

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

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

PRESENT: Councillor Chloe Tomlinson (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jason Ochere
Councillor Joseph Vambe
Councillor John Batteson
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Councillor Irina Von Wiese
Jonathan Clay (Co-opted member)

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member) and Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member)

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 disclosure of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2023 were approved as a correct record.

5. SCHOOL AMALGAMATIONS AND CLOSURES IN SOUTHWARK

The commission first received a report from Freddy Vanson and Theo Whitworth of the National Education Union on school amalgamations and closures covering the following themes:

- Equalities data on the disproportionate impact of redundancies on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) school staff.
- Retention and recruitment challenges of teaching staff nationally.
- School staff workforce diversity not reflective of the diverse backgrounds among pupils.

The commission then asked questions on the following points:

- Influx and levels of BAME members of the community at the teacher training levels
- Disproportionate impact of school closures and amalgamations on non-white school support staff and possible mitigation measures from the council
- Higher number of black staff members at juniors levels
- Comparison of equality data with schools outside Southwark and also comparison of more recent data with 2018-2020 data

Freddy explained to the commission that anecdotally and only from personal experience it is clear that more young black teachers tend to leave teacher training as a result of lack of support with work place issues, when compared to their white colleagues.

Freddy agreed with the commission that the trend based on the two schools closures in Southwark indicate disproportionate impact on non-white school support staff; however a clearer picture on the levels of this impact would be attained during the course of the next municipal year. Theo explained to the commission that support staff are more vulnerable with regards to efficiency saving measures implemented by schools prior to any discussions of schools closure or amalgamation. Freddy further explained to the commissions that very few schools have Teaching Assistants (TAs') any more, TAs' in schools helped deal and support with accidents in class so the teacher could continue teaching. Furthermore, Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) funding for students with special needs would provide similar support in classes, however the back log of EHCP applications and the time taken to receive such funding is a barrier for providing more support in classrooms.

Freddy explained to the commission that black school staff struggle to get into position of leadership within education and trends in the data indicate this. Southwark Schools Alliance initiative have a training programme for black leaders in education which helps black staff overcome some of these barriers. The commission heard from Theo that one of the factors for disproportionate representation of black staff within teachers and senior leadership is a result of Southwark's hiring policy which is inadequate in promoting diversity.

The commission pointed out that the blind application process within Southwark's hiring policy should lead to non-discriminatory and non-prejudicial selections, however the commission also considered that this could also result in lower numbers of BAME teaching staff due to fewer numbers of BAME applications. Freddy explained to the commission that there might be a case to consider applicants under the equalities protected characteristics to be selected based on the needs of the school staff body demographic which would be a step towards positive discrimination. More recent equality data will be gathered in the coming year.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes:

- Source of equality data
- Lack of applications from BAME applicants and causes for being unsuccessful; Senior leadership roles and job description tailor made for white school staff
- Possible initiatives through the careers team within schools to promote applications from ethnic backgrounds
- Impact of the falling rolls and possible school closures and amalgamations, discouraging BAME staff from applying for senior roles.
- Losing expertise in supporting SEND pupils due to redundancies in school support staff

Freddy informed the commission that casework data was collated himself and rest of the data is sourced from Southwark Council. The reasons for fewer appointments of BAME staff is a combination of job advert wording, fewer numbers of application and fewer selections of BAME applicants.

Theo agreed with the commission that vulnerable children are losing special needs support and expertise due to redundancies in school support staff, however, special needs schools are in a better position with ratios of children to staff, hence their budgets have more protection. Freddy explained to the commission that Teaching Assistants have a wealth of 1 to 1 experience with pupils which cannot be trained in a limited time and ideally such jobs provide more value for money and need to be protected.

Freddy explained to the commission the lack of ethnic minority leaders in senior

management does impact the number of applicant from young BAME people in the community. Motions related to campaigns like 'Look like Me' are in process of being submitted to the NEU, this would also involve the careers team playing a big role in promoting BAME staff. However, Freddy informed the commission that there are fewer issues in hiring for senior roles due to higher wages, there is an increase in middle managers within academies leading to the loss of 3 TA's for one assistant head teacher.

The commission then asked further questions around the following points of discussion:

- Reasons for high number BAME staff leaving schools due to discrimination and disciplinary and mitigation measure that the council could adopt.
- Demonstrable qualification through training programmes for TAs' with more 1 to 1 experience
- Higher number of BAME representation on the governing body; bias on the school interview panel for hiring Headteachers and senior school leaders.

The commission heard from Freddy that the trend in casework data do indicate that there are higher numbers of BAME staff leaving schools and there is a need for more legislation, guidance and support from the council in ensuring that schools carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) regularly and especially during redundancies. On training for TAs' the commission learnt that there are Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs run by the schools and Special Educational Needs co-ordinators (SENCo) also provide training but more needs to be done.

Freddy informed that the commission there are fewer issues when the governing body is more reflective of the staff demographic. The commission agreed to request data from the council's human resources team on schools that indicates a higher number BAME staff leaving.

6. COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING IN SOUTHWARK

The commission received a report from Danny Edwards, Head of Economy on Community Wealth Building (CWB) on the following points:

- Community Wealth Building, inclusive economies and inclusive growth; Place based approach at the heart of communities.
- Pillars of CWB; Council wide approach for CWB; Southwark 2030 sets overarching economic vision for Southwark
- New economic strategy 2023-30 details inclusive growth due for consideration by Cabinet in October 2023
- Southwark Anchor Network is a strategic leadership group as part of the wider CWB agenda, harnessing the combined purchasing power of anchor

institutions of £207bn.

- Fairer Future's Procurement Framework due to be considered at Cabinet in September 2023.
- Southwark Works initiative with support from council and anchor institutions

The commission then asked questions around the following themes:

- Focus of the CWB programme on small and medium enterprises (SME)
- Understanding the reasons for unknown size of companies in the Centre for Local Economies and Strategies (CLES) report. (pg.16)
- Understanding unknown spend within Spend by Anchor and Geography in the CLES report. (pg.30)

The commission learnt from Danny that the unknown spend in the CLES report is a result of the data gathered from procurement based on a devolved commissioning model used by the council and anchor institutions, where the ownership for commissioning funds lies with local departments and institutions which creates gaps in the contract monitoring register. One of the recommendations within the CLES report is to look at new ways of gathering procurement data.

On CWB programmes focusing on SME and locally generative institutions, the commission understood that Southwark is not an isolated economy, therefore CWB program's focus will always be a combination of large businesses and SMEs'. One of the ways the councils supports SMEs is Southwark Pioneer's Fund (SPF).

The commission then had discussions around the following themes

- Geography of spend concentrated to tourist areas with increasing demand for food and beverage businesses compared to retail businesses catering to local need.
- Connecting local employment needs to local opportunities, decreasing in work poverty; Unlocking spend from large businesses to support SME
- SPF and its work in supporting SMEs like care leavers, women and BAME owned businesses.
- Consideration and implementation of the recommendations from the CLES report; Success and delivery of social value business projects
- Detailed analysis of local employment amongst the anchor institutions; promoting Southwark Works to local employment need, like care-leavers; dedicated employment engagement service in Southwark Works
- Affordable accommodation for key workers; Southwark works promotion in schools; Information on procurement from large multi-centre companies
- Places identified in the CWB place based approach, targets to measure

success in bringing in spend locally to Southwark.

- Southwark being the first London living wage borough having 298 accredited London living wage employers and soon to reach 300 employers who would be supported a London living wage unit run by the council.

The commission heard from Danny that the dedicated employment engagement service is a critical component of Southwark Works and is being developed to be commissioned in the near future. On Southwark Works, 85% of employed are from BAME backgrounds but there is a need for a more robust and comprehensive regional engagement program. On social value there are pockets of successes such as jobs and apprenticeships within construction and also in delivering a London Living Wage, however there is a need for a central social value framework.

On place based approach in CWB the commission learnt that the focus of place based approach is in line with the local authority vision to support local communities and businesses; similar approaches within CWB focuses on neighbourhoods. The council's delivery plan includes recruitment targets of placing 2.5 thousand Southwark residents in employment by 2026.

7. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

The commission agreed to keep falling schools rolls on review during the year and hearing from ward councillors on specific issues within the schools in their respective wards.

The commission agree to include procurement, employment and social value as part of its review on CWB.

The commission also agreed to consider reviewing the SEND strategy especially due to the rising need of SEND provisions in schools.

The commission agreed to review topics 'Southwark Stands Together' and Inclusion Charter in Schools.

The commission agreed to remove the review of the Integrated Care System and Fragmentation of the NHS from the work programme.

Meeting ended at 9:05 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: