

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 25 JUNE 2019

C3 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Sufia Alam (Chair)

Councillor Mohammed Pappu
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan

Councillor Kyrsten Perry
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Neil Cunningham
Ahmed Hussain
Fatiha Kassouri
Dr Phillip Rice

- Parent Governors
- Parent Governors
- Parent Governors
- (Church of England Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Danny Hassell

Apologies:

Councillor Helal Uddin

Councillor Bex White

Others Present:

Mrs Gillespie

Spokesperson for the Members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

Officers Present:

Terry Bryan

- (Head of Pupil Services and School Sufficiency)

Debbie Jones

- (Corporate Director, Children and Culture)

Christine McInnes

- (Divisional Director, Education and Partnership, Children's)

Adam Boey

- (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)

Elizabeth Freer

- (Strategy and Policy Manager, Children and Culture)

Farhana Zia

- Senior Committee Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Helal Uddin and Bex White.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Mohammed Pappu proposed and Councillor Kyrsten Perry seconded the nomination of Councillor Gabriela Salva – Macallan as vice-chair of the sub-committee.

The nomination was unanimously agreed by the members of sub-committee.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

- To appoint Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan as vice-chair of the Children and Education Sub-Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

Dr Phillip Rice declared he was a co-opted member of the sub-committee to represent the interest of the Church of England. However he had no pecuniary interest in item 4.2 relating to the Raines Foundation School.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, QUORUM, MEMBERSHIP AND DATES OF MEETING 2019/20

The Chair, Councillor Sufia Alam asked Members to note the Terms of reference, Quorum, Membership and dates of meeting report.

She informed Members the report confirmed the decision made at the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on the 15th May 2019, which approved the proportionality and the establishment of Committees, Sub-Committees and Panels of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 20th May 2019 agreed to set up three sub-committees including the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Councillor Alam asked Members to agree her list of priorities which she had circulated to Members and stated the work programme for the Sub-Committee would be available on the council website.

Members of the Sub-Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and agreed to meet at 6:30 p.m. for the remaining meetings in the municipal calendar.

4.2 SCHOOL ORGANISATION: Raines Foundation School

The Chair, Councillor Sufia Alam made clear to all present the Sub-Committee would hear from the elected spokesperson for the members' of public in attendance at the meeting first before receiving the presentation from Ms Christine McInnes, Service Head of Education and Partnership and Mr Terry Bryan, Head of Pupil Services and School Sufficiency.

Councillor Alam stated the spokesperson for the public would have three minutes to present their concerns in relation to the proposed closure of Raines Foundation School.

Mrs Gillespie addressed the Sub-Committee and made the following remarks:

- The timing of the consultation to close Raines Foundation School was unhelpful and created uncertainty for pupils before their exams. No pastoral care had been offered by the Council, after the announcement of the proposed closure, which had impacted on pupils and parents alike.
- The Raines School website automatically forwards parents to the Oaklands School website despite the consultation having not been concluded and in contradiction to the advertising banner on the school railings telling parents to apply for sixth form places at Raines.
- Mrs Gillespie requested Members to give careful consideration to the proposed closure and asked Members to question the validity of the evidence before them. She said the consultation was riddled with inaccuracies and from the paperwork she had seen, it appeared the school was unlawfully run down to make the case that it was not a viable option. Mrs Gillespie said it would be a great shame to close a school with 300 years of history.

Councillor Sufia Alam thanked Mrs Gillespie for her contribution and asked Members if they had any questions for Mrs Gillespie.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- The evidence referred to were the financial accounts published on the school website. Mrs Gillespie said it showed the school was being systematically run down. Mrs Gillespie said she had made a freedom of information request to look at the minute books and was waiting to hear back from the school.
- Mrs Gillespie confirmed the Raines website automatically redirected parents to the Oaklands School website. She said this was her experience when she had applied for a sixth form place for her daughter. Mrs Gillespie continued stating that other parents had also received confusing and contradictory information. For example, parents who had applied for a Year 7 place at the School had initially received acceptance letters to say their child had been offered a place at Raines, only to be told later that this was not the case. At one of the consultation meetings, an independent adjudicator had stated parents had the legal right to accept the place offered.
- In response to what evidence Mrs Gillespie had seen to suggest the Governing Body had been unlawfully constituted, Mrs Gillespie said the

statutory instrument required a Trust and Parent representative to be on the board, however no such persons had been appointed.

- Ms McInnes clarified the independent adjudicator referred to, is a retired school's adjudicator and spoke of his personal experience and as such the advice given was open to challenge.

The Chair then invited the Portfolio Lead for Children, Schools and Young People, Councillor Danny Hassell to address the Sub-Committee.

Councillor Hassell said schools faced three big challenges at present.

1. Cuts to school funding from Central government meant schools were facing huge financial pressures and therefore needed to ensure their schools was financially robust and viable.
2. There had been a change in financial regulations whereby schools had to demonstrate they were not in deficit for a *maximum* of three years rather than over three years.
3. The changing demographics of the borough in terms of population and demand means the Council needs to ensure school places are in the right locations within the borough.

Councillor Hassell continued that there was no perfect time to look at school closures. The Council had done everything possible to work with the Governing Body at Raines to prevent the current situation and the decision to consult parents and the wider community had not been taken lightly. The Council was obligated to protect the Education offer and to provide a good standard of Education across the borough.

Members of the Sub-Committee then received a presentation from Ms Christine McInnes and Mr Terry Bryan.

- Mr Bryan explained that Tower Hamlets ambition is for all schools to be judged good or outstanding schools. Parental choice means some schools are oversubscribed while other can become unsustainable.
- With regard to the consultation for Raines Foundation School, views of all interested parties and the community are being sought. Once the consultation has been analysed, a recommendation will be put to the Cabinet for consideration. If a proposal for closure is agreed by Cabinet then the council will publish a statutory notice and this is a further opportunity for interested parties to voice their objections. It is the Secretary of State for Education, who will make the final decision on whether or not the school will close.
- The Council had worked with the Governing Body at Raines Foundation School and had looked at alternative courses of action. However with the current deficit, the school is not financially viable and this has restricted the options available. An amalgamation could address some of the problems but other schools would be reluctant to take on Raines' debt.

- From the table, slide 6 of the presentation, it is clear the school has been in long term decline with the number of applications and offers made falling year on year since 2011.
- Ms McInnes said in November 2015, the Ofsted inspection judged the school to require improvement. The Governing Body resigned in December 2015 and a new governing body was appointed in January 2016.
- A second Ofsted inspection took place in October 2017 but the school had not improved and was judged to require improvement a second time. When compared with other schools in Tower Hamlets and nationally, slide 9, it is clear the standards at Raines Foundation School were and continue to be below the Tower Hamlets average.
- In October 2018 the Governing Body was replaced with an Interim Executive Board. The membership of the IEB has to be approved by the DfE and the nomination from the Raine's Foundation Trust was not approved by the DfE.
- Prior to September 2018, the council had provided support to the school using a collegiate model, that is the Raine's school leadership and governors had the scope to manage the advice, guidance and training provided through another high performing school. This model was shown not to be effective in raising standards and from September 2018 an executive headteacher (the headteacher of Sir John Cass) was put in to take over the leadership of Raine's. In a monitoring visit which took place in December 2018 Ofsted acknowledged an improvement, but the improvement was from a low base and standards required further improvement.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- The Ofsted report had acknowledged that support had been put in place for Raines however the School did not make use of this.
- Raines had been given support to improve their attainment but there was a significant gap in grades achieved by pupils at Raines, especially in Maths and English and it would be a disservice to allow standards to drop further. With pupil numbers continuing to decrease and the impact this has on the school budget, it is very unlikely that a continuing improvement in standards can be achieved. Raine's Foundation is no longer a popular school within the community.
- In comparison, Oaklands is a school which is consistently good with high standards. It is a popular with parents and students and has been chosen for further expansion in that locality.
- Of the 150 places that would become available, if Raine's were to close, Mr Bryan stated the Council would like to expand Oaklands by 60-90 places. There was capacity elsewhere with possibility to expand schools in Stepney and Bethnal Green where population change shows there is need to provide further secondary school places.
- In response to how the consultation had been launched and handled, Mr Bryan said the Local Authority had reached a consensus with the Governing Body and it was only at that stage it was agreed to consult

the public on a proposal to close Raine's. Two public meetings have taken place. Mr Bryan said the timing of the consultation was unavoidable because there is a statutory framework and timescale that needs to be adhered to.

- In addition to the public meetings, parents have been able to have one to one discussions with council officers about their own circumstances. Following these meetings some parents have exercised their choice and decided to apply for places at other schools. Parents were under no duress to accept places at other schools.
- In response to why the Raines Lower Site had been part developed, and the speculation that this site could possibly be used as the new Oaklands sixth form, Mr Bryan said the section 106 monies allocated by the council for the development of the site would have to be returned if the site was not made available for an appropriate community use.
- With regard to other schools that are in deficit, Ms McInnes stated there were others. Whilst in the past the Local Authority had a flexible approach, giving schools five years rather than three years to clear their debt, the new regulations from Government made this much harder. It requires debts to be cleared in a strictly applied three year period. With falling numbers of pupils attending Raines, the debt would not be repaid.
- Ms McInnes stated 13 children had SEND and EHC plans. Their families would be consulted with a transition plan in place for the child concerned.
- A full Equalities assessment would be done after the first round of consultation had concluded.
- In response to why parents were being pushed onto the Oaklands website, Mr Bryan said that at key transition stages, Year 6 primary to Year 7 and then Year 9 to Year 10, parents need to be aware of the possibility of the closure of Raines Foundation. They are given information to help them decide what is best for their child. Oaklands is nearby and is a possible option for displaced students although parents can apply to other schools as well.
- In response to why an Interim Executive Board was appointed, Ms McInnes said the Governing Body resigned following the 2015 Ofsted inspection. A new Governing Body was constituted in January 2016 and two local authority officers were on the Governing Body in order to strengthen and challenge the leadership at the school. The school did not improve and an application was made to the Department for Education to remove the governing body and to form an Interim Executive Board to help turn around the school.

The Chair thanked Ms Christine McInnes and Mr Terry Bryan for their presentation.

The Chair summarised the key points of discussion stating the following:

- Going forward the Council needs to reflect on its consultation process to ensure the timing of consultations are done in a sensitive way whilst still meeting with statutory requirements; and
- That information should be made accessible to members of the public.

4.3 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Ms Tracy Smith, Executive Director for Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THE Partnership) gave a presentation outlining the work of The Partnership and the successes it had achieved.

Ms Smith said the concept of The Partnership came about as a result of changes to school improvement and as a response to the 2016 white paper. Schools in Tower Hamlets have had an incredible improvement journey from a very low point about 20 years ago and this had been achieved through partnership working and collaboration between schools, the council and wider stakeholders. There had been a very clear vision and exceptional leadership and The Partnership is building in that tradition.

Ms Smith said of the 104 schools in the borough 97 schools were currently members of THEP. The organisation offered a core offer and an additional offer to support school improvement. Ms Smith cited the Future Headteacher Programme which is focused on developing the next generation of school leaders; 6 of the 30 delegates had been promoted this year to leadership posts within Tower Hamlets. Ms Smith said that whilst the quality and leadership of teachers in Tower Hamlets was of a very high standard one issue faced in relation to recruitment and retention of staff, was the lack of affordable housing for key workers.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- The THEP offer does not include training for governors, although THEP do offer a Governors' Forum and do work in partnership with Governor Services to offer training at the annual conference. However the council itself does offer training to anyone looking to be a governor.
- Schools pay a membership fee of £7.00 per pupil which equates to almost half the income THEP receives; the other sources are the Commission from the LA.
- In response to what had been done to ensure White British boys do not fall behind, Ms Smith said the picture was mixed, with very good outcomes in primary but with a less positive results at secondary school level. THEP is working with schools to ensure additional support is in place and for literacy rates to be maintained.
- Diversity in leadership and headteacher posts is progressing. Some headteachers have been in post for a long time and are close to retirement. As such the THEP have worked with Headteachers in succession planning and the Future Heads Programme has resulted in six promotions.

The Chair thanked Ms Smith for her presentation and summarised the key points of discussion.

- THEP delivers value for money;
- More affordable housing for key workers is needed in the borough;
- Funding is used to support schools, which includes providing essential data;
- Diversity in the workforce is reflective of the population and changes are happening in Leadership roles too.

5. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

No other business was discussed at the meeting.

Members were reminded the next meeting of the Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee was scheduled to take place on the 8th October 2019.

The meeting ended at 8.51 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Sufia Alam
Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee