

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 29 September 2021 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Babudu (Chair)
Councillor William Hougbo(Vice-Chair)
Councillor Radha Burgess
Councillor Karl Eastham
Councillor Michael Situ
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member)

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nick Johnson and Councillor Eleanor Kerlake, Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (Co-opted member) and Mannah Kargbo (Co-opted member).

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

There were no items of business which the Chair deemed urgent.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

There were no disclosure of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting from the previous meeting on 19 July 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

5. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) PROVISION - SCRUTINY REVIEW

The commission received a slide presentation from Jemima Rhys-Evans, Director of London South Teaching School Hub and Will Cannock, Head of Inclusion, Special Educational Needs Coordinator, Charles Dickens Primary School. The commission heard from Will on the SEND provision at Charles Dickens Primary School where a graduated approach is followed to assess, plan, do and review. SEND provisions are implemented in three waves, Universal, Targeted and Specialist based on four areas of need, those being Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction, Social, emotional and mental health and lastly Sensory/Physical.

The commission also heard about the barriers to high-quality SEND provision which mainly revolved around lack of funding, specialist support and access to external services. Jemima introduced the best practices in SEND provision to the commission which composed of creating positive and supportive environments and ongoing, holistic understanding of pupil needs by engaging with their families. In addition, high quality teaching is complemented by carefully selected one-to-one and small-group interventions for pupils and finally, working effectively with teaching assistants helps improve quality SEND provision. The commission understood that the emerging priorities for SEND provision needs to be mainly focused on developing pro-active strategies to develop expertise by supporting and engaging with the schools in need whilst also encouraging and incentivizing them to work collaboratively and to engage with evidence-informed practice.

Jemima and Will then answered questions from the commission on the following points:

- Networking and linking up between Council, external agencies and schools to provide specialist support as mentioned in the third wave of support.
- Approach to barriers such as shortage of expertise and equality of access to SEND provisions across families with lack of expertise.

The commission learned that the services in the third wave of special support are the most time consuming and financially taxing for the schools who need to focus on Universal and Targeted waves of support i.e. waves one and two, to ensure that children don't have to wait long periods of time without getting any support, these are services in the form community paediatricians, NHS services- speech & language therapy and occupational therapy.

The commission also understood that there is a need for central co-ordination Of access to SEND services to bridge the gap to schools who have issues accessing services and families who lack expertise. The commission also learned that there are cultural barriers to understanding, accepting and dealing with SEND across the diverse backgrounds in Southwark, schools are developing in-house Family Liaison Services for early help who work directly with families to help them better understand and gain access to the support their children might need.

The commission also heard that COVID had hindered some of the advertising and printing of booklets for distribution on services, dissemination information on these services are now done online. On issues of schools working in isolation or in a vacuum, the commission learnt that resource bases do exist in special schools and expertise in local authority but are difficult to access, bringing schools together through Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP) by the local authority can help with the sharing of expertise.

On Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) the commission heard a diagnosis of ASD for a child doesn't automatically make them eligible for additional support or guarantee specialist support through EHCP. As the numbers of students with ASD keep growing there is a need to invest in Autism support networks in Southwark.

Jemima explained to the commission that current strategies need to be reviewed, current funding methods for schools need to be changed to prepaid so schools are ready with the support for the child when as soon as it has been identified rather than traditional means of EHCP applications which mean a year long wait for support; schools end up making cuts elsewhere to provide the support to the child right away during that one year period.

The commission then received a report from Nina Dohel, Director of Education at Southwark Council on SEND. The commission learned that there has been a growing and continuous rise in SEND entitlement for families and children which has reached a crisis point nationally, the onus of these provisions now heavily relies on the education system compared to the past where it was spread across the health system, the social care system and the education system.

Nina explained to the commission that we have over 8000 children and young people with special needs that are on SEND support without EHCPs and over two and half thousand children under EHCP since SEND reforms in 2014 this number has been gradually increasing and there are issues of the low levels of funding amongst schools and local authorities. Southwark information advisory service works with disadvantaged families across the borough, however resources are limited and stretched across the services. Southwark council has constantly been building capacity for specialist provisions, joining up strategies for providing investment to mitigate that escalation of Universal need at an early stage and also have provisions for need at higher ages of 16-25. In addition the council is also working with local communities, businesses and local level trainers to get young people with SEND work experience, apprenticeships and meaningful employment which a big challenge for employers.

On the funding approach to SEND provisions for schools the commission learned that there is spending deficit of £20m and one of the measures taken to receive more value from funding is focusing on the early interventions and diagnostics to prevent the escalation of needs at a later stage. The commission also learned that the children on EHCP are allocated £6000 in the funding pot and further top-ups are need based, the council is also looking at ways of pooling funding together across schools for the same needs, such as speech and language therapy. The commission also learned that every school has a SEN co-ordinator and also that teachers have access to training from the teaching school, local authority, online training and in person training, in addition specialist teams also visit schools to work alongside teachers for SEND support.

The commission received an address from Roger Lynch, SEND Operator and Practitioner. Roger explained to the commission that there are fundamental communication issues between the Southwark council and parents of children with SEND, children developing SEND at later ages of 12-13 struggle to get support. Roger also explained to the commission the urgent need for specialist resources in Southwark, in addition to the need to co-ordinate funding efforts between schools, council and health and the funding strategy to be reviewed. Roger also informed the commission that a parent led group called empowering parents are being led by the law centre to take legal action against council over processes around SEND.

6. FUTURE OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND YOUTH PROVISION IN SOUTHWARK - PUPIL PLACES

The commission next heard from Nina again on Pupil Places: Looking at shortfalls in primary pupil numbers across the borough. The commission understood that pupil numbers are a London wide issue and many schools across London will have to close as a result, head teachers and officers are coming together to present the projections to the public, based on which decisions will be made by Local Authorities. The reasons for the shortfall have been attributed to a declining birth-rate and impact from leaving the European Union. Nina also explained that conversations are on-going around amalgamations and federations of some these schools. Impacts of school closures would be felt across the school system including multi academy trusts and voluntary aided schools, amalgamation of schools would be based on geographical proximity. Nina mentioned to the commission that a report on Pupil Place Planning is due to go to the Cabinet in December and the commission requested a copy of the report to be circulated when published.

7. FUTURE OF WORK AND ENTERPRISE IN SOUTHWARK - ADULT RETRAINING

Report noted by the commission.

8. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The commission agreed that the work plan for the commission will be reviewed with the Chair, Vice-Chair and officer support to focus on specific topics given the limited number of meetings left in the Council year.

**9. CABINET RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY
SCRUTINY COMMISSION: REVIEW OF APPROACH TO EQUALITY AND
ADOPTION OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

Cabinet response noted by the commission.

**10. CABINET RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY
SCRUTINY COMMISSION: LOCAL ECONOMY, REVITALISING
SOUTHWARK'S HIGH STREETS AND TOWN CENTRES**

Cabinet response noted by the commission.

Meeting ended at 9.32pm

CHAIR:

DATED: