

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Chloe Tomlinson (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice- Chair)
Councillor Jason Ochere
Councillor Joseph Vambe
Councillor John Batteson
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)
Jonathan Clay (Co-opted member)
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Irina Von Wiese who was substituted by Councillor Victor Chamberlain.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Renata Hamvas and Marcin Jagodzinski (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.

The Chair informed the commission about a change in the order of the agenda with item 7. Youth Employment St. Giles trust to be taken first; then item 6. Update on St. Mary Magdalene c of e primary school and Kintore Way nursery school and children's centre; and then item 5. Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP) process, demand and timeliness.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

There were no disclosures of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

The Chair suggested an amendment to the minutes of the meeting 19 October 2023 to explicitly add a recommendation on Kintore Way Nursey to be formulated on email with the scrutiny officer after the meeting.

That the council explore all possible options with regards to the restructuring at Kintore Way Nursery including

- i. Early years SEND funding (EHCP) for children under 5 in nurseries
- ii. Pilot programme of Resource Based Provision proposed for 3 posts of staff supporting 20 SEND children in a designated area of the nursery
- iii. Clearly devise a short and long term plan for reducing the budget deficit ensuring long term financial sustainability

This amendment to the minutes of the meeting on 19 October 2023 has now been made.

5. YOUTH EMPLOYMENT- ST GILES TRUST

The commission then received a report and also heard Russ Brummell, Senior Employment Caseworker St. Giles Trust on the following themes

- Southwark Works contract with St. Giles Trust; working with people having learning difficulties, disabilities, autism and also including care leavers, mental health issues, homelessness and substance abuse.
- Helping young people (16-25) education support and training, volunteering, apprenticeships; Dealing with complex cases over a long period of time reaching out to individuals who are overlooked in society due to problematic issues
- Helping people with applications, preparation for interviews, in-work support, getting organisations to make reasonable adjustments, peer based support.
- Case studies- 90 clients with special needs having dyslexia and autism, progress has been made with a lot of the clients securing jobs as teachers, nurses, bus drivers etc.

- AJ- from a family of 11 siblings all with complex needs, AJ has successfully completed level 3 painting and decorating course, working with St. Giles inspired confidence and helped AJ realise his potential even with household projects such as carpentry and electronics; St Giles supported him in securing Construction Skills Certification Scheme accreditation. AJ has also secured painting and decorating work on short term contracts for Sotheby's. AJ now also works with supporting young people with mental health issues in the area through St. Giles trust.
- Another case study on a young lady referred by the Local Mental Health unit who suffered from mental health issues stemming from a lack of parental care and families confidence in her life choices, such as volunteering to help under 15 girls into football and working with animals. With Russ's support this young individual has now been successful in interviewing securing two voluntary roles at the London Zoo looking after penguins and animals like giraffes and camels respectively.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Budget for the 4 contracts funded by Southwark Council; Processes and working relationship with Southwark Council; Areas of Southwark contracts and St. Giles trust which provide the most fruitful outcomes
- Career development in schools for young people with special needs; process for young people St. Giles and young offenders with special needs looking for employment; employment opportunities and hurdles faced
- Council definition of progression for better work and ring fencing employment and placement opportunities;

With regards to budgets for the 4 lot contracts in the report and working processes of Southwark Works with St. Giles and also areas where it would provide most fruitful results; the commission agreed that these questions be best put to the author of the report, Carleigh Grogan, Camberwell Skills & Employment Manager, St. Giles Trust in an email for a response.

Russ informed the commission that there is always a need for more caseworkers and also that there have been successes in other outreach programmes within St. Giles, however the problematic cases have been heavily reliant on education and training support service as it's the most experienced and critical to its success.

Russ explained to the commission that career development in schools lacks engagement with young people with special needs on career guidance and aspirations, and also that the focus should be on the immediate future plan for young people rather than long term career goals. Young people with special needs have become dis-enfranchised in society due to lack of social interactions during Covid and unattainable aspirations influenced by the internet.

The commission learned from Russ that there are employment opportunities in the job market, however employer expectations are normally for potential candidates to be able to do the job from day one, which in the case of young people with

special needs does not work. St. Giles invests a lot in education and career development training to bring such individuals up to speed to apply for those jobs. St. Giles does not follow a school training format with regards to timings and supports young people throughout their employment, as and when needed.

Russ informed the commission that he is unaware whether any progression for better work and ring-fencing jobs and placements has been explored by senior officers of the council and St. Giles trust. However, St. Giles does refer individual cases to the monitoring officers. St. Giles trust actively track percentage of young people with special need in employment within the contractual relationship with the council.

The Chair then suggested making recommendations around the following points

- Council ring-fencing employment and work placement opportunities for residents
- Better work progression
- Review of the Tri-Borough partnership that existed pre-pandemic.
- Employers to provide more entry level work

6. UPDATE ON ST MARY MAGDALENE C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL AND KINTORE WAY NURSERY SCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE.

The Chair updated the commission on her discussions with St Mary Magdalene C of E Primary School (SMMS) and Kintore Way Nursery School (KW)

- With regards to SMMS, nursery has been advertised and scheduled to start in January 2024 and discussions with the diocese are ongoing with requirements for the nursery
- With regards to KW, meetings took place with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) teachers and officers on 23 November 2023 on SEND strategy; Resource based provisions discussions have taken place and recommendations' produced have been sent to Anna Chiva Head of SEND, Southwark Council.; wider discussions around under 5 SEND provisions have also taken place, however no progress on piloting a resource based provision.

The commission then heard from Councillor Jasmine Ali and Alasdair Smith on St Mary Magdalene C of E Primary School and Kintore Way Nursery School on the following points

- Consultation on SMMS has been paused to achieve more desirable outcomes
- On KW, meeting Chair of Governors who is committed to balancing the budget, meetings with Unions, Headteachers, staff, children and parents
- Positive feedback from parents on discussions; Impact of falling rolls on funding for high (45%) SEND provisions nursery such as KW; Budget deficit

issues-letter written to MP Gillian Keegan

- Cross Party campaign for the issue of falling rolls, budget deficits and funding
- Southwark Council already contributed £550k for funding KW budget deficit also includes a 5 year budget recovery plan
- Government announcement of funding of £0.5m for education and a substantial amount for the benefit of KW nursery, however to be ratified by cabinet in coming weeks
- Letter to Martin Wilkinson, Chief Operating Officer NHS, for children with SEND and for increasing EHCP; subsequent visits to and meetings at KW with Martin, Alasdair and Cllr Ali for discussions on SEND.

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- 15 redundancies at KW would result in a loss of under 5 SEND provision for children at the nursery, incurring a higher cost for parents in early years and even higher costs for schools in late years; exploring the options for a pilot in resource based provision
- Lack of communication with SMMS and clarification on pausing consultation; Chair of governors driving the balancing of budget; loss of SEND skills and expertise with redundancies at KW (low-paid high skilled staff).

Cllr Ali informed the commission that it's not just KW that is facing budget issues, Ann Bernadt Nursery School is another example of a nursery undergoing consultation on amalgamation. Discussions are on-going with regards to resource based provisions in nurseries. Cllr Ali also clarified that KW is not closing but undergoing restructuring and redundancies whilst there are nurseries that are closing or being amalgamated.

Councillor Ali explained to the commission that SMMS consultation has been paused so that the diocese could look at possible amalgamations. At KW the budget deficit is £0.5m and this will keep accruing over time, there is a need for a budget recovery plan and efforts are being made to establish this with the Headteachers and the Chair of governors.

Alasdair informed the commission that the commission that schools are responsible for their own budget according to the law and also that the funding from Department for Education (DfE) is provided on the basis that it would be negotiated between the council and the schools. Furthermore, children with special needs fall under protected characteristics and it would be unlawful for them to be refused special needs education and training.

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- Criteria's that make KW eligible to receive a signifanct amount within £0.5m of DfE funding when compared to other nurseries

- Learnings from lack of communications with SMMS about closure/amalgamation
- Budgetary considerations for provisions of SEND children Under 5 in nurseries
- Balancing budgets in schools long term and short term; and how they can be replicated throughout the borough

The commission learned from Alasdair that the Council has a responsibility to deal with all nurseries that have a budget deficit not just KW. All schools in a budget deficit will be considered for financial aid and also all budgetary decisions are discussed in the schools forum. The number of schools in budget deficit has gone down from 24 to 12 schools. DfE are paying £20m on the basis that councils invest better in schools with regards to funding in SEND.

Alasdair explained to the commission that maintained nursery schools have economy of scale and injection of funding from DfE. Dulwich School is an example of maintained school who have managed their financial difficulties.

The Chair then suggested recommendations on the following topics

- Overview of nursery budgets and financial issues cross referenced with their SEND provisions
- Councillors and community members who are aware of schools and nurseries not getting support to contact the commission.
- Distribution (criteria) of DfE funding amongst schools; surplus budget schools.
- Following schools that are having funding issues

7. EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE PLAN (EHCP) PROCESS, DEMAND AND TIMELINESS.

The commission then heard from Anna, Michael and Alasdair on the following points of discussion

- Challenges facing the EHCP plans in London; retention in London; IT and database issues; utilising available date for operational issues.
- EHCP backlog issues resolved by May 2024; support to families at an early stage with SEND.
- Updating systems with regards to modern needs of education especially with SEND and EHCP systems; better data visualisation.

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- EHCP and SEND-IF funding in nurseries and schools per child with SEND
- Schools need for EHCP funding and councils trying to reduce the number of EHCP's (finite amount of monies)

- £85k spent on tribunal processes (EHCP) in years 2016-2017, and £135k spent on tribunals in 2017-2018 and £265k in 2018-2019
- One year wait for reception schools to get EHCP

Anna informed the commission that SEND pupils are assessed thoroughly and funding is agreed proportionally to the needs and it also goes through an annual review process by the council. The council funds any needs over the £6k dedicated schools grant for high needs pupils. Southwark and other councils are looking to support children with higher needs and discussions; and are taking place to provide pupil with special needs at an earlier stage. Southwark council is working on engaging with pupils, parents, Headteachers and schools to make better provisions for special needs.

Anna explained to the commission that EHCP tribunal cases are related to therapy provision, broader factors like residential provision and disagreements with parents about local provisions. National tribunal EHCP cases have a 93% success rates, however, tribunals have a lot of cases and the issues are diverse. There have also been meetings and mapping exercises with schools and head teachers on timelines for EHCPs' in reception.

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- Reasons for the rise in tribunals in Southwark since 2021 to significantly lower levels in other boroughs in London since; EHCP copy and paste practices to help speed up EHCPs' in Southwark
- Pathway for early years support with SEND pupils under 5 years

Alasdair agreed with the commission that EHCP provisions need to be a lot better within the borough and officers are working to fix these issues, whilst trying to provide EHCP's to pupils.

Michael explained to the commission that partnership workforce is helping to identify pupil needs early in their life including engaging with parents.

Anna explained to the commission that there are on-going trials to provide EHCP funding in early years, however it need to be targeted approach as needs vary. The councils' are looking at modelling different types of interventions.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

The commissions discussed adding the following points for the work programme

- EHCP update on timelines and processes
- Funding and budget deficit with other nurseries
- East street market renovation
- Update on KW and SMMS amalgamation/closures

Meeting ended at 9:17 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: