

Item No. 22.	Classification: Open	Date: 13 June 2023	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Review of mitigating falling pupil numbers in schools	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That cabinet note the recommendations from the education and local economy scrutiny commission arising from the scrutiny review mitigating falling pupil numbers in schools in the London Borough of Southwark, paragraphs 14 to 21.
2. That the cabinet considers the recommendations from the education and local economy scrutiny commission and request that the relevant cabinet member reports back to cabinet within eight weeks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. At its meeting on 20 July 2022 the education and local economy scrutiny commission received a report from the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education and the Director of Education on short falls in primary pupil numbers across Southwark schools with regards to scale of the issue, Falling Population Rates (Births), Impact of Demographics, future forecast implications, and Pupil Premiums.
4. At its meeting on 17 October 2022 the commission heard from Headteachers' at Ivydale, St. George's and Victory primary schools on falling pupil numbers especially due to Brexit & Covid, rehousing of families outside the borough, school tourism, budgetary constraints, regeneration projects and high rent costs
5. At the same meeting the commission received a report from the planning policy manager on planning strategies for family sized homes to help mitigate falling rolls in schools; with a focus on Brexit & People Migration, Greater London Authority (GLA) Pupil Roll projections, Southwark Plan 2022 (Family Friendly Neighbourhoods) and child yield analysis
6. At its meeting on Tuesday 6 December 2022 heard from the Church Of England (COE) Diocese, explaining the circumstances leading to the closure of St. Johns Walworth School and the learnings for Southwark

Council. The diocese explained the different impacts on schools across the diocese of Southwark by falling pupil numbers, consultation process for St. Johns Walworth, need for strong governing bodies, and communications with parents. The commission also discussed tracking and management of Published Admission Numbers (PAN), interaction with the GLA on schools' projections and using their forecasts to manage school numbers across the diocese.

7. Furthermore, at the same meeting the commission heard from the Demography and City Modelling Manager at GLA; explaining population projections and the School Rolls Projections Service, Department for Education (DfE) data, pupil place planning & methodology, demographics analysis (GLA & DfE), working with Local Authorities (LA) and challenges faced such as falling birth rates. The commission then discussed the impact on school rolls projections due to; previous years (2004 onwards) increase in birth rate, inaccuracies in the school rolls projections in 2015-2016, factors such as housing affordability and cost-of-living crisis.
8. At its meeting on 8 February 2023 the commission interviewed Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools on an overview of key strategies and projects under the portfolio with a focus on key aspects such as; Keeping Education Strong strategy, Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) ratings, school funding in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis, reception cohorts data, Health and Safety of Children (Air-quality), Inclusion Charter for Schools, green Energy for schools, racism in schools, Global Ethnic Majority¹ school staff disciplinary and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) strategy. The commission also discussed Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)s' funding, increase in SEND pupils at reception level, Southwark Stands Together teacher training programme, Falling rolls data and Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) of schools affected by falling school rolls with a focus on SEND, Global Ethnic Majority and disadvantaged children.
9. At its meeting on 6 March 2023 the commission heard from the London Regional Officer, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) on; Role of NAHT in representing and supporting Headteachers and also challenges such as financial resourcing, reduction in capacity, SEND increase, issues in reducing PAN, issues with consultation process for reduction in PAN and closure/amalgamation of schools.
10. At the same meeting the commission also discussed; 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 the economic demographic of Southwark on falling school numbers, repurposing certain areas of schools like sports and leisure facilities for renting income, transforming mainstream schools

¹ <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/schools/school-of-education/final-leeds-beckett-1102-global-majority.pdf>

at risk of closure into a SEND school, council support to Headteachers and school staff who are at risk of losing their jobs due to closure of their schools and the impact on Global Ethnic Majority staff and children due to school closures and redundancies.

11. At its meeting on 19 April 2023 the commission received reports from the director of education and an independent consultant on the Keeping Education Strong Strategy, area wise planning, Ofsted ratings, reception surplus capacity & places, recommendations from the independent consultation report, PAN reduction and/or amalgamations & closures, borough-wide actions taken and its impact, Schools data on Free School Meals (FSM), SEND and Global Ethnic Majority pupils.
12. At the same meeting the commission also discussed communication with schools leaders and the need for specific EIAs for every school facing reduction in PAN and/or amalgamation and closures; and its impact on Global Ethnic Majority, FSM and SEND staff & children. In addition the commission also discussed the HR impact and having robust processes for redundancies, redeployment and retraining especially to support teachers, teaching assistants, Headteachers and staff.
13. The commission considered and agreed the recommendations at its meeting on 19 April 2023. The rationale and commission recommendations are set out in paragraphs 14 to 21.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Set out below are the recommendations of the education and local economy scrutiny commission.

14. It is evidenced in addresses to the commission that population projections has seen a significant reduction in birth rates from 2010 to 2020 across London. Some of the factors such as Brexit and the Covid pandemic have contributed to the migration of young families out of London and even the UK. Inflation in population projections between in 2015-2016 were caused by high international migration, especially in London where migration was higher than other parts of the country. Therefore affecting school rolls projection that produced higher numbers, in addition to other challenges of predicting fertility rates, family planning decisions, housing completion and delivery. In addition to these, rising housing rents, regeneration projects and housing shortages have further exacerbated the issue of falling pupil numbers.

Recommendation 1 - That the cabinet should promote dialogue between the housing, planning and education directorates to develop further planning strategies for family sized home building in close proximity to Southwark schools.

15. The commission recognises that GLA school rolls projections are incredibly challenging to produce as such projections are based on 'Trend

Based Population Projections', also used by Office for National Statistics (ONS) for general population projections. GLA use a multi-regional model based on past trends of birth and death rates and then factor in housing data from Local Authorities, this model then assigns children to actual schools, based on patterns. The time from the birth of a child to the age at which a child is admitted to reception school is very short, official data could take up to two years to be processed and published making it difficult to produce accurate projections. The commission concludes that there is a need for the council to work more closely with the GLA to develop and adapt the Council's own methodology, software coding and data. The current Local Authority Data modelling is based on revisions in Census Data and it takes years for the GLA to update their school rolls projections.

Recommendation 2 - That the cabinet review the council's current working process with the Greater London Authority (GLA) on matters related to sharing and use of Council data to produce pupil place projections and also to ensure that Council data is used to develop the GLA's modelling methodology to produce more accurate projections in the coming municipal year 2023-2024.

16. As evidenced in the discussions of the closure St. Johns Walworth School, that the school had historic budget deficits however this was not the only deciding factor, the in-year deficits contributed to the decisions taken as they weren't any options to manage that over a long term. The management of Published Admission Numbers (PAN) is an effective strategy to keep costs lower. Tracking PAN and a temporary reduction in PAN can be an effective tool to reduce the staffing costs which could help with coping in-year budget deficits, giving the school an opportunity to grow in the future to original levels. This needs to be considered prior to any decision making on schools, reducing the size of the school to one-form entry would preserve the footprint of the school.

Recommendation 3 - That the cabinet commission officers to explore the different mechanisms through which there could be a temporary reduction in Published Admission Numbers (PAN) from a two-form to a one-form entry for schools facing closure or amalgamation prior to any decisions of closure or amalgamation.

17. The commission appreciates the council's commitment to increase SEND provisions at reception and in primary schools as current post-pandemic trends indicate a rise in children with SEND needs and EHCPs 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. The ratio of staff/teachers to children with special needs is higher in SEND schools due to varying needs such as additional medical and teaching staff, the commission feels that this could be an opportunity to transform

main stream schools struggling with falling pupil numbers into schools with more SEND provisions.

Recommendation 4 - That the cabinet commission officers to explore options in transforming mainstream schools facing amalgamation or closures into schools with SEND provisions for children with special needs prior to any decisions of closure or amalgamation.

18. The commission in its findings on the closure of St. Johns Walworth discovered a trend of historic and in-year budget deficits which could have been managed by early intervention and pro-active reductions in PAN. In addition the discussions with NAHT, data from independent consultants and council reports depict that severity within schools affected by falling pupil numbers varies massively in different areas of Southwark, some schools are out performing others and presumably having surplus budgets. The council has a role to play in helping schools produce projected budget deficits; and ring-fencing budgets around better performing and more affluent schools, to help schools struggling with falling pupil numbers.

Recommendation 5 - That the cabinet devise a long-term proactive strategy in response to projected budget deficits in schools by early intervention and by subsequent reduction in PAN and ring-fencing budgets around affluent schools which could help provide financial support for schools with falling rolls.

19. Through its discussions on the consultation process for amalgamation and closure of schools the commission learnt that support from Human Resources (HR) for teaching staff is only provided at the later stages of the stakeholder consultation causing a lot of anxiety and frustration. The commission feels that Southwark is at risk of losing the educational expertise especially from Headteachers, Asst. Headteachers, deputies and middle leaders. The commission also gathered from the independent consultant that mitigating the HR impact and having robust processes for redeployment, retraining etc. especially for teaching assistants is an important area that the council needs to review. There is a need for early intervention from the council in supporting teaching staff to find suitable employment in other schools within the borough whilst ensuring that low-income support staff proportions and Global Ethnic Majority staffs' diversity percentages are maintained within the school's work force.

Recommendation 6 - That the cabinet ensure the council have a school staff redundancy policy that proactively and thoroughly supports school staff prior to any final decisions on staff redundancies due to Published Admission Numbers (PAN) reduction and/or closure of schools. Furthermore, that the school staff are supported in finding employment in other Southwark schools and/or organisations; whilst monitoring and ensuring that the 'at risk' school work force policies reflect and maintain the diversity percentages of the school's work force and therefore that the

redundancy levels do not disproportionately affect Global Ethnic Majority staff and low-income support staff.

20. It is clear to the commission that the current data provided on falling school rolls gives a holistic view of Global Ethnic Majority, FSM and SEND children in the borough's schools. Among all the schools in scope for further change; 10 schools in the borough have between 40-50% of children on FSM, 9 schools in the borough have 20-40% of SEND children and 16 schools have between 70-100% of Global Ethnic Majority children. The report on Equality Impact needs analysis within the strategy gives an overview of pre-implementation equality analysis to be carried out. The commission understands that this analysis would be carried out for every affected school after initial discussions with regards to reduction in PAN, amalgamation and closures of schools.

The commission feels that in an effort to maintain transparency, the councils reports' on the impact of ongoing falling rolls and the impact of any actions (PAN reduction) being taken, have on Global Ethnic Majority, Pupil Premium pupils and pupils on FSM and that this be published for every affected school prior to any actions taken. It is important that these reports reflect the estimated percentage reductions in these categories of pupils within the school if the proposed action was to be taken. The commission asks the cabinet for the desegregation of FSM, SEND and Global Ethnic Majority children's' data to better understand Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) of schools in scope for change.

Recommendation 7 - That the cabinet commission the council to monitor and be transparent by publishing reports on

- a. the impact that ongoing falling rolls has on Global Ethnic Majority pupils, pupil premium pupils and pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) by looking at percentage of pupils in these schools prior to action being taken as compared to the percentage reduction of pupils thereafter.
 - b. the impact that actions to address falling rolls such as PAN reductions, amalgamations of schools and closures could have on Global Ethnic Majority pupils, pupil premium pupils and pupils on FSM's by looking at percentage of pupils in these schools prior to action being taken as compared to the percentage reduction of pupils thereafter.
21. The commission acknowledges that Southwark is one of the boroughs in London that have a clear strategy in place for tackling falling pupil numbers, it is also clear that the overall trend of pupil places in London is declining and as result there is a possibility of inevitable closures and amalgamations. Hence the commission feels that the Keeping Education Strong strategy needs to include plans for repurposing and planned delegations of the closed and unused school buildings for recreation and other community activities.

Recommendation 8 - That the cabinet commission officers to devise a strategy for unused and closed school buildings in terms of repurposing and planned delegations such as for recreation and community activities.

22. It is for the cabinet to decide whether or not to accept the scrutiny commission's recommendations.
23. Overview and scrutiny procedure rule 15.3 requires the cabinet to consider and provide a written response to the report within two months.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 30 September 2022	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7373&Ver=4 (see item 4)		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 17 October 2022	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7374&Ver=4 (see item 5 & 6)		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 6 December 2022	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7375&Ver=4 (see item 5 & 6)		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 8 February 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7376&Ver=4 (see item 7)		

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 6 March 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7587&Ver=4 (see item 5)		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 19 April 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&MId=7377&Ver=4 (see item 5 & 6)		
Westminster City Council	City of Westminster Council Website	NA
Global Majority - https://www.westminster.gov.uk/news/council-commits-serious-action-inclusion		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Member	Councillor Jason Ochere, Chair, Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission	
Lead Officer	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny	
Report Author	Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	1 June 2023	