

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 18 April 2011

7.00 pm

Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

Supplemental Agenda

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Date: 15 April 2011



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 7 February 2011 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Lisa Rajan (Chair)
Councillor Andy Simmons (Vice Chair)
Councillor Toby Eckersley
Councillor Gavin Edwards
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Tim McNally
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Paul Noblet
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole

EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES: Colin Elliott, Parent Governor
Leticia Ojeda, Parent Governor

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle, Cabinet Member, Health and Adult Social Care

ALSO PRESENT: Brenda Bond, Age Concern Lewisham & Southwark
Terry Farsky, Southwark Pensioners' Action Group
Lesley Knight, Southwark Homecare
Leon Kreitzman, Age Concern Lewisham & Southwark

OFFICER SUPPORT: Doreen Forrester-Brown, Legal Services
Sarah McClinton, Deputy Director, Adult Social Care
Susanna White, Strategic Director, Health & Community Services
Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

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

- 2.1 The Chair had received requests to make deputations from Age Concern, Southwark Pensioners' Action Group and Southwark Homecare.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. SHARED SERVICES WITH OTHER BOROUGHES

- 4.1 This item was deferred to a future meeting.

5. FINAL SCRUTINY REPORT: REVIEW OF HOUSING REPAIRS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE)

- 5.1 Councillor Tim McNally declared a personal and prejudicial interest.
- 5.2 Councillor Gavin Edwards, chair of the housing & community safety scrutiny sub-committee, introduced and answered questions on the final scrutiny report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be welcomed and referred to the cabinet for consideration.

6. CALL-IN: GATEWAY 2 - CONTRACT AWARD APPROVAL - HOME CARE SERVICES IN SOUTHWARK (CABINET 25 JANUARY 2011)

Deputation - Age Concern Lewisham & Southwark

- 6.1 Leon Kreitzman, the chair of Age Concern Lewisham & Southwark, addressed the committee. He challenged the tender process on the basis of lack of involvement of service users. He also challenged the change in criteria which he believed had the effect of reducing the quality of the service and he had little confidence in the council being able to run, monitor and evaluate the results. Leon Kreitzman highlighted that no contract had been awarded to any voluntary sector or specialist group. Two service providers were now dominating the personalisation process and he feared that this would ultimately lead to a reduction in quality and choice and increases in price.
- 6.2 Members asked for Age Concern's comments on service users being able to continue with their existing providers. Leon Kreitzman stated that Age Concern would be withdrawing from services in the borough. Age Concern and similar organisations would not be able to afford to continue. Brenda Bond, chief executive of Age Concern, felt that there would be an inevitable bias towards the two main providers, who would benefit from economies of scale, and a disincentive

to refer to other providers.

- 6.3 Members asked whether Age Concern would have been happy with any outcome of the tendering process if the criteria of quality and price had been given equal weight. Leon Kreitzman was concerned that there had been no strategic discussions with the council about the best way to provide quality services. Brenda Bond added that the lengthy tender process had caused difficulties, that concerns over dropping the quality threshold remained and that there was a risk for users if one of the chosen providers ceased business.

Deputation – Southwark Pensioners’ Action Group

- 6.4 Terry Farsky of Southwark Pensioners’ Action Group addressed the committee. He stressed the need for care services to be improved and for homecare and day-care to be excluded from the cuts programme. If this did not happen Southwark’s most vulnerable residents would not be protected. Terry Farsky singled out the closure of Holmhurst, in his view the only centre providing care for the elderly with mental health problems. He did not think its users could be accommodated elsewhere. He also drew attention to changes in the taxi card scheme and increased costs for users.
- 6.5 Members asked whether Southwark pensioners had been making representations to the council. Terry Farsky stated that the Pensioners’ Action Group had been concerned for some time about the quality of homecare and day-care but had not found a way of raising this until the budget discussions had taken place.

Deputation – Southwark Homecare

- 6.6 Lesley Knight of Southwark Homecare was concerned at how Southwark could maintain a quality service when the homecare contract had been awarded at such a low price. She was also concerned that providers would be leaving the market. Lesley Knight highlighted the decision not to award the specialist contract to Older Adult Support in Southwark (OASIS) which she believed provided a very good service in response to a particular need. She commented that the cost of the contract was £0.5 million in comparison to the £1.9 million the service saved, the latter figure based on SLAM’s evaluation of the service.
- 6.7 Members asked if Southwark Homecare could make any suggestions as to how savings could be made in this area. Lesley Knight responded that this might have been possible had current providers been able to work with service users. There were options in terms of reducing cost but reducing expenditure, for instance reducing spend on training, would always have an effect on the service provided.
- 6.8 Some members were concerned that unsuccessful bidders for the contract had information about costs that should not be available to them. Lesley Knight commented that all current providers shared information about terms, conditions and costs.

Call-in

- 6.9 Councillor Tim McNally introduced the reasons for the call-in. He emphasised the

importance of homecare services to Southwark's most vulnerable population. He also drew attention to two contracts which had not been let. Councillor McNally was concerned that placing weight on the contract price could mean that staff providing the service were the lowest paid and least well trained. He was also concerned that, should one of the contractors fail, 50% of the service would be lost and that other providers might no longer exist in the market to take up the slack.

6.10 Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle, cabinet member for health and adult social care, acknowledged the work of organisations and of home-carers. She emphasised the difficult economic climate, the depth of cuts and that decisions had to be taken quickly but stressed her opinion that the quality of homecare would remain at the same level. Councillor Dixon-Fyle explained that the contracts to the two specialist groups had not been let as alternative provision had been made. In respect of the number of providers she also explained that the greater risk was to let out more contracts than could be afforded.

6.11 In response to questions from members, Councillor Dixon-Fyle commented that she had not been in her cabinet post in 2008, at the beginning of the contract process. She was confident that people in the community would continue to get a good service, that the new contract would be explained to users and that safeguards would ensure that the contract was properly monitored.

6.12 The committee considered each of the reasons for call-in in turn.

Failure to let two of the specialist contracts and not giving a satisfactory explanation of how these needs would be alternatively and adequately met

6.13 Members picked up on the deputations' concerns about users possibly having a lack of choice of provider and whether smaller providers would remain in the market. Councillor Dixon-Fyle confirmed that clients would be able to choose how to spend their budget and to remain with their current provider. Susanna White, strategic director, health & community services, added that the process was not intended to drive out smaller providers but that there needed to be a more economic cost. In response to further questions she stressed the importance of establishing the best price instead of continuing with a range of prices.

6.13 Members highlighted the decision not to award contracts for the older adult support in Southwark (OASIS) service and the intermediate care and neurological-rehabilitation (neuro-rehab) service. They were concerned about the sensitive groups of clients who benefitted from these services. Susanna White stressed that no-one would be left without a service. It was important that a service was available but not necessarily that the previous format be retained.

6.14 Sarah McClinton, deputy director, adult social care, explained that funding of the OASIS service had been intended to provide a specialist service for people with mental health needs. A review of the needs of current users suggested that the service met a variety of needs and not just personal homecare. For some users the right kind of service was not being provided. Some of users' needs could be met by a short-term re-ablement process. Work was being done with SLaM to better understand the range of users' needs and service options. Some members were concerned that the figure agreed for hourly costs was low in terms of the level

of skill required. Sarah McClinton indicated that a benchmark figure had been taken from similar services in other boroughs.

- 6.15 Sarah McClinton also explained that the intermediate care and neurological-rehabilitation (neuro-rehab) service offered up to twelve weeks' help to people coming out of hospital. The existing contract continued until the end of August. There was a degree of overlap with the re-ablement pilot and subsequent procurement would aim to produce a consistent and coherent service.
- 6.16 Members asked whether the £4.3 million due to come to the council for re-ablement could be made use of in order to fund these two specialist services. Susanna White clarified that councils would benefit differentially from this settlement and that this might provide substitute funding for services already provided, rather than additional funding.
- 6.17 Some members felt that it was unclear that users would have a continuity of service. They also asked why specialist contract 5 had been awarded. Susanna White stated that this highly specialised service was an exception. It was not a re-ablement service but an ongoing service for people with particular needs.

The decision advocates two compromises on quality of care

- 6.18 Councillor Dixon-Fyle explained that the tender process awarded points for a range of criteria, including the possibility of expansion. Points had been reduced from thirty to twenty-seven in terms of quality but the price of the service was also important when serving the borough's residents. Susanna White clarified that there had been no change in the requirement of a two star CQC rating. She stressed that the change in the points threshold did not mean a reduction in the quality of care provided in a home and that "quality" related to anything which was not price, for instance the ability to upscale the offer. The reduction in the threshold had allowed local voluntary sector providers still to be considered.
- 6.19 Some members were concerned at the lack of involvement of service users in measuring the quality of tendered bids. Sarah McClinton reported that it was difficult to look at the feedback of individual users but that homecare surveys had been taken into account.
- 6.20 Members asked whether a link existed between the amount charged by a provider and the experience and pay of staff. A member highlighted that, compared to other agencies, some of the non-profit organisations had the lowest staff turnover and the highest trained staff. They provided continuity of service and quality. Susanna White commented that there was no simple correlation to be made between quality and price. She recognised that individual organisations had highly trained and long-standing staff groups providing quality service. At the same time, the council had to face the issue of affordability. Susanna White did not believe that the change in the quality threshold had made a difference to the outcome of the tender process in this respect.
- 6.21 Councillor Dixon-Fyle was confident in the contractors to be appointed and that the right decisions had been taken in respect of the criteria. Members asked what action would be taken if a provider fell below a two star rating. Susanna White

responded that if this occurred then the provider would be given the opportunity to improve. Account would be taken of the nature of the loss and what it related to. She emphasised that there was no reason this was likely to happen. The expectation was that as users moved to individualised arrangements the use of contractors would diminish, which was reflected in the decision to appoint two rather than three providers. Sarah McClinton added that if a provider was compromised on quality then the individual circumstances would be looked into, taking users' views into account, before considering whether to retender or make alternative arrangements.

- 6.22 Members of the committee stressed the importance of contract management and queried the use of electronic monitoring systems. Sarah McClinton responded that a common complaint was that carers did not stay for the full time. Electronic monitoring meant that the council would know the actual time spent and paid for. Members requested further details of the electronic system. Members also asked for details of how the cabinet would monitor the contracts. Councillor Dixon-Fyle confirmed that there would be regular report backs to the cabinet member.

Letting only two out of the three main contracts leads to increased risk if one of the contractors experiences problems

- 6.23 Members remained concerned as to what would happen if one of the contractors failed. Susanna White repeated that the personalisation agenda meant that a transition was taking place away from block contracts and towards more individualised arrangements. This, together with a more mature market of providers both in Southwark and across London, would mitigate any future risk to the council. Susanna White also confirmed that assessing the long-term financial viability of bidders was part of the contract process.
- 6.24 Sarah McClinton added that about a half of existing providers had come to meetings to discuss continuing to work with current users. Some members were concerned that existing providers had not been sufficiently involved in discussions about the changing arrangements. Councillor Dixon-Fyle was confident that there had been various forms of consultation since the beginning of the contract process in 2008. In response to questions she also explained that a specialist team had been set up to support clients affected by the change. Susanna White emphasised that the aim was to provide affordable choice and that discussions would take place with all users to establish the right approach for them, either remaining with their existing provider or moving to the new contract.
- 6.25 Members asked whether the contract process could have been halted at any time or whether there would have been legal penalties. Susanna White responded that the contract had been monitored throughout, particularly in view of changes in national policy, but that decisions had been taken to modify the process rather than abandon it. In terms of specific legal requirements she confirmed that TUPE would apply.
- 6.26 At 9.05pm the committee moved into closed session. In response to questions Sarah McClinton clarified that awarding three contracts would have been a risk in terms of the number of hours to be transferred. The experience of other boroughs had been taken into account and it was likely that the number of hours would

decrease over future years. Equally, the two providers would be able to provide more hours if necessary. Susanna White gave further clarification of the impact of the changes made to the criteria and of whether the award of contracts could be challenged as a result.

- 6.27 Some members were concerned at any possible financial cost to the council if a decision were delayed. Susanna White indicated that a delay would have cost implications. The meeting returned to open session at 9.25pm.

RESOLVED:

That the decisions in respect of the Gateway 2 Contract Award Approval, Home Care Services in Southwark, be referred back to cabinet for reconsideration on the basis of the following concerns:

1. Further information is required about alternative provision identified for recipients of services of the two specialist contracts not let (OASIS and the intermediate care and neurological-rehabilitation service).
2. Clarification is needed of whether the council has the option to terminate either contract if the CQC rating of the provider falls below two stars.
3. Whether the cabinet can satisfy itself that adequate contingency arrangements are in place in the event that either provider is, for whatever reason, unable to perform the service as contracted for.

The meeting ended at 10.12 pm



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 7 February 2011 at 10.20pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Andy Simmons (Vice-Chair)
Councillor James Barber (Reserve)
Councillor Gavin Edwards
Councillor Mark Gattleson (Reserve)
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Tim McNally
Councillor Jonathan Mitchell (Reserve)
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Fiona Colley, Cabinet Member, Regeneration and Corporate Strategy

ALSO PRESENT: Jim Patterson, Southwark Friends of the Earth

OFFICER SUPPORT: Jon Abbott, Elephant & Castle Project Director
Deborah Collins, Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance
Gill Davies, Strategic Director of Environment
Doreen Forrester-Brown, Legal Services
Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Noblet and Lisa Rajan.

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

2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 Councillor Eckersley declared an interest as a former cabinet member who had been involved in a related decision. He left the meeting but suggested that advice in this area needed to be reviewed as it might undermine the efficiency of the scrutiny function.

4. CALL-IN: MULTI UTILITIES SERVICES COMPANY (MUSCO) COMMERCIAL PARTNER (CABINET 25 JANUARY 2011)

- 4.1 Councillor David Hubber introduced the reasons for the call-in as on paper.

“The decision gives insufficient details about (a) the alternative means to achieve the zero carbon growth (and indeed 'Climate Positive' aims) outlined in the strategy, (b) the implications of halting the procurement on other bidders who have taken part, and (c) on the EU regulation implications of carrying out a new procurement that includes the supply of other sites outside the E&C footprint.”

Deputation – Southwark Friends of the Earth

- 4.2 Jim Patterson of Southwark Friends of the Earth addressed the committee. He was concerned to find out what the cabinet considered to be unworkable about the proposal and when it became clear that it was no longer viable. He was also concerned that the decision could mean that no Multi-utility Services Companies (MUSCo's) were pursued in the borough and sought assurance that there was still a commitment to zero carbon developments.
- 4.3 Councillor Fiona Colley, cabinet member for regeneration and corporate strategy, stated that the cabinet was disappointed that the decision had to be taken to end negotiations with the Dalkia consortium. Dalkia had not been able to meet the council's requirements and did not have funding. Negotiations had to end in order to find a real sustainable energy solution. The cabinet remained fully committed to zero carbon growth at the Elephant & Castle.
- 4.4 Members asked whether it would be possible to re-tender the contract or go back to some of the other original consortia. Deborah Collins, the strategic director of communities, law & governance, explained that a contract could not be re-tendered until a procurement process was completed. It was not practical to go back to previous bidders as one was no longer operating and the other had dropped out when negotiations had begun with Dalkia.
- 4.5 Gill Davies, strategic director of environment, explained that under the regeneration agreement it was up to Lend Lease to come forward with new proposals. The cabinet report set out how the commitment to reduce carbon could be taken forward.

“The likely costs associated with a new procurement and the reduced profit share are given insufficient consideration in making the financial case for abandoning the MUSCo.”

4.6 Members asked for clarification of the likely cost of any new procurement and the financial impact of abandoning the MUSCo. Councillor Colley emphasised that Dalkia had been unable to deliver a MUSCo and that the cabinet would not accept any further procurement costs. It was Lend Lease's responsibility to bring forward alternative proposals. She commented that it was difficult to quantify any reduced profit share but there would be ongoing costs if the council continued to negotiate with Dalkia. Gill Davies referred the committee to the closed cabinet report which addressed the issue of profit sharing.

4.7 Members were concerned whether Lend Lease had experience in providing zero carbon and combined heat and power (CHP). Councillor Colley understood that Lend Lease had a substantial record in this field. Jon Abbott, Elephant & Castle Project Director, gave examples in Greenwich Village and the Olympic Village. In their planning application, Lend Lease would also be required to demonstrate how they would reduce water consumption in the development.

"There is no professional advice given on the impact of the decision on (a) minimum statutory building carbon emissions, (b) future carbon emission standards, (c) the existing failing district heating systems on the Aylesbury and other surrounding estates, and (d) planning permissions granted in the E&C area on the proviso that the MUSCo would be forthcoming."

4.8 In response to questions, Councillor Colley made clear that there had been no lack of professional advice during the decision-making process. This was not a political decision but a response to Dalkia not being able to deliver the council's requirements. The cabinet remained determined to deliver regeneration.

"The report states that there are no specific leaseholder implications, which is inaccurate if, as the report suggests, Lend Lease are to set up an ESCo that will supply energy to neighbouring roads and estates."

4.9 Gill Davies commented that nothing could be taken to leaseholders until Lend Lease came up with options.

4.10 Members asked whether the Section 106 agreement relating to the Strata Tower would lapse if the block could not link up to a MUSCo and whether there were implications for leaseholders in the block. Jon Abbott explained that the early schemes had the capacity to connect to a MUSCo. As there was no guarantee that a system would come forward, clauses in the Section 106 agreement did not oblige the owner of the building to connect to a MUSCo.

4.11 Some members were still concerned that leaseholders had not been updated on the current situation. Cllr Colley reminded the committee that decisions of the previous administration to extend the coverage of the MUSCo to the Aylesbury Estate had not been consulted on. However she stressed again that the decision did not reflect a political agenda but was taken because the best and final offer from Dalkia did not meet the council's requirements. Lend Lease would be trying to find another solution.

RESOLVED:

That the cabinet decisions not be referred back and therefore be implemented immediately.

The meeting ended at 10.55pm.

DRAFT

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REVIEW

Report of the Education and Children's Services
Scrutiny Sub-committee

April 2011



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1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee decided to conduct a review on school admissions on 12 July 2010. The focus was on reviewing the clarity of information available alongside reviewing support networks to help parents negotiate the system.
- 1.2 The sub-committee chose this subject because of concerns about the complexity and about the ease with which parents and carers were able to negotiate the schools' admissions process. It was noted that even parents and carers with a lot of information could find the process stressful. It was particularly important to ensure that parents had the right information and support to make the best choices for their children and to minimize the difficulties involved.
- 1.3 The review's focus was a result of the sub-committee's interest in evidence which indicated that supporting parents had a major positive impact on their children's wellbeing and educational attainment. In the last administrative year the previous sub-committee had produced a report on the importance of parental involvement in children's education. This concluded that there should be an emphasis on enabling parents to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to help their children. Alongside this the sub-committee looked at a volunteer programme which demonstrated success in addressing child protection issues by using mentors to support parents. Members also held concerns that there was insufficient support for parents with children with disabilities.
- 1.4 This review is therefore part one of two reviews looking at parenting support. The second review will look at volunteer and peer support, with particular attention paid to support available for parents and carers of disabled children.

2. Context

- 2.1 School admissions are regulated through government legislation. The current School Admissions Code (the Code) came into force on 10 February 2010 and applies to admissions to all maintained schools. Academies are also required to adopt practices and arrangements that are in accordance with the Code and admissions law.
- 2.2 The Code sets out the regulations in place for management and implementation of school admission arrangements which includes:
 - i) Equity and fair access to school places and consultation
 - ii) Setting fair oversubscription criteria
 - iii) Coordination schemes for admission applications
 - iv) Referral of objections
 - v) Admissions forums
 - vi) Choice adviser service
 - vii) Support for parents and carers

- 2.3 Local authorities are responsible for coordinating and processing all primary, secondary and in-year admission applications to schools in their areas. Southwark processed 3725 primary and 4048 secondary applications for 2010/11 admissions and has received 292 in year applications from 1 September 2010 to date.
- 2.4 Parents and carers apply for places online or by completing a paper Common Application Form (CAF). Parents are able to apply for up to six schools of their preference; these must be listed in priority order. Many voluntary aided schools and some academies also require a supplementary information form to be completed which is used to rank all applicants in priority order against their published admissions criteria.
- 2.5 Local authorities have a duty to establish an Admissions Forum for their area with a membership that reflects the types of schools in the locality. The main focus of the Forum is to consider the fairness of admission arrangements in their local context. Southwark's Admissions Forum has the following ethos: *To consider and promote a fair and effective schools admission system which advances social equity and inclusion, serving the interests of local parents and children collectively.*
- 2.6 Local authorities are required to provide advice and assistance to all parents of children of all ages in their area to help them navigate the school admissions application process. This must be provided through an independent service that is focused on supporting the families who most need support. Southwark delivers this role through a School Preference Adviser (Choice Adviser), term time only as a member of the Parent Partnership Service which is also an independent service.
- 2.7 The School Preference Adviser supports parents through the process through: i) one to one and group meetings with parents at schools and community centres to explain admissions processes; ii) telephone and email requests; iii) explaining the admissions appeals process and accompanying parents to admission appeal hearings. Between September 2009 and July 2010, the following support was given to parents by the School Preference Adviser:

Number of group meetings held	Number of parents seen	Number of phone calls taken	Number of appeals attended
38	771	106	17

- 2.7 The election of a new coalition government in May 2010 means that arrangements for school admissions are in flux and subject to imminent policy and legislative changes. In addition the loss of central government grants and the requirement to make significant savings may affect current provision of admissions support.
- 2.8 The Government set out in the White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching', that in early 2011 it would, 'consult on a simplified and less prescriptive School Admissions Code'. The aim is to publish a revised Code by July 2011.

- 2.9 The Education Bill 2011, currently before parliament, removes the requirement on English Local Authorities to establish an admissions forum.
- 2.10 The Area Based Grant (£49,425) supporting the Preference Advisers was 'protected' from the significant in year budget cuts for 2011-12; however, funding beyond the end of this financial year remains uncertain. Southwark's Admission Forum is due to consider support options for parents and carers post August 2011

3. Methodology

3.1 The methodology consisted of:

- Officer reports on School Admissions
- Sub-committee members sharing good practice
- Consultation with Parent Participation Forum (PPF)
- Southwark Governors Association (SGA) submission
- Consultation with the School Admissions Forum
- Questionnaire distributed to parents and carers making secondary school admissions (Data from this will be available in the beginning of May)

4. Findings and recommendations

Information for parents and carers

- 4.1 The council produces information for parents in two main ways - on the website and through two guides; one for starting primary and one for starting secondary school. These are printed as booklets.
- 4.2 Parents were positive about the information on the website. Most felt that the booklets were useful and the school information good. However there was feedback that the guide should be easier to navigate, as parents whose first language was not English found it difficult to use. It was felt that it might be helpful for there to be a short simple version for these parents and consideration should be given to translating a short, simplified guide. Parents with special needs wanted more information in the guide.
- 4.3 The parent participation forum wanted to give feedback on the guide and requested that next year's version come to them for comment.

Recommendations:

1. The guide should be made easier to navigate.

2. There should be more information in the guide on special needs.
3. Consideration should be given to producing a short simplified version and/or one in different languages to meet the needs of parents where English is not the first language.
4. Next year's draft guide should be brought back to the Parent Participation Forum for feedback.

Communication with parents and carers about the admissions process

- 4.4 Feedback from parents and officers was that the school preference advisor was very successful at reaching parents and carers to advise, support and assist them with the admissions process.
- 4.5 Parents, officers, teachers and governors all held the view that parents whose first language was not English, and who did not have good language skills, struggled the most in the admission process. Events at children's centres, school and nurseries were endorsed. It was suggested that these were expanded to all schools and centres and one be held at Tooley Street.
- 4.6 Outreach through links with predominantly BME communities and through specialised workers was endorsed.
- 4.7 Parents and carers recommended that children's centres and other providers used their databases to contact people and send reminders. These databases should be maintained and regularly updated.
- 4.8 Many parents are in contact with services through the use of nurseries, schools, children's centre and other providers. Some of these providers intensively targeted parents through advisory sessions, and speaking to parents as they picked up and dropped off their children. They ensured that all parents got a form and appropriate information and regularly reminded them. Kintore Way was held up as an example of good practice. This should be promoted.
- 4.9 Council officers already reach out to Private, Voluntary and Independent ["PVI"] early years managers. Parents and carers also noted that they use university nurseries and other early year provision so these providers should also be targeted.
- 4.10 It was pointed out that there are many parents and carers who might not be in regular in touch with services and these parents might be the ones that particularly struggle with the admissions process. Parents thought that health visitors 2½ year check would be a good time to alert parents to the nursery and primary admissions process. They also felt that more use should be made of databases that health and social services hold to do targeted mail outs.

- 4.11 The service already uses one stop shops and parents welcomed this and suggested that this is expanded so that information and training is also given to front line staff in libraries and community centres.

Recommendations:

5. Retain the school preference advisor for outreach and one to one support; particularly focus their work on the needs of parents whose first language is not English and parents of SEN children.
6. Hold open days at schools, Tooley Street and in the community; particularly focus these on the needs of parents whose first language is not English , and parents of SEN children.
7. Contact university nurseries as well as Private, Voluntary and Independent ["PVI"] early years managers.
8. Train workers and keep booklets on the admissions process at settings such as libraries, one stop shops and community centres.
9. Use networks and contact details more smartly to distribute information and send reminders (health visitors, children centres, nurseries). Ensure they have sufficient information and CAF forums.
10. Use face to face contact – health visitor 2 ½ year check ups with parents, parent mentors at the Parent Participation Forum, nursery school attendance.

Choosing a place and taking a test.

- 4.12 Parents found visiting lots of schools on the same day stressful. Disabled parents and children, for example wheelchair users, found access difficult to negotiate during these busy times.
- 4.13 Parents and children found the amount of tests for secondary schools very stressful and unnecessary. They wanted one common test for all the schools so that a child would only need to take one test. Officers have advised the committee that they have been seeking to negotiate one common test for all Southwark schools, and there has been some progress. All the local secondary schools, apart from the Harris academies, will use one test next year. Harris academies will use one test for all their local schools. This will reduce testing for Southwark schools to two tests, however the best local outcome would be one test for all Southwark schools. The ideal outcome would be the same test for all London schools as some Southwark children will apply out of the Borough.

Recommendations:

11. Introduce a common test for secondary school entry.
12. Draw up an open day schedule for parents of children with SEN.

Making an application by completing the CAF or using the online form

- 4.14 Parents gave very positive feedback on the CAF and online form, if they had a straightforward application; they liked the simplicity and the receipt received. A parent/carer with two children (not twins) noted a problem, as she received an offer for only one of the children. Other parents who made late applications had a few problems.

Recommendations:

13. Ensure that carers and parents with more than one child in the same academic year (who are not multiple births) can make a successful application.

Receiving an offer

- 4.15 Offer day is a very stressful time and it was suggested that more information and support is given at this time. Parents need more information on waiting lists, for example that their child's place in the queue can go up and down. Sometimes parents and carers hear nothing for some time and this can create anxiety. Parents would like more accessible real-time information on school availability, local waiting lists lengths and their child's place.
- 4.16 Currently parents are asked two or three times to accept a school place. Once via the online process, once by the school, and once by the local authority. They have to accept both the school and the local authority place and it is not clear what the purpose of the eform acceptance is. This is confusing.

Recommendations:

14. Simplify the process so that parents and carers do not have to accept and respond to both the local authority and school to successfully accept or decline a place. Disable the automatic eform acceptance unless it is functional.
15. Offer more support around offer day and including additional

information explaining waiting lists and managing places.

Supporting parents

- 4.17 Offer time is a busy period for officers and a stressful time for parents. Officers would like to be able to meet parents at Tooley Street as this would be much more efficient than booking slots in one stop shops etc. It would also mean that officers are more accessible to parents.

Recommendations:

16. Make meeting space available in Tooley Street for staff to take appointments with parents.

Local coordination and the admissions forum

- 4.18 The education bill currently before parliament will mean that having an admissions forum is a local choice. The admissions forum believe that this body enables a more coordinated and robust process across the local authority and advances social equity and inclusion.

Recommendations:

17. Retain the Admissions Forum.

5. Summary of recommendations

1. The guide should be made easier to navigate.
2. There should be more information in the guide on special needs.
3. Consideration should be given to producing a short simplified version and/or one in different languages to meet the needs of parents where English is not the first language.
4. Next year's draft guide should be brought back to the Parent Participation Forum for feedback.
5. Retain the school preference advisor for outreach and one to one

- support; particularly focus their work on the needs of parents whose first language is not English and parents of SEN children.
6. Hold open days at schools, Tooley Street and in the community; particularly focus these on the needs of parents whose first language is not English , and parents of SEN children.
 7. Contact university nurseries as well as Private, Voluntary and Independent ["PVI"] early years managers.
 8. Train workers and keep booklets on the admissions process at settings such as libraries , one stop shops and community centres.
 9. Use networks and contact details more smartly to distribute information and send reminders (health visitors, children centres, nurseries). Ensure they have sufficient information and CAF forums.
 10. Use face to face contact – health visitor 2 ½ year check ups with parents, parent mentors at the Parent Participation Forum, nursery school attendance.
 11. Introduce a common test for secondary school entry.
 12. Draw up an open day schedule for parents of children with SEN.
 13. Ensure that carers and parents with more than one child in the same academic year (who are not multiple births) can make a successful application.
 14. Simplify the process so that parents and carers do not have to accept and respond to both the local authority and school to successfully accept or decline a place. Disable the automatic eform acceptance unless it is functional.
 15. Offer more support around offer day and including additional information explaining waiting lists and managing places.
 16. Make meeting space available in Tooley Street for staff to take appointments with parents.
 17. Retain the Admissions Forum.

Appendices

1. Consultation with Parent Participation Forum (PPF)
2. Southwark Governors Association (SGA) submission and School governor interview
3. Consultation with the School Admissions Forum

All available on the Southwark website and published for the 14 March 2011 committee meeting :

<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=303&MIId=3563&Ver=4>

Members of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee who contributed to this review:

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 Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole (Vice-chair)
 Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE
 Councillor Adele Morris
 Councillor Rosie Shimell
 Councillor Althea Smith
 Councillor Cleo Soanes

Education representatives:

Sharon Donno
 Colin McKenzie Elliot
 Leticia Ojeda
 Reverend Nicholas Elder

References

- 1 School Admissions Codes and Regulations:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmissions/a00195/school-admissions-codes-and-regulations>
- 2 Education Bill 2011
 A Summary of the Government Bill, Ref. Bill 137, February 2011 Document Summary Service

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