

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 6.30 pm (Online/Virtual meeting).

PRESENT:	Councillor Peter Babudu (Chair) Councillor Humaira Ali (Reserve) Councillor Radha Burgess (Reserve) Councillor Eleanor Kerslake Councillor Richard Leeming Councillor Michael Situ Martin Brecknell Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer Nicole Gordon
OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods
OFFICER SUPPORT:	Everton Roberts, Head of Overview and Scrutiny (Acting)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anood Al-Samerai, Karl Eastham and Eliza Mann.

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

There were no late items.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 26 October 2020, 27 January 2021 and 22 February 2021 be approved as correct records.

5. SOUTHWARK'S REFRESHED PLANS FOR YOUTH PROVISION IN SOUTHWARK

The commission received an update from Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education in respect of the refreshed plans for youth provision in Southwark.

Councillor Ali highlighted the follow key developments in respect of youth:

- The establishment of a new Youth Parliament
- New Sure Start for Teenagers
- Relaunch of the Positive Futures Fund
- The establishment of a new officer and Member group to oversee new developments in relation to Youth.

Questions and discussion were held around the following areas:

- The financial limit set around Youth Parliament deciding where the positive future fund goes.
- The current percentage of young people benefiting from the current youth plan and estimated percentage of young people that will benefit under the new plan.
- The future of youth clubs
- Making the Southwark Youth offer more accessible

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMISSIONS SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF EXCLUSIONS AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education informed the commission that a head teacher and lead member task and finish group had been established to look at findings from the exclusions report, and ideas from the conference around 'keeping children in school'. It was explained that due to the lockdown and schools being closed, the scheduled meetings had to be cancelled. This would be picked up again now that schools had re-opened. Councillor Babudu, chair of the commission would be invited to the first meeting.

The commission also heard from Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director of Family, Early Help and Youth Justice.

Jenny advised that permanent exclusions had significantly reduced. There was a peak of 50 in Southwark Schools in 2017/18, down to 39 in 2018/19 and the indicative data for 2019/20 was 11 (based on 2 terms worth of data).

Jenny explained that the latest published DfE data related to 2018/19 school year, but there was also census data from 2019/20 which was being reviewed by her team. Jenny highlighted that an area of concern was the rate of permanent exclusions for black Caribbean children which was 1.5 times higher than the rate for white British children. The rate for mixed white and black Caribbean children was slightly higher at a rate of 1.1 times. It was this level of analysis that her team were undertaking to try and understand the reasons for this. As the overall numbers were quite small it was possible to look at the individual cases.

In terms of fixed period exclusions, Jenny reported that there was a notable difference between the ethnicity of pupils being given permanent exclusions compared to fixed period exclusions with an overall highest rate of fixed period exclusions being given to black pupils, a rate of 5.22, and second highest rate being mixed ethnicity children at a rate of 4.83, and white children at a rate of 3.9. Jenny expressed that this was of concern. Jenny hypothesised that a reduction in permanent exclusions may have led to fixed period exclusion rates going up in the short term. The data was ready to be shared with schools, and head teachers invited to review the data and the policies within their schools around exclusions.

Nina Dohel, Director of Education informed the commission that the detailed analysis would also be considered by the task and finish group with a view to looking at the changing and shifting trends to feed into the longer term strategy around how the council works with schools with the goal of eliminating exclusions.

The commission asked questions around the following:

- The role of the task and finish group in relation to partnership working with schools
- Work around home schooling and identifying off-rolling
- The views of young people of who have been excluded being incorporated into the strategy.

Nina informed the commission that there would possibly be an increase in home schooling where some families had had a positive experience with home schooling and would like that to continue. Nina stressed that there must not be an increase in home schooling due to off-rolling. Nina reported that an additional resource had been obtained through the budget challenge process, which would be used to provide additional resource to the growing homeschool sector, and also to work with family early help to look forensically at where the council thinks/can evidence occurrences of off-rolling.

In terms of the role of the task and finish group, Nina hoped to see a school led strategy around the approach to inclusion and alternative provision. The thrust of the task and finish group was to come up with a new way of looking at how to make sure that children and young people are accessing the education that they need. Nina indicated that terms of reference were being developed for the task and finish group with a focus on being really clear of what the outputs need to be.

Councillor Ali confirmed that young people's voices will inform the strategy.

7. THE COUNCIL'S WORK TO SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS VIA A DEDICATED TRUST AND OTHER PRE-EXISTING CHANNELS

The commission received an update from Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education in respect of children in care.

Councillor Ali informed the commission that the council had been working with the charity 'Catch 22' to reshape the care offer with a view to setting up a Trust to be led by young people. Councillor Ali explained that the care leavers had indicated that they did not want a new trust and had a preference to stay with the Council. Care leavers were requesting a significant increase in access to employment opportunities and housing, the council was therefore focusing on this.

Councillor Ali informed the meeting that consultation had been undertaken with children in care and care leavers about service provision throughout Covid. The council also sought their thoughts about Black Lives Matter and Southwark Stands Together. Feedback from the consultation was incorporated into Southwark Stands Together programme and the council's response to Covid.

An issue that came through in the consultation discussions was that young people felt quite isolated throughout the pandemic and needed more support. An additional £90,000 had been allocated to foster carers to help support children throughout the pandemic.

8. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S SEND EDUCATION PROVISION STRATEGY

The commission received an update from Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education in respect of SEND provision.

Councillor Ali reported that the council had opened up a new school in September in the Camberwell area which catered for both primary and secondary school pupils and a college opened in Newington Ward.

An additional £500,000 had been put aside in the council budget for assessments

for Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). £500,000 had also been set aside for transport provision.

Nina Dohel informed the commission that a briefing note had been produced in response to questions raised ahead of the meeting. This would be circulated to members of the commission.

Nina informed the commission that the previous SEND strategy was coming to an end. One of the pillars around the strategy was around Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and the department was just completing a review of ASD provision, once complete this would feed into the refresh of the strategy.

Questions were raised around the following by commission members:

- A commission member highlighted that the human rights commission was expected to shortly release the findings of their inquiry into the treatment of disabled children in schools, particularly in relation to potentially harmful restraint, isolation booths and other forms of isolation. The commission member enquired as to whether the council held any information on the use of these techniques in Southwark schools [special schools, mainstream schools and mainstream post 16 settings] and whether any research had been undertaken on the impact of such techniques on children's mental health and education. It was suggested that senior officers come back to the committee once the inquiry was published.
- Keeping children with SEND in mainstream education where possible so that they can receive education alongside their peers, and how it will be funded.
- The accountability of schools for reporting SEND spend to school governors and transparency in this area / annual reports being published on school websites.

In responding to the question relating to keeping children in mainstream education, Councillor Ali explained that it was a matter for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which had been the cause of consternation [how support for SEND was funded and money available], the council was spending money but was not receiving it back from the government. Councillor Ali further explained that where mainstream schools had SEND pupils, that this was supported, but that there were also brand new state of the art schools which had been purpose built for children with autism. Councillor Ali expressed that there was a mix of options and it was about giving parents and pupils' choice.

In relation to the question on restraint, Nina explained that there was no duty on schools to report it or for the local authority to collect that information, however just like any other form of discrimination, or unacceptable incidents, the school should be recording incidences for their own purposes and report that to the governor's or board. Nina further explained that there were very clear guidelines on restraint,

this was set out in the 'keeping children safe in education' safeguarding document. Nina expressed that whilst she could not say that it does not happen, Southwark special schools are second to none and leaders in their field were acutely aware of all issues around restraint, including the impact on young people.

In relation to question around funding for schools, Nina explained that funding for schools was very complex. Nina stressed that there was a national crisis around funding for SEND, which has not been addressed by the DfE. Southwark had been at the forefront of raising the issue with DfE. Nina reported that there had been a slight increase in funding, but it was not keeping pace with the scale of numbers and need.

Nina explained that because Southwark has excellent assessment professionals in the health and education sector, more and more children at a younger age were being identified as having more and more complex needs. The default position was that for as long and as far as possible that children stay in mainstream schools, and that would be supported. Only where there is the need for specialised education, would a pupil come out of the mainstream setting, with an aim to keep the child within the borough. This would not be possible in all cases due to the needs of some children being so specialised, which may require residential placements. Nina indicated that these placements came at an extremely high cost, but the financial provision was not being made for that.

In relation to the reporting of SEND spend, Nina explained that schools have been spending more money than they have been allocated for SEND provision. In terms of accountability the information on spend should be being reported to Governor's and being included in the minutes. Anybody could request to inspect governor minutes and would be able to see what the reporting mechanisms were.

9. PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND EDUCATION THROUGH COVID

Councillor Peter Babudu, Chair of the Commission outlined the commission's draft recommendations which had been informed by issues that had emerged from the commission's work throughout the year in relation to the pandemic and resultant lockdown. The chair highlighted the following areas

- The mental health of school children, particularly primary school children and what support could be provided in schools.
- Supporting young people's wellbeing including providing early access to public spaces as they reopen
- The council advocating an evidenced based informed approach to helping young people catch up
- Role of the council supporting schools in relation to digital access

Jenny Brennan informed the commission that mental health support was being delivered through a multi-agency approach, such as the public health nurse,

running wellbeing sessions which could be accessed by parents and children, the NEST work being undertaken with parents, Early help, CAMHS and child wellbeing practitioners. Services could be accessed at primary and secondary school, and community as not every child was attending school. There was also the back to school email and Back to School working group (a multi-agency group) that had been meeting weekly since May.

The chair informed the meeting that the commission was due to hear further evidence from young people at the next meeting, and following that would seek to finalise the commission's recommendations to cabinet.

10. COUNCIL'S ACTION PLAN FOR HIGH STREETS AND TOWN CENTRES - PROGRESS UPDATE

The commission received a progress update from Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods in respect of the council's action plan for high streets and town centres. The commission also heard from Danny Edwards, Strategy and Partnerships Manager.

Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that the action plan was in the process of being developed. Councillor Macdonald reported the council was working on a number of themes, one of which was around business support, increased growth and community wealth building. The council was also looking at how high streets could be shaped to best effect, through planning policies, regeneration, working with communities, celebrating the diversity of the high street through cultural activities, transport and movement and look and feel of high streets.

Work on preparation of the plan was ongoing and It was anticipated that the plan which was in early draft form could be given wider circulation within a couple of months.

Questions, discussion and points were made around the following:

- Turnaround of letting out shops and business premises
- Sustainable freight and the high street, in particular traffic interventions and impact on the high street
- Taking best practices happening within different parts of the borough, to be included as part of the core framework approach to high streets
- Community renewal fund
- Short term support on supporting re-opening of businesses
- Providing opportunities for businesses to test new locations in other parts of the borough
- Low line project (animating the railway infrastructure and use of derelict arches)
- Work being undertaken with other authorities in connection with high streets

In respect of lettings, Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that there was a monitoring plan in place of what shops were vacant and this would be done on a continual basis.

11. PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF HIGH STREETS AND TOWN CENTRES

The commission received feedback from Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods on the commission's preliminary draft recommendations.

Councillor Macdonald confirmed with the commission that a number of the preliminary recommendations were already being covered within in the work the council was doing, including mapping, baselining and the development of a community wealth building approach.

Councillor Macdonald referenced and directed the commission to the new corporate asset management plan agreed by the cabinet in January 2021. In relation to the Creative Compact, Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that a deadline of the end of March had been given by the Arts Council for a response on how the council intended to move forward with the project. There was a re-engagement process being undertaken with the sector to look at how best to use the money, particularly in light of the Southwark Stands Together initiative.

In terms of resourcing, due to there being no definite plans to have future rounds of the High Street Challenge, Councillor Macdonald suggested to the commission that they make a recommendation asking cabinet to explore how specific funding can be made available to support some pilot projects.

In relation to improving digital and physical connections and accessibility to high streets, Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that a Digital Strategy was due to be brought to cabinet.

12. PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF EQUALITIES

The commission received feedback from Councillor Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods on the commission's preliminary draft recommendations. The commission also heard from Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities.

Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that the preliminary recommendations had highlighted a lot of the priorities that the council would be looking at.

In terms of consolidating equalities data, Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that this would be done. The starting point would be to compile the equalities impact assessments in one place for ease of access to the

assessments. A similar initiative had been undertaken by Hackney Council and Southwark would be seeking to emulate that model.

Councillor Macdonald indicated that benchmarking was being undertaken and an annual report around equalities could also be considered.

In terms of the evaluation of current stakeholder groups and interested parties, clarification on the commission's priorities was sought in relation to this. Councillor Macdonald explained that she had tried to establish whether a formal list of stakeholder groups existed due to the number of stakeholder groups that may exist both with formal and informal relationships with the council. In the absence of this, Councillor Macdonald advised that the priority commitment within this area would be with Southwark Stands Together. The council plan commitment was starting with looking at tenant and resident association committees, voluntary and community sector organisations supported by the council and cultural boards.

In terms of establishing closer relationships with business improvement districts, Councillor Macdonald informed the commission that a meeting had taken place with BIDs earlier that week which was a positive first step.

Following further comment and discussion on the evaluation of stakeholder groups, Councillor Macdonald advised the commission that within the equalities framework, guidance would be included on consultation and engagement with different stakeholders.

13. WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21

RESOLVED:

That the work programme as at 17 March 2021 be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.19pm

CHAIR:

DATED: