

## Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 22 February 2021 at 6.30 pm (Online virtual meeting)

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Peter Babudu (Chair)  
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Radha Burgess (Reserve)  
Councillor Karl Eastham  
Councillor Richard Leeming  
Councillor Jason Ochere (Reserve)  
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)  
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (Co-opted member)  
Nicole Gordon (Co-opted member)

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Everton Roberts, Head of Overview and Scrutiny (Acting)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Eleanor Kerlake (maternity leave) and Councillor Michael Situ.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Anood Al-Samerai.

### CONFIRMATION OF VOTION MEMBERS

Those Members listed as present were confirmed as the voting members for the meeting.

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

The chair gave notice of an additional late item – Briefing note from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People, responding to urgent questions from the previous meeting.

The chair informed the meeting that Supplemental Agenda No. 1 contained information relating to the 'Review of Approach to Equality and Adoption of the Equality Framework.

Supplemental Agenda No. 2 contained the minutes for the 26 October 2020 and 27 January 2021 meetings.

### **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

Councillor Jason Ochere declared that he was a governor of a 6<sup>th</sup> form centre in Lewisham which was attended by Southwark residents. It was also declared that Councillor Karl Eastham was a teacher in a Southwark school.

### **4. MINUTES**

Due to late circulation, it was agreed that the minutes be deferred to the next meeting for approval.

### **5. REVIEW OF APPROACH TO EQUALITY AND ADOPTION OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

The commission heard from Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods, Stephen Douglas, Director of Communities, Jasbinder Baddhan, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Programme Lead and Suganya Naveenan, Equalities and Inclusion Lead Officer.

Councillor Macdonald provided the commission with a brief overview of the cabinet portfolio areas relevant to equalities that were within her remit, including the overall approach to equalities, putting in place the framework and embedding equalities in everything the council does, community engagement, relationship with the voluntary and community sector, volunteering, community grants, the neighbourhood approach building on the social regeneration charter, responsibility for protected groups including LGBT+ community and women's rights, digital and financial inclusion and customer services, ensuring that public facing services are accessible to all.

Councillor Macdonald explained that the Southwark Stands Together came under the Leader of the Council's portfolio and that Workforce came within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Business and Jobs so the implementation of the workforce equalities priorities came under that remit. Councillor Macdonald stressed that equalities was everyone's responsibility and that it had to cut across all work.

Councillor Macdonald advised that some of the fundamentals to the approach on equalities were:

- Understanding what the inequalities are and what is causing them (to support this a lot of work was going into collecting and analysing data).
- Strong equality approach throughout the Borough Plan including clear specific inequality policies, such as increasing representation in community leadership positions, guaranteeing access to education and employment for every school

leaver, tackling health inequalities and food insecurity.

- A strong framework to ensure that the council has the rigour and the right tools to analyse, monitor and address what the data is showing.
- How the council approaches equalities, i.e. with kindness, understanding and sensitivity

Councillor Macdonald reported that the refreshed equalities framework would be considered by cabinet in June, this would take account of the work being undertaken through Southwark Stands Together. Councillor Macdonald indicated that she welcomed input from scrutiny as well as other stakeholders, including staff and the forum for equality and human rights. Some key principles would be revised tools for implementation, along with strengthened equality governance – other models across London were being looked at.

An equality audit of all council services was also being proposed for later in the year. In relation to tackling racial disparities, a review of the grants programme was being undertaken to make sure that the council was supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and to identify any barriers.

There was also focus on the community support alliance and digital exclusion. In respect of digital exclusion, there had been close working with the Education department in getting laptops to children for learning. Councillor Macdonald's particular focus was on working with broadband providers to get free internet connections. A commitment for 500 connections had been obtained.

There was work being undertaken with the public health team, including looking at how to address vaccine hesitancy.

Following the cabinet members address, questions and discussion were held around the following areas:

- Whether there had been any work centred around air quality/pollution and impact on BAME communities
- Looking at the impact on different groups and engaging them in the conversation
- Working towards understanding the barriers to people accessing information on things like air quality and increasing awareness in communities that are particularly impacted
- Diversifying stakeholder groups and action that can be taken to engage other groups
- Identifying expert stakeholders to build up a resource base
- The different approaches to engaging with communities (appreciative inquiry / co production through deliberative approach)
- Bias and inequalities in new digital technologies/artificial intelligence algorithms
- Engagement and participation with business representatives (BIDs) to ensure that they are rooted within a community and not acting in isolation (**Note:** Councillor

Macdonald to be invited to a Southwark BIDs CEO event)

- Built environment policies
- Work with Blue Bermondsey around healing and reconciliation work – opportunities for businesses to get involved.
- Available data sources and whether that presents a realistic picture of equalities at present
- Timeline for presenting draft framework and how it relates to the equalities charter [it was confirmed that this would be presented to cabinet in June]
- Thinking around using community grants to address equalities issues [ it was reported that an external review was due to be undertaken, particularly within the context of Southwark Stands Together, looking at the barriers faced, along with remedial action – a report was expected back in July 2021]
- Research to be undertaken on hidden communities in the borough
- Work of the Digital Working Group – a priority would be mapping the work being undertaken across the organisation which would inform a more integrated approach for service delivery for residents
- Equality audit of services, with a potential for an annual audit
- Environmental concerns linked to asthma amongst black students in particular (**Note:** Officers agreed to look at this and report back)

## **DRAFT SCRUTINY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

The commission discussed proposed draft recommendations in relation to the scrutiny review areas being undertaken by the commission, to be put to cabinet members ahead of any final recommendations being made to cabinet.

The commission discussed draft recommendations around the following areas:

### Children's Experiences and Education through Covid

- Making the commitment to work with BIDs to coordinate efforts to address equalities issues with business
- Creation of an expert database that has good representation from BAME expert participants, with a view to them providing regular input into discussions / meetings
- Equality audit and a commitment to regularly report on progress with the equality framework
- Environmental audit of pollution on schools or as a starting point schools that might be adversely affected due to location e.g. near a main road or in an area known to have high levels of pollution
- Long term mental health support for students

- What the council is doing to analyse levels of attainment for purposes of enabling children to catch up
- Plans for catch up for younger children
- Long term mental health support for Teachers and implications for teachers seeking mental health support (establishing current provision in schools such as the 'Place to Be' scheme)
- Support for provision like dyslexia and other special educational needs
- Prioritising young people as services such as libraries open back up.
- Renewed effort to give young people opportunities for extracurricular activities which were stopped due to covid 19 / lockdown

#### Revitalisation of High Streets and Town Centres

- How the council can support / drive retail innovation
- Using empty units to provide opportunities for next generation businesses
- New round of high street challenge fund to incentivise landowners to think about using spaces in different ways
- Support for cultural organisations in the creative industries
- Impacts on businesses through an equalities lens
- Impact of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods on businesses, both positive and negative
- Comprehensive map of the different local economies
- Support for more community led activity
- More active role for council to play more active role for creating new uses for the high street, including role for supporting the communities well being
- Exploring community ownership structures
- Apprenticeships not been able to complete their examinations due to covid-19 and needing to stay on longer – impact on future apprenticeships.

#### **6. EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21**

The chair informed the commission of proposed ideas for the April commission meeting. Potential areas to be explored:

- Further community evidence from young people and affected businesses
- Receiving further information from teachers
- Hearing from South London and Maudsley in relation to their immediate response

to children's mental health issues

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme as at 22 February 2021 be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.38 pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**