

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice- Chair)
Councillor Chloe Tomlinson
Councillor Joseph Vambe
Councillor Cassandra Brown
Councillor David Watson
Mannah Kargbo (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member), Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer (Co-opted member) and also Councillor Renata Hamvas who was substituted by Councillor Maggie Browning.

Apologies for lateness were received from Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member), however the member did not attend the meeting.

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.

Councillor Rachel Bentley disclosed that she is employed with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) which has been mentioned in one of the reports in the agenda pack, however she also explained that there is no co-relation between her role at CLES and the information contained in the report.

4. PUPIL PLACES: LOOKING AT SHORTFALLS IN PRIMARY PUPIL NUMBERS ACROSS SOUTHWARK

The commission received a report from Councillor Jasmine Ali, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education on Pupil Places, looking at shortfalls in primary pupil numbers across Southwark. The commission heard from Councillor Ali on the following topics:

- Demographics of Southwark being a young diverse and rapidly growing borough with large numbers of young adults and residents from very wide range of ethnic backgrounds.
- Falling rolls in primary and secondary schools, performance and standards of schools and investment in schools.
- Falling rolls being attributed to falling birth rates, Housing, Global Pandemic, Brexit and Housing shortages.
- Mitigation of falling rolls by managing pupil admission numbers, federating schools, repurposing schools for community use and special needs and setup of a member officer group to tackle falling rolls.
- Case studies on church schools having the lowest numbers of admission.
- Future steps- Letter to Education Secretary, Green Paper on Special Education Needs, White paper on Schools and Strategy to Cabinet in autumn 2022.

The Chair suggested that the commission write a joint letter to the MP Robert Halfon, Chair of the Education Select Committee on falling rolls in pupil numbers in Southwark and nationally.

The commission then heard from Nina Dohel, Director of Education, Children and Adults Services on the following topics:

- Need for initiative in tracking and analysing falling rolls nationally from the Department for Education (DFE).
- Southwark Council's proposal to Cabinet on managing falling rolls and funding.
- Maintaining high quality education by working with Heads of Schools, parents and teachers.
- Inaccuracies in GLA projections which schools use plan their provisions in schools.

Nina Dohel and Councillor Ali answered the commission's questions on the following topics:

- Factors for reception cohorts (admission rates) that are at around 70% in relation to birth rates across London.
- Disproportionate impact on: good and outstanding schools and disadvantaged pupils and working class pupils in good and outstanding schools.

Councillor Ali expressed that it would be valuable to the work of the commission to look at data for factors leading to reception cohorts corresponding to birth rates. Nina suggested that the commission could approach the London Councils and PAN London Place Planning Group for the factors affecting reception cohort rate and also approach the Secretary of State for statistics on population and migration out of London.

The commission also learned that factors such as parent preference and proximity affect the intake in good and outstanding schools noting that the quality of education is quite similar between the schools. On disadvantaged and working class pupils in good and outstanding schools the commission learned that equality impact assessments are carried out to ascertain any measures to be taken. The commission also learned that schools having falling rolls and more than 10% vacancy struggle to get funding.

The commission agreed to look into planning matters on provisions of family sized homes in London and also health and safety, bringing up children with regards to air quality and climate change that could cause migration out of London.

The commission asked questions on the following topics:

- Impact of the policy of free universal primary school meals on pupil premium funding for schools.
- Teacher pay rises of 5% compared to school funding rise of only 2% leading to budget deficits for schools.
- Impact of removal of families from Black Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) backgrounds from council homes in London on falling rolls and also children from BAME backgrounds not receiving free school meals

The commission learned that the council through the schools are continually encouraging parents to apply for pupil premium funding, however there are language and cultural differences amongst families which the schools are handling sensitively.

The commission also agreed to look into school funding being impacted by the cost of living crisis, taking into account that the teacher pay rises are only 5% which have been traditional offset by hiring younger, cheaper by pay teachers.

Councillor Ali thanked the commission for bringing to notice the impact of removal of BAME families from Council Homes in London with regards to falling rolls and

that this issue would be reviewed. The commission also heard that almost all secondary schools are a part of multi academy trusts and they are developing their own strategies to mitigate their fall in pupil numbers.

5. IMPACT ON BUSINESSES IN THE FACE OF THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The commission received a report from Matthew Little, Principal Strategy officer on the impact on businesses in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. The commission heard from Matthew on the following topics:

- Jobs and recruitment – Economic mitigation strategies that are currently in consultation with businesses to overcome barriers in the aftermath of the pandemic such as cost of living crisis.
- Business support employment programs such as Southwark Works and Southwark Pioneers Fund (SPF) meeting inflationary costs
- Supply chain- local spend research with CLES.
- London Living Wage- Target of 250 employers with the help of a steering group.

The commission then discussed the following topics:

- New Economic Strategy consultation- response to inflationary pressures with innovative procurement strategies.
- Opportunities for ex-offenders and their success rate in Southwark Works.
- Southwark Works contract renewal in June 2023.
- Living wage and conditions of employment such as zero hour contracts.
- Affordable work spaces.
- Landlords for commercial properties occupied and empty properties including council and privately owned properties.
- Procurement strategy with CLES.
- Impact of the £2m SPF funding on regular and BAME businesses in the aftermath of the pandemic.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The commission proposed the following work programmes items:

- Pupil Places - looking at shortfalls in primary pupil numbers across Southwark
- Impact of businesses in the face of the cost-of-living crisis.
- Progress and delivery of the inclusion Charter in schools across Southwark including the inclusion of Black children and anti-racism in schools.
- Performance of businesses - Climate change targets including green jobs for youth.
- Southwark Works and its outreach programme.

- Progress and delivery of the SPF.
- Green energy and BAME staff disciplining in schools.
- Attending out of commission meetings for information gathering such as All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) meetings.

Meeting ended at 9:02 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: