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EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B3)

Councillor Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children and Families, introduced his paper on the latest developments in Children's Services.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Councillor Caluori explained that Mount Carmel Catholic Girls' School was to become a mixed sex non-denominational academy. It was reported that staff, the school's leadership team and pupils were generally engaged with the transition. Staff would transfer to the new academy under TUPE arrangements. Some parents were displeased with the decision of the catholic diocese, which was due to an over-supply of catholic girls' places in north London and the school running a financial deficit. The Executive Member was not aware which provider would be sponsoring the academy, however advised that the council was engaging with the Regional Commissioner to ensure that an appropriate provider was selected. It was clarified that the council remained opposed to academy schools, however was prohibited from opening a new school and acknowledged the reasons for the transition. The council was keen for the academy provider to be fully engaged in the Islington community of schools.
- Mary Clement noted her regret that Mount Carmel would not retain its catholic status and queried if other options had been explored, such as becoming a mixed sex school, however noted the possible impact this could have on St Aloysius' College. Whilst Councillor Caluori could not speak on behalf of the diocese, it was commented that the school was significantly under-enrolled and only around 35% of Mount Carmel pupils were catholic. Pupils would be supported during the transition.
- Councillor Nick Wayne queried if the Regional Commissioner's choice of academy provider could have an impact on other local schools and if the transition could lead to the creation of a multi-academy trust with City of London Academy. In response, it was advised that no decision had yet been made and although the result could be that one provider operated two academies in the borough, the council was not aware that the City of London Academy had ambitions to expand to Mount Carmel. The Executive Member noted the government intention for all schools to transition to academies, however commented that it was unlikely for the Regional Commissioner to recommend transition while Islington schools continued to perform well. It was suggested that developing the independence of the community of schools could assist in allaying any concerns of the commissioner.
- The Chair queried how the CSE awareness project detailed in the paper submitted would be monitored and evaluated. In response the importance of evaluation was recognised, however it was noted the project was in the early stages of development and evaluation methods were yet to be agreed. Child Safeguarding Boards had a responsibility to communicate the risk of CSE and there was a need to raise awareness of the risks posed by peer to peer and gang related CSE. It was suggested that the council could monitor any increase in the number of CSE disclosures following the completion of the project.
- The Committee praised the recent baby-friendly award granted to Islington by Unicef.
- It was advised that the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee would be scrutinising the performance of the Youth Offending Service at a future meeting. It was suggested that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee could carry out a review of the service in the next municipal year.

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- A member of the public commented that Islington had been rated positively in a recent Department for Education publication. The Executive Member advised that he would investigate before the next meeting.

The Committee thanked Councillor Caluori for his attendance.

117 **ALTERNATIVE PROVISION: WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

(a) Evidence from witnesses

The Committee received evidence from John d'Abbro OBE, Head Teacher of the New Rush Hall Group, a provider of alternative provision in the London Borough of Redbridge.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- John d'Abbro was the Head of the New Rush Hall Group and also sat on the Mayor of London's advisory panel on education.
- The New Rush Hall Group was a soft federation of education settings which included an all-ages special school, a behaviour support outreach team, three pupil referral units, an adolescent psychiatric unit and an early years provision which received multi-agency support.
- The Committee noted the context of the Group's work; Redbridge was a changing and fast growing borough which had sought to achieve economies of scale by pooling their resources and services into the Group. This enabled the Group to provide a comprehensive and joined-up service for children with behavioural and medical difficulties and their families.
- The Group worked with children from ages 4 to 16. Comprehensive support was provided to all pupils. Those with emotional and social difficulties were able to access therapists.
- Pupils achieved good outcomes, both academically and personally. A low number went on to become NEET, a low number were in custody or prison, and it was considered that New Rush Hall pupils had fewer emotional breakdowns than would otherwise be expected.
- Mr d'Abbro commented on Islington's target to reduce the number of children in alternative provision. Whilst the ambition to reduce the number of children in need of alternative provision was supported, it was emphasised that any reduction should be based on need, otherwise children could remain disengaged in mainstream education. Although some would argue for the closure of specialist schools and the need for re-integration into mainstream education, Mr d'Abbro appreciated that mainstream education was not suitable for all.
- Whilst it could be considered that the Group's pupil referral units were below capacity; Mr d'Abbro suggested that the 75% occupancy rate indicated an encouraging level of churn. It was explained a number of pupils were able to resume their studies in mainstream education after receiving support from the Group; and the PRUs did not retain pupils unnecessarily.
- Although Mr d'Abbro recognised that pupil referral units and alternative provision were costly forms of education, it was commented that they were able to save money in the long term by reducing the demand for specialist, high-dependency services such as residential care.
- It was explained that many pupils attending the Brookside School for pupils with mental health issues had social and emotional difficulties. The majority of Brookside pupils were girls, whereas the majority of pupils in the PRUs were boys. It was suggested that young women tended to internalise problems which then presented as mental health issues, whereas troubled young men

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more often exhibited challenging behaviour. It was thought this was a problem for society as a whole, as the invisibility and stigma of mental health issues could result in female pupils not accessing appropriate support.

- An increasing challenge was working with pupils with foetal alcohol syndrome. It was reported that a number of children with the syndrome had been misdiagnosed as autistic and research indicated that up to 1 in 100 children could have the syndrome. It was commented that the syndrome frequently led to behavioural difficulties. The Group was guided on this matter by the research of education consultant Professor Barry Carpenter.
- Pupils were able to access mental health support in the form of counsellors and therapists. Two full time therapists worked with the New Rush Hall School and a trainee worked with the PRU. The Group considered pupils' difficulties systemically, and sought a holistic view of the reasons for poor behaviour.
- It was noted that pupil progress was tracked for five years after they left the Group, however it would be preferential to examine outcomes up to age 25. The lack of long-term outcomes data was a problem across the sector.
- The Committee queried what an ideal education support system would look like. In response, Mr d'Abbro suggested that ideally mainstream schools would be able to offer comprehensive support to their pupils and prioritise individual needs; however the reality was that schools had limited resources, poor behaviour impacted on the learning of others and that pupils with particular needs would be disruptive unless they received appropriate support. Given these challenges alternative provision was considered necessary. The importance of early intervention was also emphasised.
- The Group's early years provision was for 4 and 5 year old children. Pupils attended in the mornings and re-joined their mainstream school in the afternoon. The early years' school was a nurturing setting which focused on prevention and therapy. The Group sought to contribute to the learning of mainstream education providers; it was a requirement for schools with pupils enrolled with the Group to send staff to the setting for training.
- It was explained that some primary schools found the structure of the early years alternative provision to be disruptive and had suggested that the pupils should attend for three full days a week. Whilst it was important to meet the needs of schools, it was commented that pupil needs were the priority and it was important for pupils to be fully engaged in both environments, as well as with other services such as family support workers and therapists.
- There was a general concern that schools did not take appropriate responsibility for pupils referred to alternative provision. For some schools, it was thought that pupils could be "out of sight, out of mind".
- The Committee queried the alternative provision referral pathways in Redbridge. It was advised that early years alternative provision referrals were made by schools. For PRUs providing alternative provision at secondary level, referrals were considered by a Panel comprised of Head Teachers or their representatives. Papers were circulated in advance of meetings. It was not always decided to refer pupils to alternative provision; if appropriate pupils could be referred to another mainstream school on a "one in, one out" basis. Similarly, the New Rush Hall Group could refer pupils to be re-integrated into mainstream education.
- It was confirmed that around 80% of New Rush Hall pupils in PRUs at KS3 were referred back to mainstream education for KS4; however very few pupils were referred back to mainstream education during KS4 as this was likely to disrupt their GCSE studies.
- It was noted that the unified alternative provision system in Redbridge was different to that available in Islington where pupils were only able to be referred in KS4, and there was a variety of providers available. Mr d'Abbro suggested that authorities using such providers required a robust quality

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evaluation framework. It was suggested that the authority could carry out unannounced spot checks to ensure quality of provision.

- Following a question, it was advised that Brookside pupils were aged between 13 and 18, had to be referred by a consultant psychologist, and their stay varied between four to five weeks to several months. Some did not return to their mainstream school and were referred to local colleges instead. It was explained that peers in school could stigmatise those who returned. Returning to school may also be distressing for pupils, for example if they had attempted suicide on school premises.
- The Committee requested that a visit be arranged to the New Rush Hall Group.
- A member of the public queried how the New Rush Hall Group worked to improve attendance. In return, it was accepted that pupils on alternative provision often had poor attendance which needed improvement, however 100% attendance was considered unrealistic for these pupils. The Group was satisfied if attendance improved over time, yet appreciated that there may be lapses. Subject to their attendance level when they were referred, the Group expected all pupils to achieve between 80% and 85% attendance. The Group had offered incentives and rewards, such as iPods, to pupils whose attendance improved significantly.

The Committee thanked John d'Abbro for his attendance.

The Committee received evidence from Antony Doudle, Head of School Improvement – Primary, on early intervention and identification opportunities.

- The Committee noted that Islington had a number of very good primary schools, however the government required a demanding examination culture in primary schools which disengaged some pupils from mainstream education.
- Pupils were tested 12 times during key stages 1 and 2 and those pupils who were not academically able could lack confidence, have lower aspirations or consider themselves to be a failure as a result.
- It was noted that assessment outcomes had real implications for schools and there was a great deal of pressure on teachers to achieve results.
- The Committee considered the use of pupil premium funding, which was intended to provide a rich and varied education to the most disadvantaged pupils, however was sometimes used on resources to improve attainment, such as “learning to learn” activities. Officers considered it important for schools to use pupil premium funding to vary their educational offer as this helped disengaged pupils. Some schools used the funding to provide varied educational experiences, however did not review their offering annually. It was commented that the best outcomes were achieved when the activities funded were tailored to the cohort.
- Officers highlighted the importance of providing constructive feedback to children. As opposed to being provided with their grades, children had to be advised of their strengths and weaknesses and told how to improve.
- The importance of a positive growth mind-set was emphasised.
- Attendance at primary age was important. Officers commented that schools should be insistent, consistent and persistent in regards to attendance. Children were safer in school and absence was considered as a safeguarding issue.
- A discussion was had on how willing schools were to monitor and enforce attendance. It was commented that schools had to be brave in raising attendance with parents, and although some schools were wary about fining

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parents, this could be a useful tool. The importance of building relationships with parents was emphasised.

- The Committee noted the Mental Health and Resilience in Islington Schools (MHARS) project carried out with the Islington Schools Health and Wellbeing Team. The project worked with schools to develop strategies for supporting young people's mental health and was being rolled out to all primary schools following a pilot. This was focused on evaluating the risks to pupils and working to develop personal resilience.
- Children's Services was working with schools to improve the effectiveness of pupil progress meetings. It was suggested that school staff should have the opportunity to discuss progress with senior leaders at least termly; and changes to pupil support structures, such as the allocation of teaching assistants, should be made as a result. It was also suggested that changing the way in which the curriculum was implemented could help to better engage some children.
- It was commented that some schools previously ran 'Reading Recovery' and 'Numbers Counts' programmes for pupils in years 1 and 2 who were struggling. However, this was no longer centrally funded.
- It was thought that further work was required to better support children in transitioning to secondary school. Clear guidance on best practice was required. It was commented that some vulnerable pupils could benefit from attending summer schools. Successful summer schools focused on a range of subjects such as science, art, music and coding, alongside English and Maths. There was no central government funding for such schemes.
- It was noted that the Sutton Trust had published a report which indicated that some forms of intervention used by schools were ineffective. Following a query, it was explained that using pupil premium funding to provide 1-to-1 support was expensive and not sustainable; although it could assist children in catching-up with their peers, children in receipt of such support did not tend to keep-up in the longer term. For this reason, the council encouraged interventions which focused on developing life skills and resilience, together with providing meaningful feedback, developing positive mind-sets and metacognition techniques.
- The Committee noted that separating primary children into ability groups could be damaging and that Children's Services did not support this approach. It was suggested that mixed ability groups better reflected real life and enabled pupils to interact with a greater range of pupils. The exception to this was grouping pupils by reading age when teaching literacy.
- The Committee queried if not grouping pupils by ability impacted the performance of the most able pupils. In response, it was advised that this was not a significant concern and the importance of children interacting with a variety of their peers was emphasised.
- Following a query on the quality and qualifications of primary teachers, it was advised that schools recruited teachers from a range of backgrounds and it was the responsibility of the teacher's training provider to ensure they were adequately prepared for teaching. However, newly qualified teachers were supported by mentoring programmes and the quality of teaching in Islington schools was very good.

Councillor Rakhia Ismail left the meeting and the Committee became inquorate. Members continued to consider the matters on the agenda, with the deliberations of the Committee to be ratified at the following meeting.

- The Committee considered to what extent engagement and successful intervention at primary school impacted on the number of KS4 pupils being referred to alternative provision. Although definitive data was not able to be

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provided, it was known through surveys that pupils with a high level of wellbeing at primary age tended to maintain this throughout secondary school.

The Committee thanked Anthony Doudle for his attendance.

The Committee received evidence from Gabby Grodentz, Head of Alternative Provision; Kim Lawson, Operational Manager (Children in Need Provider Services); and Scott Strand, Education Manager (Specialist Multi-Agency Outreach Services), on partnership work between the alternative provision and early intervention services.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The services had a partnership agreement in place, the aim of which was to increase the number of young people educated in mainstream school and reduce the demand on alternative provision.
- The pilot project was in its infancy. In September 2015 the council had approached Holloway and Mount Carmel schools to participate in the project, and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School had requested to join the pilot in November 2015.
- IFIT had established links with local schools and had a multi-disciplinary team with relevant specialisms, including qualified teachers. The service worked with children aged 10 to 18, including those at risk of referral to alternative provision or exclusion, those with poor attendance, young offenders and those with a history of antisocial behaviour. The service also provided integrated employment and mental health support to adults.
- The IFIT service had an intensive 'whole family' approach which included twice-weekly home visits. The service worked with parents to develop their skills.
- The Committee noted that Highbury Grove school had been approached to participate in the project however had declined to take part as they had already commissioned additional support to students at risk of alternative provision through the 'Think Forward' programme. St Aloysius' School had also declined to participate.
- The service had worked with schools to identify Year 9 pupils at risk of alternative provision and, following screening, established that many of those at risk had previously had involvement from agencies such as Children's Social Care, Youth Offending, Families First and IFIT. Some pupils had siblings who had previously been referred to alternative provision, which indicated entrenched family issues.
- The project worker was seeking to improve outcomes for young people at risk of alternative provision by reviewing the schools' intervention practices, offering IFIT support to the five families most in need, and signposting to other services.
- The project worker was providing a flexible service to schools, integrating with existing support mechanisms such as counsellors.
- The pilot was to be funded for one year. It was decided to focus the project on Year 9 pupils as this was likely to have the most significant and immediate impact for pupils. Officers noted that ideally the service would engage with pupils at risk of referral earlier.
- The project was working to change school approaches to pastoral care. Some schools limited pastoral care meetings to the senior leadership team, whereas the council recommended involving a range of staff in such meetings.
- It was reported that there had been a delay in appointing the project worker as the service wanted to employ someone with an appropriate mix of skills and

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experiences. In particular, it was thought that the worker needed an education professional background to be able to engage with teachers effectively.

- It was too early to establish if the pilot had been successful; it was commented that an evaluation of destinations post-Year 9 would be required to definitively measure performance, however the work carried out to develop school intervention practices was encouraging.
- The Committee queried if previous agency involvement with pupils had been effective if the pupil was still at risk of referral to alternative provision. In response, it was advised that previous interventions may have been focused on other family issues, and ensuring that pupils were not at risk of referral required the family accessing the right services at the right time. It was suggested that early help services were not considered to be a 'cure all', however it was necessary for early help services to demonstrate positive outcomes to justify investments in the services.
- It was queried how Mount Carmel School transitioning to an academy would impact on the pilot. In response, it was advised that this would not necessarily have an impact on the project as the service had a strong relationship with the school and this was expected to continue despite the change.
- The service was not confident that the project could be expanded to Phase 2 without securing additional funding. The project was funded by the participant schools for one year on a pilot basis. It was hoped that if there was strong evidence of a positive impact then the project would receive further funding and would be expanded to other schools and year groups.
- The project was evaluated on an ongoing basis through regular progress meetings. Updates were also to be provided to the Schools Forum.
- The Committee suggested that the service could liaise with Think First and other providers to establish best practice.
- The Committee noted that in its previous Early Help scrutiny it recommended the use of peer to peer support and queried if this could be useful for parents with children at risk of referral to alternative provision. It was advised that this had not been explored. Coffee mornings for parents were held at New River College, however it was thought that it was more difficult to engage parents in a large secondary school setting.
- Following questions by a member of the public, it was advised that the target of reducing the number of pupils by 25 was reached as the council had a target of reducing the number of referrals by 100 over the next four years. It was advised that the majority of pupils engaging with IFIT had improved their attendance and this had also been assisted by the Alternative Provision service recently recruiting a dedicated Education Welfare Officer. Pupil attendance was increasing from around 50% to 70-80%, and although this was encouraging, some pupils had not made progress as quickly as expected.
- Further evidence was needed to establish if the project had reduced the prevalence of antisocial behaviour.

The Committee thanked the officers for their attendance.

(b) Key Stage 4 Alternative Provision Report 2014-16 (Briefing Notes 3 and 4)

Noted.

118 **ENGAGEMENT WITH AND THE CONSISTENCY OF EARLY YEARS PROVISION (ITEM NO. B2)**

Penny Kenway, Head of Early Years and Childcare, introduced the report which provided an overview of the quality and usage of early years provision.

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The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee noted that outcomes data was not directly correlated to data for quality and reach; as outcomes data related to children aged 5 and the majority of early years services were accessed by children aged 3 and 4.
- The Committee noted that engagement with children's centres was lower for families involved with Children's Social Care and queried if this was acceptable. In response, it was advised that around 70-75% of families engaged with social care were also engaged with children's centres, as opposed to 93% of the overall population. It was commented that this was a relatively small cohort and a small number of families not engaging with children's centres could significantly impact the figures. Registration with children's centres was voluntary and it was reported that some families disengaged, only to register again at a later date.
- Islington was below the national average for the number of children achieving a good level of development by the end of their reception year and it was queried if these children tended to catch up at a later date. In response, it was advised that the majority of children caught up, however some Turkish children continued to underachieve later on. The service was concerned by this and was engaging with the Turkish community to improve access to integrated reviews.
- The number of Black Caribbean children achieving a 'good level of development' was below the overall average. The number of Somali and Bangladeshi children achieving a 'good level of development' was also below average. It was commented that Somali and Bangladeshi children often did not have English as their first language and this could be a contributing factor.
- Members with young children reported that they had not received regular information about the services and activities available. Officers commented that this would be followed up.
- It was noted that neither the Department for Education nor Ofsted had an agreed definition of 'sustained participation' and this was not helpful when compiling statistics. It was commented that sustained participation did not necessarily indicate the impact of early years services, although a higher impact would be expected from a greater number of visits.
- It was suggested that communication and language skills, particularly speech, was the key to improving childhood development. It was commented that new teachers were increasingly skilled in supporting language development.
- Members expressed concerns that the number of children achieving the expected level in Literacy and Maths was below the national average, however acknowledged the difficulties of assessing these skills in children aged 5.
- The service was pleased that child development in the prime areas of personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development were around the national average given the level of deprivation in the borough.
- Concern was expressed that the number of Islington children achieving the expected level of Literacy development at age 5 was four percentage points lower than the Inner London average. Officers thought that it was realistic for Islington to achieve the average level over time, however further work to improve engagement, particularly within the first 21 months, and the quality of services was required.
- The Committee queried the barriers to 2 year olds accessing early education. It was advised that some families struggled to access services due to family routines or geography and some families chose not to engage. It was commented that 2 years old was considered to be too young to begin education in some cultures. The number of 2 year olds accessing early

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education was increasing year on year. The service would continue to promote services by communicating the benefits of early years education.

- The service did not yet know the impact of the Department for Education plans to divert the Direct Schools Grant from London to other areas.
- The service worked with early years settings to target support to groups of children who did not tend to do as well as others. For example, girls tended to out-perform boys in prime areas of development and officers were considering if services could be tailored to improve the performance of boys. However, tailoring services to under-performing groups was not always possible, for example it was not possible to close the achievement gap between summer-born and autumn-born children.
- The service was working to increase the attainment of those eligible for free school meals by providing cultural opportunities and experiences for children that they may not otherwise have access to.
- A member reported the comments of some local parents, who considered primary and early years education to be “feminised”. It was noted that the majority of staff working in primary schools and early years settings were female and the need for young boys to have positive male role models was recognised.
- The Committee noted the detailed equalities impact assessment.
- It was not possible to compare the attainment of Islington children from specific ethnic minorities to children of a similar background in other local authority areas as this data was not published by the ONS for foundation stage children. It was known anecdotally that BME children in Hackney had similar levels of attainment.
- It was queried if the methods used to assess children at age 5 disadvantaged some BME children. For example, children were assessed on their level of independence, whereas this was not a trait encouraged in children from some cultural backgrounds.
- A member of the public queried the capacity of early years provision. It was advised that Islington had additional capacity, particularly with child-minders, and further places were being developed in primary schools. Work was underway to increase parental confidence in child minders in order to increase take-up.
- It was noted that child-minders rated as inadequate did not differentiate their fees from those rated as outstanding. Child-minders were private businesses and the council had no control of fees, however it was known that those rated inadequate found it more difficult to attract parents.

The Committee thanked Penny Kenway for her attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)

It was noted that the Committee was to visit two alternative provision providers in March and had also requested to visit the New Rush Hall Group.

Members indicated that an opportunity to review the evidence received and form conclusions would be welcomed prior to agreeing draft recommendations. It was proposed that a concluding discussion be had at the April meeting and draft recommendations be considered in May. It was requested that members submit suggested recommendations to the Chair in order to facilitate drafting.

It was thought that the number of items to be considered in April would not allow for detailed consideration of the items and for this reason it was suggested to dispense

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with the Youth Crime Update and Executive Member Questions items. It was suggested that the report on the educational attainment of BME children be submitted for information only and any comments of the Committee would be reported back to officers outside of the meeting.

MEETING CLOSED AT 10:00PM

Chair