



**Report of:** Corporate Director for Children's Services

| Meeting of:                          | Date             | Ward(s) |
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| Children Services Scrutiny Committee | 28 November 2017 | All     |

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## **SUBJECT: Alternative Provision Review 2015/16 – 12-month report back**

### **1. Synopsis**

1.1 The Council Executive received a report on [insert date] from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee which reviewed Alternative Provision (AP). The scrutiny report proposed 15 recommendations to address the following review objectives:

- To identify how we can reduce the numbers of children on alternative provision.
- To identify how we can ensure that provision is of the highest quality.
- To make recommendations to further improve the outcomes, attendance, and accountability for those in alternative provision.
- To identify how schools and academies are ensuring the best possible outcomes for the most vulnerable children, including their emotional wellbeing, and make recommendations about how best practice can be in place in all schools and Academies.
- To evaluate the quality, standards and value for money of alternative provision providers, and the range of provision.
- To identify how early intervention and 'Think Family' approaches can be mainstreamed once the pump priming funding is no longer available.

This report outlines progress on those actions.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 To note the progress towards actions in response to the recommendations of the Alternative Provision Scrutiny Review.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 In September 2015 the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee commenced a review of Alternative Provision. The aims of the review included identifying how the number of children in alternative provision could be reduced, how to ensure that provision is of the highest quality and how schools and academies are ensuring the best possible outcomes for the most vulnerable children. The Committee considered evidence from a range of witnesses and carried out several visits before forming its recommendations and finalising its report in June 2016.
- 3.2 Overall, the Committee concluded that mainstream school is the best setting for the vast majority of pupils, however it appreciated that alternative provision is beneficial for a small number of pupils disengaged from mainstream education. The Committee made 15 recommendations related to the review objectives. Several of the recommendations were intended to minimise the need for and use of alternative provision. Recommendations were also made to increase the effectiveness of alternative provision for the pupils who do require this style of education.

### 4. Progress on actions in response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations

The processes for AP in Islington have changed since the recommendations were agreed. Management of AP has transferred to New River College (NRC). At the moment they are operating a legacy system for Year 11 and a new system entirely for Year 10.

Year 11 pupils continue to be looked after in the old way with NRC staff monitoring the attendance and progress of pupils in partnership with pupils' home schools and quality assuring provisions in partnership with a number of other local authorities in North and North East London.

For Year 10 pupils the system has changed in a way that has greatly impacted on how schools deal with pupils who in the past would have been referred to Alternative Provision. The service at NRC is a subscription service and referring schools are expected to pay a subscription to access the services that NRC will offer. The team at NRC has retained two duties. They are responsible for the procurement and quality assurance of places with AP providers. They are supported in procurement by officers from LBI and in quality assurance by colleagues from schools and from the partnership already in place with neighbouring LAs. Under these new arrangements home schools are fully responsible for the progress, attendance and wellbeing of these pupils. Pupils stay on roll with their school until the end of Year 11. Schools are also responsible for paying for AP placements for the pupils who they refer up to a limit of £10,000 per placement. Any AP costs above this figure may be supported on application to the SEN High Needs panel. This change has contributed to a reduction in referrals to AP from Year 10. As schools are taking full responsibility for their pupils many have made the decision that they can best support these pupils and monitor their progress by keeping them in school.

At the time of writing there are 35 pupils still on AP in Year 11 and 5 pupils in Year 10. This is a marked reduction from the position at the same time in 2016 (104 total in 2016, 20 in Year 10 and 84 in Year 11). Early signs of impact are good with better engagement between schools and at risk pupils, no corresponding increase in exclusions from schools and a borough wide reduction in first time and repeat offending.

#### Referral and assessment for Alternative Provision

- 4.1 **Recommendation 1: That the alternative provision referral process is strengthened in order to increase the accountability of schools and potentially reduce the number of pupils referred. It is recommended that a formal referral panel be established to consider applications for referral, the membership of which should include senior school representatives and relevant council officers. This panel should have the authority to approve or decline applications and make recommendations associated with the child's education where appropriate.**

Under the new framework for AP in Year 10 the accountability of schools has increased. Schools are now expected to be the only point of monitoring for their pupils on AP and are responsible for their outcomes at GCSE when they get to Year 11. Schools using the framework are required to sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with NRC which clearly sets out responsibilities for all parties in the AP process. This has encouraged schools to keep more pupils in school and to liaise more with early help teams in order to ensure that needs are better met. Referral forms and information passports have been redesigned to ensure that schools have carried out early intervention work and all information necessary for referral to the most appropriate provision is available. Referrals will not be made if all information isn't supplied. A specific panel wasn't set up. Some AP referrals come to the Securing Education Board and more expensive placements go to the High Needs panel. Current evidence shows that referral numbers are well down.

- 4.2 **Recommendation 2: To ensure that the needs of pupils are identified and that they have access to appropriate support, a standardised assessment framework to be introduced for those pupils proposed to be referred to alternative provision. Such assessments should be carried out by schools before pupils are referred to alternative provision.**

The system facilitated by NRC has embedded in it the requirement that prior support work and certain assessment outcomes are provided. A standardised framework of expectations is set out in the SLA which schools using the service have signed.

- 4.3 **Recommendation 3: Guidance be produced to support schools in making applications to the referral panel, and to assist the referral panel in decision-making. When considering a referral, the panel should consider factors such as the needs of the pupil identified via assessment, the support available to the pupil inside and outside of school, pupil aspirations and attainment levels and the wishes of the pupil.**

The SLA signed between NRC and schools sets out expectations including those around referrals. As schools are now accountable for progress, attendance and all additional support for pupils on AP this has resulted in schools deciding that keeping pupils in school is the best way to ensure that they receive the best possible provision.

#### Early intervention

- 4.4 **Recommendation 4: The council should encourage schools to implement targeted interventions for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision. Such interventions should not narrowly focus on attainment, but should seek to raise aspirations, identify pathways and develop pupil resilience. The Committee is especially keen for such interventions to begin in primary school.**

The new AP procedures have encouraged schools to see mainstream schooling as the normal pathway for all but a small handful of their pupils. This has resulted in a focus on early identification and intervention. Schools, Children's Services and NRC outreach workers are working together to ensure that targeted interventions are in place. These interventions are also referred to in paragraph 4.5.

- 4.5 **Recommendation 5: The council should continue to develop its wrap-around early help services for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision in partnership with schools. It should be the aim to provide comprehensive and integrated support to pupils at risk of referral and their families at the earliest possible stage, in order to reduce the need for alternative provision by Key Stage 4.**

Families First now link to each primary school in the borough, with IFIT doing the same in secondary schools. The Family Support Worker attached to the schools connects with their pastoral care staff or team around the school so that children and families with additional needs can be identified and support plans made with the consent of the family. They also facilitate coffee

mornings or attend playground meet and greets with parents to promote easy access to help. A specialist worker in IFIT also links to families where a young person has been identified by the school as at risk of requiring alternative provision. The Children, Employment and Skills department will continue to monitor and review support to adolescents including enabling schools to identify and support pupils and families in school.

**4.6 Recommendation 6: As alternative provision pupils tend to have a higher level of need and vulnerabilities, the council should review the SEN and CAMHS support available to alternative provision pupils and consider increasing the level of support if required.**

Pupils in the legacy Year 11 cohort benefit from SEN and CAMHS support from NRC in addition to a dedicated educational psychologist. The small cohort in Year 10 benefit from support provided from their schools. These pupils remain on roll at and are the responsibility of their schools until the end of year 11. CAMHS plan to offer training for AP providers in working with the pupils referred to them.

NRC are able to offer support drawing on their relationship with the council's early help support. This includes NRC outreach support for schools and a to be appointed outreach support worker for AP in the Families First service. This post will be responsible for improving outcomes for young people on AP through effective delivery of targeted interventions that will support behaviour and learning needs, raise education outcomes with a focus on improving school attendance and inform and support young people to identify their strengths and plan their post-16 progression pathways.

**4.7 Recommendation 7: The council should seek to further develop information sharing systems between the alternative provision service and other relevant areas of the council to ensure that the best interests of children are secured.**

This continues to be in the development stage as part of a council-wide approach. In the meantime, AP information is uploaded to the pupil database and close links are kept with AP, schools and other relevant council areas.

Supporting Alternative Provision pupils to achieve good outcomes

**4.8 Recommendation 8: All pupils should have the opportunity to study GCSEs and should be encouraged and supported to do so. The council should aspire for all pupils to achieve at least a grade C in GCSE English and Maths.**

The fact that pupils who would have been referred to AP are now staying in school means that they have the opportunity to study GCSEs in the mainstream. Quality assurance processes are resulting in the small number of remaining providers offering a wider range of GCSEs.

**4.9 Recommendation 9: The council review the options and pathways available for pupils wanting to study vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4, to ensure that the demand for vocational education does not contribute towards the need for alternative provision.**

National assessment requirements continue to focus on academic subjects and schools have responded to this by continuing to offer limited opportunities for vocational education. Council officers continue to promote a wide curriculum offer in discussions with school leaders which is also a priority in Ofsted school inspections.

**4.10 Recommendation 10: The council should review its post-16 employment and skills outreach support offer to alternative provision pupils. The level of advisory support offered by alternative provision providers varies and a minimum offer should be agreed to ensure the best outcomes for pupils.**

All pupils on AP are allocated a worker from the Post-16 Progress team in the Autumn term of Year 11. Input from this worker continues throughout Year 11 and into the Autumn term of Year 12 and includes one to one advice, workshops around applying for further education and employability and

monitoring to ensure that they are still in education, employment or training. Those who fall out and become NEET are referred to the team that specifically supports those young people who are NEET.

**4.11 Recommendation 11: The Committee believes that alternative provision pupils should be achieving the benchmark of 95% attendance. There should be clear escalation policies around pupil attendance, with a robust accountability framework supporting this.**

The attendance of Year 10 pupils is the responsibility of individual schools and contributes to their headline whole school figure. There are clear policies and an accountability framework around this. Attendance in the Year 11 cohort is monitored by the team at NRC with the expectation of at least 95% attendance. Current attendance of this cohort lies at 73% - an improvement on this point in 2016. For current Year 11 pupils NRC have brought an increased focus to bear on attendance. They have hired a new Education Welfare Officer from the beginning of the academic Year who also has responsibilities around pastoral care, giving a more holistic approach. This officer also works with AP providers and supports them to ensure attendance is accurately monitored and followed up.

Students' attendance is scrutinised weekly and individual interventions are planned fortnightly. Robust liaison is in place with universal and targeted services - all interventions relating to attendance are recorded and shared with supporting networks. Regular meetings take place with students and parents and statutory procedures are followed. Letters are sent home for non-attendance and also to recognise where there have been improvements in attendance. Home visits take place regularly with parents and carers reminded of their responsibility to ensure good attendance to school.

**4.12 Recommendation 12: The Council should only use alternative provision providers that have a broad outlook and high aspirations for their pupils; providers should focus on academic achievement and personal skills as well as pupil behaviour.**

There is a robust quality assurance framework in existence based on Ofsted framework and operated across the five partner LAs who are part of the NLCEP (North London Children's Efficiency programme). This framework is currently being refined and developed as part of an internal self-evaluation process.

**4.13 Recommendation 13: Shared learning should be facilitated between schools and alternative provision providers to increase standards in both settings. This could develop the teaching skills of alternative provision providers and assist schools in implementing the most effective behaviour management techniques for challenging pupils.**

The number of AP providers has reduced and those providers are monitored by Ofsted as well as by the NLCEP QA processes which apply high standards in terms of teaching and learning, curriculum, progress and leadership and management. Lack of resource as well as capacity have made the bringing together of expertise from schools and AP providers difficult to achieve.

#### Accountability

**4.14 Recommendation 14: The Committee identified the "never give up" approach adopted by schools such as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Highbury Fields to be best practice. Alternative provision should only be used as a last resort once all other attempts to engage the child in mainstream education have been exhausted. However, to ensure the best outcomes for the children that are referred due to exceptional circumstances, the council should work with schools and providers to improve the perception of alternative provision. It is important that alternative provision is viewed as a fresh start and a legitimate alternative to mainstream education for those who truly need it and not as a setting for failed pupils. Alternative provision should not be used as a threat.**

**Recommendation 15: It is important that schools do not consider pupils to be “out of sight, out of mind” once they are referred to alternative provision. Whilst referral back to mainstream education is not always possible or desirable, it may be appropriate and beneficial in some instances for the pupil to remain a member of the school community, especially as schools are still accountable for their outcomes. Schools should remain actively involved in the welfare of pupils, especially on matters such as safeguarding and attendance, and should consider involving pupils in extracurricular activities as appropriate.**

The new processes around AP have resulted in AP now being seen as a last resort. Even with those who are referred, schools remain fully responsible for pupils’ welfare and accountable for their outcomes. Referrals in Year 10 are limited by these processes and by the expectations placed on schools by the service level agreement.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Financial implications:**

There are no additional resources required to implement the majority of the recommendations. However, further financial advice will be sought on proposals which implement actions requested by the Executive.

### **5.2 Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications arising from this report. The actions support the implementation of statutory duties relating to alternative provision.

### **5.3 Resident Impact Assessment**

Alternative Provision seeks to address a range of inequalities in the school population to help them to achieve their potential and build resilience to factors that may disadvantage them. Resident Impact Assessments will be undertaken as part of the process of developing and implementing policies and actions arising from this report.

## **6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

- 6.1 This report details the Executive’s response to the recommendations from the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee.

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None

Final report clearance:

**Signed by:**



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Date

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