



Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 4 September 2024 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Cassandra Brown (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sunil Chopra
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Councillor Jon Hartley
Councillor Youcef Hassaine
Councillor Irina Von Wiese
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

There were no apologies for absence.

Apologies for lateness were received from Marcin Jagodzinski.

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 of a change in order of the agenda, item 7. the Cabinet Member Interview would be taken before items 5 and 6 on the agenda.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

There were no disclosures of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

7. CABINET MEMBER INTERVIEW- CHILDREN, EDUCATION & REFUGEES

The commission first received a presentation from Cllr Jasmine Ali the Cabinet member for Children, Education and refugees on the following points

- Challenges for children & families, refugees and young people; Children services leadership, scrutiny of Youth Justice Service Leadership
- Corporate parenting; one new care home; Lifelong links programme for children in care and care leavers.
- Free School Meals (FSM) - 10th Anniversary and rollout of FSM for secondary school children; Early Intervention and Prevention; Climate Action Plan and sustainability in schools.
- Keeping Education Strong (KES) strategy, falling birth rates, pupil place planning; Increase in adult education numbers; Mental Health in children and young people; demands in NEST mental health service; Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) waiting list 462 referrals in 44 weeks.
- Radically improving SEND services in Southwark; SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board and challenges faced; £700k investment in SEND; 98% good and outstanding schools, GCSE/A level student results higher than inner London and national trends
- School exclusions on the rise at 5.7% in Southwark, however still lower than other London boroughs, regular meetings between the council Headteachers; Inclusion Charter progress.
- Southwark 2030 work in mental health and SEND; Child Poverty Task force; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) grades to be replaced in schools with score cards; Early years expansion.
- Refugees- 2362 asylum seekers receiving support, 3rd highest in London; Borough of Sanctuary status for Southwark

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Closures and amalgamation of schools in the KES strategy; Number of school exclusions over the years; Library sanctuaries and adult education.
- Analysis of increase in exclusions; Adult education needs and upskilling; CAMHS waiting list and working with the NHS; Borough of Sanctuary and jobs for asylum seekers.
- Lifelong links program; Investment areas for £700k in SEND; School staff redundancies due to amalgamations and closures; Wider expansion of Borough Sanctuary process; Exclusions in the previous year, Demographics of school exclusions.

Councillor Ali explained to the commission that the council is constantly working on the numbers within the pupil place planning report with regards to closure and amalgamations of schools. Furthermore, previous pro-active steps taken in the KES have made progress in a positive way in dealing with falling pupil numbers in schools within Southwark. On exclusions, the commission heard that it was at 49 exclusions in 2018, which was reduced during the pandemic years, however it is now on the rise. Library sanctuaries are where adults can go to access information and support in education.

Councillor Ali informed the commission that poverty, cost-of-living and impact from the pandemic has had a major impact on children and their behavioural expectations in schools.

Adult education has seen significant progress, apprenticeships through the work of the local economy team working with industry partners. With regards to the CAMHS, new structures in health and social care and the wellbeing board meetings will help resolve the challenges in mental health, there is a need to clear the EHCP backlogs in partnership with the health service. Furthermore, employment is a key focus for asylum seekers and the Secretary of State has been invited to visit Southwark with regards to supporting refugees.

The commission heard from Councillor Ali that Lifelong Links program is about supporting children and young people, rebuilding links between children and young people with their families, including foster parents. Wider expansions of the borough of sanctuary involves working with voluntary sectors such as Community Southwark, Centre for Asylum Seekers, Afghanistan refugee centre.

5. PARENT CARER FORUM REPRESENTATIVE (SEND)

The commission then heard from Nicky Rolfe Chair (PCF) on the following themes

- Various forms of mental health issues from self-harming to eating disorders; Significant progress In SEND provisions, since the new appointment of Asst. Director of SEND at Southwark Council; Example of child in foster

care, not being diagnosed early and then excluded in secondary school.

- Lack of resilience in schools when dealing with children with SEND, despite existing facilities, specialist staff and resources; Challenges with oversubscribing in SEND schools and issues accessing health services.
- Need for parent training with regards to SEND children; Delays in accessing health services leads to increases severity of SEND issues in later life; PCF focus groups on different ages and different diagnosis including speech and languages areas.

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Changes needed in SEND; Training for staff in schools for SEND; Specific issues with Health service; Severity levels of SEND children.

Nicky explained to the commission that parents working in SEND are completely voluntary and there is a growing need for parents of children with SEND to be educated on Autism, ADHD etc. Furthermore, there is an increased need for Schools and the Health service to work together with parents to tackle the challenges faced in children with SEND. Schools have dedicated SEND co-ordinators that teach classes and this needs to be encouraged in mainstream schools. The funding for SEND needs to be proportionately distributed amongst special needs and mainstream schools, mainstream schools struggle with providing SEND services within their budgets. Speech and language needs of SEND children are not properly understood by the public. Health services such as at Sunshine house are usually a one-time diagnosis of SEND issues; these are lifelong disabilities which can get worse over time, and there is a need to for these services to be comprehensive, ongoing, and lifelong such as the wide-ranging support and care for cancer.

The commission heard from Nicky that there are lot examples of SEND children including her own, who have learnt to read and write themselves and excel in areas of mathematics. However, SEND children can achieve these only for a certain period as they struggle to cope with day-to-day life.

6. EARLY INTERVENTION AND SEND INCLUDING EHCPS'

The commission then received a presentation from Anna Chiva, Asst. Director for SEND and heard from Joe Gould (Early Years Team), Kathy Johnston and Lindsey (Speech and Language Therapy team)

- Early Intervention in SEND, timely and early intervention in SEND, Communication and social interaction pilot, specialist resources provision, multi-agency transition panel, early language and communication development

- SEND Inclusion Fund provision for 3-4 years old increased by 147% from £250k to £680k, average SENDIF support contribution per child £3000k.
- EHCP timeliness in Southwark just below national average; EHCP Process Improvement; SEND partnership board's strategic vision to overcome challenges; EHCP process improvement.
- Early Language & Home Learning Improvement; Home learning single most important factor; Intervention programs at home and their impact on children; National Literacy Trust Programme; Early Words Together program for young children.
- Raising Early Achievement in Literacy by training and supporting parents in the early home learning environment; Opportunities, Recognition, and Interaction Model (ORIM)
- Early Communication Needs, Developmental Language Disorder; Scale of the speech, language and communication needs; Screening tools for Special needs (WellComm) based on Red Amber Green (RAG) rating.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Number of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in early years in Southwark; long term effect of Covid on young children's language development; Children from diverse back grounds and from abroad and its impact on their language developments.
- Early infancy mental and interaction health checks; Indicators for speech and language communication needs.

The commission learnt from officers that there are 800 children with speech, language and communication needs in Southwark. Officers agreed to provide numbers on the percentage of SEND children that Southwark can support and help in speech and language. Multilingual families and children are celebrated in Southwark and is a key message from the council. Children with SLCN would have issues in their language development in English as well as their primary languages; and the assessment efficacy factors this in as well. Multilingual children have better educational outcomes because of their proficiency in different languages. EHCP assessment completion within 20 weeks is at 48 % nationally, and Southwark is between 45-46 %, the aim is to be at 80%. Infants and young children in the UK undergo universal health checks. Upskilling practitioners and child minders within the borough is key to providing early intervention for babies and young children. Early year signs for SLCN are exhaustive and range from verbal and non-verbal indicators such as eye-contact within the first 16 months.

8. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

The commission discussed the need to review the root causes of school absences, especially within families. The commission also talked about the job skills needed for the Southeast London early prisoners release plan.

In addition, the commission discussed how community representatives could be more in touch with local schools.

The commission also noted that Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer, has stepped down as a co-opted member and representative of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark and that a new co-opted member would be appointed in due course to the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission.

Meeting ended at 9.30 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: