

Children's Services
222 Upper Street
London N1 1XR

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

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 9 February 2023

Ward(s): Barnsbury and Caledonian

Subject: Proposal on the Future of Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. The School Organisation Plan was approved at the Executive Board on 13 October 2022. The Plan sets out how the council will manage the high levels of surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for children. In response to this, officers undertook a detailed first stage consultation between 3 November and 16 December 2022 on a proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools.
- 1.2. This report details the process of the first stage consultation on the future of Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools and the responses received to this for consideration by the council's Executive to determine whether to issue a statutory notice to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To review and consider the responses to the consultation.
- 2.2. Based on the feedback received during the consultation it is recommended that the council proceed with the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and follows the next stage of the prescribed process, which is to issue a statutory notice, of which a draft is attached at Appendix D.

3. Background

- 3.1. Birth rates in Islington have reduced significantly and this decline is projected to continue. This is leading to falling rolls and a high level of surplus capacity in Islington's primary schools with vacancies in Reception at 20% in October 2022.
- 3.2. The part of the borough with the highest level of surplus places is Planning Area 4, which is comprised of seven schools, two of which are Copenhagen and Vittoria. Both schools have high levels of surplus capacity with 17 pupils in Reception class in Copenhagen this year and 12 pupils in Reception at Vittoria.

- 3.3. The proposal is to amalgamate Vittoria and Copenhagen primary schools to a single school on the Copenhagen site so that the new school is financially viable. This will support a quality educational offer by making use of the staff expertise across both school sites.
- 3.4. As set out in the School Organisation Plan and in line with Department for Education Guidance all possible options were explored before making the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.
- 3.5. A first stage consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools has been carried out and the detail of this is set out in the report.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. It is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to remain financially viable when pupil numbers are falling as the majority of school funding is pupil based in line with the School's National funding Formula. Therefore as pupil numbers decline, schools receive less funding. Per pupil funding in Islington is on average £5,500 per pupil depending on the characteristics of its pupils. One way to make schools more financially sustainable is to merge two schools with surplus capacity into a single school with a smaller combined capacity.
- 4.1.2. Individual school balances stood at £8.313m at the end of 2021/22, with 10 schools in deficit. School balances are forecast to reduce further over the course of this financial year, where more schools are projected be in deficit. School balances in Islington have been in decline since 2018/19 when they stood at £11.732m. The main driver of declining school balances is falling pupil numbers alongside increasing cost pressures such as energy costs and pay.
- 4.1.3. Schools that are in deficit or are set to go into deficit are required to complete deficit recovery plans to bring their budget back into balance and eliminate their deficit within three years. This is becoming increasingly challenging for schools in the light of falling pupil numbers and increasing cost pressures and is a national issue.
- 4.1.4. Both Copenhagen and Vittoria were in surplus at the end of 2021/22, but their balances are forecast to decline over the course of the year with Copenhagen entering into a deficit by 31 March 2023. When two schools merge their balances are amalgamated.

School	Copenhagen	Vittoria	Total
Balance at 31 March 2022	£0.024m	£0.097m	£0.121m

Forecast balance at 31 March 2023	-£0.006m (deficit)	£0.050m	£0.044m
Movement	-£0.030m	-£0.047m	-£0.077m

4.1.5. Alternatively, if a school closes the local authority meets the cost of any deficit balance from the General Fund. In the event of 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 inadequate) the deficit remains with the local authority to be paid from the General Fund.

4.2. Legal Implications

4.2.1. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to provide sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in their area.

4.2.2. The Education and Inspections Act 2006, the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, the statutory guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools' (November 2019), and the statutory guidance 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools (October 2018) sets out the procedure for amalgamation of schools, by way of closure of a school and expansion of another.

4.2.3. The proposals set out in this report comply with the above legislation and guidance.

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

4.3.1. Environmental Implications 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 taking place 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.

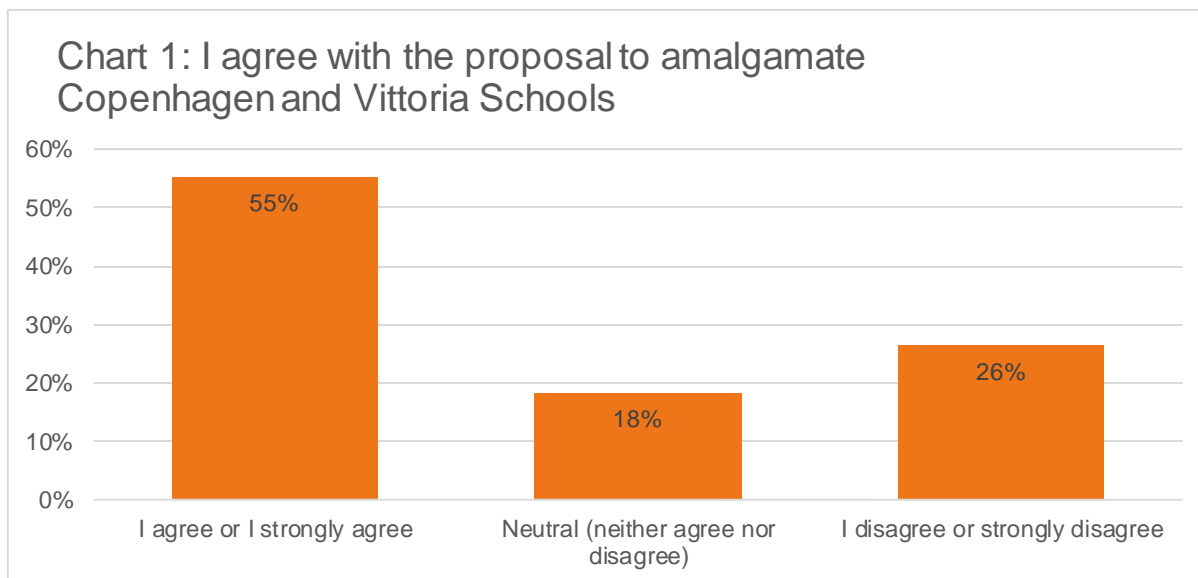
- Reducing emissions in the borough from transport. Schools again can play their part in delivering on this priority. In proposing specific measures as part of school organisation planning, the implications on school journey distances, school streets and potential changes to vehicle journey numbers will 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 20 December 2022. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is appended.

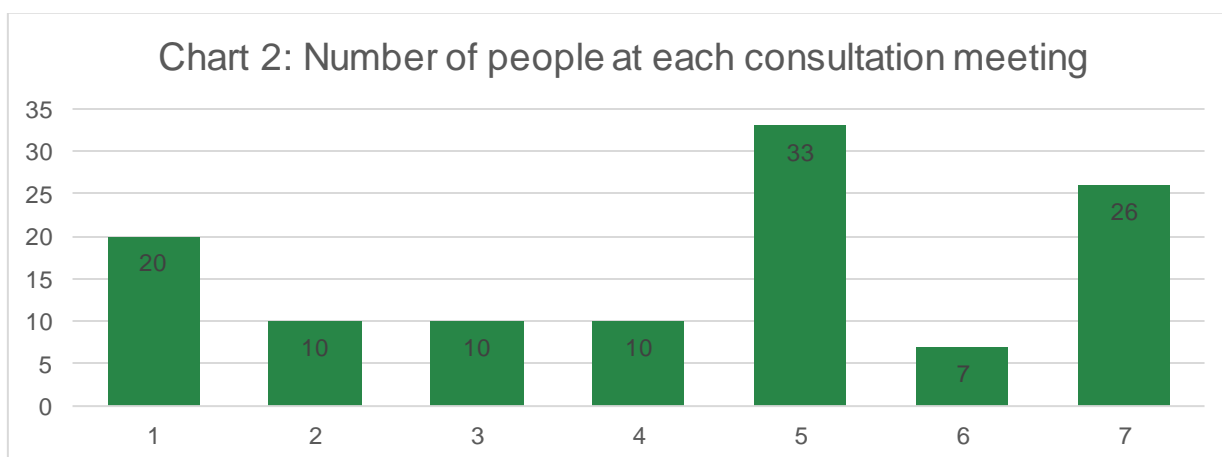
5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. There was good engagement with the first stage consultation process, through formal responses to the consultation and attendance at multiple meetings held during the consultation period.
- 5.2. The main themes emerging from the consultation were about the school identity, staffing implications, and the future operating model and financial sustainability of the amalgamated school should the proposal proceed.
- 5.3. There was a general understanding that to “do nothing” is not an option and that action must be taken given the declining pupil numbers.
- 5.4. 38 respondents completed the online consultation questionnaire: 55% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 18% were neutral (figures rounded to the nearest whole number).



5.5.

5.6. 116 people attended the consultation meetings.



5.7.

5.8. Several important considerations were raised that can and will be explored and developed by the Governing Board and school leadership in more detail with the school community if the proposal is agreed. This will help to ensure that the best educational provision for children and strong parental engagement are at the centre of the amalgamated school proposed.

6. Appendices

- Appendix A – Consultation document on the Proposal for the Future of Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools
- Appendix B – Analysis of responses to the Public consultation
- Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix D – Proposed statutory notice

Final report clearance:

Authorised by: Cllr Michelline Safi Ngongo, **Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families**

Date: 27 January 2023

Report Author: Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning and Culture

Tel: 020 7527 5753

Email: sarah.callaghan@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Tim Partington, Assistant Director of Finance, Schools, Resources and Childrens

Tel:

Email: tim.partington@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Rob Willis, Chief Corporate and Commercial Litigation Lawyer

Tel:

Email: rob.willis@islington.gov.uk