

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 8 February 2023 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 Cassandra Brown
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (Co-opted member)
Marcin Jagodzinsk (Co-opted member)
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 Councillor David Watson and Councillor Joseph Vambe.

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 disclosures of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were approved as a correct record.

5. IMPACT OF COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS ON BUSINESSES

The commission first heard from Russell Dryden, Manager Blue Bermondsey Business Improvement District (BID) on the following topics

- How small businesses around the high street in Bermondsey are supported by working with the community and local partners.
- Reduced profits for small businesses due to rising cost of products and utilities
- Southwark Council support for small businesses in Bermondsey in setting up a bid through a BID cluster report
- Council led High Street Challenge funding and High Street Market initiatives such as setting up a local charity to help support markets in October 2023.
- BID forum meetings with Council and large businesses helping to develop a network beneficial to small, medium and large businesses
- Need for BIDs to be given a budget through channels of Council's Section-106 funding and also creating small local jobs such as cleaning contracts for local businesses.

The commission then heard from Nic Durston, Chief Executive South Bank London around the following points:

- South Bank Employers Group (non-profit) and the setup of South Bank BID
- Different types of business in the borough mainly comprising of hospitality and services with a few retail businesses in Oxo
- Larger businesses in South Bank have comparatively recovered well after the pandemic
- Unlocking the local labour market in Southwark is critical by ways of providing training and apprenticeships and employers paying London Living Wage
- Rising energy costs and business rates revaluation leading to cost savings
- The value of having flexible business models with regards to pricing as exhibited by hotels during the pandemic
- Higher price points helping offset some of the costs but as inflation goes higher there is a risk factor for businesses
- Campaigns such as Let's do London which is a collaboration of Greater

London Authority (GLA), Local Councils, BID's and hospitality and tourism businesses that has helped retain jobs for Londoners and also has ensured businesses can continue to grow

- Need for collaborative work between Council and businesses to face challenges in recruitment and retention
- Need for Council to look at flexibility in channelling Central Government Funding such as grant funds to support cultural organisations which are a very important part of the ecology of hospitality and tourism businesses.
- Successful innovative Section 106 mechanisms such as; 1% of the revenue from London Eye being channelled back into the revenue streams for BID's on the South Bank

The commission then asked questions around the following themes:

- Impact of inflation on rents for businesses
- Inflation pressures and demand for pay rises in the private sector
- Barriers to more devolution of powers to BIDs
- Marketing of businesses in schools for work experience and apprenticeships

The commission heard from Russell that it would be beneficial for small businesses if there are further initiatives from the council to help cap rents in council owned commercial properties. The commission also learnt from Nic that more and more businesses are looking for flexibility in work spaces wherein they are not tied to long term leases and this flexibility in landlord business models is the way to the future.

The commission also heard that privately owned small businesses have downsized staff and brought in more flexible hourly contracts and temporary work. Hospitality businesses that had majority of European staff were already struggling due to Brexit and the pandemic further exacerbated the issue within their own labour market, shrinking it and causing such businesses to be open fewer days in a week. After the pandemic a lot of businesses have opted for flexible working arrangements where they can save overheads by people working from home a few days a week. Individual pays have risen keeping in line with inflation within the private sector.

Russell explained to the commission that it is important that pathways are created for local unemployed people through apprenticeships and training, BIDs have a proven track record in facilitating and supporting the local labour market. BIDs and local organisations have been successful in obtaining grants for small projects from Mayor Of London but often regulations impede the delivery of such projects.

The commission heard from Nic that Morley College which is a centre for adult education has now revised their curriculum to reflect local employer needs and regular meetings are taking place between the college and 10 BIDs to discuss the needs of employers, building a stronger network for the local labour market.

The commission also noted that there is a need for small local businesses to have the opportunity and support to get local projects and that this is an area where the

Council's local economy team could get involved.

6. SOUTHWARK SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (SSCP)

The commission then heard from Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families on Southwark Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) on the following themes

- National review of children's safeguarding arrangements resulting in the change from an independent chair to rotating chairmanship between the council, health and the police
- Need for improvement in private fostering arrangements and subsequent assessments
- Challenges in recruiting staff for social work and care including children's safe guarding and care especially in cases of agency staff, London is leading the way in the work being done to adapt to this new business model
- Demand management, cost of living crisis and austerity putting families under financial and housing pressures
- Domestic Abuse and Violence cases where children are involved makes up the majority of child safeguarding referrals from the police
- Funding issues, council work to reduce the number of children coming into care
- Partnership led reviews of children's safeguarding in Southwark revealed no significant issues.
- Independent review and reform of children's social care and safeguarding by the central government, however there are no new funding streams from the government to support these changes

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Covid lockdown measures leading to increase in domestic abuse referrals involving children and families
- Need for data over a four year period rather than a two year period (Covid) which indicates a decrease in Child Protection Plans towards the end of the calendar year
- Training for new and existing parents facing parenting pressures
- Reasons for Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) review of 'Good' rather than 'Outstanding' for Southwark

Alasdair informed the commission that although it has been very difficult to exactly pinpoint the reasons behind domestic abuse cases involving children, this could have been due to parental pressures during Covid; the council has made an effort to get early help to the families in such cases.

The commission heard that children under Child Protection Plans are under the Child Protection System where issues and assessments are recorded over a period of time rather than referrals which have to be newly assessed. Only a small

minority of parents mean harm to their children and the council has done a lot of work within their safeguarding teams through training to ensure that parents suffering from anxiety during the pandemic do not get included in this minority.

Alasdair explained to the commission that the council offers a wide range of parenting programmes to meet the diverse need of parents from different culture ethnic backgrounds. The council run Children's Centre runs parenting programmes and also has graduation ceremonies which is a targeted approach towards early help service. In addition early help service in schools brings together Child Safety Agencies, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Children Health Agencies and Community and Voluntary Service where there is a comprehensive range of parenting programmes.

The commission heard that the Ofsted review of 'Good' is quite a high standard in Ofsted's review process with almost no criticism for Southwark, young people in Southwark have expressed their appreciation for the support received from Southwark's children's service which has made them feel as part of a family, the young people who gave feedback were chosen independently by Ofsted. However, there is an issue in private fostering arrangements, where improvement is required.

7. INTERVIEW WITH CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SCHOOLS

The commission then heard from Councillor Jasmine Ali on the following points

- Progress on Ofsted reviews from previous years
- Schools improvement report, 98% of good and outstanding schools in Southwark
- Plans to mitigate disruption in learning, felt by children and young people in early years and from disadvantaged backgrounds during Covid
- Strides in the progress of children in care from A Levels to University
- Recommendations from the 2021-2022 Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission on Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) incorporated into the new SEND strategy.
- SEND priority areas include: improving provision for complex needs; timely high quality early identification of needs; development of confidence and skills; development pathways into adulthood.
- New local SEND provisions in mainstream education in primary schools and local internships for SEND
- School based planning and 'Keeping Schools Strong' strategy, amalgamation and merging of schools.
- Mental health services like The Nest for young people between ages 11-25, 71% of schools signed up to the Youth New Deal Offer.
- Climate Action Schools Network, 17 schools registered which involves support for climate action, sustainability expertise sharing, collaborative engagement workshops and support for schools to net zero
- Air quality action plan for schools, pilot programme for installation of High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) in schools

- Southwark Stands Together: professional development teacher induction addressing all form of discrimination in schools, curriculum development in schools by lobbying Ofsted and Department for Education (DfE) to de-colonialize curriculum
- Inclusion Charter for Schools that has brought permanent exclusions down from 49 to 8 and no primary school exclusions

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- SEND and only minority number of students having EHCPs funding
- Increase in SEND at reception level in schools and upskilling teachers
- Protection of SEND children at risk of alienation due to high stakes testing & examination models and contradictory implications of a 'Good' Ofsted review on children with special needs
- Monitoring of Southwark Stands Together teacher training programmes and its impact in classrooms
- Falling rolls data, Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) and Keeping Schools Strong strategy with a focus on SEND, BAME and disadvantaged children

The commission heard from Councillor Ali and Nina Dohel (Director of Education, Southwark) that the new SEND strategy aims to increase provisions in primary schools. Current post-pandemic trends indicate rise in children with SEND needs and EHCP nationally, although pupil numbers are falling, these trends are indicative of socio-economic factors like financial pressure on families and the mental health effects on children. The new SEND strategy aims to work with teachers in all schools to develop their knowledge, understanding, confidence and capacity in working with SEND children across varying degrees of need.

Nina explained to the commission that as a part of the new SEND strategy the council has been working with SEND co-ordinators (SENCo) to develop a framework for early identification and assessment which put in place support and training needed rather than referrals and assessments in later years. Non-verbal children have been getting social skills programme and speech therapy work.

Councillor Ali explained to the commission that independent consultants have been appointed to analyse impact of falling rolls in schools and the results are expected in March 2023. The commission heard from Nina that the schools code of practice ensures that SEND children are receiving necessary support in all schools and should not be at a detriment by having to leave good schools.

The commission noted that there is a need to look at more detailed data on the impact of falling rolls in schools having more SEND children, as this can be disruptive for children with special needs.

Councillor Ali informed the commission that issues of exclusions and off-rolling of SEND children is at the core of the inclusion charter and the SEND strategy, council has conducted extensive discussions with Headteachers', primary and secondary school teachers on the difficult transition of SEND children moving to different stages in their education.

On Southwark Stands Together training, Nina explained to commission that we are still in early days of training programmes for teachers, the council has been in discussion with Headteachers on modifying, developing and improving their curriculum through feedback such as inclusion of Black History Month whilst ensuring that it includes the national curriculum as set by the DfE.

The commission noted that it would be useful to have sight of the falling rolls school data and report from the independent consultants before any plans and recommendations are made for closure of schools to help inform the scrutiny commission's own recommendations to Cabinet on falling rolls in schools.

Councillor Ali and Nina informed the commission that the independent consultants report and recommendations is expected to be ready between March and April 2023 and could possibly be shared with the commission in time for the next meeting on 19 April 2023.

On bringing exclusions to zero and the schools inclusion charter the commission learnt that it's important for all the schools, services and agencies involved with children to sign up and there are plans for a sign up event in the summer of 2023 at Southwark Council.

The commission also learnt that 17 Schools have signed up to the 'Let's go net Zero' network which is the Green Energy for Schools plan, experts from the field have been talking to schools about the physical building and also with students about combating the climate emergency.

The commission noted that although pupil numbers are falling due to housing costs, housing regeneration schemes, Brexit, Covid during which families had moved out of London, falling birth rates etc. however the need for pupil places and provisions for children with special needs is rising.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The Work Programme 2022-2023 was noted by the commission.

Meeting ended at 9:44 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: