

## Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 19 April 2023 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)  
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Chloe Tomlinson  
Councillor Joseph Vambe  
Councillor David Watson  
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted Member)  
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (Co-opted Member)  
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted Member)

**OTHER MEMBERS**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Martin Seaton

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cassandra Brown and Councillor Renata Hamvas.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Joseph Vambe.

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

There were no items of business which the Chair deemed urgent.

### **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.**

There were no disclosures of interests and dispensations.

### **4. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

### **5. MITIGATING FALLING SCHOOL ROLLS - KEEPING EDUCATION STRONG STRATEGY**

The commission first received a presentation (*Appendix 1. Minutes*) from Nina Dohel, Director of Education on Keeping Education Strong strategy

- Southwark Context pupil places 2021-2022; 74 primary schools, 97% Good or outstanding schools according to Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), currently 924 surplus places at reception age which would be monitored until September 2023 when children start school, 5,850 surplus places from reception to year six which is 22% surface capacity, ideal target is to keep 5-10% surplus capacity in the system i.e. 27 students out of a class of 30 students.
- Southwark Planning Areas; PA<sub>1</sub> –Borough, Bankside & Walworth, PA<sub>2</sub> - Bermondsey & Rotherhithe, PA<sub>3</sub> – Peckham & Nunhead, PA<sub>4</sub> - Camberwell, PA<sub>5</sub> - Dulwich
- Borough-wide actions taken and impact; Surplus Capacity 2018/19:19 % Reception 14% school places, changes implemented since 2019 have resulted in reduction of 570 reception places with the impact carrying through to 2028 resulting in reduction of 1395 Primary School Places, 2022-23 surplus capacity: 22% reception 22% School Places
- Borough wide actions taken, such as reduction of Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) have been outstripped by the high rate of falling pupil numbers.
- Planning Area Meetings with Headteachers from autumn 2021; scale of difficulty and specific area challenges, Pupil trends, Falling birth rates, reduced PAN and point of closures, St John's Walworth
- Head Teachers Schools Strategic Board (HTSSB) developed criteria for making recommendations about action, 49 schools for further evaluation, Criteria templates: Pupil Roll Trends and Projections, Quality of Provision, Budget Health, Quality of Building and Estate, Local Issues
- Recommendations with help of independent consultants for schools, PAN reductions and amalgamations
- Free School Meals (FSM) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) graphs for schools; FSM is provided from Nursey to year six for eligible children

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- The commission asked for desegregation of FSM, SEN and Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) data on the graphs in the presentation to better understand Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) of schools in scope for further change.
- Criteria for FSM, School budgeting for FSM preparation and subsidies
- Converting schools into academies, amalgamations and mitigation process.
- Lack of mention of staff employment rights and union discussions as result of redundancies in Local Authority services.
- Disproportionate impact on BAME children and language barriers

Nina explained to the commission that there is an income level eligibility for FSM and she will get back to the commission on the exact criteria. On paying for FSM, the schools get reimbursed for FSM through a FSM allocation budget provided, however the schools have to pay for kitchen staff and maintenance of kitchen equipment.

Nina informed the commission that school governors are entitled to explore conversion into academies and amalgamation of schools through a Department for Education (DfE) process. The Council's role is to propose the amalgamation or conversions based on the algorithms from the research conducted in that area. The study indicates that no schools are exempt from the impact of falling school rolls. Academies and trusts go through a due-diligence process carefully before decisions are made for the conversion into academies or amalgamation of schools.

The commission heard from officers that Keeping Education Strong strategy is primarily focused on resolving the issue of falling schools rolls and does not cover employment rights during the redundancies in Local Authority Services. On the impact on BAME children and their families the commission heard from Nina that schools that have PAN reduction are already operating at lower numbers of children so there is no impact on such schools. However the schools that are amalgamating or were facing closure such as St Johns Walworth had all the required children and families support services present in the room before any discussions with parents, ensuring that each and every child is placed in an alternative school, bespoke to their needs such as SEN.

The commission then asked further questions around the following themes

- Communication with School Leaders; all catholic schools to be converted into academies Archdiocese of Southwark commission
- Strategy for secondary schools that might be affected in the future
- Specific EIA for schools with reduction in PAN, amalgamations and closures

Nina explained to the commission that communication with school leaders involved, Chairs, Governors and Head teachers, decisions to convert into academies are a mixture of schools themselves coming to the conclusion and proposals by the Councils and there has not been any recent communication on

the conversion of all catholic schools into academies.

On secondary schools Nina informed the commission that out of the 20 secondary schools in Southwark 19 are part of very large established trusts and the 20<sup>th</sup> School is affiliated to the network of trusts. There have been regular meetings with CEO's and head teacher networks of secondary schools to keep them abreast of the projection numbers coming into year 7, however there hasn't been any significant downturn in pupil numbers in secondary schools; academy trusts making their own decisions.

The commission learnt from officers specific EIA's for schools will be a part of discussions and consultation with schools and parents once the initial conversations on the council's proposals have been conducted.

The commission then received a presentation (*Appendix 2. Minutes*) from Helen Jenner, independent consultant discussing falling school rolls and outcomes

- Establishing an effective schools organisation strategy; clear communication with the governing body with regards to timelines and strategy
- Planning areas data and analysis based on Keeping Education Strong Strategy
- Challenges with parental preference and geographical divides
- Stress testing options before publishing findings; Equity, Quality, Sustainability and Deliverability

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Geographical locations of schools parental preference
- In-year vacancies in secondary schools
- Budget for redundancies and moving allowances for schools
- National media reporting of the issue of falling pupil numbers in London.

Helen explained to the commission that the strategy does not propose amalgamation of schools that geographically are two or more miles apart as that might be unfair to parents. On in-year vacancies in secondary schools, there is sometimes a decline in numbers; where there is a good state school next to a private school and the parents move their children to try and get admission into the better secondary school with early moves in years 3, 4 or 5.

Helen expressed to the commission 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.

Nina informed the commission that the budget for redundancies and moving allowances are recovered from the remainder of the school budget and any remaining costs covered by the council. Academies are directly funded by the DfE.

Nina explained to the commission that it has been disappointing to see the lack of

early media coverage on falling pupil numbers in London and nationally and the current media coverage has journalistic factual inaccuracies in pupil numbers data.

The commission then asked further questions around the following themes

- Challenges in enforcing caps of 27 pupils in a year across Southwark due to parental choice
- Social inequality in working class and disproportionate impact on BAME children; Effectiveness of the strategy in mitigating such wider trends
- Good practices from other boroughs in proactively tackling equality issues in school closures and amalgamations

Helen explained to the commission that in instances where schools have been asked to reduce PAN but parental preferences show otherwise, the schools adjudicator will rule in favour of reduction of PAN. Instances where schools that can fully support inclusion with SEND and are based around schools that lack the expertise, officers have then worked with the school to expand from two form entry to three form entry.

Helen informed the commission that no other borough have significantly countered the disproportionate impact on equality issues, with BAME children it is difficult to mitigate the disproportionate impact in some communities plainly because of the market approach for schools in certain areas.

## **6. FALLING PUPIL NUMBERS FOLLOW UP DATA/REPORTS**

The following reports were noted by the commission

- Social rented housing not at affordable housing levels undergoing enforcement investigations
- Air quality data around schools
- S-106 Monies for schools

## **7. LOCAL ACCESS PARTNERSHIP (LAP)**

The commission then heard from Councillor Martin Seaton, Cabinet member for Jobs, Business and Town Centres on Southwark Pioneers Fund (SPF) and Local Access Partnership (LAP)

- Development of SPF 2018-2019; council proposal £33m program; LAP program blended social investment for social enterprise over 10 years.
- Proposal in October 2019 setting out visions for LAP and social economy enterprise support plan submitted to foundation for social investment and Big Society Capital (BSC)
- LAP vision statement is to have a collaborative, sustainable and diverse social economy, which delivers positive social impact and a better future for

all Southwark residents. The collective ambition for LAP is to build a new capacity skills, community connections and support across social ecosystems to tackle entrenched social issues in Southwark.

- Refresh of SPF; creation and scaling up of commercial and social enterprise including revenue rating for charities, widen diversity of people owning or leading enterprise in Southwark, reduce enterprise carbon emissions, start-up program to generate good quality employment and generate wider social value, and growth program which is the enterprise board for later stages of an enterprise focusing on growth, and social and community program that supports enterprises led by women and from BAME backgrounds.

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Allocation of LAP funding through Access foundation, and funding through SPF
- Lack of access to funds for businesses like East Street Traders and organisations like Black Business Network.

The commission heard from Matt Little, Principal Strategy Officer that the money is yet to be withdrawn through the access foundation which would then along with SPF funds be allocated at a granular level to businesses.

Councillor Seaton informed the commission that regular visits have been made to businesses across Southwark, the issue has been the underlying disconnect with traders, and leaflets have been distributed across Southwark to mitigate this. The council is constantly promoting the message across the community of buying locally from local businesses and many organisations such as the Federation of Small Business (FSB) and Chamber of Commerce offer professional support and guidance to local businesses.

The commission then heard from Jon Hitchin, Chief Executive of Renaisi the leading accountable body for LAP in Southwark

- Social Investment Models and driving investment into social businesses and social enterprise which is a thriving sector in the UK
- LAP- Renaisi' s role and future plans to co-ordinate and access funds from Access Foundation and BSC
- Challenges- massive equity differences in BAME and Women led social enterprises and London economy driven land and property prices. Southwark is the only London Borough included in this program.
- £900k from Access as development grants and £500k from SPF for BAME and women led businesses to grow as Enterprises
- £5m from BSC and Access combined monies to go only to investment as repayable finance and not grants of any kind.
- Community Asset Trust model being developed to invest in local assets, properties and spaces with repayable finance at set interest rates which could be collectively owned by a community group and not the council or Renaisi.

- Renaisi co-ordinating with local businesses community groups to invest in multiple properties within the borough.
- Proposition to de-couple development finance from investment finance speeding up the delivery of finance in the community with an aim of perpetuity in the model.

The commission then asked questions around the following themes

- Deadlines on BSC monies investment and council's role in supporting the development of the community asset trust model.
- Support within the LAP for successful BAME businesses like 'Plush' who have been evicted as a result of the private landlord wanting the land for redevelopment.
- Affordable work spaces for local businesses through long leases. Planning applications to help affordable work space provisions.

Jon explained to the commission that BSC are focused on having enough confidence in development of the Community Asset Trust Model rather than a deadline to spend the investment money. The council has been incredibly supportive of the LAP and developing the model. The council also has a major role in bringing together partners, building partnerships and networking. The decisions made on council owned properties and assets are dependent on variety of factors, pressures and demands.

Jon explained to the commission that in order to make the Asset Trust Model to respond to on demand issues for businesses such as Plush; it would depend on the viability of site, land value challenge and the market demand of the land for development. Although it's unlikely that that a community social investment trust can outbid the market value for a site.

Councillor Seaton explained to the commission there are certain protection within the planning policy framework for businesses in-situ for 10 or more years. Small to Medium Enterprises have support available from professional organisations where the council could provide guidance. The current levels of funding through LAP of a few million pounds would be inadequate in resolving such issues.

Councillor Seaton explained to the commission that Southwark is a very resilient Borough when it comes to businesses, the council is doing more to protect local businesses, by promoting 'buy locally' campaign. Councillor Seaton explained to the commission that he is confident that members in the planning committee will enforce the planning policies on affordable work spaces provision. The council's economic strategy plan is out for consultation and it's very important for all members and parties to come together to support the strategy.

Jon explained to the commission that procurement is a very important tool through which the council can help support the local businesses in Southwark.

## **8. FINALISING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The draft recommendations 2022-23 (*Appendix 3. Minutes*) were circulated at the meeting and would be circulated electronically after the meeting. The deadline for commission members to respond on email was set to Friday 28 April 2023.

## **9. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023**

The commission noted the Work Programme 2022-2023

Meeting ended at 9:21 pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**