

Item No. 18.	Classification: Open	Date: 12 September 2023	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Response to Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Review: Mitigating Falling Pupil Numbers in Schools	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND REFUGEES

The following report is a response to the Local Economy Scrutiny Commission’s timely review of our work to mitigate the impact of falling school rolls in Southwark.

I would like to thank Cllr Ochere, Cllr Tomlinson and all of their team for their excellent work in this area. It was most helpful to go through this work with them as we responded to this challenging issue.

The scrutiny review interviews of the Greater London Authority (GLA), a selection of school leaders, our education team and the independent consultants have already added value to this work. I am pleased to report we support all eight of the recommendations and are doing much of what they propose already.

Background

Following our £200m investment in schools, education in Southwark has never been stronger, with 97% of schools Ofsted-rated as good and outstanding. Taken together the impact of the dramatic fall in births, Brexit, the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, the national housing crisis and inflated housing costs in the borough constitute a demographic earthquake. The result has been a significant fall in pupil numbers in primary schools.

Keeping Education Strong Strategy

We have documented our approach in our Keeping Education Strong strategy.

This work is the product of close partnership working between the council and schools.

The work of the scrutiny team (between July 22 and April 23) has been especially helpful. Their interviews with the GLA and local schools have already added value to our work in this area. It was reassuring that the commission “acknowledges that Southwark is one of the boroughs in London that have a clear strategy in place for tackling falling pupil numbers”.

Scrutiny Commission Recommendations and Response

The report makes eight helpful recommendations which are set out below, along with our responses.

1. This calls for further strategic relationships across the council including housing.

We welcome this recommendation and aim to get on with it.

2. This calls for us to look at the current working process of the GLA and its data on school rolls. The GLA is set to review its own work on falling school rolls in 2024.

I will write to the GLA to ensure our thoughts are considered in their review.

3. This requests that officers explore the different mechanisms for schools to temporarily reduce their Pupil Admission Numbers before any proposed action on closures or amalgamations take place.

There is already a process to change the capacity of a school at short notice (under the Office of the Schools’ Adjudicator). So we can agree this straight away.

4. This calls for all closed schools to be re-provisioned for pupils with special educational needs and or disabilities.

We can confirm that plans are already underway to repurpose closed schools for children and young people with SEND needs.

5. This calls for 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.

We have put clear policies in place as agreed with the Schools Forum to assist this as a result of the strategy on Keeping Education Strong. Our officers will now further explore with Schools Forum how we can work together to support schools with falling rolls.

6. This recommends a council ‘school staff redundancy policy’ that proactively supports school staff.

We acknowledge that each school is responsible for setting its own restructure and redundancy policies. However the council HR team provide clear advice and guidance for school leaders in any restructure or redundancy situation as a result of falling rolls.

7. This calls on the council to monitor and report on the impact that ongoing falling rolls has on Global Ethnic Majority pupils, pupil premium pupils and pupils on Free School Meals (FSM).

The Equality Impact Assessment are produced for each school going through changes will detail potential impact of reducing PAN, amalgamating or closing a school and mitigations on pupils from Global Ethnic Majority background, those attracting a Pupil Premium and/ or eligible for Free School Meals, as well as those with SEND. In addition, each report will also consider the impact on staff. Officers will revise the current Equalities Impact Assessment template to fit in all of the necessary information. To provide greater transparency.

8. This asks for a strategy for unused and closed school buildings. *We are happy with this as the Council's policy has is for ex-school buildings to be used for education, training, employment, recreation or community activities. Council officers will now explore the benefits and dis-benefits of supplementary planning guidelines.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Cabinet note the response to the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission report and recommendations.
2. That the Cabinet approve the agreement to deliver recommendations 1, 4 and 8.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. On 19 April 2023, the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission met to consider and agree its recommendations to Cabinet following nine months of meetings, discussions and reports on the strategy to manage falling pupil numbers in schools.
4. Between July 2022 and April 2023, in addition to hearing from the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees, and the Director of Education, the Scrutiny Commission heard from the head teachers of Ivydale, Victory and St George's primary schools; the planning policy manager from the Council; a representative from the Church of England diocese; the Demography and City Modelling Manager of the GLA; and the London Regional Officer of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

5. The Commission also received reports from the Director of Education on the Keeping Education Strong strategy and from an independent consultancy (Isos) who reviewed the strategy and provided further recommendations to deliver on it. An annual Place Planning report also comes to cabinet in October. This report provides detailed analysis of pupil numbers, future projections and mitigations in place to manage capacity.
6. Work across the wider council continues in promoting the growth of pupil numbers. There is a focus on building and enabling housing which supports families with children to stay in Southwark and attend Southwark schools.
7. Whilst there has been decline in available and affordable stock in the private rented sector (PRS), Southwark Council continues to be the largest social landlord in London with 55,000 homes lived in by 40% of Southwark residents (tenants and leaseholders),
8. Southwark's council-house building programme is delivering more family sized homes and is continuing to promote the delivery of larger homes with a requirement in the Southwark Plan (P2) for residential developments to provide minimum percentages of larger units. The draft Old Kent Road Area Action Plan (AAP) also emphasises the need for family homes with a target of at least 4,000 family homes with 3 or more bedrooms. We will continue to promote further dialogue between directorates to develop further planning strategies to meet current and future need for family homes."
9. The recommendations of the Scrutiny Commission were published and shared in a report (Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Review of mitigating falling pupil numbers in schools) on 13 June, 2023, and a request was made for Cabinet to respond within eight weeks.
10. This report is the response from Education to those Scrutiny Commission recommendations.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. Responses to the recommendations from the Scrutiny Commission:

<p>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.</p>

Response to Recommendation 1 - Cabinet agrees this recommendation and will promote further dialogue in strategy development between directorates.

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.

Response to Recommendation 2 - As detailed in the Scrutiny Commission report dated 13 June, 2023, the Demography and City Modelling Manager from the GLA attended the Scrutiny Commission in Autumn 2022 to explain the methodology used by the GLA to produce projections on pupil numbers and the process the Council follows to provide the GLA with data. These projections are based on a number of factors, including housing trajectories and planning permissions, which are provided to the GLA by the Council as required, and in a timely manner, to allow the GLA to model its projections.

It is our understanding that any inaccuracies in these projections have been caused by external factors (such as Brexit, Covid, welfare reforms, housing rent levels) rather than data provided by the Council. In such instances these external factors could not have been predicted or modelled for.

The GLA's modelling methodology is developed in conjunction with all 32 London local authorities and the processes are agreed together. These processes are reviewed and refined annually and the next review is scheduled to take place in Spring 2024. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member will write to the GLA to ensure they take our views into consideration before the next review.

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.

Response to Recommendation 3 - Yes, there already exists a process to change the capacity of a school at short notice (under the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator). A school can reduce its PAN and then increase it at a later stage, or admit bulge classes, and in every case under the Keeping Education Strong strategy, reduction of PAN was and will be explored before proposal of amalgamation and/ or closure.

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.

Response to Recommendation 4 - Yes, where school buildings have become vacant as a result of closure or amalgamation of a mainstream school, plans are actively underway to re-provision these schools for SEND purposes.

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.

Response to Recommendation 5 - We have put in place clear policies and procedures, agreed with Schools Forum to mitigate this and council officers will further explore with Schools Forum how we can work together to support schools with falling rolls. There are number of points in the year where we can review our strategy and its effectiveness – through the annual Place Planning report which comes to cabinet each October and provides detailed analysis of pupil numbers, future projections and mitigations in place to manage capacity; numbers of pupils actually taking up places each September; the October census which is a data capture of numbers of children in school on a given day; and registration for reception places each January/February.

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 180 6 redundancy levels do not disproportionately affect Global Ethnic Majority staff and low-income support staff.

Response to Recommendation 6 - Each school is responsible for setting out its own restructure and redundancy policies ratified by the governing body. As part of its Keeping Education Strong Strategy the council has ensured that all affected staff in maintained schools receive one to one support in exploring options should their school be in scope for closure or amalgamation. A re-deployment process was presented to Schools Forum in September 2022 which set out the offer of options of employment in other settings as a first course of action to affected school staff. The schools HR team provide clear advice and guidance for school leaders in any restructure or redundancy situation as a result of falling rolls.

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.

Response to Recommendation 7 - The Equality Impact Assessment are produced for each school going through changes will detail potential impact of reducing PAN, amalgamating or closing a school and mitigations on pupils from Global Ethnic Majority background, those attracting a Pupil Premium and/ or eligible for Free School Meals, as well as those with SEND. In addition, each report will also consider the impact on staff.

Where any changes (PAN reduction, amalgamation or closure) are made in a school, we can say what percentage of pupils in a school have each of those characteristics before any changes are made and after any changes have been made and use this analysis to support the decision making.

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.

Response to Recommendation 8 - Yes, the Council's policy has been shared with stakeholders and in every case we ask for ex-school buildings to be used for education, training, employment, recreation or community activities. Council officers will explore the benefits and dis-benefits of supplementary planning guidelines.

Policy framework implications

12. There are no additional policy framework implications attached to these recommendations.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

13. We know that our schools are the heart of our communities and that changes can have a far reaching impact on those communities. However, having full, well-resourced schools that can provide an excellent education is best for children, families, staff and communities.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

14. A full Equalities Impact Needs Analysis (EINA) has been completed for the Keeping Education Strong Strategy, for the recommendations made by the independent consultancy and an individual EINA will be completed for each school proposed for PAN reduction, amalgamation or closure.

Health impact statement

15. The implementation of the Keeping Education Strong strategy has considered the impact on the mental health of school staff at every stage, and reference to support available has been made explicit in communications.

Climate change implications

16. There are no climate change implications to these recommendations.

Resource implications

17. There are no additional resource implications to these recommendations.

Legal implications

18. There are no specific legal implications to these recommendations.

Financial implications

19. There are no specific legal implications to these recommendations.

Consultation

20. Extensive consultation was undertaken at every stage of developing the Keeping Education Strong strategy and will also be undertaken in the event of any school amalgamation or closure, both in line with and in addition to the statutory requirements.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

21. No supplementary advice from other officers were required.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Review of mitigating falling pupil numbers in schools	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712 545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s114684/Report%20Mitigating%20falling%20pupil%20numbers%20in%20schools.pdf		
Keeping Education Strong: Strategy for future proofing primary schools and protecting the quality of education in Southwark	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712 545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): Report Keeping Education Strong - Strategy for future proofing primary schools and protecting the .pdf (southwark.gov.uk)		

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Equalities Impact Needs Analysis	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/emergency-evacuation-information-sharing/equality-impact-assessment		
PAN reduction, amalgamation or closure	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712 545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2023-to-2024/schools-operational-guide-2023-to-2024		
National Association of Head Teachers	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712 545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://membership.naht.org.uk/become-a-member/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIIntPa1ZbwgAMVwIdQBh3BigXZEAAAYASAAEgLCmfD_BwE		
isos consultancy	Education Directorate 4 th Floor Southwark Council London SE1P 5LX	Poppy Charlton 07712 545090
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.isospartnership.com		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees	
Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children and Adult Services	
Report Author	Poppy Charlton, Service Development Manager - Performance and Strategy	
Version	Final	
Dated	31 August 2023	
Key Decision?	Yes	
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
List other officers here	N/a	N/a
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		31 August 2023