



London Borough of Hackney
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2023/24
Date of Meeting Tuesday 27 June 2023

Minutes of the proceedings of the
Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street,
London E8 1EA

Chair	Councillor Sophie Conway
Councillors in Attendance	Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Midnight Ross, Cllr Ifraax Samatar, Cllr Lynne Troughton and Cllr Sarah Young
Co-optees	Andy English, Sudenaz Top and Mia Arthur
Apologies:	Jo Macleod
Officers In Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children’s Social Care• Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play• Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion• David Court, Head of School Organisation and Commissioning• Laura Stagg, Parent Carer Engagement System Leader• Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Well-being; and• Tim Wooldridge, Early Years Strategy Manager.
Other People in Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representatives from Save Colvestone Primary School• Parents from Baden Powell Primary School
Members of the Public:	1 and representatives from the press.
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Scrutiny Officer in the Chair

1 Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission

Scrutiny Officer in the Chair

1.1 The positions of Chair and Vice Chair were confirmed by Cabinet on 17th May 2023 as thus:

- Chair- Cllr Sophie Conway
- Vice Chair - Cllr Margaret Gordon

1.2 This was noted by members present.

2 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Conway in the Chair

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Commission:

- Jo Macleod, co-opted representative

3 Urgent Items / Order of Business

3.1 There were no urgent items and the agenda was as had been published.

4 Declarations of Interest

4.1 There were no declarations of interest.

5 Terms of Reference

5.1 At the start of each municipal year, members are required to note and agree the terms of reference for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission as set out in Article 7 and Section 4.5 of the Constitution.

5.2 Members noted the terms of reference.

6 Childcare Sufficiency (19.10)

6.1 Each year the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission reviews the sufficiency of local childcare ahead of autumn 2024 entry. A full sufficiency review was undertaken in 2022, therefore officers from the Early Years Service produced a brief update for members to review.

Questions from the Commission.

6.2 What evidence is there locally on the impact of the cost of living crisis on children and families' access to and uptake of early years childcare and education and on providers in being able to deliver services effectively? Are impacts being felt equally across all settings (e.g. in children's centres, nurseries)?

- The impact of the cost of living crisis was being felt across the early years system particularly in relation to demand for services. Parents were using childcare services more flexibly post Covid, where there was now greater demand for part-time places as parents continued to work from home. Financial pressures also meant that parents were also maximising the use of free childcare entitlements to which they were entitled.

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- Cost of living pressures were also impacting on child care settings with many facing increased cost pressures in terms of staffing, utilities and cleaning. The number of providers operating across the sector in Hackney had remained stable however, as settings which closed were often replaced by new ones.
- An Independent Child Care Commission had been established in Hackney to review those factors which were impacting on the provision of childcare in Hackney and what the authority can do to further support provision.
- The childcare element of the Children's Centres was also currently being reviewed to further understand the factors which were affecting delivery.
- The greatest impact had been within the playgroups which offer sessional childcare for 15 hours and 30 hours which is of concern. Occupancy at children's centres was currently running at 88% which is of also a concern as these were subsidised places and the impact that it has on private nurseries. There was a mixed picture across the PVI sector, where some settings are doing very well whilst others have had to re-evaluate their financial model.

6.3 Staff retention and recruitment was still widely recognised as the number one challenge for many local early years settings. Is there a clear strategy to support local providers? What work was being undertaken with Hackney College to provide more qualified staff to local settings?

- Staff retention was a national issue. Like most people, early years staff continue to be impacted by cost of living pressures. Early years and childcare could be a difficult and challenging role (especially during Covid) and it was clear that there were retention issues as staff left to seek better paid employment, predominantly in the retail sector.
- Given the lack of demand for places, there were currently sufficient numbers of staff to meet local childcare and early years settings needs. Recruiting staff with appropriate qualifications still remained problematic however, as staff continued to leave for other opportunities. HE was supporting settings through the delivery of NVQ Level 3 training at Hackney College and the development of a wellbeing offer to early years staff. It was anticipated that additional staff would be needed across the sector in response to the extension of free childcare from April 2024.
- In terms of the NVQ course at Hackney College a course will be running in the autumn of this year. Recruitment to the course had been difficult however, as trainees needed to be employed by a local early years setting and be allowed one day a week study leave. To date registrations were around 14-15 in total, but a further recruiting drive was planned to bring numbers up further.

6.4 Ofsted have reported that the high quality local apprenticeships could play a significant role in responding to local recruitment and retention issues in the early years sector. Have there been any developments in creating more apprenticeships in the early years sector in Hackney? Hackney Council is a significant provider through its Children's Centres - do local Children's Centres support local apprenticeships schemes? Is there any data on the number of childcare apprentices there are in Hackney?

- Some settings did have apprenticeships but no data was available on this at present. This could be included in the next sufficiency survey which would allow a much fuller picture to be obtained.

6.5 Supporting vulnerable children to access the 2 year old free childcare offer is a priority as this can deliver real benefits to children and their families. What does Hackney know about the 33% of children who are entitled are not taking up this offer: has there been any formal analysis of this cohort, for example where they are located, if they are in temporary accommodation?

- The names of low income families eligible for 2 year old free childcare are released to Hackney Education, and local Children's Centre then attempt to make contact with these families to support their pathway into local childcare services. GDPR regulations mean that this data has to be destroyed after 2

weeks, so only those parents whose children enter child care as a result can be tracked.

6.6 In terms of the 1,122 vulnerable 2 year olds currently receiving free childcare in Hackney, are these equally distributed across all types of settings (independent, nursery, child-minders and children's centres)? Is there also a sufficient take up of this offer within the Orthodox Jewish Community?

- It is very difficult to tell what the take up is as the DWP just supply a list of names and postcodes of eligible children for free 2 year old childcare entitlement. Playgroups and Children's Centres support many of the children accessing the free 2 year old childcare offer for vulnerable children as many Private, Voluntary and Independent settings choose not to do so.
- Officers reported that there was a significant take up of the free childcare offer for 2 year olds in the Orthodox Jewish Community, but it was difficult to determine what proportion of the community were represented as the authority did not have access to the data of those not taking up the offer. For those children it was aware of, there was significant uptake in child-minding settings who were supporting over 120 children from the Charedi community.
- A number of two year olds who are entitled but not officially taking up provision may be utilising free open access provision at local children's centres until a vacancy becomes available at the children centre or until provision becomes available at a setting closer to them.

Agreed: That Hackney Education would include data in the next childcare sufficiency on the number of children receiving two year old free childcare across early years settings.

6.7 Although access to specialist support services is out of the control of early years staff, what can officers report back in terms of waiting times for SLT and other specialist support services for children in early years settings? Are waiting times improving?

- Hackney Education can only provide anecdotal evidence on this as these waiting lists are controlled by health partners. It was noted that whilst some children were being seen quite quickly, others may have to wait significantly longer. More detailed data would be available from the Homerton Hospital which operates these services.

6.8 The number of children accessing support under the SEND Inclusion fund has increased. Last year it was reported that the total fund available was just under £1m. Has there been any uplift in funding available for 2023/24?

- The inclusion fund is developed by top-slicing Early Years funding for 2,3 and 4 year olds which is then used to support children (not settings) with additional needs. Any funds not used have to be passported back to local settings and for the last few years, the allocated sum has been sufficient to meet local demands and the fund has not been overspent. If demand does increase, proposals will go to School Forum to get authorisation for an increase in funds.

6.9 An additional £204m is being provided to provide an uplift to childcare funding for 2023/24. Is there any estimate as to what this extra funding will mean in terms of the increases in the hourly rates payable to providers for the provision of 2 year olds and 3 and 4 year free childcare? How was the Council planning to engage and involve parents in these reforms?

- The Chancellor set out plans to gradually extend free childcare provision from April 2024 through to September 2025, in which free 30 hour childcare would be provided to children aged 9 months and above whose parents were working (16 hours). It was not clear what impact the additional funding would have on the hourly rate provided to childcare providers at this stage, but an increase was expected in September 2023. It was difficult for the authority to plan for these developments at the moment as much of the information was not available (e.g.

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if there will be a national advertising campaign, additional funding to LA's to administer the scheme, whether children aged 9 months+ would be eligible for funding within the Inclusion Fund). It was also not clear at this stage what impact that proposed developments would have on demands for childcare and the availability of places locally.

- Hackney Education was waiting for news of any central government promotional campaign and if there would be any additional funding for local initiatives to promote parental awareness. HE had numerous promotional platforms at its disposal which would be used to promote parental awareness, but ensuring that local settings were fully aware would be key to reaching local parents.

6.10 Can you briefly update the Commission on vacancy and uptake of childcare places across local children's centres? Are there waiting lists for childcare provision at Children's Centres?

- The occupancy rate at local children's centres was 88% which does not appear to have changed since last year's full assessment (noting a review of Children Centre usage was under way). Vacancy rates were however higher at local playgroups and child-minders (c.60%). This demonstrates that there were vacancies across the sector.

6.11 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to members questions.

7 School Estates Strategy (Falling School Rolls) (19.30)

7.1 An update on the School Estates Strategy was taken at Cabinet on 22nd May 2023, which, due to falling school rolls, proposed to informally consult on the closure of two primary schools (De Beauvoir and Randal Cremer) and the merger of a further four primary schools (Baden Powell with Nightingale and Colvestone with Princess May). The informal consultation will take place from 5th June to 16th July 2023. The Children and Young people Scrutiny Commission has agreed to scrutinise the proposals put forward by Cabinet and to make a submission to the informal consultation.

7.2 To inform the scrutiny process, the Commission has made a number of approaches to include representation from parent groups from the most impacted schools (Randal Cremer, De Beauvoir, Colvestone and Baden Powel) and from Hackney National Education Union. The Commission managed to secure representation from parents at Colvestone Primary School and Baden Powell school and the chair thanked parents for attending the meeting.

7.3 After this meeting the Commission would submit a response to the informal consultation, and for transparency, this will be published in the next agenda of the Commission (14th September 2023).

Hackney Education

7.4 A short presentation was made from Director of Education and Inclusion which highlighted the following from the report:

- Falling school rolls was a London wide problem with 29 of the 32 London boroughs experiencing reduced demand for primary school places.
- There were a number of factors driving this which included lower birth rates, exit of families from London due to Brexit and the Covid pandemic.
- DfE recommended that local education systems should not operate at a surplus of places greater than 5%, but in Hackney this was in excess of 20%.
- HE had engaged local stakeholders from January to April 2022, and with the assistance of a range of criteria, developed a number of proposals to close and amalgamate 6 local primary schools. Cabinet agreed to informally consult on these proposals in May 2023 ahead of any statutory consultation.

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- It was acknowledged that the proposals were difficult for all parties involved, but HE had sought to avoid these actions through support to schools to change their model of operation and the restrictions of local Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) at a number of local schools.
- 97% of local schools were good or outstanding, but schools would face pressures to maintain such high standards with increasing budget pressures which would result from falling school rolls (e.g. cuts to teachers and support staff, extracurricular activities).
- The informal consultation would be open to all local stakeholders and local residents. All schools and parents impacted would be visited by HE setting out the proposals and to gauge their responses. HE would then consider all these views together with the consultation responses and would update proposals for Cabinet to consider for statutory consultation in the autumn.

Save Colvestone Primary School (SCPS)

7.5 Parents from Save Colvestone Primary School (SCPS) made a presentation to the Commission highlighting a number of key issues which are summarised below. A full transcript of the submission was circulated to all members and is also attached to these minutes with further detail of the issues raised.

- Representatives of SCPC had already made a detailed submission to Cabinet setting out their challenge to the proposals to merge Colvestone Primary School with Princess May School (which is included within Cabinet Papers for 22nd May 2023). The SCPC representatives noted that there has not been any response from HE to any of the issues thus far raised by their group in the pre-consultation or official submission to Cabinet.
- SCPC raised a number of concerns around the assessment of financial viability, including that the school had now returned to surplus since joining the Blossom Federation and had continued to reduce its outstanding deficit.
- There were outstanding questions about the consultation process, particularly in respect of the information that it was seeking from local schools, parents and other local stakeholders. The lack of clarity on the consultation criteria gave concerns as to the authenticity of the consultation.
- A number of schools had already lost children as a result of them being named within the proposals, which was further jeopardising their financial position. It was not clear how those schools would be compensated if they are not closed or merged?
- Representatives suggested that plans for the school merger did not recognise the Dalston Development Plan which noted that 600 new homes would be built in the vicinity of Colvestone, 200 of which would be affordable and family homes.
- Merger proposals did not also support parental choice as Colvestone Primary (a one form entry school) was preferred by many parents over the larger Princess May (two form entry). Surveys among parents at Colvestone indicated that Princess May did not figure in any of the 6 preferred choices of parents and that a majority would not send their children to Princess May if Colvestone was merged with that school.
- 24% of children accessing Colvestone have SEND and parents have chosen this school as they have assessed that this school would better suit their needs, especially as this is a smaller school.
- It was suggested that different metrics have been applied to faith schools compared to maintained schools in assessing future viability and inclusion within these proposals (i.e. applications over registrations) and the use of different pupil number viability thresholds (60% and 80% respectively). Whilst the local authority has no authority to close faith schools, this has occurred in other boroughs.

7.6 No further time was available for SCPS representatives to present, but the Chair noted that the presentation had been circulated to members in advance.

Representatives from SCPS raised a number of questions in the presentation for which they had as yet not received a response.

Baden Powell Parents

7.7 A number of parents and children from Baden Powell Primary School attended and made the following comments:

- Baden Powell School had specifically been selected by parents as it met the needs of parents of children with SEND; it was a smaller school with good SEND provision.
- Parents were anxious as to how the transfer to another school would impact on children with SEND, particularly these children may find it more challenging to adjust and adapt to different environments, other children and new staff. It had taken a number of years for children with SEND to settle into Baden Powell School, but now staff understood their child's needs and they were receiving the support they needed. Parents were anxious that this relationship would be jeopardised in the transfer to a new school.
- There were also issues raised around the use of SATS scores determined during the pandemic to determine school place admissions in year 6 transfer to secondary.
- Nightingale Primary School did not have a large play area compared to Baden Powell school.

Questions from the Commission

7.8 Can officers set out the key aims and objectives of the informal consultation process? Can Officers also set out what dialogue there has been so far with stakeholders?

- The consultation documentation asks a number of questions of stakeholders which will contribute to an evaluation report. The aim of the consultation is to capture as much information as possible to inform the next stage of reporting and decision making. Officers will advise Cabinet and who will then make a decision. The informal process aims to maximise the contributions from as many stakeholders as possible.

7.9 The informal consultation survey asks whether respondents agree or disagree with the proposals being put forward? What if there are clear majorities of respondents who disagree with the specific proposals put forward?

- Officers will review all the information from the consultation and on that basis will make recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet will ultimately decide on the proposals put forward.

7.10 What key areas of information are officers looking to receive from the informal consultation process? Is there any specific information which might inform or influence subsequent proposals put forward by Hackney Education or any of the mitigations put in place? The Commission referred to the submission by Save Colvestone Primary School about the lack of clarity of what was expected from the consultation process.

- The School Estates Strategy set out the criteria for assessing schools and how that brings the 6 schools named in the proposals into scope for closure or amalgamation. Financial viability and school numbers are important in this assessment, as well as the voice of parents and carers. In terms of the process and what information is needed to remove a school from this scope or to end the process overall is a demonstration that schools are sustainable against the criteria set out in the report - can a school sustain itself financially in the long term?

7.11 The Chair noted that there was not time to scrutinise the consultation further, but it was clear that members of the Commission were not satisfied with the fullness of the answers set out above. Further clarity was needed in respect of what the council aimed

to achieve from the consultation and what it intended to do with the information collected.

- The Group Director responded that the council did not want to presuppose any information it might get from the consultation process and that it was genuinely interested in all responses it might receive. It would take into account all these contributions when developing recommendations to Cabinet. The GD reiterated that the council was compelled to act as 20% vacancy factor in primary schools was not sustainable and the council must act to protect education quality across Hackney. The Council was genuinely open in respect of the information it was looking for from the consultation and would produce evidence based recommendations.

7.12 The proposals put forward for the school mergers assume that parents will choose to move their child to the merged school (i.e. from Baden Powell to Nightingale and from Colvestone to Princess May). How confident is Hackney Education that parents in merged schools will move to suggested schools? What has been the feedback from parents at Colvestone and Baden Powell on their intentions? If parents do not choose to move children as assumed, will this not jeopardise the stability of host schools (Princess May and Nightingale)? Data produced by Colvestone Primary School suggests that the majority of parents would not send their children to Princess May. Is the council verifying this data and what mitigations are in place for Princess May should the numbers of expected children switching from Colvestone do not materialise?

- Parental choice is important and HE did not want to undermine any due process by pre-empting any findings that might emerge from the consultation. It was reiterated that Cabinet would not take any decisions on this issue until December 2023. No local authority had the jurisdiction to order parents to send their children to any specific school, this remained the choice of parents themselves. Using the best data available and applying detailed modelling, officers have presented options for merged schools based on best local fit (walking distances to school, availability of alternatives etc.). These are recommendations and not mandatory. This would be a guaranteed offer to parents, should they wish to take it up, but they were not obliged.
- It was reiterated that there were in excess of 20% surplus places in primary care settings in Hackney and that tough decisions have to be taken to reduce this surplus as this is a burden on the whole educational system and is not sustainable. A number of schools were currently experiencing financial difficulties and others were likely to run into financial difficulties in the year ahead, so action was needed to be taken and surplus places needed to be taken out of the system.

7.13 Although Brexit and the pandemic have been cited as factors which are contributing to falling school rolls, it is also clear that local academies and free schools had also been a factor in drawing children away from maintained local schools. Why are children moving away from maintained sector schools if they are good and outstanding?

- It was inaccurate to say that children were moving from maintained schools to academies and free schools locally, as the key issues were Brexit and pandemic and broader migration of families outside of inner city areas. It was acknowledged that competition from free schools had impacted on local places but a free school has not opened for a number of years in Hackney. There were recent concerns that a further free school would open in the borough but this has not materialised. It was noted that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor had recently written to the Secretary of State setting out their concerns around the emergence of free schools and its impact on local school place planning.

7.14 Why was a merger between the two schools proposed for closure (Randal Cremer and De Beauvoir) not considered?

- The modelling had shown that these two schools were too far apart in distance to be considered for a merger.

7.15 After the announcement of schools in scope, will parents not begin to move their children from the schools now, across all year groups even before the consultation has closed and a final decision taken. Will this not compound the financial problems of schools in scope? What mitigation measures will be put in place? Why has there been significant recent capital investment in Colvestone school for this school now to be considered for merger off site?

- This was not an easy issue to deal with and it was a risk to all those schools concerned. It was noted that a school in Islington had recently closed soon after consultation on merger and closures were announced as there was a significant number of parents who chose to move their child almost immediately. This is unfortunately out of the control of officers and all that the council can do is to reassure parents and staff that the school remains open and no final decision has been taken. This is a national issue and the Council has looked at how other boroughs have taken on this process, and unfortunately, there are few if any options to do this differently without risk to schools as you cannot dictate to parents what they can and cannot do.
- It is incumbent on the authority to make sure that all children receive education in good quality schools. No decision has been taken as yet, so the council will make sure that every school is fit for purpose and has the best quality buildings and infrastructure it is able to provide.

7.16 Why has the decision been taken to merge Colvestone with Princess May schools on the Princess May site and not the Colvestone site?

- Being a one form entry school, Colvestone Primary was too small a site to scale up and accept more children whereas Princess May is a two form entry. Both schools had great attributes but it was not physically possible to relocate to Colvestone.

7.17 In terms of assumptions and projections, the Council is talking about a number of schools which are currently in scope for closure and amalgamation. Clearly other schools will be facing financial difficulties in the near future on these projections, so what is being done to prepare schools in a possible next tranche of amalgamations or closures?

- It was acknowledged that this was a live situation in which it was likely that school rolls will be falling for a considerable time, until 2029/30 at the earliest. A dedicated School Estates Team was being set up to provide ongoing support to schools to ensure that engagement was taking place at an earlier time as possible. Many schools have already commenced efforts to improve financial efficiencies through a range of processes described in the report. It was impossible to say how many more schools or school places may need to be removed from the system in any further restructures, but the authority must ensure that the local education system is sustainable, has integrity and is delivering high quality education to children and young people.

7.18 As the local authority has no powers to reduce PANs or to close schools operated by London Church Diocese (Church of England and Roman Catholic schools) can officers set out how these respective organisations are engaged and involved in local school place planning particularly as these schools are also facing acute pressures from falling school rolls? The Commission also noted that 83% of parents in the Hackney Schools for All Consultation said that local schools should be non-denominational.

- Faith schools play an important role in the local education system not only in delivering quality education, but also through extending the choice of schools available to local parents. There has been strong engagement from both RC and CoE Diocese as well as the local Charedi community in the School Estates Strategy and they have all been assessing school numbers. It was not just about

numbers however, these decisions also need look at location, accessibility and parental choice.

- It was acknowledged that a number of faith schools were in a vulnerable position and that discussions were in an advanced stage about future options which might include (for example) vertical grouping of classes or merged leaderships.
- All settings have a role to play in the local education system irrespective of whether these are faith schools, free schools, academies or maintained schools. It is important that the process is fair, open and transparent for all schools.

7.19 Colvestone School Representatives noted that similar information was submitted as part of the pre Cabinet decision to go to informal consultation but has not been responded to.

- Officers noted that the report from Colvestone was received too late for a formal response within its own documentation, but representatives were thanked for their detailed submission. This submission was included in the Cabinet reports and it will be assessed as part of the evidence base for the next stage of this process.

7.20 The Chair noted that as the local authority could only propose limiting numbers or the closure of maintained schools, it was seeking assurance that there had been consultative and engagement processes with other education settings and authorities to develop a fair and equitable range of proposals to respond to falling school rolls.

- Officers responded that consultation with a wide range of schools and stakeholders had been in process for many months prior to the publication of the Cabinet report in May. Details of these consultations were necessarily confidential to preserve the integrity of the process and that other schools (including faith schools) were in further dialogue about possible future interventions. No parts of the school system were exempt.

7.21 What reassurance can officers provide that planned new development across the borough has been sufficiently factored into local school place planning (e.g. Dalston Local Plan, London Legacy Development Corporations housing plans for the Olympic Park). The Commission noted that the report provided evidence that local planning documents suggest that 70% of planned new homes are for 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation which are not family accommodation. What assurance can officers provide that Hackney Education and Hackney Planning Authority are working together collaboratively across this issue and that there is sufficient family accommodation being planned for in Hackney?

- Hackney Education has worked closely with colleagues in Housing Services in producing these plans and proposals. It is the overarching assessment of housing colleagues that the amount of new development coming forward will not significantly impact pupil numbers and ultimately these plans. The GLA modelling data was well respected and used by all 32 London boroughs. If there were any further data which might influence these figures, it would be assessed and reflected in local plans.

7.22 Recent data submitted to this Commission indicates that in excess of 200 children were being Electively Home Educated (not including children from the Orthodox Jewish Community)? What is being done to engage and support parents, with a view to encouraging children to return to mainstream education?

- Parents who choose to home educate do so for a number of reasons. Even if all these children were encouraged to return to mainstream education it would have little impact on the overall surplus of school places.

7.23 What assurance can the officers provide to the Commission on the accuracy of projections given that Nightingale School was developed in response to expected increase in demand for new primary places which did not materialise?

- This decision was taken some years ago before the decision making process for this current assessment on school rolls. Officers would take this issue away to see what happened in this instance, but like this decision, officers were probably putting forward proposals based on the best evidence available at the time.

7.24 At 3.4.7.2 the report suggests that the cumulative balance of Randal Cremer schools is a £310K surplus accrued over 5 years. How is Randal Cremer school able to generate a financial surplus against falling school rolls? What happens to cumulative balances if the school is closed?

- The head is outstanding who has brought a wide range of expertise and experience to the school. The head is also a trained accountant which has contributed to such a good financial position that the school was in despite its ongoing pressures around falling rolls. The head holds multiple roles within the school which has helped to reduce staff costs and also restructured the school numerous times to reduce budgets. The numbers of pupils attending the school have continued to fall and there are few other options available.

7.25 The Cabinet report (at 5.3.2) notes that financial implications of the proposals if taken forward will result in a £3.4m cost (of which £1m will be annually recurring to protect vacant sites). Will all these costs be liable to the Council General Fund? Will any of these costs be absorbed in DSG funding? How confident are officers that the £3.4m financial cost to administer the proposals for closure and amalgamation are realistic given that the contracted liabilities of the schools in scope are not known/ documented and a number of schools in scope are experiencing a deteriorating financial position?

- Officers reassured the Commission that whilst not wanting to pre-empt the proposals, a number of council departments were looking at the implications in relation to contract management, capital and property teams and asset management. In terms of protecting school sites this would have to come from the Council General Fund as it would not be liable within the DSG.

7.26 A key aim of local education policy is to ensure that there is diversity of school provision, but also to ensure that there is diversity within local schools which reflect the rich and vibrant social, economic and cultural mix of local communities in Hackney. The Commission notes that the schools all in scope all have higher rates of children on FSM and with SEND - how can officers ensure that there is diversity of provision going forward?

- Parental choice is key here and the authority has jurisdiction over this.

7.27 The report highlights the number of children with an EHCP who will be impacted by the proposed school closures and mergers and indicates that 'further support' will be made available. Can officers clarify what might be included in this offer of 'further support' and what can be done to mitigate the impact?

- Parent carer voice has been an important part of the process and their concerns have been noted and recorded (e.g. around SEND, playgrounds and uniform costs. Whilst it was still too early to put in place any support as yet ahead of any decision, concerns had been noted and HE would be in a good position to respond once a decision has been taken.
- The head of SEND had also been part of the consultation process and had been present at a number of consultation meetings to provide further assurance on what could be put in place to support children with SEND. Transitional support would be key to help children adjust to new school environments which their parents chose. These children would be provided with bespoke transition plans.

7.28 How many staff will be impacted by the proposed school closures and amalgamations? Can officers set out the implications for staff at those schools proposed for closure and for amalgamation? Will staff at school proposed for closure be provided with redundancy? Will staff at both schools proposed for amalgamation be able to compete for jobs on the new singular site?

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- There are 200 staff across all the schools in scope within these proposals. It is difficult to be precise about the possible impact at present as these are just proposals and no decision has been taken. The Council was doing all it could to minimise the impact that these proposals would have on staff and preserve as many jobs as possible. It is likely that staff at those schools hosting an amalgamation will be in a better position than those who are vacating a site. Hackney Education was conducting dedicated consultation with staff groups across all the schools and when any final decision has been made, HE HR department will support staff further to transition to future staffing models.
- HE does not have all the answers at this stage, but it will learn from other areas and listen to all the stakeholders and develop and improve plans as needed.

7.29 The shortfall in the number of children accessing primary schools will eventually work through the system to local secondary schools in future years. Given that the majority of our schools are academies over which the Council has limited influence in terms of pupil numbers - how is the Council preparing for the likelihood of falling secondary schools rolls?

- Next term, officers will be sharing data with local secondary schools and help them to prepare for what is expected in terms of falling school rolls. Every tool available to the council will be used but what is expected is unprecedented.

7.30 The Chair noted that there will be a process off-line to pull together a submission to the informal consultation for the 16th July 2023. The chair emphasised that the role of the Commission was to scrutinise proposals and to act as a critical friend, to help improve decision making by providing challenge to the proposals put forward and holding decision makers to account in public. The Chair also noted that the Commission was not decision making and it cannot override decisions taken by Cabinet.

7.31 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from members.

8 Unregistered Educational Settings (20.40)

8.1 Following further scrutiny in January 2023, the Commission agreed to write to the Secretary of State setting out its ongoing education and safeguarding concerns around the presence and unregistered educational settings in Hackney. The letter was circulated to members and sent to the Secretary of State in March 2023, and is included here for public record.

8.2 The Commission received a response from the Secretary of State on the day of this meeting (27/6/23) and will be sent to Commission members and published in a future agenda pack.

Action: Letter from Secretary of State to be sent to members of the Commission and published in the next agenda.

9 Housing Support for Care Leavers (20.45)

9.1 In March 2022, the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission undertook an investigation into the nature and level of housing support for care leavers in Hackney. The Commission developed a report setting out 10 recommendations in October 2021.

9.2 The Cabinet response to the Commission's recommendations was published on June 16th 2023 and was considered (and approved) by Cabinet at its meeting last night (26th June 2023). The Chair thanked officers from across Corporate Parenting -

Benefits and Housing Needs - Housing Policy and Strategy for their support for the Commission's in this work.

9.3 The Chair noted a number of key achievements from this work as recommended by members of the scrutiny commission's which included:

1. The housing needs of care leavers would now explicitly stated in the new Housing Strategy (due end of 2023);
2. Although the quota for care leavers has not been increased as recommended by the Commission, it is expected that the Housing Register will be amended so that all care leavers age 18 can register for social housing (previously 21, important for parity and help reduce 'cliff edges' of care and support);
3. There are now 2 new benefits and housing needs officers dedicated to supporting local care leavers.
4. Most care leavers will be required to find housing in the private rented sector and the Commission is pleased that additional support will be provided through Commissioning of voluntary sector support via Settle (this is again important for the parity of support). Also rent deposit support is now available to all care leavers who wish to move on to their own tenancies before the age of 21.
5. Accepted recommendation (8) to improve communication with care leavers through improved on-line offer AND establishment of a care leavers hub

9.4 The Chair noted that there is clearly further work needed to be done, for example, to make sure that our care leavers are exempt from council tax - wherever they are placed as they are in many other London boroughs. There were also a number of recommendations where there has been no response from Cabinet which the Commission will follow up, for example, in recommendation number 6 around the Housing Strategy. There has been no response in the report to recommendations around for example:

- Care Leavers being named as a priority in the Living Rent Scheme;
- How local Housing Associations would be engaged to support the needs of local care leavers.

9.5 The Chair emphasised that it was important that care leavers were named as a priority in the future Hackney Housing Strategy, but further help was needed at this strategic level to increase both housing capacity and options for care leavers. The Chair would meet with the Chair of Living in Hackney to arrange monitoring and review arrangements for this work.

9.6 Members noted the response from Cabinet.

10 Children and Family Hubs Consultation (20.55)

10.1 Hackney Education is consulting on proposals to develop some of its existing children's centres into four Children & Family Hubs. These hubs will offer support for families with children up to 19 years old (up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities – SEND). The Consultation will run from June 1st to July 13th 2023.

10.2 Due to timetabling pressures it has not been possible to include a full public scrutiny of the proposals for this to contribute to the planned consultation timeframe at this meeting (and the next meeting will be after the consultation has closed i.e. on the 14th September 2023). Therefore given the consultation timeline, the Commission is therefore asked to consider if it would like to develop a submission off-line - and publish this in the next available agenda.

10.3 If members wanted to provide a submission, it was requested that these should be provided to the scrutiny officer by June 29th, where these would be collated and

submitted to the consultation by July 13th 2023. Alternatively, members can contribute personally towards the consultation online (up until July 13th).

11 New Work Programme 2023/24 (21.00)

11.1 The Commission develops a new work programme each year to ensure that it is relevant and aligns with the priorities of the community, the Council and other stakeholders. The Commission consults with key stakeholders in developing the new work programme including:

- Members of the Commission
- Other non-executive councillors
- Members of the public
- Cabinet members and senior officers
- Local statutory partners and HCVS.

11.2 Attached in the report pack was the list of suggestions received which have been accumulated from 4 sources:

- Standing items which the Commission takes regularly within its work programme
- items identified from the 2022/23 work programme
- Horizon scanning - national and local policy developments (or events) which may necessitate the Commission to look at;
- Suggestions from key stakeholders.

11.3 Members were invited to review suggestions and prioritise issues for inclusion within the work programme for the year ahead. Noting:

- There are 7 remaining meetings;
- An in depth review could be undertaken in one singular - scrutiny in a day - session
- There will be opportunities to review multiple areas at Cabinet Q & A and through the budget scrutiny process.

11.4 In prioritising issues members should consider:

- Does the prospective issue align with corporate priorities?
- Does the prospective issue resonate with residents and the local community?
- Is this an area where scrutiny can have impact?

11.5 Members of the Commission noted the following priorities:

- Cllr Binne Lubbock - 1. Vaping 2. School Behaviour management. 3. FSM 4. FASD. 5. Play and Physical Activity. 6. Impact of school closures should they be agreed;
- Cllr Laudat Scott - 1. FSM provision follow-up particularly in relation to secondary school provision.
- Cllr Samatar - 1. FSM 2. Mental health and wellbeing for children in schools. 3. Language provision and support for refugee children in schools. 4. Cyberbullying
- Cllr Ross 1. Child safeguarding protection and the emotional and mental health impact of abuse on children.
- Cllr Gordon - 1. Behaviour management in relation to child Q outcomes and evidence base of these policies in local schools. 2. Kinship carers offer. 3. FSM
- Cllr Troughton - 1. Vaping and substance misuse items would be beneficial. 2. FASD - education and provision. 3. Sexual harassment in schools of girls and VAWAG would be useful.

11.6 Standing items were agreed by the Commission to come back every year, however, this is the decision of the Commission and they may chose not to do so, but perhaps defer for a year or absorb into another item.

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11.7 The Chair, Vice Chair and Scrutiny Officers would develop a draft work programme for the year ahead and circulate to members for review. The Chair would then engage with relevant Cabinet members and Senior officers to scope and plan agreed items.

12 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

12.1 Minutes of the previous meeting held on the 17th April 2023 were noted and agreed by members.

13 Any Other Business

13.1 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 14th September. There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9.55pm.

Duration of the meeting: 2hr 55min