



## **EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 4 October 2010 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

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**PRESENT:** Councillor David Hubber (Chair)  
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole  
Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE  
Councillor Adele Morris  
Councillor Rosie Shimell  
Councillor Althea Smith  
Councillor Cleo Soanes  
Jane Hole  
Sharon Donno

**OTHER MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER  
SUPPORT:** Julie Timbrell , project manager  
Shelly Burke , head of scrutiny  
Romi Bowen , strategic director children's services  
Pauline Armour, assistant director , children 5 – 11 services and inclusion  
Glen Garcia , head of pupil access

**1. APOLOGIES**

1.1 Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Rosie Shimell and Althea Smith.

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

2.1 There were none.

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

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

### **4. MINUTES**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2010 were agreed as an accurate record.

### **5. CABINET QUESTIONS WITH CLLR CATHERINE MCDONALD - CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

5.1 Cllr Catherine McDonald, Cabinet member for Children's Services, tabled written answers to questions 1 – 17. [These are attached] The Chair invited members to ask supplementary questions. A member queried why questions 19 to 23 had not received written answers and the cabinet member explained that the last few questions had come in after the deadline, but she would do her best to answer these during the course of the meeting. There were two other queries on questions and it became apparent that one question had gone astray and had not been put to Cllr McDonald, and question 18 had been submitted on time but had inadvertently not received a written answer.

5.2 Cllr Adele Morris asked a supplementary query to the written answer given to question 1, commenting that 2 miles is a long distance for a child to travel to school and asked if there are any plans to facilitate transport and avoid the use of cars. The cabinet member for children's services responded they are trying to reduce distances travelled and the 2 miles is the statutory limit but the council endeavours to meet the parent's preference where possible. The council are also trying to make permanent the extra places to build on temporary arrangements.

5.3 Cllr Rosie Shimell asked a supplementary query on question 5 and asked the cabinet member how she felt Youth Community Council meetings are working in practice? The Cabinet member commented that the young people participating are able and passionate and she had been impressed with their contribution.

5.4 Cllr David Hubber referred to question 4 and asked about the slight drop in numbers of children supported by Social Services following the Southwark Judgement. This was attributed to partly to work done to keep children with their families.

5.5 Cllr David Hubber referred to question 5 and asked if social services turnover was reducing? The strategic director for children's services, Romi Bowen, reflected that last year was a difficult year with Baby Peter. Southwark Council did have some vacancies that we could not fill so the Council approached New York. The council also paid extra money to keep people on the front line. We are now looking forward to reforms following the Social Work Task Force report and the current national review of child protection which the government has commissioned and which is being led by Prof Eileen Munro. These reforms should make social work more attractive.

- 5.6 Cllr Adele Morris commented that the recent Crystal Clear youth participation event had been well attended however she queried the appropriateness of a youth worker posing questions. Officers commented that it was difficult to comment without knowing the details but youth workers do sometimes play an advocacy role.
- 5.7 Cllr Adele Norris commented, in relation to the answer given to question 7, that there had been a rise in the number of teenage conceptions. The Cabinet member agreed that had been a small jump but generally there is good progress. Cllr Adele Morris asked about the number of conceptions that lead to live births. The strategic director for children's services commented that the abortion rate in Southwark is high and she can supply the figures to the committee.
- 5.8 Cllr David Hubber asked about plans for the Youth Offending Teams following on from the answer submitted to question 8. The Strategic Director commented that following a review the Council decided that the team should focus more on their enforcement and probationary role – in line with its statutory remit. The Youth Service has now picked up some of the other services formally offered by this team.
- 5.9 A member asked about the implementation of free school meals, following on from question 10. The Cabinet member responded that the Council has invited schools to participate in a proof of concept to ensure the model works. The Cabinet member was asked if she thought this would impact positively on obesity levels. She responded that the provision of one nutritious meal a day was one of the reasons the programme was being implemented and other councils who have done this have increased take up.
- 5.10 A member commented that one of the issues preventing take up is that children do not like the food and will not eat healthy meals. There was a comment that this can be improved by growing food and improving cooking skills.
- 5.11 The Cabinet member was asked about the cost implications and the Cabinet member responded that they had elected on the manifesto which included the pledge. The administration is committed to ensuring every child has one nutritious meal and reducing obesity levels which cross social class.
- 5.12 A supplementary question was asked on question 11, requesting more details on the Council's response to obesity levels. A member asked a specific question on engaging with parents to look at cooking. The Cabinet member responded that a range of healthy eating courses are offered. There was a question on the number of fast food outlets near schools and the Cabinet members indicated that they are working with planning to refuse permission to fast food joints near schools.
- 5.13 Cllr David Hubber drew the attention to the good practice in other boroughs in investing in volunteer mentors to support parents who are struggling with raising their families in challenging circumstances and referred to question 13. The Chair asked if the Cabinet members would consider introducing this in Southwark? The Cabinet member said in principle we could look into this. The Strategic Director said that Southwark does have Homestart which do this and the council does have a funding relationship with this organisation.
- 5.14 Cllr David Hubber referred to question 14 commenting that he and the Cabinet

member recently attended a meeting of Southwark Anti-Homophobic Forum where the main topic was the need to tackle more effectively homophobic bullying in schools. Cllr Hubber commented that he got the impression that the teachers found this difficult and needed more support, particularly if the teachers were gay or lesbian themselves. Could the heads be given more assistance? There is a need for more support so teachers feel more comfortable and are able to be 'out', if they want to. And the same is true for pupils. The cabinet member commented that they are looking at resources and assistance from Stonewall and that we do already have a good programme of PSHE education in schools.

- 5.15 A member asked about school results, referring to question 15, and asked how the vast improvements in the educational results, particularly GCSEs, in Southwark in the past eight years can be maintained and the upward trend continued? The cabinet member responded that schools will be looked at on a case by case basis and we will be working with teachers, heads and governors. We had 28 schools at floor level now there are 6. We will be promoting the ethos of aspiration so that all schools aspire to be outstanding. We also want to support teacher practice so class are delivered to a high standard and are engaging.
- 5.16 Cllr Cleo Soanes referred to question 17 and asked if Southwark schools are safe from Building Schools for the Future cuts? The Cabinet member confirmed that they were.
- 5.17 Cllr Cleo Soanes referred to question 18 and asked if the cabinet member if she thought that making every council home warm dry and safe will have an impact on education. The cabinet member agreed that it would and highlighted the importance of home and a place to do homework.
- 5.18 Members asked if the cabinet member believed that the improvement in educational attainment in Southwark was directly related to increased investment under the Labour Government and are you concerned that cuts in education spending could damage attainment? She responds that she did envisage they would cause damage, and that her aim was to minimise the impact. They are awaiting details from central government. Some things will end and something's the council will do differently. The council is engaged in a broad consultation and is speaking to Community Councils, the Youth Council and Speaker Box.
- 5.19 Concerns were raised about after school programmes and the possibility that schools might cut their extended schools programmes as a result of the cuts. The cabinet member responded that it was difficult to comment with out knowing the scale of the cuts and what will go; furthermore we do not know what the role of the authority will be. There was a query on the number of schools involved in the Olympic 2012 initiative. Officers responded that they would get back to members with this information.
- 5.20 Cllr The Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole asked if we're encouraging the young people to get involve in criminality by not providing sufficient services and facilities for them. The Cabinet member responded that most young people are not involved in crime; we have a good youth service and diversionary activities.
- 5.21 Members referred to questions 22 and 23 and asked how Councillors are going out to meet/engage the young people in the Borough? The cabinet members

referred to the recent Crystal Clear event, the youth council forums and assured members that they are using engagement to shape the services offered. The strategic director also referred to the 1000 stories collected last year, many of which have been published.

5.22 The Chair thanked the cabinet member for attending.

## **6. ACADEMIES REPORT**

6.1 The academies report circulated with the agenda was briefly presented by Pauline Armour , Assistant Director of 5-11 Services.

## **7. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REPORT**

7.1 Glen Garcia presented the report circulated. She explained that schools admissions is a complex process and the council makes information available both on the website and through publications. Some parents want face to face support, particularly if they have other complexities such as a child with special needs. One to one support is also often needed to help parents who do not get their first preference initially.

7.2 A member asked if parents can change their application preference? The officer confirmed that this can be changed up until the closing date.

7.3 Members commented that more information and promotion of the parental choice advisors would be good.

7.4 The officer explained that one of the issues is that council officers and teachers cannot give advice, only information. However the parental choice advisors can do this. This is to prevent any prejudicial or undue influence. This is less of an issue at secondary schools but can be a real issue at nursery level when children transfer to primary school.

7.5 This year the council did not circulate applications with initial information filled in as they want to increase online applications and reduce confusion. Last year people sometimes did two applications, both posting and submitting an online application. There was a request form a member for sufficient blank applications to be sent to schools.

7.6 Members emphasised the importance of clear advice so that parents can make realistic choices. Officers explained that they have revamped the publications they produce to help parents and children's with their school choices.

### **ACTION**

Members requested that they receive hard copies by post of Southwark's:

- i) Guide to starting secondary school
- ii) Guide to starting primary school

## **8. REVIEW OF PARENTING SUPPORT - PART ONE : SCHOOL ADMISSIONS**

8.1 The scoping documents circulated were reviewed and it was agreed that the committee agreed would pursue the following :

### **ACTION**

- i) hold interviews with officers and parents representatives and if possible, any governors in a one-off session
- ii) ask the independent members of the sub-committee to submit any evidence they may have, whether anecdotal or not
- ii) request evidence from the Admissions Forum

## **9. REVIEW OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND SPORTS PROVISION FOR SECONDARY AND PRIMARY CHILDREN**

8.1 The committee reviewed the scoping document and agreed they would pursue the above topic over the next two meetings.

8.2 Members thought it would be good to look at obesity rates for individual schools. They asked Pauline Armour , Assistant Director of 5-11 Services, if schools varied the amount of sport being offered and if some specialised? The officer confirmed there was variation and specialist sports partnerships. Members commented that it would be interesting to understand how sports programmes impacted on weight.

### **ACTION**

Officers will provide:

- a) A list of obesity rates for Southwark primary and secondary schools
- b) A list of Southwark sports specialist schools

Comparisons will then be made.

Relevant Southwark education and public health officers will be asked to:

- i) provide a presentation on the topic
- ii) Seek out academic research on nutrition & physical activity and its impact on childhood obesity.

## **10. TRAINING**

10.1 The Committee considered safeguarding training for members. It was agreed that if Southwark can do in house training then this will be organised. If this is not possible outside training will be purchased.

## **11. SOUTHWARK YOUTH COUNCIL**

11.1 Southwark Youth Council will be invited to attend a committee meeting. The committee will look into building links with the Youth Council and consider partnership work such as the youth council suggesting topics for review.

## **12. WORK PROGRAMME**

12.1 The new independent safeguarding chair will be invited . There will also be a request for the annual safeguarding report.

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**