

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 6 March 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 Joseph Vambe
Councillor Cassandra Brown
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Irina Von Wiese (Substitute for Councillor David Watson)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Watson who was substituted by Councillor Irina Von Wiese and apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Renata Hamvas.

Apologies were also received verbally from Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member) prior to the meeting which were unwittingly missed at the meeting.

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

There were no urgent items of business that the Chair deemed as urgent.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

There were no disclosures of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice-Chair) made an addition to the minutes of the meeting 8 February 2023 which has since been amended to reflect the following.

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.

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2023 were approved as a correct record following the above amendment.

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

The commission heard from Paul Smith, Regional Officer London, National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) on falling school rolls around the following points.

- Role of NAHT in representing and supporting Headteachers, 35000 members Nationally
- Challenges in financial resourcing for schools, reduction in capacity of schools, Increase in children's varying needs- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Reducing Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) two form to one form resulting in a downward spiral
- Issues with the consultation process wherein consultation with trade unions and staff occurs only after the decision is made for the future changes and/or closure of a school
- Southwark at risk of losing educational expertise in the form of Headteachers and Staff.
- Implementation of the Mitigating Falling School Rolls- Keeping Education Strong Strategy (Southwark Council) would be key in ensuring that effective solutions are found whilst retaining the pool of expertise and staff
- Importance of managing declining budgets effectively whilst producing the same high quality education and fulfilling SEND needs.

The commission then asked questions on the following themes.

- Percentage of Headteachers in NAHT in Schools in Southwark; Views on the Keeping Education Strong strategy; Advantages and Disadvantages of reducing PAN numbers; Budgetary pressures prior to discussions on closure of schools; Council's role in early intervention and pro-activeness
- Impact of economic demographic of Southwark on falling school numbers; repurposing certain areas of schools like sports and leisure facilities for renting income
- Transforming mainstream schools at risk of closure to a SEND school
- Council support to Headteachers who are at risk of losing their jobs due to closure of their schools; unintended consequences such as losing talented middle leaders in teaching staff who aspire to become Headteachers
- Polarisation of white middle class parents towards affluent schools; Impact of the rising cost of living in suburbs on schools in terms of falling rolls and the effect on schools especially in poorer areas where English is a second language hence needing more English language support

Paul explained to the commission that there are 170 members in Southwark Schools in NAHT and are very well represented in primary schools when compared to secondary schools. Paul also informed the commission that some schools have bulged classes together to deal with falling numbers. On Keeping Education Strong strategy, Southwark is one of the boroughs that has a strategy document compared to many other boroughs who don't have a strategy and vision, however implementation is key with regards to the different varying needs of local communities and local solutions are needed. NAHT members are keen to be part of the solution by being involved in the discussions early in the process, they have ambitious visions for their schools, students and communities and are also aware of local issues within their communities.

On reducing PAN numbers and merging schools, Paul explained to the commission that some schools might not be fit for purpose such as Old Victorian built schools and larger newer schools might be able to compete better for pupil numbers. However, when a school is closed and merged with another, the identity of the school site that is closed disappears and cannot be brought back at a later date. School children have varying levels of success in different sized schools, larger schools as a result of mergers might be beneficial to some children but not others.

Paul agreed with the commission that the economic development and the resulting demographic has had an impact on falling rolls and perhaps such factors should be considered when planning and development decisions are made in the borough.

Paul informed the commission that Headteachers are continually looking at generating income from leisure facilities, there is an example where council run speech and language therapy unit was based in the school, which was later

closed, thus losing the provision of the unit and the income generated from facility. There also might be a case for looking into capital funding for schools who are not able to rent out sports fields due to inadequate facilities such as lack of proper fences etc.

Paul explained to the commission that SEND schools have a high demand for staff due to varying needs such as additional medical staff. Some children thrive better in mainstreams schools if they have the right provisions and support in the form of EHCPs and CAHMS referrals. SEND provisions and schools are in high demand and it's an area where huge financial investment is required.

The commission learnt from Paul that teaching staff needing HR support during the closure of school always comes in the later stages of stakeholder school closure consultation causing a lot of anxiety and frustration. There is a real need to supporting teachers during this with early intervention by the council. National surveys has revealed a rise in teachers leaving the profession due to various challenges, this includes Asst. Headteachers, deputies and middle leaders. The current pay dispute strike is one of the examples of the issues the education sector faces.

Paul explained to the commission that the decisions made by parents in choosing or changing schools often relies on Ofsted results, local perceptions and reputations. The main factor governing over or under subscription in schools is funding which relies on pupil numbers; some other funding exists for English as a second language, pupil premiums and SEND. Schools with a high a number bilingual children are celebrated as a positive trend amongst educators.

6. IMPACT OF THE COST-OF LIVING CRISIS - SOUTHWARK BLACK BUSINESS NETWORK

The commission then heard from Shade Abdul, Chair of the Southwark Black Business Network and Tina Daley on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis ion East Street traders and black businesses.

- Importance of shopping in East Street markets compared to shopping in high street retailers in the wake of the cost-of living crisis
- Impact of the decrease in spending by customers and rising business costs; Extreme economic hardships leading to East Street traders resorting to creating publicity in the media and protests planned for the next day (7 March 2023) outside Southwark Council Offices on Tooley Street
- Increase in rent on council owned properties and decrease in foot-fall on East Street with no increase in pitch sizes for traders, leading to closures of some businesses.
- Comparison of prices at East Street market who cater to low income people compared to Borough Market, Morrison's, Sainsbury's and Tesco's.
- No advertising support for East Street Traders; Increase in rent for pitches

from £312 to £380 monthly without any increase in size of pitches for trading

- Need for the Council to invest in and supports places like East Street traders to make it more attractive to visitors

The commission then asked questions around the following points.

- Comparison of post Covid recovery of Business Improvements Districts (BIDs) like South Bank and Blue Bermondsey to East Street traders
- Publicity needed in terms of what the individual areas in the borough have to offer to local people and visitors
- Existing Council support for traders in the local economy; freeze on rent prices for traders
- Lack of variety in trading on East street leading to decrease in foot fall; Lack of one hour free parking for people with mobility issues; Lack of Evening or night Markets

Tina informed the commission that East Street market has been around for a long time, other areas such as Elephant Park and surrounding areas have been getting investment. East Street Market needs more publicity by advertising with regards to its history.

Tina explained to the commission that there is no freeze on rent prices and also that there is no support for East Street traders from the council, in addition traders face challenges such as parking charges amounting to £490 per year for their trailers and customers have to pay £4.80 an hour for parking; bus routes through Wharf road are due to be closed. The number of East traders have decreased from 260 to 80.

The commission learnt from Tina that around East Street the council has been renting out properties that have mainly been turned into stores that are selling Afro-Caribbean produce which is predominantly owned by a single family, thus attracting just that demographic of shoppers, toy stores and florists have disappeared from the shops on East Street. Traders have parking for a limited time between 9am-12am and customers have no free parking at all. Tina informed the Commission that East Street traders were keen to have a Night Market or an evening market, however Council's management staff finish work by 5 pm and there is no one left to manage the spaces for traders.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes.

- Fundamentals for investment in place; Comparison between issues faced by East Street traders and other businesses in the Southwark Black Business Network
- Council's role in promoting East Street market as a cultural and festival market
- Trader's role in managing tidiness of their stalls; Homes deliveries of Fruit

and Veg from East Street

Tina explained to the commission she herself has been a trader on East Street for almost 40 years and they have had no issues with council charges until now; investing in places would mean looking at the future of the entire community and East Street has been forgotten in that respect with no investment whatsoever. In addition there also seems to be a trend of organisations using cost-of-living crisis as an excuse to raise prices hurting local businesses.

Shade informed the commission that Southwark Black Business Network is quite a new organisation and funding from the council such as Southwark Pioneer's Fund is quite challenging for businesses to get access to; as it's required for the businesses to have to develop and gain expertise by attending courses, which is quite challenging whilst running a full time business.

The commission learnt from Tina that in 2015-2016 she had helped organise festivals but since the change in management of the site there has been a lack of interest in this aspect from the management. In the past traders have added their monies in addition to the money provided by the council management for hosting festivals for the community.

Shade informed the commission that it's important to look at changing demographics within the community and more research is needed in terms of insights into the changing needs of the public within the community, and also visitors that could be potential customers.

Tina explained to the commission that issues that have been raised in the past of vegetables lying on the ground has now been resolved by raising the displays to a height. Home deliveries are carried out by East Street traders on certain days and only when they have more resources to run their stalls. However there are issues with management not adequately monitoring stalls leading to some licensing issues with shops displaying products beyond the limits allowed to them by the council.

7. DRAFT SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair and the commission then discussed drafting recommendations around the following points.

- Council's role in working with the GLA in using council data to develop GLA's modelling methodology in projecting pupil numbers in schools
- Exploring the different mechanisms through which there could be temporary reduction in Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) from a two-form to one-form entry for schools, rather than closure or amalgamations of schools
- Need for a long term strategy especially in terms of having a pro-active in

response to projected budget deficits in schools by early intervention and reduction of PAN numbers; Ring fencing budgets around affluent schools to help provide some financial support for schools with falling rolls.

- Cascading the benefits of central areas of already successful businesses like Bermondsey outwards to the wider borough's streets by providing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money; CIL Money for East Street rather than streets like Elephant Park who already have the needed infrastructure.
- Investment in the council's governance and management structure for support to Local Businesses by appointing business liaison officers
- Exploring options around transforming mainstream schools that face amalgamation or closures, to schools where there are SEND provisions and support for children with special needs.
- Need for a Local trader to be involved as co-operative in managing businesses on East street
- Need for clear distinction in remits for cabinet portfolios to allow timely intervention by the council; for e.g. Cabinet member for Business not being responsible for business rates leading to businesses reaching a crisis point due to businesses being unable to pay rent
- Strategy for unused and closed school buildings; repurposing and planned delegation of school buildings
- Review of Council support for longstanding businesses when compared to new businesses

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

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

Meeting ended at 9:18 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: