

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

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 18 May 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. The outcomes of the informal consultation were reported to the Executive on 9 February 2023. The Executive reviewed the outcomes and decided to proceed with the proposal and issue a statutory notice on Thursday 23 February. The notice had a representation period lasting until 23 March. The statutory notice was published in accordance with guidance for opening and closing maintained schools.
- 1.3. This report provides details of the responses received during the representation period and makes recommendations. A copy of the statutory notice and statutory proposal is available online at [Statutory Proposal to Amalgamate Copenhagen Primary School and Vittoria Primary School](#).
- 1.4. This report is coming to Executive to consider the representations made to the statutory notice and to determine, considering those responses and officer recommendations, whether it wishes to implement the proposal as laid out in the statutory notice.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To review and consider the responses to the formal representation period of the statutory notice.
- 2.2. Based on the feedback received during the statutory notice period and the earlier information consultation, it is recommended that the council proceed with the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and implements the statutory proposals to discontinue Copenhagen Primary School and move Vittoria Primary School to the Copenhagen Primary School site, with effect from 31 August 2023 and to

increase the capacity of Vittoria Primary School from 210 to 315 and with effect from 1 September 2023.

- 2.3. That officers, together with the existing schools, develop the Copenhagen school site for the operation of the amalgamated school.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. 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.
- 3.2. In the context of increased financial pressures and falling rolls many Islington 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.
- 3.3. The School Organisation Plan sets out the approach as to how we will confidently manage this surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people and sustainability of schools. The 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.
- 3.4. We have a duty to ensure that sufficient schools are available at primary and secondary stages of education in the local area, and for children with special educational needs. Decisions to change the organisation of Community and Voluntary aided schools are made by the Council, and for academies, by the Secretary of State, advised by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- 3.5. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools to manage change within their national funding formula allocations. Department for Education (DfE) guidance on school closures includes a presumption not to close. Therefore, all options have been exhausted to avoid school closure although, where there is no alternative, long-term option, this does have to be considered
- 3.6. 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.
- 3.7. 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.

- 3.8. 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.
- 3.9. A first stage consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools was carried out and a second stage statutory notice was issued with a four week representation period.

## 4. The reasons for the proposal

- 4.1 School places are planned by dividing Islington into six different planning areas. Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools are in Planning Area 4 (Barnsbury). This planning area has the highest vacancy rate in the borough with 260 places in reception across seven primary schools, with 76 places currently unfilled in October 2022, a vacancy rate of 29%.
- 4.2 The pupil number projections show that this vacancy rate will increase further in the coming years at both reception and for all year groups. Preferences show how many parents each year choose a school as their first choice for their children starting in reception. Both schools have a lower number of first choice preferences than their capacity and have been under-subscribed for the last six years.
- 4.3 Copenhagen and Vittoria schools both have high levels of spare school places, with pupil numbers set to fall further still in the coming years. As a result, both schools are expected to experience budget deficits, which could lead to a decline in the educational offer if it is not addressed.
- 4.4 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. These are as follows:
  - 4.5. **Reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN)**
    - 4.5.1. Both schools are currently operating as one Form of Entry (one class a year) and cannot reduce their size any further as this is the legal minimum size and the minimum size at which a maintained primary school is financially viable.
  - 4.6. **Maximise the pupil numbers**
    - 4.6.1. Both schools have sought to maximise their pupil numbers, however falling births in the area means there are not enough pupils to fill either school.
  - 4.7. **Make better use of spare building capacity**
    - 4.7.1. Copenhagen has spare capacity which has been maximised over the last two years by using a whole floor with separate entrance as the spare space for other schools to use when capital works are taking place. However, this use is not sufficient to address the future budget shortfall.

#### **4.8. Including children with SEND**

- 4.8.1. Copenhagen and Vittoria have a higher proportion of pupils with SEND Support than the borough average and Copenhagen has the fourth highest proportion of pupils with an EHCP in the borough and so are already doing this.

#### **4.9. Collaboration and Federation to achieve economies of scale**

- 4.9.1. Copenhagen and Vittoria are already part of the Islington Futures Federation with Elizabeth Garret Anderson and Beacon High. There are shared staffing posts across several areas, shared events and resources and they have completed a series of cost reduction measures. Over recent years, both schools have put cost saving measures in place to help tackle the financial difficulties facing many London schools and feel that continuing to cost cut within the individual schools would be to a detriment to the children's' learning experience

### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The council carried out a detailed consultation from 3 November to 16 December 2022 on the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools in line with Stage 1 of the statutory guidance on Opening and closing maintained schools. The outcome of this consultation was considered by the Executive at its meeting on 9 February. [See the full details on this consultation and outcomes.](#)
- 5.2 Based on the outcomes of the consultation the Council decided to proceed with the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and follow the next stage of the prescribed process, which was to issue a statutory notice.
- 5.3 The statutory notice was issued on Thursday, 23 February. The notice was published in the Islington Tribune, the Islington Gazette, and on the council website. The notice was sent directly to staff, parents and governors of Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and interested parties as set out in the guidance on closing and opening maintained schools.
- 5.4 A joint meeting was held with parents of both schools on Thursday, 23 February to explain the next steps and share the statutory notice and how they could make representation. Feedback was also sought and recorded during this meeting as part of the representation feedback.
- 5.5 15 parents and carers attended the parent meeting and participants asked for clarity on what the school will be called and what the uniform would be following amalgamation, and clarity on the location of the school. Parents were also concerned if any proposed building works would affect the school's budget. Overall, discussions focused on how the transition will be managed - for example: when will children be introduced to each other, and could parents meet each other and the teachers - and the opportunities that amalgamation could bring, including developments to the curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
- 5.6 There was one written representation received which opposed the proposal and objected to the loss of name of Copenhagen school, raised concerns about any staff

redundancies, and asked why other schools in Islington were not being considered for closure.

- 5.7 There was one request for information on pupil numbers and the requestor was directed to the full proposal where this information is provided.

## 6. Implications

### 6.1. Financial Implications

- 6.1.1. 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. 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.
- 6.1.2. 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.
- 6.1.3. 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.
- 6.1.4. 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 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

6.1.5. 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.

## 6.2. Legal Implications

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

6.2.2. 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.

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

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

6.3.1. 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.

## 6.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4.1. 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.
- 6.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 24 March 2023. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is included as Appendix A.

## 7. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 7.1. 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, as reported to Executive on 9 February.
- 7.2. No new issues or concerns were raised during the statutory notice period. The feedback received reflected the important considerations raised in the earlier stage of the consultation which are being explored and developed by the Governing Board and school leadership in more detail with the school community to help to ensure that the best educational provision for children and strong parental engagement are at the centre of the amalgamated school proposed.

## 8. Appendices

- Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

### Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Date: 5 May 2023

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