

Children's Services
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

Report of: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 13 October 2022

Ward(s): All

APPENDICES B AND C TO THIS REPORT ARE EXEMPT FROM PUBLICATION

Subject: School Organisation Plan

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Islington is committed to driving educational excellence through inclusive schools. Our evolving Education Plan sets out our commitment that by 2030 every child, whatever their background, has the same opportunity and ambition to reach their educational potential in a good Islington school.
- 1.2. To achieve our ambition, we need strong sustainable schools offering a first-class education. Falling rolls are a risk to our plan because lower numbers on roll, means reduced budgets and that impacts on schools' ability to offer a diverse curriculum.
- 1.3. A key pillar of our Education Plan is a clear strategy for school organisation across the borough. The purpose of this School Organisation Plan is to:
 - 1.3.1. ensure sustainable levels and a good supply of high-quality school places at primary and secondary
 - 1.3.2. promote choice and diversity in our local school offer and that the most vulnerable children, including those with specific educational needs are supported through effective school place planning
 - 1.3.3. enable all stakeholders have a clear understanding of how robust decisions are reached about pupil place planning.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To approve the School Organisation Plan attached as Appendix A to this report.

- 2.2. To approve the confidential Part B of the School Organisation Plan attached as Exempt Appendix B to this report.

3. Background

- 3.1. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure the adequate supply of early years, school, specialist, and post-16 provision to meet current and future demand. We need to guarantee that every child has a school place and to ensure that we have capacity for this. We must also ensure the financial viability of every school and pupil numbers are critical to determining the funding of a school.
- 3.2. Local Authorities are responsible for promoting a good supply of strong settings and schools through planning, organising, and commissioning places to raise attainment, increase diversity, encourage collaboration between settings and schools, and to promote community cohesion.
- 3.3. The Islington School Organisation Programme Board was developed in April 2021 to drive the delivery of Islington's strategic School Organisation and Pupil Place Planning approach. The Board's members are Headteachers, Chairs of Governors and Local Authority Officers.
- 3.4. The approach is set out in the School Organisation Plan and specific proposals relating to individual schools to deliver the objectives of the plan are set out in Part B.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial Implications

4.1.1. Individual school balances in Islington have been in decline since 2018/19 when they stood at £11.732m. Balances have reduced over the last three years and currently stand at £8.313m and are expected to reduce significantly over the medium term. 10 schools are currently in deficit, with this number set to increase over the next financial year. The main causes of decline in Islington are:

- Reducing pupil numbers. 90% of school funding is pupil led under the National Funding Formula for schools – each reduction in pupils equates to an average loss of funding per pupil of £5,430 in primary and £8,040 in secondary schools.
- Increasing numbers of pupils with SEND. Education health and care plans increased at a rate of 10.4% per annum in Islington in 2021/22.
- Increasing inflationary cost pressures within schools.

4.1.2. Action is required to remove surplus capacity from the system to help return schools to a sustainable financial footing so they are best placed to meet the needs of pupils.

4.1.3. If a school closes, merges, or becomes an academy, liability for deficit balances are as follows:

- Closure – the local authority meets the cost of any deficit balance from the General Fund.
- Amalgamation – the balances of the federating schools are combined.
- Academisation – there are two scenarios: for convertor academies (those that voluntarily convert) the deficit is repaid to the local authority by the DfE and recouped from the academy; for sponsored academies (forced conversion due to the school being assessed as requires improvement) the deficit remains with the local authority to be paid from the General Fund.

4.2. Legal Implications

4.2.1. The Council has numerous statutory duties in relation to education, including ensuring sufficient school places, increasing choice, ensuring fair access, providing education for children with special educational needs, and commissioning training for older children. The Plan, at Appendix A, The Legal Context, explains that Section 14 of the consolidating Education Act 1996 requires a local authority to secure that sufficient schools are available at primary and secondary stages of education for their local area. In addition to that and other primary legislation, there are requirements in Regulations, notably for present purposes the School Organisation Regulations 2013, Statutory Instrument 3109 of 2013; and there is statutory Guidance. The Plan is in conformity with the requirements and Guidance; and duly sets out the Council's aims for organising and providing the highest quality education for children and young people.

4.2.2. It is not a statutory requirement for the Council to have a School Organisation Plan, it was one of a number of statutory plans repealed by section 64 and Part 1 of Schedule 5 to the Children Act 2004, which came into force on 1st March 2005. However, we are presenting this plan to Executive because it facilitates a strategic and consistent approach to managing pupil places across the borough through the application of some common principles set out within this report. The benefits to this are that there is some consistency to the approach and also it is aligned to our corporate objectives for a more equal borough by ensuring that any decision is considered in a consistent and equitable way.

4.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

4.3.1 Islington Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019, committing the council to working towards making Islington net zero carbon by 2030. A 10-year Net Zero Carbon Strategy, with action plans, was adopted by Executive in November 2020. The implementation of the School Organisation Plan 22-25 will be progressed in a manner that aligns with and supports the delivery of the council's ambitions for creating a clean and green Islington. In particular key environmental implications that the school organisation plan impact are:

- Improving the energy efficiency and reducing the level of carbon emissions of all buildings and infrastructure: schools form an important element of our non residential buildings and infrastructure net zero carbon workstream given their number, size and distribution across the borough. Decarbonisation Feasibility Studies have already been undertaken for 22 of our schools with a further 14 planned during 2022/23. The impact on the environment and the findings from these decarbonisation reports will be fully considered in developing plans,

and where there are falling rolls in making better use of the spare capacity thereby optimising energy efficiency.

- Reducing emissions in the borough from transport. Schools again can play their part in delivering on this priority. In proposing specific measures as part of school organisation planning, the implications on school journey distances, school streets and potential changes to vehicle journey numbers will be fully considered in consultation with schools and key stake holders.

4.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

4.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

4.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 22nd June. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is appended.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1. Falling rolls is a pressing issue with a surplus capacity of 18% currently anticipated in reception across Islington schools in September 2022. This position is set to continue and further increase based on the roll projections if no action is taken to reduce places. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools more widely to be financially sustainable; preserve and offer a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils and meet our commitment that every child, whatever their background, has the same opportunity and ambition to reach their educational potential in a good Islington school.

Appendices:

- Appendix A: The School Organisation Plan
- Appendix B (Exempt): The School Organisation Plan Part B
- Appendix C (Exempt): The Equalities Impact Assessment

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



Cllr Michelline Safi Ngongo, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Date: 30 September 2022

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