

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EDUCATION BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 1 November 2016 at 7.14 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hall (Chair), Gareth Siddorn (Vice-Chair), Liam Curran, Brenda Dacres, Carl Handley, David Michael, Jamie Milne, Hilary Moore and John Muldoon

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jim Mallory, Kevin Mantle and Monsignor N Rotheron

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the open meeting held on 12 July 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

2. Declarations of Interests

None Received.

3. Decisions Made by Mayor and Cabinet on 19 October 2016

Financial Forecasts

The Chair said according to the Government's Bill there would be cuts to the schools budgets, and asked what would be the implications for Lewisham Schools.

The Executive Director for Children and Young People summarised the Financial Forecasts pertaining to Education and said that a report had already been to the CYP Select Committee which was due to go to Mayor and Cabinet. She stressed that as far as she was aware Lewisham schools were not eager to embrace multi-academy trusts. The Executive Director for CYP said there were problems with some secondary schools, namely St Matthew Academy and Sedgely, which was going through the process of becoming an Academy.

Councillor Michael asked for examples of the collaborative work that schools were currently doing. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said emphasis was being put on middle leadership and an experienced former Head Teacher from Wandsworth was helping Lewisham schools with this work. She said the secondary schools were now working together in an open and honest way, learning from each other's successes and failures to improve their schools.

Councillor Curran asked about the current financial position at Forest Hill school and its implications. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said a number of schools had gone into financial difficulties because of several reasons and Forest Hill was one of them. She said the implications would be they would have to reduce their staff numbers. She said benchmarking their staffing would enable them to deliver quality education. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said an improvement plan had been put in place for the educational

and financial challenges that they and other schools would be facing, especially if the government introduce the new funding scheme.

The Executive Director for Children and Young People said a report about the two schools would be going to Mayor and Cabinet next week. The Chair asked what would be the implications of reducing the number of staff at the school and was told that because of the support being given to the school from Human Resources, plus the curriculum support things would not be bad. She emphasised that the first priority was to the pupils in the school.

The Chair asked who provided audit for the school and was told Lewisham. The Chair said, that being the case the Council also have responsibility and a statutory role to sign off the budget. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said officers had identified the problem at the last financial year, and she had immediately asked for all schools that had been spending from their reserves to be visited urgently so they could explain their position. She said the support for education finance within the Council had been reduced and they were now down to 3 staff to do the work, and it had been a challenge to provide proper support. This situation was reflected across the Council's staff as they were doing complex jobs with less people.

The Head of Financial Services said that schools were also beginning to share best practices and information about concerns that had been identified. He said school governors were also being trained extensively on how best to support their schools.

The Chair asked how many staff members were in danger of losing their jobs and was told that officers did not have any figures now as the consultation process was still in progress. The Chair said Business Panel Members should be kept informed of developments. He asked whether schools deficit was a local or national issue. The Chair requested a written briefing to Business Panel Members explaining the scale of the problem, the number of jobs that could be lost, and the impact on education outcomes.

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Councillor Dacres said from experience she did not feel governors were being given sufficient training and support that would prepare them for the role of guardians of these schools. She emphasised that they needed to be made aware of what their role would entail before they start. Councillor Dacres said if lessons had been learnt from Sedgehill school's deficit these schools would not be in this position. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said this was very difficult with only 3 staff supporting this work, but processes were being put in place to address the issues.

The Chair asked about the impact the reduction of staff would have on Children with ASD and was told that a scoping exercise was being done and Members would be sent the result as soon as possible.

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The Chair asked whether parents' interest in these schools have been affected judging from open days turn out, and was told that it was early days for Forest Hill school as the information was just coming out, but for Sedgehill school it had been very difficult to recruit children into the school.

Councillor Michael said from experience he was aware that some Head Teachers were very strong and prefer governors to rubber stamp their decisions, without probing to get facts. He asked whether this was one of the problems at Forest Hill School. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said she had experienced this too, hence governors were currently being trained to have confidence to challenge decisions, and support would be available to them from the Directorate as needed. She said they were being told they need to recognise the important role they have.

The Chair said Business Panel Members need to know what site has been identified for the new free school mentioned in the report, and was told by the Executive Director for Children and Young People that no site has been identified for any proposed new school as the process was very long. She said there was a site for a primary school, but to her knowledge none for a secondary school. She added that the DFE would pay for Free Schools but a site had to be available for the school to be built.

The Chair said he heard there was an application from the Church of England to build a new Free School and asked why Members were not notified. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said it was very early in the process and Members would be notified if this proposal became tangible.

Following the discussing Business Panel agreed the following:

- i. that the Schools audit to be referred to the Audit Panel and CYP Select Committee to look at their performance and achievement.
- ii. that officers provide information on specifics around staffing and capacity at Forest Hill school, plus the equalities impact on staffing reduction, to be circulated to Business Panel Members.
- iii. that officers provide CYP Select Committee with a further update on Free Schools especially secondary school places.
- iv. Members had expressed grave concerns about the size and range of school deficits, and asked what is the Council's governance role to investigate this.
- v. officers to provide an update on Sedgehill School deficit to be circulated to Business Panel Members.

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RESOLVED that:

- i. the decision of the Mayor be noted.

- ii. that the Schools audit to be referred to the Audit Panel and CYP Select Committee to look at their performance and achievements.
- iii. that officers provide information on specifics around staffing and capacity at Forest Hill school, plus the equalities impact on staffing reduction, to be circulated to Business Panel Members.
- iv. that officers provide CYP Select Committee with a further update on Free Schools especially secondary school places.
- v. Members had expressed grave concerns about the size and range of school deficits, and asked what is the Council's governance role to investigate this.
- vi. officers to provide an update on Sedgehill School deficit to be circulated to Business Panel Members.

Education Commission Update

Councillor Dacres asked whether the Education Commission would be looking at nursery places, and was told that funding for nursery places would become an issue as they were being funded as part of the voluntary independent sector. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said according to government proposals funding for nursery would get worse, and Lewisham would be putting a strategy in place for Early Years.

RESOLVED that the decision of the Mayor be noted.

Meeting ended: 8.10pm

Chair