

London Borough of Hackney  
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2023/24  
Date of Meeting Monday 15 January 2024

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

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<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Sophie Conway</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge and Cllr Sarah Young</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Ifraax Samatar and Cllr Lynne Troughton</b>
<b>Co-optees</b>	<b>Andy English</b>
<b>In Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children’s Social Care</b></li><li>• <b>Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks &amp; Play (On-line)</b></li><li>• <b>Jacque Burke, Group Director Children and Education</b></li><li>• <b>Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion</b></li><li>• <b>Jim Gamble, Independent Safeguarding Commissioner</b></li><li>• <b>Jason Marantz, Assistant Director, School Standards and Improvement</b></li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Recording:</b>	<b><a href="https://youtube.com/live/v7bYsQD8NgM">https://youtube.com/live/v7bYsQD8NgM</a></b>
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## **Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair**

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
- Cllr Lee-Laudat Scott;
  - Cllr Lynne Troughton;
  - Cllr Ifraax Samatar.

- 1.2 Members connecting on-line:
- Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice Chair)
  - Cllr Anya Sizer
  - Chanelle Paul (Co-opted Member)

## **2 Urgent Items / Order of Business**

2.1 The Chair indicated that an item on Unregistered Educational Settings was scheduled for this meeting, but as the council is in a pre-election period due to the current by-election being held in Cazenove ward, it was agreed to defer this item to a later date (May 2024) given the significant community interest in that ward in this subject.

2.2 The Chair also reminded members to avoid conversations which may specifically concern issues relating to Cazenove ward.

2.3 There were no late items and the business of the meeting was as published.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

3.1 The following declarations were received:

- Jo Macleod was governor at a school in Hackney and was a parent of a child with additional needs.
- Cllr Anya Sizer was a parent of a child with SEN.

## **4 City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report (19.05)**

4.1 The City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) annual report is a standing item within the Commission's work programme. This report allows the Commission to have oversight of local child safeguarding work which can in turn guide and inform topics selected for future scrutiny.

4.2 The Chair thanked Jim Gamble, Independent Commissioner for Child Safeguarding for the CHSCP annual report which provided a comprehensive account of safeguarding activity across Hackney. The Independent Commissioner thanked all local agencies for their contributions to the 2022/23 report and highlighted the following key issues to members present:

- The report detailed progress against key safeguarding priorities. The report primarily responded to CHSCP priorities for 2022/23, including staff wellbeing. The wellbeing of the local workforce was critical in delivering high quality services and in the effective safeguarding of local children. A staff safeguarding survey revealed that there was much willingness to engage with CHSCP and staff on the whole indicated that they were well supported by their line managers.
- There was a need for safeguarding organisations to engage further with local housing providers and with voluntary sector organisations to raise awareness, extend networks of good practice and support information sharing.
- Child Q update report response was disappointing in that the police did not acknowledge institutional racism in the force for which there was a growing body of evidence to support this.
- Since the publication of the Child Q review, all local agencies had committed to anti-racist policies and practice, yet to date there was little tangible evidence of these being applied and this was being followed up by the CHSCP.
- The CHSCP spoke to children in their own environment which was a positive development in helping to reach the authentic voice of children and young people. The CHSCP would be teaming up with other agencies to further develop this approach for this year.

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- There is a national programme of 'getting the basics right' in safeguarding, but the view of local practitioners here in Hackney was that this approach was too Eurocentric and would need to be adapted with the project lead (NSPCC) when applied in the borough.
- The reviews that the CHSCP undertake are highlighting a number of new issues for the locality, such as the management of sex offenders within the community. A local case referral had promoted a broader assessment of provision to identify if there were any systems that needed to be strengthened.
- Working Together had been consulted upon by the government to implement a number of developments to local safeguarding arrangements. Whilst some of these were welcomed others were felt to be untested. Of particular concern was the suggested removal of the Independent Chair from local partnerships to be replaced by the Head of Children's Services as this would raise questions about accountability and the ability to provide independent challenge to local safeguarding arrangements. It was suggested that this weakened local safeguarding arrangements, and this was the view of Hackney and many other local safeguarding partnerships who also did not support this move.

#### Questions from the Commission

4.3 From the safeguarding work across the partnership, what were the key safeguarding risks and challenges to emerge in Hackney for 2022/23? a) Are there any new or emerging risks that the Commission needs to be made aware of? b) Are safeguarding concerns in Hackney any different to other London boroughs, or are there specific risks for Hackney? c) How do these assessments inform local safeguarding priorities for 2023/24?

- (JG) The mental health crisis has been rapidly developing across the country and Hackney was no different in this respect. More recently the crisis in Palestine had substantially increased the risk and incidence of faith based hate crimes and the potential impact that this has on young people particularly in relation to becoming radicalised. This would need to be carefully assessed and monitored locally by all agencies.

4.4 Like many other boroughs across London, Hackney is having to place large numbers of families in temporary accommodation due to the lack of social housing and other housing options within the borough. From a safeguarding perspective, is the CHSCP aware of evidence, here or elsewhere, of heightened safeguarding risks to children placed in TA?

- (JB) Once a child has left care at the age of 18 they will have the support of a personal adviser (PA). The leaving care team works very closely with housing service to develop stronger pathways including within supported living arrangements for those that may need ongoing post 18 support. The borough has a strong record of supporting care leavers, but access to affordable housing is a real challenge across London. Working closely with housing providers helps the corporate parenting team to engage with young people earlier on the issue of future housing which can lead to better planning.

4.5 The Chair followed up from the questioning above, to ask whether there were any associations between the referrals for children's social care being received by the department and if these families were residents in temporary accommodation?

- (JB) Housing was a significant issue for many families that the children's social care service was working with. It was noted that many of the families are placed outside of the borough in temporary accommodation, therefore their safeguarding needs would also be met by the borough in which they reside.

4.6 In terms of the risk of increased radicalisation of children, an Open Democracy report noted that children were being referred to this programme in relation to support for Palestinian cause. Are children in Hackney being referred to anti-radicalisation

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programmes in Hackney and if so, how is this reconciled with entitlement to freedom of speech? What are the safeguarding implications of such referrals?

- (JG) When the conflict in Palestine was triggered CHSCP was in immediate contact with the Borough Commander and a gold group was configured. It is the role of CHSCP to ensure that children are properly supported from being radicalised but also able to exercise their free speech. CHSCP has worked with Prevent for the same purpose. It was encouraging that there were new policies being considered by political parties which may support a more beneficial role in the way that children are engaged in respect of risks of radicalisation.

4.7 The cost of living crisis continues to put local children and families under severe pressure which may have wide ranging implications for the safeguarding of children (e.g. possible increase in cases of neglect, exposure to domestic violence, increasing prevalence of anxiety and mental health issues). Has there been any noticeable trends in local child safeguarding risks/cases as a result of the cost of living crisis, and if so, how has the partnership and other services responded? Is City & Hackney Safeguarding Partnership confident that there is an effective multi-agency preventative (early help) offer to help address emerging safeguarding needs arising from cost of living crisis?

- (JB) When parents are crushed by debts and anxiety this can affect their ability to effectively parent their children. In all its work with families, children's social care must view families in context, recognising the financial and other pressures that they are under. Therefore, workers will aim to ensure that families have access to appropriate grants and other resources which may be able to support them. The Mayor of London has extended free school meal provision for primary aged children to the end of July 2025 which will help struggling families and the local authority would be working to maximise this support. In terms of early help, the council operates 21 children's centres, numerous youth clubs and a robust supporting families programme. There were also good relationships with local schools to help reach out to children and families across different settings. Social workers worked together in partnership with all other agencies to maximise the support provided to children and families.
- (JG) The CHSCP held a dedicated meeting on the cost of living impact on local families which was attended by all local stakeholders. Of particular interest to the partnership was the impact that the cost of living crisis was having on staff, and the pressures that this created on them.

As a follow up; Cllr Young asked how families were being supported who were required to go on a waiting list for services? What support was available in the interim?

- (JB) If the referral for children's social care, there is no waiting list. Where there was a waiting list for other statutory services, such as CAMHS, the appointed social worker would continue to support the family in liaison with the in-house clinical service team within children's social care. If families were requiring specialist advice or support they could also be supported by agencies within the early help system. There was WAMHS which was available in all local schools, providing mental health support to children in these settings.
- (JG) It should be noted that all services are managing a decline in central government funding and resources which was placing significant pressures on service delivery, and in some areas this had resulted in cuts to specific services.

4.8 The CHSCP published its Child Q update in June of last year, which suggested that more should be done to ensure that local schools adopt a safeguarding first approach, particularly in relation to behaviour management in schools. a) What has been the response of local schools? b) Has there been any changes in local school safeguarding policies? c) Has there been any 'uptick' in school staff requesting safeguarding / adultification training?

- (JG) On the whole, the report was received well by local schools. The CHSCP has continued its safeguarding audit work with schools. To support this safeguarding work with schools, it has strengthened its central coordination role,

bringing in the head of a local academy to facilitate more internal challenge. A safeguarding first approach was a philosophy not a policy and the CHSCP intended to measure the impact of this in its work with local schools. The update report also indicated that it would independently survey the schools and local young people to assess progress and it was working with education colleagues to undertake this.

- (PS) There has been an audit process and the response of schools has been incredibly positive. Despite the Child Q report did have some difficult messages for schools, most schools have engaged with CHSCP and HE in follow up work stemming from the report. It was important to note that whilst not all schools agreed, there was good engagement across the sector.

4.9 Continuing with Child Q, adultification bias was a central theme in the Safeguarding Practice Review, and a programme of adultification training was commissioned across all partner agencies? a) Can the CHSCP update the Commission on the rollout of the adultification training across Hackney? b) Are all partner agencies, especially the police and education, signing up to this training in sufficient / equal numbers?

- (JG) Adultification training was provided by Hackney Education through to schools and elsewhere. A real priority for the CHSCP was to ensure that this training was cascaded through the community and voluntary sector partnership, so that training was being delivered by local people who know and understand these issues in Hackney. Police attendance at this training offer had improved significantly since the time it was first offered and the new Borough Commander was committed to this training.
- (PS) Concurred that there had been a positive engagement from the Borough Commander and that there was a good engagement between schools and local policing. The Safe Schools Policing model was being reassessed to identify if there were new approaches that could be implemented locally, to create a Hackney specific approach. The Borough Commander had attended both primary and secondary head teacher's meetings to explore new ways of cooperative working between the police and schools.
- (Deputy Mayor Bramble) Noted that it was important to move forward from Child Q, not only to allow Child Q herself time to withdraw from the spotlight and to heal, but also to ensure that local agencies focused on the underlying conditions which gave rise the experience of Child Q and that there was a systemic response.

4.10 'Named organisations' are those organisations which work with children predominantly in informal out of school settings (e.g. sports clubs, dance clubs). a) Is CHSCP confident that all those organisations working with children are 'named' are registered with them? b) Has there been any follow-up to recent audits of safeguarding practices in 'named organisations'? c) Are there any specific areas for which the CHSCP may have concerns?

- (JG) Under the Children's and Social Worker Act, organisations working with children and young people are designated as 'named' organisations. Local safeguarding partnerships will then ensure that these organisations complete a safeguarding self-assessment to determine the level of risks to children, and that there are appropriate safeguarding systems in place to keep children safe. There is however, no statutory duty for these organisations to comply, and change is therefore best affected by influence and best practice rather than through enforcement. Whilst there has been good engagement from local named agencies, there was scope for wider engagement. There was wide variation in local practices in these organisations, with some named agencies illustrating excellent safeguarding practice, whilst others were proving difficult to engage. CHSCP was of the view however, that if there was not greater buy-in to local safeguarding arrangement then more radical steps would need to be taken alongside partners.

4.11 Mobile phones and social media continue to present safeguarding risks for children and young with evidence of increased anxiety and mental health, as well as exacerbating risks. a) Can CHSCP update the Commission on work that has been undertaken locally to address these risks, particularly in relation to: work in Schools; work with parents; and children directly?

- (JG) Social media is not a distinct issue, it has to be treated as fundamentally part of children's lives. Phones are part of children's lives, but there is a difference of opinion as to whether these should be in children's person all the time, such as in school and other educational settings. The focus should be on educating children to use this technology responsibly and at the right time. There were also issues raised in relation to potential criminalisation of young people under the age of 18 and 16 in relation to certain activity on their phones.
- (PS) The safeguarding partnership had a good programme of training and development opportunities on this important area of keeping children safe around mobile technology and social media. This was a fast developing area which schools were having to adapt to on a daily basis.

4.12 The children's service workforce across education, health and social care continue to face acute pressures - not only in respect of the complexity of cases they are required to support - but also in the context of recruitment and retention of staff. At its most recent meeting the Commission heard from Children's Social Care of the acute social worker shortages which had impacted on some areas of service performance during 22/23. The Commission noted that staffing was a safeguarding priority for 2022/23 and this year, can CHSCP update on key ongoing challenges and the local response?

- (JG) Pressures in Hackney are very much the same as other authorities: rising caseloads for staff, increasing complexity of cases, difficulty in retaining high quality and experienced staff and ongoing challenges in recruitment. Every public service working with children was under this same staffing pressure including health, education and social care, so it is imperative that this issue is a priority for the local safeguarding partnership. In the absence of national investment in all aspects of the public sector, the recruitment and retention problems will remain.
- (JB) Hackney was not alone in this challenge, as there were social work recruitment pressures across London. There have been a number of developments to help ease these pressures, including an agreement among London authorities to stop recruiting agency social workers who have recently left a permanent position. Career progression was also recognised as a retention issue, and the children' social care team has changed the structure to allow more internal career progression and development opportunities. It should be noted that some agency workers were very committed to the local authority but for their own personal reasons, they did not want to be permanent members of staff.

4.13 The report notes that the DfE are consulting on plans to remove Independent Commissioners from chairing local safeguarding arrangements, and for these to be chaired by one of the key partners (most likely the Director of Children's Social Care). Can CHSCP set out the risks for this prospective development and provide further details of the consultation (when it closes) and whether a local response from CHSCP - or individual partners have been submitted?

- (JG) The CHSCP provided a response to the Working Together 2023 consultation. It was made clear that CHSCP opposed the specific aspect of the proposals which removed the independence of these arrangements. However, in its response to the consultation, the government has accepted the proposal to remove the independent chair of local safeguarding arrangements and there is 11 months to implement this. It is clear that if this is implemented that there will be an imbalance in the local safeguarding partnership, and there will be an element of partners 'marking their own homework'. There is a need to continue to

challenge the central government on this proposal but it was acknowledged that there was a limited timeframe in which to do this.

**Agreed: That the Commission would write to the DfE setting out its concerns around the amended Working Together safeguarding children arrangements in respect of the removal of independent chair and subsequent reduced local accountability.**

## **5 Cabinet Q & A - Cabinet Member for Education, Young People & Children's Social Care (20.05)**

5.1 Cabinet members who have responsibility for children and young people's services are invited to the Commission annually to enable members to scrutinise services within their portfolio. The Commission may identify up to three service areas on which to focus questioning which the Cabinet member can provide verbal responses. For this session, Deputy Mayor Bramble and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care was invited to respond to questions on 2 policy areas which the Commission had selected:

- Free School Meals (FSM) and Childhood Food Poverty;
- Next steps in school estate strategy.

5.2 Since the time when the policy areas were agreed and questions submitted in November 2023, members noted that there had been a number of key developments which had taken place in relation to these policy areas:

1. The Mayor of London had announced the extension of the free universal FSM provision for all primary school pupils to July 2025.
2. The Cabinet decision to close / merge schools was called-in and discussed by the Scrutiny Panel on the 9th January 2024. The focus of that discussion was on the evidence relating to the decision to close /merge the schools. The focus for this session is on what happens next, those plans to support children, families and their schools agreed for closure / merger and future preparations for likelihood of ongoing falling rolls in both primary and secondary school sectors.

### Questions on Free School Meals (FSM) and Childhood Food Poverty:

5.3 Can the Cabinet member update the Commission on the Local Authority's work to address childhood food poverty and support the extension of FSM in schools (as set out in the recommendations of the Tackling Food Poverty in Education report), in particular:

1. The development of a local action plan to support the strategy and how this is being overseen and implemented by the Cost of Living Board;
2. Setting up of School Food Trust to support schools to carry on FSM provision after cessation of Mayor of London's FSM programme (7/24);
3. Plans to establish a local FSM auto-enrolment procedure for local parents and schools;
4. How local voluntary sector organisations are being supported to work with local schools to provide healthy, nutritious and cost effective school meals;
5. Changes to Capital Programme to facilitate maintained schools to update and or extend school kitchen facilities;
6. How the £300k of additional investment announced in August has been used to support the delivery of the above plans;
7. Progress in developing planning restrictions which prevent new fast food outlets within 250 metres of schools and education settings.

5.4 The following is a summary of Deputy Mayor Bramble's response to the questions above:

- Given the introduction of FSM across London by the Mayor of London, there has had to be a change of focus to ensure that there was longer term sustainability of local schemes. In addition, there was a need to ensure that local school meals were cost effective and of high nutritional value to children. The Food Poverty

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Task Force had been helpful in assessing local priorities and coordinating a plan of action set out in the council report.

- It was noted that all of the schools had their own kitchens which was positive. Funding arrangements for FSM from the Mayor meant that whilst funds could be spent on staffing arrangements to support delivery, it could not be used for any capital works. The extension of the FSM offer had been relatively straightforward, but had required schools to invest in additional resources (plates, cutlery, staffing) to meet the increased demand for meals.
- Improving School Meals Strategy Group was set up and had a number of different work streams to help support schools (e.g. procurement, healthy and sustainable food options). This also linked to the reducing food poverty work which was going on across the council, so local work in this area is more coordinated.
- The task force was supported by £300k of additional funding to help schools adapt and improve FSM provision. Each school now has a link to experienced voluntary sector organisations working in this sphere to support them in their provision of FSM including Chefs in Schools and Hackney School of Food (Gainsborough) School. The latter grows its own food for children at the school and offers training for other schools and teachers.
- A grant system was set up for local schools to bid for money aligned to the priorities and recommendations of the Task Force report. Applications closed on January 6th 2024. It was important that schools lead and take this work forward in their own school. The working group will reflect on how the grants system was working and make adjustments as needed.

5.5 The Commission asked the following supplementary questions (with responses).

5.5.1 Given that there are other family benefits attached to FSM entitlement, what is the authority / schools doing to make sure that parents continue to apply for FSM now that universal free provision is in place? Is auto-enrolment being considered?

- This issue was being discussed London wide as this impacted all local authorities. The critical issue here was data sharing so that eligible families continued to apply and ensure that schools received Pupil Premium (PP) funding which was attached to FSM entitlement. Hackney Education was working with the local Money Hub to support this. It is important to get the message to parents that they should still apply given the significant levels of school funding attached. The authority was investigating automatic sign-up to ensure that FSM entitlements (and attached PP funding) was maintained.

5.5.2 The Commission notes that as independent schools do not qualify for FSM provision, in Hackney the Household Support Fund (HSF) has been used to support Charedi community organisations to deliver school meals (£852k year to March 2024). Under current government plans the Household Support Fund will cease from March 2024, are there plans for supporting the pupils from the Charedi community beyond this date?

- The authority was speaking to the central government and London Mayor about how the authority can continue to support independent schools within the Charedi community and Charedi community more broadly. The Council through its broader poverty reduction work was committed to ensure that all children and families in need were supported (e.g. families with no recourse to public funds are provided with free school meals). Hackney has a tradition of continuing to fund programmes even after central government has ceased funding and it would of course look into the impact of the discontinuation of the HSF and how work might be continued (where possible). This all sat within the council's overall reducing poverty framework and was not an issue for Hackney Education and local schools alone.



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- (PS) The Poverty Reduction Board is working closely with the Schools Food Group, and it was hoped a more bespoke solution could be developed in near future to respond to these areas of unmet need.

5.5.3 To what extent are those children in secondary school whose families who do not have recourse to public funds are entitled to free school meals?

- (Mayor Bramble) Children in secondary school settings need free school meals as much as those children in primary settings. The Task Force was commissioned and set up to look at issues such as this. At this stage it was helping secondary schools work together and to share good practice which was evidently present in local schools. Urswick Secondary school does offer FSM to all its pupils and there is much that can be learnt from this approach. The challenge of providing FSM to secondary school pupils was more nuanced, as children of this age may mask over food poverty.

5.5.4 Southwark Council, which has had universal free school meal provision in place for primary school pupils for a number of years, has been allowed to use Mayoral funding to develop more targeted FSM support to pupils in secondary school settings. Whilst work to extend FSM has focused within primary settings, has there been any similar work to develop FSM in secondary settings in Hackney? What does food poverty look like in secondary school settings?

- The FSM and Food Poverty report set out a number of recommendations in this area and the local task force continued to look at this issue.

#### Questions on the School Estates Update

5.6 Can the Cabinet member update the Commission on the School Estates Strategy and proposals (agreement) to close / merge 6 primary schools in Hackney in response to falling school rolls? In particular, members would welcome further information on the following:

1. Data on the number of reception school places and vacancies in Hackney from September 2023 entry;
2. Transitional support available for children and families at schools confirmed for closure and / or merger (especially those children with an EHCP or on SEND support);
3. Details of any transitional support available for staff at schools proposed for closure / or merger;
4. Ongoing engagement and involvement of local primary schools that continue to be impacted by falling school rolls and local strategies to address this;
5. Engagement with local secondary schools to assist future planning to prepare them for falling school rolls;
6. Strategic planning for deciding how school sites which may become vacant will continue to be used for educational or community purposes?
7. Upcoming timetable for key decisions to support the future implementation of the School Estates Strategy.

5.7 The following is a summary of Deputy Mayor Bramble's response to the questions above:

- Schools were at the heart of the local community and often attended by multiple generations of families. No officers or elected officials go into office to close schools, but have a duty to maintain quality of education for all children locally. Although there were some very high performing schools locally, the education system as a whole was experiencing a challenge through falling school rolls. Local schools were high performing by design, supported by highly motivated and committed teachers and staff.
- The GLA level of surplus places within local educational systems was recommended to be within 5-10%. In Hackney, surplus places were currently at 21% and projected to rise further without rationalisation of the school estate. This is having a significant impact on school finances as school income is

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predominantly through per pupil payments. As a consequence, the total value of school reserves was being depleted, with reserves projected to fall to £2.1m in 2023/24 from £9.9m in 2020/21.

- Falling school rolls was therefore undermining the future sustainability of the educational system and the decision was taken to close two primary schools and to merge a further 4 schools on two sites.
- In terms of transition for children and families, schools were leading in making sure children and families were prepared for respective closures and mergers. Schools will be able to draw in the expertise of other professionals to help support them in this process. Children on an EHCP will have the guidance of a key worker to help and support the school and parents decide where the best school option for their child will be after closure / merger. Additional support will also be given for children on SEND support. An additional 300 Hackney SEND places (in special schools, ARP) will be provided through the SES to ensure that parents have more local options in which to educate their children.
- The HR team led a Q & A with all staff at affected school sites to explore what the impact would likely mean for them. Now that the decision to close the schools has been confirmed, a wide range of support will be made available to staff including support for job applications and the development of soft skills (e.g. interviewing techniques).
- A key timeline of events will be developed for all the schools to ensure that there is an appropriate transition for all children, families and staff to follow the closure decision. WHAMS, the mental health and wellbeing service for schools will continue to operate as normal and support children in affected schools.

5.8 The Commission asked the following supplementary questions (with responses).

5.8.1 How were schools continuing to experience falling school rolls to be supported, particularly in the context that local surplus reception places would continue to be well above the advised level (5-10%) even after the current programme of closures and mergers were implemented. Is there a timeframe to reduce the vacancy rate further to within this advised level?

- (Deputy Mayor Bramble) The School Estates Strategy (SES) continues to look at the whole school system in response to falling school rolls. It was important to note that the previous Mayor and Deputy Mayor had written to the DfE highlighting the need for additional funding for school, and the necessity to bring in new powers for local authorities to support a more system wide assessment of education provision, and not just focus on schools maintained by the council. Whilst funding was increased, it was insufficient to make any substantial impact on the long term position. Non-maintained schools also remain out of scope of falling school roll rationalisation plans. The authority would continue to work with the SES to support sustainable schools. There is preparatory work being undertaken with secondary schools to ensure that they are resilient to likely reduction in school numbers '*coming down the line*', for example, one local secondary school was moving to become coeducational from single-sex school. Given that projections showed continuing falling school rolls to 2029/30, this was a long term project in which officers would continue to work with schools to promote sustainability.
- (PS) The current school closure programme will reduce surplus capacity from 21/22% to 17%, so there is still further to go. A working group had been set up among local primary and secondary heads to help develop long term plans for school places but also assessing what had been learnt from round 1 of closures and to help identify good practice from other local authorities. All maintained and non-maintained schools will be represented in this process. It was also noted that despite these funding pressures, schools were still delivering outstanding results, but this could only be maintained for so long.

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5.8.2 Given the experience of this round of school closures, are other local schools aware of the processes that they may need to consider to ensure the future sustainability of their school (such as closure working with neighbouring schools)?

- Every head teacher locally would have had this conversation as falling school rolls are having a London wide impact. Head teachers meet quarterly together to discuss this and other issues of importance. Regular updates on this issue are also provided to all head teachers across the borough. The next step is just to reassure schools going forward of the support available, and to facilitate local cooperation between schools to address underlying issues. The local authority is of course open to all suggestions and dialogue with schools on this important issue. One form entry schools remain a particular focus within this work as these schools are stand alone and maybe have reduced scope to adjust and adapt to changing pupil numbers. Secondary schools on the whole are larger and maybe have greater flexibility to adapt, but it was noted that such schools in Hackney tended to be comparatively smaller in comparison to other boroughs. The Deputy Mayor also assured members and others in attendance that there was no plan to sell-off any of the school sites.

5.9 The Chair thanked Deputy Mayor Bramble for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.

## **6 Work Programme 2023/24**

6.1 Members noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year:

### February 2024 Agenda:

- Session will be devoted to proposed changes to local Children Centres. The proposals are due to have been published on 12th Jan for consideration at Cabinet on 22nd January.
- These papers will inform scrutiny and will be distributed informally as soon as they are published.
- The Commission will need to plan how to scrutinise the session and consider, aside from officers, who it may wish to invite to attend (e.g. local parent's groups).

### March 2024 Agenda

- EBSA item, the Commission is working on an invitation to a specialist independent agency as well as two local heads teachers.

### 2024/25 work programme

- The Commission needs to consider those items early on in the work programme for 2024/25 given the proximity of meeting dates (June and July)
- June 2024 - Joint meeting with Living in Hackney - Youth Justice and Housing for care leavers.
- July 2024 - Childcare Sufficiency - new free childcare entitlement, wraparound childcare.

## **7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

7.1 The minutes of the 30th November 30th 2023 and 18th December 2023 were noted and agreed.

7.2 Actions arising:

### 30th November

**Action:** HE to provide data on the proportion of children with an EHCP who move from one mainstream school to another who are a) moving to a Hackney school and b) who are new to the borough.

**Monday 15 January 2024**

- *These have been requested and will be included in the February agenda.*

**Action:** Pupil movement has been added to the draft work programme for 2024/25, noting that it will require further scoping (to include more demographic analysis).

- *Noted for next year's work programme development.*

18th December

**Action:** Scrutiny would present a number of questions to Children's Social Care which it was unable to ask due to time limitations. Responses to these questions would be published in a future scrutiny agenda.

- *These have been requested and will be included in the February agenda.*

**Action:** That further information on the future funding of OBIS beyond 2023/24 would be provided to the Commission.

- *This has been raised with Director of Children's Social Care and Group Director*

**Action:** The scrutiny officer will develop the aims and objectives for the review in liaisons with the Commission and, once Cabinet members and officers have been consulted, create a work schedule for delivery.

- *This has commenced and a draft was planned for the February 2024 meeting.*

**Agreed:**      **a) Minutes of the 30th November 2023**  
                    **b) Minutes of the 18th December 2023.**

## **8 Any Other Business**

8.1 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 19th February 2024.

8.2 There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9.10pm.