role, or to extend or exaggerate his responsibilities. He stressed many aspects were not his remit - for example governance of schools remains primarily the responsibility of local boards and MATs, and there is an Admissions Adjudicator with responsibility for ensuring a fair process; who had recently produced a nine page report on Kingsdale. The member responded that the Kingsdale admissions adjudication report only focused on the narrow issue that the school had consulted on (admission of

teachers' children) whereas the underlying issue was the need for a genuine wide ranging consultation with the local community about the admission criteria used, which is supposed to happen every seven years. The Commissioner responded that parents are able to make other objections to criteria if they are unfair; the system is reliant on parents utilizing this process. He repeated that most local parents were satisfied with places received and the quality of education was very high in Southwark.

5.19 A member said that children who are adopted outside the area are not given priority in admissions; this can adversely impact children with high needs. The Director and Head of Admissions referred to a letter by Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards. Officers are looking at mechanisms to address the concern raised. The Head of Admission said she has been looking at this matter, exploring the possibility of considering applications of pupils in this situation under the social and medical criterion for community schools, which would offer prioritisation. The member responded positively and agreed this could be a pragmatic solution; parents and schools would need to be told.

5.20 A local parent, who is an Education journalist, asked about the John Keats School and recent promotion he had received. He understands this will be delivered on the site of the former Southwark Free School. He noted this was a controversial decision as the school was refused permission by the council planning committee, but then this was overturned by the former Mayor of London. He asked if additional primary schools were really needed, given the falling rolls at reception. The Commissioner responded that he would write back on this point.

5.21 The local parent then also asked about shrinking cohorts of children in a local academy chain. He referred to data he had seen for one local MAT, which indicated that the number of children enrolled shrank over the years, and that the worry might be that children could be moved off roll to improve the performance figures. He asked if the Commissioner had examined this data, and contacted the MAT to see if falling rolls could be linked to formal or informal exclusions. The Commissioner invited the audience member to send the data so he can examine this further.

RESOLVED

A minute of the session will be circulated to all contributors to comment on and include updated data and answers to queries, where possible. This will then be published as a record of the session.

6. FOSTERING CARE IN ENGLAND

6.1 The chair welcomed the following officers to present on the report enclosed and early thoughts on how Southwark will respond:

- Daisy May James - Supervising Social Worker and training lead
- Kelly Henry - Access to Resources Manager
- Helen Woolgar - Head of Service Permanence, Adoption

6.2 A member asked about 'delegated authority'. Officers said that Southwark generally encourage this - young people do have anxiety that things like forms will get agreed quickly, however sometimes there are sensitivities with families that mean some decisions need to be discussed.

6.3 Training is being invested in.

6.4 The council are working to enhance children and young people's 'secure base'. It is often schools which are the key constant that needs to be protected.

6.5 Officers said that they are learning from strengths in adoption and translating that to fostering with a big focusing on matching and permanence. There was a discussion on translating this to older children. An example was given of a day where older children participated with foster carers and 70 % achieved a permanent match - which is very high. There has been a revamp of forms to get the right level of disclosure and also to emphasise the positives of children and young people.

6.6 Members spoke about joint commissioning and the importance of this. Officers were asked how social care links in with the wider local authority work. Officers said that there is an issue with potential foster carers wanting to be foster carers but they often do not have room. In this situation officer do encourage carers to get involved in other areas. There are arrangements for people in priority one housing bands to enable people to get bigger houses to meet the requirements of children in their care or to take on larger siblings groups. There was discussion about if this could be misused. Officers said this was only offered to families who are known, engaged and vetted. There have been projects to add extra adaptations and space for families with children with disabilities.

6.7 There was a discussion about fees for carers. There are a range of views on this. Officers said that the training and support is very important for retention.

6.8 Members asked about the 'Pause' initiative and officers explained that this is a programme of intensive support for women who have a cycle of removals. This has been very successful.

6.9 Officers were asked about support for foster carers managing stresses. This can be particularly so for police removals and other situations where the police are involved. Officers are investing in more support here.

7. EHCP MINI REVIEW

The review would like to hear from Voices for Autism and a time meet is being is being arranged.

8. WORK-PLAN

The knife crime review scrutiny session will now be held on 21 March 2018.