

Item No. 9.	Classification: Open	Date: July 9 2008	Meeting Name: Council Assembly
Report title:		Motions – Chief officer comments to motions	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Legal and Democratic Services	

2 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LISA RAJAN (seconded by Councillor Michelle Holford)

Please note that, in accordance with council assembly procedure rule 2.9 (6), council assembly shall consider this motion.

National Challenge for Schools

1. Council notes the recent launch of the National Challenge for Schools, intended to reduce to zero the number of schools where fewer than 30% of pupils achieve grades A*-C at GCSE and welcomes the announcement of funding to assist schools to improve standards.
2. Council notes with concern statements made at the launch by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families where he made reference to 638 'failing' schools.
3. Council notes with concern that this approach takes no account whatever of either individual or local circumstances, value-added ratings for individual schools or improvements already underway.
4. Council notes that in Southwark, three schools – the Academy at Peckham, Geoffrey Chaucer School and Kingsdale School – are on the list of 638 schools, but notes that:
 - a) The Academy at Peckham has been improving rapidly and is already part of the academy programme;
 - b) Geoffrey Chaucer School has shown rapid improvement since the council intervened, that the latest Ofsted inspection report noted that it "has improved significantly over the last two years and now provides a satisfactory education" and that it is set to become an academy later this year;
 - c) Kingsdale School is one of the fastest improving schools in the country and was recently recognised as such by Lord Adonis, the London Schools Minister as the most improved school in England.
5. Council notes with concern the Secretary of State's announcement that the government might intervene to either force these schools to convert into academies or even to close if certain requirements are not met.
6. Council notes the hard work of students, teachers, heads and council staff to improve results at these three schools and notes with dismay the distress which this announcement has caused them.
7. Council expresses its dismay at the lack of context behind the Secretary of State's statements and its opposition to direct government interference in these three schools.

8. Council therefore calls on leaders of all political parties in Southwark to sign a letter expressing support for the students, staff and head teachers at the Academy at Peckham, Geoffrey Chaucer and Kingsdale Schools.

Note: If the motion is agreed, any proposals will be submitted to the executive for consideration.

Comments of the Strategic Director of Children's Services

Much hard work has been undertaken by Southwark schools to address issues of achievement in the last few years, not just those highlighted in the announcement. This has resulted in a number of our schools being identified by the Department of Children, Families and Schools as some of the most improved in the country. The timing of the policy change is unhelpful as resources in schools have to be diverted to respond to it. The three schools identified in this announcement have shown good improvement over the past three years across a wide range of indicators, including achievement. We share the belief with the head teachers of those schools that there is more to do however, but we are not complacent.

Our local response is made more complicated as we understand that the programme will not actually include Geoffrey Chaucer as announced, as the school closes this summer to be reopened as the Globe Academy, nor the Academy @ Peckham, which Ministers believe to be making good progress. The Minister's letter to Kingsdale, which identified it as a rapidly improving school, adds further to the confusion around this announcement.

Nonetheless, any additional resources that are brought to bear by central government to some of the most deprived communities and hardest working schools in the country must be welcomed.

4 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR NICK STANTON (seconded by Councillor Jonathan Mitchell)

Please note that, in accordance with council assembly procedure rule 2.9 (6), council assembly shall consider this motion.

Child Poverty

1. Council notes that in 1999, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair committed the Labour government to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020 and that this commitment has been reaffirmed on more than one occasion.
2. Council notes that child poverty is particularly acute in inner London boroughs like Southwark and notes that 51 per cent of children in inner London live in income poverty, compared with 29 per cent in England.
3. Council notes that the government is set to fail to meet its target of halving child poverty by 2010 and that on June 10 2008, the Department for Work and Pensions reported that child poverty has risen again for the second year in a row.
4. Council believes that after more than a decade of Labour government, these figures demonstrate the abject failure of the Labour Party nationally to tackle problems of poverty in deprived areas.
5. Council therefore welcomes the steps taken by Southwark Council to do what it can to address the causes of child poverty, notably:

- a) Maintaining the Southwark Credit Union which provides 5,300 Southwark residents with flexible savings and low cost loans - an example cited as 'good practice' by the London Child Poverty Commission;
 - b) Reducing the time homeless families spend in bed and breakfasts to just one week;
 - c) Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) to 1 in 10.
6. Council notes that despite these efforts, there is still a great deal to be done to reduce child poverty in Southwark.
 7. Council notes the report by the Department for Work and Pensions, 'Public Attitudes on child poverty' which highlighted the central role of the national government in tackling poverty.
 8. Council therefore calls on the executive to write to the Prime Minister, seeking a renewed commitment to meet the 2010 and 2020 targets and to work with Southwark and other local authorities to support their efforts to tackle child poverty.

Note: If the motion is agreed, any proposals will be submitted to the executive for consideration.

Comments of the Strategic Director of Children's Services

Child and family poverty limits life chances and can prevent children reaching their true potential. To tackle historic patterns of underachievement targeted work with underperforming groups in schools has had a marked impact. Children eligible for free school meals have made excellent progress over 2003-07. Last year on all measures at key stages 2, 3 and 4 pupils in Southwark schools attained above their national counterparts and there is clear evidence that we are closing the achievement gap.

Health outcomes are disproportionately worse for disadvantaged families. Close partnerships between health and children's services and the voluntary sector targeted at areas of greatest need have led to reductions in health inequalities. Improvements in infant mortality, smoking cessation and breastfeeding rates for disadvantaged groups have included those living in poverty.

The continuing success of our 'Southwark Works' worklessness programme has enabled many people including lone parents in the borough to overcome the often complex barriers they have to work, for example by supporting jobseekers to access childcare support in partnership with children's services. Southwark Works has developed new methods to overcome reluctance to engage with government agencies like jobcentre plus, identifying those living in workless households and targeting areas of high worklessness. Southwark Council has driven this work to fill the gaps where government programmes have been unable to deliver to those in need of most help. The model has been recognised by central government departments as groundbreaking, particularly for its ability to focus services on those in greatest need where communication with government agencies has not happened or been addressed before.

Southwark Works has a partnership with the council's adolescent and aftercare service, supporting young people leaving care to access vocational training, volunteering, work experience, apprenticeship schemes and jobs. The specialist employment adviser is embedded in the adolescence and aftercare team. The programme is jointly funded by the economic development team and the adolescent and aftercare service. In 2007-08 the adviser supported 47 people of whom 75 % accessed accredited training and 43 % entered employment.

At year end (March 2008) the not in employment, education and training (NEET) level had decreased by 10% from 451 to 406, with strong indications that this will fall even further by March 2009. The new employment and support allowance (ESA) benefit system that will be replacing the current incapacity benefit (IB) scheme is likely to have an impact in discouraging those who are not eligible for IB while recognizing those who genuinely are in need of such support. From October 2008, young people who were eligible to make a claim under IB would now be able to claim ESA instead, including 16 and 17 year olds. The ESA reform aims to improve opportunities for young people with health conditions and disabilities to achieve their aspirations and make a positive contribution to the local economy and community. We anticipate that this may help to reduce further those who are NEET in the medium to longer term.

The economic development team is currently working with housing options to pilot a new area of support for unemployed or workless Southwark residents with or at risk of housing instability. From early July a Southwark Works employment adviser will be based at the homeseach centre in Peckham providing employment and training related advice and guidance for people using the centre. Referrals will come from the housing officers. It is expected that demand for the service will be high and this will be monitored during the year to continuously identify ways to improve the service.

Southwark has been the most successful London borough in encouraging childcare settings to take-up the childcare affordability programme (CAP). This is a scheme across all London boroughs aimed at providing support to low-income parents through the provision of subsidised day care places, whilst assisting parents to stay in or return to full time or part time employment or training. In 2007-08 525 parents in Southwark were supported through the CAP, with over £1m of funding allocated.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Member Motions	Town Hall Peckham Road London SE5 8UB	Constitutional Team 020 7525 7228

Lead Officer	Ian Millichap, Constitutional Team Manager
Report Author	Lesley John, Constitutional Officer
Version	Final
Dated	June 26 2008