



**255**      **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)**

None.

**256**      **VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

The Committee received presentations from council officers and external witnesses on the services available to vulnerable adolescents.

- a) The Committee received a presentation from Finola Culbert, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support, and Lisa Arthey, Director of Youth and Communities, which provided an overview of the council's services for vulnerable adolescents.

The following main points were made:

- The Committee noted the various services provided in the Safeguarding and Family Support directorate. The Front Door Service was the single contact point for families and professionals to make referrals to support services. The service assessed new cases before deciding whether to make a referral to early help services or statutory services.
  - The council had six social work teams that largely operated on a locality basis, however there was flexibility for social workers to work outside of these geographic boundaries if necessary.
  - The Independent Futures service supported care leavers up to age 25.
  - The Friends and Family service supported those who had been granted special guardianship orders, which gave parental responsibility to a friend or family member of the biological parent. The council had a statutory duty to support special guardians.
  - There had been a significant increase in the number of children being looked after; 259 children between the age of 10 and 17 were currently being looked after. It was previously the case that older children aged 14 or over were usually placed with extended family, however as the complexity of cases was increasing, older children were more likely to be placed into specialist care.
  - The number of contacts to social care was increasing, and this was resulting in an increased number of referrals. Over 3,000 referrals had been made in 2016/17, an increase of over 500 on the previous year.
  - The Youth and Community Services directorate was a new directorate established in 2016 to focus on early intervention and the prevention of youth crime. The Committee noted the services within the directorate.
  - The Committee noted the work of the Youth Offending Service, and that users of the service were generally males aged 14 to 17.
  - The Targeted Youth team carried out engagement work in the community. The team was working to offer more evening and weekend activities on estates as this was the time when crime and anti-social behaviour tended to peak.
  - The Integrated Gangs team offered multi-agency support to the 50 most vulnerable young people on the gangs matrix.
- b) Simone Headley, Chair of the Children's Active Involvement Service, spoke of her experiences of being a young person in care.

The following main points were made:

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- The Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) was previously known as the In Care Council. This was a body of young people who were in care or had a social worker who the council worked with to develop services for young people.
  - Simone had left care at age 19 after staying with her foster carer for one additional year. She had been living independently for the four years since.
  - The CAIS was working to tackle the stigma associated with being a young person in care or accessing statutory support. Simone had appeared in national media to raise awareness of young people's issues, and the CAIS had arranged a film project for young people.
  - The CAIS worked with vulnerable young people from age 7. The service was acutely aware of safeguarding issues and their responsibilities.
  - Simone's role involved working closely with officers and members to improve the services available to young people. Simone said that she was in regular contact with senior officers in Children's Services to "keep them on their toes" and make sure they were listening to young people.
  - The CAIS was working with officers to explore the feasibility of a project similar to the House Project in Stoke. The project supported care leavers to refurbish their own properties and learn about property maintenance and budgeting.
  - Simone intended to write a book about her experiences and hoped to inspire other young people in care.
  - The Committee noted that a visit to the CAIS would be arranged as part of the scrutiny review.
- c) The Committee received a presentation from Inspector Kier Newman on the Metropolitan Police's safer schools and youth engagement work.

The following main points were made:

- There was a safer schools officer assigned to every school in Islington. This was a higher resource level than other London boroughs, some of which only assigned 4 officers to an entire borough.
- The Police considered that the Safer Schools Officer resource was being underused at present. Whilst some schools used their Safer Schools Officer extensively, others did not, and it was commented that schools needed to make best use of this free service, otherwise resource levels may have to be reviewed.
- Safer Schools Officers worked to keep young people safe in school, provided advice on personal safety and crime prevention, and could assist with safeguarding issues in schools.
- It was difficult to measure the impact of Safer Schools Officers, however the project was intended to reduce young people's offending and associated harm.
- It was possible to tailor the safer schools offer to each school. For example, Safer Schools Officers could lead sessions on knife crime if this was a known problem in a school. Similarly, sessions had been held on risky intimate relationships where this was known to be an issue.
- Islington and Camden shared a Police Youth Engagement Team which worked with gang nominals on the periphery of offending to offer diversionary activity in the community. Community activities organised by the Police included a boxing club at the Sobell Leisure Centre that was attended by 100 young people. It was intended to train the young people who regularly attended to become coaches and get involved in the running of the club.

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- A 'Life Maps' project was delivered in partnership with the Army which organised residential weeks for young people focused around life skills, resilience and discipline. It was commented that these were particularly well received by young women.
  - The Junior Citizens project taught resilience and life skills to vulnerable young people to better prepare them for leaving school.
  - The Police worked in partnership with the Anne Frank Trust to deliver a project on hate crime awareness.
  - The Police Cadets programme worked with 150 young people on activities related to good citizenship, crime prevention advice, and test purchasing.
- d) The Committee received a presentation from Freddie Hudson on the work of Arsenal in the Community.

The following main points were made:

- Arsenal in the Community was able to engage with young people in a way that other agencies could not. There was often a stigma associated with accessing services from the council, Police, or CAMHS services. There was no stigma associated with attending Arsenal FC projects.
  - Arsenal in the Community employed 50 casual staff, most of which were local people who had previously taken part in the organisation's community programmes. The organisation invested heavily in providing training and accredited courses for its staff.
  - Arsenal in the Community worked closely with the council to align its work to local priorities. Although activities were delivered through the medium of football, the focus of the organisation was on education, employment and youth crime.
  - The organisation had received funding from MOPAC, the Home Office and Sport England to deliver projects. Each of these was evaluated through key performance indicators.
  - The organisation engaged with 5,700 participants a week. There were 3,000 regular participants in the organisation's activities. There were over 1,000 participants a week at the Arsenal Community Hub, which provided a safe space for young people.
  - Arsenal in the Community had previously delivered an alternative provision course for a small number of young people who were causing issues for their schools and housing providers, and were known to the Police and Social Services. The provision was an intensive six-week pilot delivered in partnership with New River College, and provided activities for young people three days a week between 10am and 3pm. It was reported that the young people did not have any contact with the Police during this period, however the provision ultimately had mixed results. Whilst offending decreased over the period, the young people's behaviour deteriorated after the project ended. The Committee noted that some vulnerable young people needed sustained and long term support.
  - Arsenal in the Community provided an employability programme which achieved good outcomes for young people, and a pre-employability programme which focused on numeracy, literacy, and key skills.
- e) The Committee received a presentation from Abi Billingham on the work of Abianda.

The following main points were made:

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- Abianda was a social enterprise that worked with young women affected by gangs and the professions that support them. The organisation provided a range of bespoke projects for young women, and sought to influence government policy on how young women are supported.
  - The organisation's projects included the Star Project, which worked with young women on a one to one basis exploring issues such as healthy relationships, violence and exploitation; the Young Trainer Programme which trained young women affected by gangs to become trainers themselves and work with professionals to help tailor their services; and the 'Be Your Own Boss' project run in partnership with the London Village Network which provided advice and support to young women wanting to start their own business.
  - Young women affected by gangs told Abianda that they were living in a war zone. They were living high risk and high vulnerability lifestyles and did not feel safe. Abianda's philosophy was that a system-wide culture shift was needed to make vulnerable young women feel safe in accessing support services.
  - Abianda's work was focused around solution-based therapies. Abianda's services were non-judgemental, and focused on the young woman's strengths and her future. Young women did not have to disclose any information about their relationships, associates or past traumas. Young women affected by gangs did not trust authorities felt that they were at an increased risk if they had to disclose information. Abianda's approach tended to allow young women to build relationships quickly with their support worker, even if the young woman had a history of non-engagement.
  - Abianda had been successful in developing system-wide partnerships. An Abianda worker was co-located in the council's integrated gangs team to provide tailored support to young women.
  - The organisation recognised that young women were the experts on their own experiences, and embedded young women in the running of the organisation
  - Abianda's growth model delivered social impact by training young women to deliver their services. Six young women had been trained and employed recently to work with the Metropolitan Police Gang Crime Command.
  - Young women in gangs told Abianda that they felt a lack of power and control. Abianda worked to give those young women power and control over their lives, in a way which contradicted their experiences in gangs.
  - The organisation was currently working with 25 high-risk young women in Islington. The organisation hoped to develop services for younger girls as a form of early intervention, however this would require additional funding.
- f) The Committee received a presentation from Sheron Hosking, CAMHS Commissioning Manager, on the mental health services available to vulnerable adolescents.

The following main points were made:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were commissioned in partnership between Islington Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- The majority of services were provided through the Whittington, which received over 2,500 referrals in 2016/17.
- The Committee noted the range of services available. Some services were traditional clinical services, others were co-located in community settings such as schools and children's centres.
- A CAMHS worker was allocated to all schools in the borough and New River College. A specific worker was assigned to support looked after children.
- The Royal Free Hospital provided services to young people with eating disorders. 27 young people were referred in 2016/17.

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- The Brandon Centre was a VCS organisation that provided counselling and therapeutic services for 16 to 21 year olds from the council's youth hubs. This service received a high level of self-referrals from young men.
- The refugee therapy centre provided bespoke services to a small cohort of refugee and asylum seeking children.
- CAMHS workers were integrated in several council services for vulnerable young people. A worker was also assigned to undertake mental health screening of young people in police custody.
- Young people had been consulted to co-design future CAMHS services. Feedback received from young people expressed a preference for online services and a wide range of services available in community settings.
- CAMHS services supported the council's early intervention agenda, and were working to embed trauma informed approaches in schools. This was intended to support vulnerable young people at an earlier stage and prevent escalation of needs.

The Committee discussed the evidence received and asked questions of the witnesses. The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee asked if services were effective, and if they were successful at reaching vulnerable adolescents in need of help. Abi Billingham commented that more work was required to reach all young women in need of help, however Islington had developed strong referral mechanisms. Some young people reported to support services that they did not know about the range of services available.
- It was difficult to communicate the wide range of services available to marginalised young people, particularly those who did not access services at Islington's youth hubs.
- Freddie Hudson commented that Arsenal in the Community provided a range of short-term and long-term programmes, however thought that long term approaches were most effective for the most vulnerable adolescents. Longer-term approaches allowed relationships to be built with young people; workers could then recognise when young people were struggling, and also when they were most receptive to support and open to changing their behaviour.
- Some young people had said that they wanted to be able to self-refer to services, however officers thought that this would not allow for the effective triaging of support. There was a concern that if access to services was not managed effectively then services could become overwhelmed.
- Young people had reported that they need consistent support and the turnover of staff in support services was not helpful. Working with the same support worker for an extended period allowed strong and positive relationships to develop. Officers commented that the focus on relationship building was a new development that had emerged over the past ten years.
- Following a question, it was advised that CAMHS workers were not embedded in Arsenal in the Community. However, Freddie Hudson advised that Arsenal in the Community would welcome this development, commenting that a CAMHS worker in an Arsenal tracksuit would help to remove the stigma associated with accessing mental health services.
- A member of the Committee suggested that a tool to assist primary schools in identifying signs of mental health issues and other vulnerabilities would be useful. Officers commented that it was more difficult to detect mental health issues at a younger age, however it might be possible to develop a basic screening tool.
- Officers advised that authorities across London had experienced increases in referrals and the complexity of cases. Vulnerable young people increasingly had multiple vulnerabilities.

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- Following a question, it was advised that a wide range of services were commissioned because there was no 'one size fits all' service for vulnerable young people. Some young people had very specific needs that needed carefully tailored services. The council and CCG worked closely with partner organisations, and adapted the services commissioned in line with feedback received.
- Officers commented that Islington had a different approach to other boroughs, in that gang activity was considered a safeguarding concern, rather than exclusively an offending issue.
- Officers commented on the importance of early intervention. Most vulnerable adolescents had experienced trauma in early childhood, and it was thought that dealing with such issues proactively would improve outcomes for young people in the longer term. The effectiveness of the council's early intervention approach was monitored through a range of key performance indicators.
- In response to a question, it was advised that vulnerable adolescents could be made less vulnerable by developing their self-esteem and resilience.
- The Committee asked about how the child's voice was heard in services for vulnerable adolescents. It was advised that young people regularly sat on staff interview panels to ensure that the child's voice was reflected in the recruitment of staff. Council services, and services provided by partner organisations, welcomed feedback from young people and developed their services accordingly. Children's services also worked closely with the Youth Council in developing and reviewing services.
- It was important for young people to hold services to account. It was beneficial for young people to participate in service reviews as this not only helped to improve services, but developed the skills of young people as part of the process.
- It was noted that the Fair Futures Commission had received a range of evidence from young people and would be making recommendations on how the council could develop its services to better support young people.
- The Committee noted that domestic violence, substance abuse, neglect and mental health issues were the most significant factors which contributed to a young person's vulnerability. It was essential for adults working with young people to recognise the signs of such issues.
- It was commented that services which required a referral were only as effective as the professionals making the referrals. It was therefore essential that practitioners fully understood the range of services available to young people and were able to clearly communicate how they could help the young person. Abi Billingham commented that sometimes the services offered by Abianda were misunderstood and young people had different expectations of their services.
- It was requested that demographic data on the users of services for vulnerable young people be circulated to members of the Committee.
- Inspector Kier Newman commented that the Metropolitan Police was supportive of early intervention work, as they would prefer to work with young people and discourage them from offending. Whilst the Police was keen to work with the local community, police officers only had limited discretion in how they responded to criminal behaviour.
- The Committee suggested that services for vulnerable young people should be promoted more widely, including to the general public. It was commented that members of the committee did not have prior knowledge of some of the services available, and a public awareness of such services would help to ensure that vulnerable young people were referred to appropriate support services.
- Freddie Hudson commented that the work of Arsenal in the Community could be communicated more clearly. It was advised that resources were focused on

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providing front line services rather than communications, however it was recognised that a stronger presence on social media could be useful in raising awareness of universal services. Officers agreed that advertising services effectively was fundamental to engaging with young people.

- A member of the public queried why the Police-backed boxing club at the Sobell leisure centre had been scaled back, and what the costs were for users. In response, Inspector Kier Newman said that the club previously operated Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, however was now only held on Mondays and Wednesdays due to a resourcing issue. Friday evening was the busiest time for Police officers, and the Police was exploring if the club could meet on another day instead. The sessions previously cost £2 per session, however the sessions were now free for young people, with adults attending charged a higher amount.

The Committee thanked all of the witnesses for their contribution.

### **257 QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q1 2017/18) (ITEM NO. B2)**

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director of Children' Services, Finola Culbert, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support, and Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, introduced the quarterly performance update.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Persistent absence remained an issue in the borough and the council was working with head teachers and governors, as well as young people, to reduce the number of persistent absentees. Although there had been successes in re-engaging persistently absent young people in education, officers wanted to explore the reasons why absence issues persisted, as more pupils were becoming persistent absentees each year.
- The council was making good progress with issuing Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Whilst the number of young people in alternative provision had increased in quarter one, it was reported that this number had decreased in quarter two.
- Officers commented that outcomes at KS4, managing absence, and the placement of young people in Alternative Provision were issues where the council had limited influence. Whilst the council worked with schools to support their work, schools needed to lead on improving these outcomes.
- The percentage of children who were seen in accordance with a Children in Need plan appeared to have decreased. Officers advised that there had been an issue with the reporting of seeing children due to an increase in referrals resulting in capacity issues. In response to a question, it was clarified that all records had now been completed, however the performance indicator required records to be completed the day after the visit. Records were being completed up to four days after the visit during this busy period.
- The number of children missing from home had slightly increased. Officers commented that children missing from home tended to be older teenagers with very complex needs.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Children's Services performance in Quarter 1 2017/18 be noted;

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- (b) That the changes to Children's Services performance indicators, as detailed in the report submitted, be noted.

**258 EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B3)**

The Committee noted the Executive Member's update circulated in the agenda pack.

**259 REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)**

The Committee requested a further opportunity to ask questions of the witnesses that attended the meeting. It was advised that visits would be arranged as part of the scrutiny review and further written information could be requested if necessary.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15 pm

Chair