

Children's Services
222 Upper Street
London N1 1XR

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

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 20 April 2023

Ward(s): All

The appendices to this report are exempt and not for publication because they contain exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972) Paragraph 6 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: relating to a proposal to give a statutory notice

Subject: Phase 2 of School Organisation

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Islington is committed to Putting Children First by driving educational excellence through inclusive and sustainable schools. To do this, three strategic plans were agreed by the Executive Board on 13 October 2022: Islington's Plan for Education 2023-30; the School Organisation Plan and the SEND Strategy. The reason these were presented together was that no single plan can be delivered in isolation and that to achieve the ambition of our Education Plan - to 'Put Children First' - there needs to be inclusive and financially viable schools.
- 1.2. The School Organisation Plan sets the strategic direction for pupil place planning across the borough and has been developed alongside the Education Plan to ensure that the principles applied to managing our school estate reflect our corporate and political commitment to driving educational excellence through inclusive and sustainable schools and supports the delivery of a quality educational experience for all children and young people through a diverse curriculum offer.
- 1.3 Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools to manage change within their national funding formula allocations.

Recommendation:

To note the contents of this report and to approve the changes proposed in exempt Appendix A

2. Background

- 2.1. Across London, there has been a reduction in pupil numbers because of falling birth-rates, changes to EU migration (Brexit), the impact of COVID, and associated with housing, families relocating to places outside of London. Islington is not immune to this,

and this is reflected by a high level of surplus capacity in Islington's primary schools with vacancies in Reception at 20% in October 2022.

- 2.2. In the context of increased financial pressures and falling rolls many schools are experiencing financial difficulties. The impact of this financial pressure is that the quality of the educational experience for children and young people is compromised. This is because less money impacts on staff numbers and resources that then impacts on the diversity and quality of the curriculum offer.
- 2.3. Consideration is required on how to further reduce the surplus capacity in Islington's primary schools.

3. Implications

3.1. Financial Implications

- 3.1.1. It is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to remain financially viable when pupil numbers are falling as most school funding is pupil based in line with the School's National funding Formula. 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.
- 3.1.2. 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 to 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.
- 3.1.3. 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.

3.2. Legal Implications

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

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

- 3.3.1. 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:

- 3.3.2. 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.
- 3.3.3. 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.

3.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 3.4.1. 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.
- 3.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed in March 2023. This item is exempt from publication.

4. Appendices

- Appendix A – Proposal for Phase 2 of School Organisation – **Exempt from publication (exemption 6: information relating to a proposal to give a statutory notice)**
- Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment – **Exempt from publication (exemption 6: information relating to a proposal to give a statutory notice)**

Final report clearance:

Signed by: Cllr Michelline Safi Ngongo

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Date: 7 April 2023

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