

Open Agenda



Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 19 October 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 Joseph Vambe
Councillor John Batteson
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Councillor Irina Von Wiese
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (Co-opted member)
Jonathan Clay (Co-opted member)
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted member)

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Jason Ochere and apologies for lateness 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 19 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

5. SCHOOL AMALGAMATION/ CLOSURE OF ST MARY MAGDALENE C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

The commission first heard from Anna Harding, Head teacher on the plans for closure/amalgamation of the St Mary Magdalene C of E Primary School (SMMS) around the following points

- Background info on SMMS; One form entry Church School is now Half form entry school with mixed age classes due to falling rolls, Ofsted inspection with good statutory results above national average, 96 pupils from a capacity of 210 pupils, High number of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils, 37 Pupils on Educational, Health Care Plan (EHCP), 3% of children have no recourse to public funds, 51% of pupils eligible for pupil premium, In the lowest 10% of schools nationally under deprived demographic, 91% Black or mixed heritage pupils and 94% any non-white ethnic groups, high satisfaction and good overall experience from pupils and parents, experienced staff and well-loved school in the community.
- Steps taken to avoid closures and amalgamations in the past; mixed age classes, restructured staff body, minimised redundancies, low budget deficit £27k, plans to open nursery/reception class on a temporary basis from January 2024, explored options to join Southwark Diocese and multi-academy trust, other options for amalgamation also being considered but church schools are further away.
- SEND pupils would struggle with transition if amalgamated, pupils have their educational, emotional and support needs met at this school.
- Resource based provision for SEND would help the school to stay open.
- Lack of communication from Council since May 2023 when proposal for amalgamation/closure was made, however meetings have taken place in the last week.

The commission then heard from Sonia Phippard, Chair of Governors around the following themes

- SMMS co-operating with the Council in line with the 'Keeping Education Strong Strategy', however due to lack of communication, it has delayed all options being explored until now which would have helped Pupil Admission Numbers.
- Financially viable school and reducing budget deficit year by year.

The commission then heard from Enuma Madu, parent on the following topics

- Opening of Nursery/Reception school vital to the local area according to parents
- SMMS the first choice of most parents in the area; excellent care and attention to pupils; safe and supportive environment.
- Church schools are known to shy away from SEND pupils according to media reports but SMMS treats everyone with dignity and respect.

The commission then heard from Reggie Osei-Bonsu, parent on the following themes

- On exploring options for my child at reception level schools in the area, SMMS being smaller and private suited my child's needs.
- Excellent care and treatment of my relatives children made me choose SMMS
- Relocation plans for the family outside London were cancelled due to the needs of my daughter who has received excellent care and support from SMMS.

The commission then heard from Remi-Leigh, parent on the following points

- Undeniably warm and welcoming school making it a great asset to the community.
- SMMS has a high number of SEND pupils, however not all SEND pupils need SEND schools depending on the degree of need, SMMS creates a tailored environment to accommodate a range of SEND needs.
- Families have been supported thoroughly, parents like the option of choosing a smaller school
- Lack of clear and transparent communication on the closure and amalgamation process which has created anxiety among parents and especially children

The commission then heard from Damien, Parent Governor on the following topics

- SMMS pillar of the community, nurturing and fostering young minds of the future generations
- Immense ramifications for parents, staff and children if a decision is made to close the school.
- Dedicated staff with 20-30 years of experience, high quality of education shown in Ofsted ratings
- Generations of a family have chosen SMMS due to the uniqueness of the school unlike any other school in the borough

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- Nursey plans; hours of operation, capacity and projected income
- Organisation of School: breakfast club, wrap around after school provision and a 3 year reducing budget deficit plan
- Council and councillor support to ensure that communications are made to ensure and assure parents that opening of a nursery school makes the school viable for applications next year.

The commission then noted a statement from Martin Brecknell, Education Representative (Diocesan Board), and Co-opted member of the commission that the Diocesan Board have worked all throughout the process with the Council and SMMS and in no way have undermined the Council's processes unlike the council's perception of the board's involvement.

Anna explained to the commission that the nursery/reception would have 15 full time places (school hours, excluding school holidays), accepting children that have 15-30 hrs free childcare with parents of 15 hr free child care having the option to top up the rest themselves. Feasibility study conducted earlier in the year indicated 9-11 pupils' projection for nursery, however due to the delay in process for nursery the numbers expected might change in January 2024. Income expected in the first term is approximately £15.5k and further growth can be expected. The breakfast club, after school club and holiday club are run by an external company called Ultimate Sports who work closely with school staff and are a part of the SMMS family. There is also a licensed 3 year deficit recovery plan base on the nursery bring SMMS budget into surplus in 3 years.

The commission also heard from Anna that SMMS need improved communications, regular meetings with all stakeholders-council, councillors, diocesan board, teachers and governors. The council should explain the issues with viability of SMMS and all options need to be explored.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Process behind the idea of the nursery initiative
- Proportion of pupils belonging to different faiths; Catholic, Church of England etc. making it more difficult to find schools with the similar faiths to amalgamate with.
- Exodus of students from SMMS due to news of uncertainty over the future of the school

Sonia explained to the commission that primarily the motivation behind the nursery was due to parent needs although there is a budget benefit in it. Early knowledge of children's needs in nursery such as SEND helps the staff give better care, support and a better start to the child's education as compared to ascertaining needs in year one. SMMS has a more Angelical and Pentecostal approach towards faith which suit the diversity of students within SMMS, while the proposed amalgamated School St. Johns and Clements has a more Higher Anglican approach to faith although both are excellent church schools. Applications this year are lower due to the news of closure/amalgamation proposal, so looking forward to the nursery and this would need an admission applications process for September

2024 to be advertised.

The commission heard from Anna that SMMS is chosen by parents mainly due to the ethos and core Christian values rather than faith places. There has been a loss 4-6 pupils next year due to the uncertainty over the future of the school. SMMS has had to reject 12 applications in year 1&2 and year 5&6 as their full in capacity indicating that it is still a popular choice.

The commission then noted possible recommendations

- In line with 'Keeping Education Strong' strategy all options are explored flexibly on proposals for closure/amalgamations of schools
- Improved communications and regular meetings and engagements with all stakeholders
- Equality Impact Assessments are carried out and shared with schools before any proposals for closure/ amalgamations are made.

6. THE RESTRUCTURE OF KINTORE WAY NURSERY SCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE.

The commission then received a report from Rebecca Sherwood, Kintore Way (KW) Nursery School and Children's Centre and Matthew Waterfall from National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) on the restructure of Kintore Way Nursey School on the following themes

- Impact of the changes at Kintore Way nursery would have on the wider community and especially SEND children in the community.
- One of the largest and oldest nursery schools in the country, financial issues at KW due to the failing of the funding process to address the unmet needs of Children with SEND.
- Detrimental impact on children, families and community at KW, not being able to access those services due to restructuring resulting in more difficult situation for children and families
- KW provides outstanding services to most vulnerable children and has a Ofsted rating of excellent, 15 redundancies among staff are planned sending shockwaves through the community, highly subscribed and full capacity nursery, 34 families on waiting list.
- Current funding does not account for children under 5 with SEND when these children go to special schools and are deferred back to nursery, the nurseries receive £6k compared to £33k going to special schools if the child is accepted. The budget deficit is a result of the mismatch in SEND funding for Nurseries providing SEND services.
- Need for Council strategy for Early Intervention and SEND provisions in Nursery which would provide greater value for money for children with SEND and make a difference in the community.
- Resource based provisions is being applied in other neighbouring boroughs who have identified the gap in funding for SEND in nurseries.

- Lack of communication from Council with regards to the restructure and decreasing the budget deficit.

The commission then heard from a parent (anonymous), Rebecca and Mathew on the following themes

- Non-verbal children, families are hugely dependent on nurseries like KW.
- SEND children need early adult interaction within the window of opportunity in early years to help with their cerebral development.
- Parents often don't have the skills and expertise to deal with SEND needs and as a consequence suffer from mental health issue themselves, KW has been a respite for such parents.

The commission then heard from Michelle, parent and Brenda, (ex-parent of KW) on the following topics

- Immense support and love, staff give children at KW, as a result the child does really well at special schools
- Staff at KW have helped parents get through the EHCP process; SEND children at KW are helped to be more sociable, articulate and independent.
- KW staff have also helped children and families through bereavements

The commission then heard from Claire, teacher at Grove & KW nurseries on the following points

- Staff at Grove & KW are highly skilled in performing tracheostomies, eye drops, tube feeding and diabetic injections within the class room environment for children with special needs
- Reducing the number of staff will have a devastating impact on the children with special needs; current staff are highly skilled, experienced, dedicated and motivated to provide such medical care.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Experience with Southwark and KW interaction; redundancy costs would cost more than the current costs
- Current central government funding of SEND does not include early years help, learning from practices in other boroughs; as Southwark is also facing significant budgetary pressures
- Redundancy time frames would help inform the upcoming budget for next year
- Clarity on nursery based resource provision and accelerating the EHCP process

Matthew explained to the commission that there are specific examples of resource based provision centres which have worked in providing value for services in the

long term, and that this would be provided to the commission later in an email.

Rebecca informed the commission that the school has to pay £116k in pensions and School in Difficulty Panel would provide the £115k in redundancy costs. Southwark has been provided with Service Level Agreements on resources based provision and many such examples from Lambeth and Wandsworth boroughs are already in place. Current SEND Inclusive Funding of £1200/term for under 5 can take almost a year to process and by then the child reaches special schools who then receive EHCP funding for the entire amount of £33k. Previous practices involved back dating pay to nurseries which has now been discontinued, as a result nurseries unable to cover costs of teaching assistants and SEND staff who have supported the child for a year.

The commission agreed that there is a need to review early years SEND funding for children under 5 in nurseries which is a national issue

The Chair suggested a recommendation on exploring all possible options with regards to the restructuring at Kintore Way Nursery including

- i. Early years SEND funding (EHCP) for children under 5 in nurseries
- ii. Pilot programme of Resource Based Provision proposed for 3 posts of staff supporting 20 SEND children in a designated area of the nursery
- iii. Clearly devise a short and long term plan for reducing the budget deficit ensuring long term financial sustainability

The commission heard from Rebecca that the current budget deficit at KW is over £1m, any action taken now would not have any effect on the planned redundancies. However, staff who have received have been kept informed of the conversations with trade unions and the council and that they would be informed if there is a change in circumstances by December 2023. On resource based provision, a pilot is being proposed for 3 posts of staff supporting 20 SEND children in a designated area of the nursery. Some of the current staff are willing to stay at KW.

7. EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHWARK

The commission then received a report from Patrick Doherty, Principal Strategy Officer on youth employment on the following points

- New Economic Strategy to be adopted by Cabinet by the end of the year, strategy involves new jobs and opportunities for young people
- Southwark Youth Deal- employment services and advice
- Southwark Works- employment service commissioned for another 4 years split amongst 9-10 contracts, and one for people over 50 with specialist skills; 3 contracts for vulnerable young people been in criminal justice system and young people with disabilities
- Council's Internal Apprenticeships service, External apprenticeships through

Passport centre and through LSBU Centre, Southwark Construction Centre and Green Skills hub

- Council Delivery Plan to deliver 250 paid internships for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds spread across 3 strand schools, graduates and councils own scheme has been very successful
- Southwark Local Offer and Southwark Information and Advice Service targeting young people with SEND
- Education Business Alliance bringing together Businesses and Schools preparing students for the transition to jobs from education
- Sub-regional partnerships such as Central London Works open to Southwark residents' aged 16-25 and Youth Opportunities bullet in for young people in Southwark to sign up.
- One hub website and care leavers website targeting young people

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Southwark Works visibility and advertising in the borough; support for young people below the age of 18
- Apprenticeships numbers when compared to other boroughs; creative ways to reach young people; Southwark Works contracts promotion in the community
- Potential collaboration with organisation to increase visibility of Southwark works; ex-offender support and rehabilitation to get back into work

Patrick apologised to the commission on the framing of the phrase aged 18 and above in Southwark contracts as a typo. Within Southwark works contracts young people aged 16 and above have contracts available to them if they face barriers to employment. Southwark has successfully met targets for past two terms of 2500 apprenticeships, however benchmarking against other borough will be provided to commission at a later date. Providers within contracts are assessed on a two year term with an option to extend based on performance. Southwark Youth Deal within the New Economic Strategy is aimed at filling the gaps in publicity and spreading awareness of job opportunities and apprenticeships amongst young people. Specific contracts are tailored for ex-offenders and providers are measured against placement and sustaining jobs as a metric; such contracts are limited due to budgetary and resource constraints. However, Southwark has been quite successful in achieving value for money. Southwark has also an integrated network co-ordination service which has successfully linked many partners in the borough for over 20 years, however there is room for improvement as it's not perfect. Southwark is also working on an Outreach and Engagement plan to gauge the reach of such initiatives in the community.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes

- Education Business Alliance – communication between the private sector and community based initiatives, pooling resources and synergy
- Internships figure too low, evaluating performance of programmes, no. of apprenticeships in last 5 years

- Graduate scheme only for graduates or one year after graduation

Patrick explained to the commission that Education Business Alliance sits within a different department in the council and not local economy, answers to the question will be provided at a later date. Internships targets of 250 was set by Cabinet and officers did not have any input in it. On evaluation of programmes, last year an independent review was done by an external organisation called Rocket Science appointed by the council, to compare similar programmes in other boroughs, where in Southwark Works outperformed most comparative programmes. However, there were some improvements needed in working with clients for job opportunities and working with clients to train them for the jobs available.

The commission will be provided data on apprenticeships at a later date and also that council is working on reviewing the apprenticeship programme.

The commission agreed that graduate scheme needs to be reviewed with regards to graduates being supported 1-2 years after graduation as Universities already support students about to graduate.

The commission also agreed to ask in the Cabinet Member Interviews on internship targets that were set so low at 250 as many organisations involved could provide external paid internships.

8. CABINET RESPONSE TO EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY REVIEW: MITIGATING FALLING PUPIL NUMBERS IN SCHOOLS

The Cabinet response was noted by the commission.

9. CABINET RESPONSE TO EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY REVIEW: IMPACT OF COST OF LIVING CRISIS ON BUSINESSES

The Cabinet response was noted by the commission.

10. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

The commission noted the proposed Work Programme for 2023-24.

Meeting ended at 9.18 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: