



Report of: Corporate Director of Children, Employment and Skills

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	Date: 9 January 2018	Ward(s): All
---	-----------------------------	---------------------

Delete as appropriate		Non-exempt
------------------------------	--	------------

SUBJECT: Making Islington a great place to grow up, learn and work: Update on the Islington Fair Futures Commission

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Islington has committed to create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life – a fairer Islington. This also means fairer for the forty thousand children and young people living in over twenty thousand households in Islington to ensure that they are life-ready. Children and young people still have to compete for political priority and resources without an accountability mechanism directly to them for a place they have to grow up in. The local authority has a statutory duty to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the Council and its partners with a view to improving the five statutory well-being outcomes of children and young people. This means reflecting and challenging ourselves to do better in the way we exercise our role as the place leader, shaper and maker of Islington for children and young people.
- 1.2. To enable a focused and independent reflection on our ambitions to build resilience through prevention and early intervention for this key group in Islington, Cllrs Richard Watts and Joe Caluori via the Children and Families Board requested a Commission inquiry focused on children and young people that will help to fast track our journey to making Islington a great place to grow up in.
- 1.3. The Fair Futures Commission was successfully launched at the end of February this year. This report outlines the progress and key highlights to date.
- 1.4. The Commission was clear that as well as needing to develop some big solutions, they needed to think about other ways to meet need through small changes, such as the way we use an existing spaces and

places, the system design around population groups as well as service design, behaviour change by both citizens and organisations, or community empowerment.

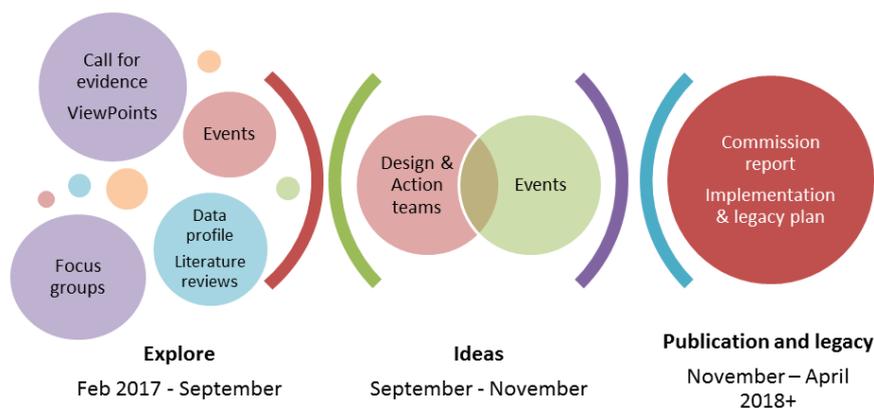
2. Recommendations

2.1. To note the progress and the next steps for the Commission.

3. Key issues, highlights and next steps: moving from challenges to action

3.1 The Commission has entered its final phase and developed recommendations for building a fairer Islington for children and young people (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fair Futures Commission Roadmap



3.2 The Commission chose three themes to guide its discussions and research: place, power and possibilities.

- **Place** is about the physical environment. It looked at what children and young people need from their local area in order to thrive. Particular issues included safety, housing, outside space and travelling across Islington.
- **Power** focuses on how children, young people and families can shape and support their own lives. This focused on the role of the wider community and different types of networks including digital support.
- **Possibilities** focuses on how we can ensure that children and young people develop the life skills that they need to thrive. This included inclusive economic growth, preparation for the workplace, independent living and other key transitions in life.

3.2 The Commission used an evidence-informed approach. We conducted a programme of insight and intelligence gathering to enable the Commission to understand the issues for Islington's children and young people. At the Commission's launch, organisations and individuals were spurred to debate the challenges and opportunities to make Islington a great place to grow up in.

3.3 We issued a [Call for Evidence](#) asking departments within the council, organisations and individuals to send in submissions that answered questions about Place, Power and Possibilities. We received submissions covering a range of perspectives.

3.4 A data profile, existing evidence, information and intelligence from published and 'grey' literature was developed for all three themes. This identified knowledge and awareness about what is already happening and promising practice.

3.5 We ran a [Viewpoint essays](#) initiative which outlined the opinions and stories of young people, parents and those who work with or devise policy for children and young people. These formed part of the evidence for the Commission. Jermain Jackman, Chair of the Fair Futures Commission, also produced a [think piece advocating the need to put children and young people's issues and needs back on the agenda](#).

- 3.6 Several external organisations and several councils expressed an interest in meeting or working with the Commission to contribute intelligence and ideas. There have also been enquiries about replicating the Fair Futures Commission.
- 3.8 One success of the Commission's process so far is that values such as the involvement of the voice of children and young people are now at the forefront of non-Children's Services officers' ambitions e.g. in Greenspace and Leisure.
- 3.9 A core thread that brought together the issues and themes is **using the opportunities and assets Islington has – as a community and a network of organisations - to make social mobility real particularly for the children and young people who face challenges as they grow up.** The recent [Social Mobility Commission report on the State of The Nation](#) as one of the best performers against their social mobility indicators. However, the report also highlights that Londoners who experience challenges that disadvantage them face a competitive labour market after statutory education. London still experiences one of the highest unemployment rates for young people aged 16 to 24 year olds and London residents are more likely to cycle in and out of low pay. London also has the highest living costs in the country alongside unaffordable housing.

Place: A safe and prosperous community with space and room to grow, live, play and work

- 3.10 We hosted the **Place Summit** on 27 June. This was attended by architects, planners from Islington council, the GLA, developers, housing associations, council officers, FF Commissioners and young people. It followed two successful youth-led borough tours which brought council officers and young people together to reflect on places and spaces in Islington. The Summit reflected on good practice and key findings. Participants visited the local area and identified how it could be designed differently. The outcome of these events can be read [here](#).
- 3.11 [Dinah Borat](#), who worked with us on the borough walking tours and the Place Summit, is now a Design Adviser for the Mayor of London and has advocated the Commission's approach to progressing children and young people's needs in urban planning and the forthcoming London Plan. Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron is also working on the creation of child-friendly neighbourhoods to feed into the development of the London Plan.

3.12 Summary of Place issues and challenges:

Built environment

- Islington is a borough of lots of people and very little land, meaning space is hugely valuable to people and under an enormous amount of pressure. Whether we are talking about public space, infrastructure or housing, the lack of space is something which looms over Islington's ability to adapt and change to accommodate children, young people and families' needs. We have to start thinking about other ways to meet need through small changes, such as the way we use an existing space, behaviour change, or community empowerment.
- **Contested Space:** Space means different things to different ages and those with particular needs. The conflict between generations and the purpose/use of space can be an issue in a borough with such limited space.
- **Ownership of space:** It's not always that space is contested for different uses, but that sometimes, children, young people and family needs are misunderstood (for example, safety vs risk)
- **Inclusive Design:** a way of making space usable for all is a good use of space
- **Public/Private Space:** Some developments with social housing cut off access to open space to these tenants. Many new developments feature private space that has public access but there is threat that this access could be revoked by official owners. Planning Policy tries to protect it, but more could be done to convey the importance of it.

In this context, where our spaces are under such pressure, with competing demands and a strong sense of ownership, how do we ensure that these spaces benefit and work for children and young people and their parents and carers?

Travel and safety

- There is perception that much crime in the borough is committed by young people (whether to other young people or the wider general public)
- Children surveyed at our Adventure Playgrounds identified that they hardly travelled or played out without their parents.
- A strong feeling of safety on a street or access route may result in the area being used for play and socialising rather than simply for access, but this has to be cultivated

Housing

- The lack of space in the borough combined with an ever increasing population and high levels of poverty has led to problems such as overcrowding and challenging living conditions for families.
- Some young people expressed a feeling of being forgotten in Islington's regeneration and agitation with the gentrification around them. Several young people suggested that they cannot see themselves living here to raise a family due to the cost of living and unaffordable housing. However, it was also suggested that Islington is part of a big city with great access links.
- This set of issues suggested a need to build more homes that are truly affordable, including enabling young people to either rent or buy, in a borough that has some of the most premium property prices in the country and with very little space left for development.

Power and Possibilities

3.12 We conducted several focus groups and interviews with young people to complement the thematic analysis of evidence submissions from organisations and the public, previous consultations, needs assessments and local intelligence about the issues for this theme. This was complemented by results from a Health and Wellbeing Survey conducted in schools earlier this year. There was a focus on the lived experiences and hidden voices particularly young carers, LGBTQIA young people, BAME young people and those who have overcome challenges.

3.13 Young people expressed that although there is a strong focus on their academic success, they felt there is limited support for teaching the social and emotional capabilities which are connected to issues such as employability, youth crime and preparation for adulthood. This was the focus of the final workshop held on Wednesday 8 November. It saw young people brainstorm ideas with professionals from business, education, health, social and youth work sectors for working with both children (primary-aged) and young people to prepare them and develop their skills for:

- Preparing for work and the future of work
- Managing emotional wellbeing and feelings
- Positive relationships with their peers and adults
- Independent living including planning for and managing a home and money

The event was well received by both professionals and young people as a way of unpicking the issues and co-creating ideas for solutions.

3.14 Summary of Power and Possibilities issues and challenges:

Children and young people in Islington

- The younger age groups are more culturally diverse than the older age groups
- A significant number of children live in poverty
- Young people and families are mobile. There are also a range of vulnerabilities experienced by children and young people in Islington. The issues for children, young people and families are becoming more complex e.g. youth crime, special educational needs and disability, problems within families
- National policies such as housing and welfare reform are intensifying the challenges of growing up in Islington
- The challenges are affecting middle-income as well as low-income families

Table 1: Resolution Foundation Living Standards Audit 2017

Living Standards	Household incomes	Poverty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing variation of living standards across the UK in recent decades. Private rents have increased significantly faster than mortgage interest costs over the past five years, especially in regions near London. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stagnated incomes of low to middle income households, through a combination of low earnings growth, rising housing costs and reduced state support. Households with children, and younger working-age families having the lowest incomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the UK, 49% of all children and 57% of children in working families lived in low to middle income families in 2015-16. The share of low to middle income people living in poverty (defined as below 60% of median income) rose by 7% between 2003-4 and 2015-16.

Living in Islington

- There is positivity about living in Islington
- There is also a sense of feeling removed or disenfranchised by external forces such as gentrification, money and people in control (local and national decision-makers, schools, police, etc)
- There are a range of assets and resources in Islington – it just depends on whether you know about them
- Some young people felt unsafe in Islington; others thought that this is being “over-hyped” by the media and others

Early childhood, children and the transition to adolescence

- The foundations set in early childhood are significant and [Bright Start Islington](#) is intrinsic to a sustained focus on this.
- Before and after the birth of the child is a crucial time to support families to give children the foundations for good health, as they are especially receptive to offers and advice. Early identification and intervention can identify families at risk of problems escalating into neglect and abuse
- The active involvement and full participation of parents including fathers contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of early childhood interventions for vulnerable children.
- Playful children are securely attached to significant adults. The lack of play can be from:
 - Poverty and urban living, resulting in stressed parenting and lack of access to natural and outdoor environments
 - Over-scheduled and over-supervised children, as a consequence of perceptions of urban environments as dangerous for children
 - Growing culture of risk-averse parenting
- Positive factors which might support wellbeing during transition to early adolescence include positive parent-child relationships, attainment, and children’s friendships.
- For some of our young people who had poor childhood experiences, the loss of attachment to significant adults as they grew up may have played a role in their future negative or risky circumstances
- Families, particularly those contending with a significant number of problems (e.g. parental depression, low income), benefit from accessible and non-stigmatising support.
- Schools play a positive role in fostering engagement and enjoyment of learning, improving school wellbeing, particularly important for children who have particular pressures in their lives (e.g. difficulties at home, poor parental support or experiencing stressful events).
- The Community Budget for Families with Multiple Needs provided a partnership approach to the strategy and funding for early help. This could be disrupted by potential changes to the national Troubled Families approach and funding.

Supporting adolescents

- The focus during adolescence tends to be on the negative things to do with this phase in life e.g. involvement in crime, risky health behaviours, rather than how we build on young people’s assets and strengths

- There are groups of young people who are not within the council's child protection, care or youth offending system and may still need support although not necessarily from those services
- The totality of a young person's vulnerability may not always be recognisable from apparently isolated incidents e.g. focusing solely on their involvement in crime
- Some young people expressed a sense of disempowerment as if power is not a personal ability
- Relationships when working or engaging with young people and parents were key and understanding the lived experiences and realities has been called for at all levels including those who make decisions
- Peer relationships and attachments are key. This also requires adolescents to be equipped with good judgement and a sense of self-worth. There is a call for dealing with the contexts and issues such as youth crime or exploitation through a different lens e.g. as a public health or societal issue
- Poor childhood experiences can lead to worse health and wellbeing, being more likely to engage in harmful behaviours and at greater risk of poor physical and mental health, chronic disease and premature mortality. This can particularly affect health and wellbeing in adulthood and the need for adult services to address these issues.
- Evidence suggests that ways of addressing the effects of poor childhood experiences include trauma-informed approaches, effective early childhood services, strong relationships with a trusting adult and social and emotional learning programmes. There may also be a need to form relationship-based approaches to engaging with young people.
- Children's health particularly those with long-term conditions and mental health continue to be key issues in Islington.
- Young carers' peer relationships and opportunities to connect with other young carers helped to cope with the challenge of being a young carer. They called for better awareness about their situation particularly in schools and the NHS.
- LGBTQIA young people highlighted that, despite the changes enabling equality, they still experience challenges with other young people and adults. They are still a group that remain a hidden voice, including recognising their diversity, when it comes to understanding and thinking about services and support for them. They also called for better awareness about LGBTQIA young people in schools and proactively addressing their challenges.
- Young adults who reflected on their difficult experiences highlight that there is a need to look beyond those who will be easier to involve (for example, only using established forums) and what has happened throughout their lives to avoid repeating the same practice and identify ways to intervene earlier
- Some young people such as young carers, care leavers and homeless 16/17 year olds have to move to independent living or managing the household at a young age. Support to manage money, a home and emotions well is key to entering independence successfully at an earlier age and with less family help than the average young person
- Islington should have people and places (services) that empower imagination and possibilities

Readiness for work and the future of work

- Some young people felt left behind by gentrification. However, for some, living cheek by jowl to wealthier residents/families encouraged their aspirations to succeed in life
- Where young people could no longer afford to live in Islington, this could lead to a brain drain which could be detrimental to local economic growth
- Non-cognitive skills refer to a set of attitudes, behaviours and strategies that are thought to underpin success in school and at work, such as motivation, perseverance and self-control. There is substantial evidence that non-cognitive skills are important determinants of school and labour market outcomes, both directly and indirectly (through their effect on education attainment). Non-cognitive skills are also strong predictors of engagement in risky behaviours (e.g. involvement in crime, or exclusion from school).
- Overcrowding at home often affected a young person's ability to study
- Young people would value independent careers advice and guidance from those who work in the different sectors at the right time

- Young people highlighted that it can be about who you know and that if a young person is from a disadvantaged background, they are several steps behind young people whose parents have the connections in the business world or different industries. This also includes connections for good work experience.
- They don't feel prepared with employability skills to compete with others or for the future of work (the 4th industrial revolution) e.g. flexible working, skills particularly technological innovation and adapting to this
- There were not many opportunities to consider being an entrepreneur and this wasn't encouraged as much as it could be. It was also identified that to do so would take finances to tide young people over at the start and some young people were from families that are not in a position to do that.

Other

- Interactive support such as using digital technology to complement and extend how services are delivered. This is a slightly different approach from digital skills education and what is provided in settings to support that. It focuses on how organisations who work with children, young people and their parents can use digital technology to support them, active citizenship and social action. An example of this is [Newham University Hospital DAWN project](#).
- Adopting a focus on health and care for children and young people in the same that it is now viewed for adults and older people
- A different way for leaders across the public, business and third sectors to constructively drive and invest in children and young people. This will require a rethink about how the democratic and accountability structure for children, young people and families works.
- Engineering a strategic shift of this kind when the pressures on public funding are intense is challenging.
- For the benefit of children, families and a thriving community it is a challenge that those involved in all areas of children and young people's lives must continue to invest in.

Key themes for the Commission's final recommendations

- 3.15 This understanding has led to the emergence of some key themes that inform the commission's recommendations on how improve the lives – and life chances – of Islington's young people for generations to come including:
- A guarantee for young people living or studying in the borough about what the outcomes and support they can expect
 - A better focus on work experience
 - Making life skills in preparation for adulthood a reality for all young people
 - More emphasis on youth leadership, social action and giving young people a say, for example in planning and managing public spaces and housing
 - Exploring housing options for young people that allow them to pursue education and work
 - Changing the approach to rules on estates such as 'no ball games'
- 3.16 The commission emphasise that when the time comes to implement the final recommendations, actions must be tailored for the appropriate equality groups and other key groups of children and young people such as young carers and those in care.
- 3.17 The commission is formulating recommendations that take account of the severe budget pressures on the council, but also the opportunities afforded by its relationships with other organisations in the private and public sectors.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications.

4.2 Legal Implications:

The council has a duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 to promote cooperation with relevant partners (including health, education, police and probation services) regarding children's well-being in Islington, and relevant partners have a duty to cooperate with the council. The focus of the arrangements referred to is children's physical and mental health and emotional, social and economic well-being; protection from harm and neglect; and education, training and recreation.

4.3 Environmental Implications

None

4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

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.

A Resident Impact Assessment will be completed when the Fair Futures Commission has developed its recommendations for submission to the Council and its partners.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. The overall goal of the Commission is promoting the necessary social and health development of all children and young people to ensure a sustainable community which is fit for all. It embeds the original imperative of the Children Act 2004 and subsequent Every Child Matters programme where the wellbeing of children and young people is everybody's business.
- 5.2. The Children Act 2004 places a statutory duty on local authorities to lead co-operation arrangements that will improve the five statutory children's wellbeing outcomes:
- Physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
 - Protection from harm – both from a safeguarding children and community safety perspective;
 - Education, training and recreation
 - Opportunities and support to make a positive contribution to society; and
 - Social and economic well-being

This can only be achieved by:

- enabling the statutory roles of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children to fulfil their place leadership function by steering, promoting and creating opportunities for cooperation within the council and with local partners;
 - working together across the Council departments;
 - working with other public, private and social sector organisations; and
 - working with children, young people, families and the wider community
- 5.3. Full Council will receive the final recommendations from the Commission on 22 February 2018. Consideration of the issues within the Fair Futures Commission will support progression towards becoming a UNICEF child-friendly community and the place leadership and legacy required for children and young people for the future.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None

Signed by:



20 December 2017

Carmel Littleton,
Corporate Director of Children, Employment and Skills

Date

Report author: Tania Townsend, Partnership Development and Strategy Manager and
Fair Futures Commission Programme Lead
Tel: 020 7527 3080
E-mail: tania.townsend@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Tim Partington, Head of Finance
Tel: 020 7527 1851
Email: Tim.partington@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Peter Fehler, Acting Director of Law and Governance
Tel: 020 7527 3126
Email: peter.fehler@islington.gov.uk