



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 March 2022

SECOND DESPATCH

Please find enclosed the following items:

Item 4	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	1 - 8
Item 1	Draft Recommendations	9 - 14

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 4

London Borough of Islington

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 6 December 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on Monday, 6 December 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Chapman (Chair), Woodbyrne (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Burgess, North, Ozdemir and Woolf

Co-opted Member: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

293 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Convery and Zaleera Wallace.

294 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)**

There were no declarations of substitute members.

295 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

296 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

297 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)**

The Chair updated the Committee as follows:

Local Area SEND Inspection

In early November 2021, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Islington to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

Officers were thanked for facilitating the inspection and the committee would look forward to the report being made public in the next few weeks.

Evidence Gathering Sessions

Since the last meeting members had visited the Bridge, had held a number of virtual meetings including with SENCOs and Headteachers, link governors for SEND, the council's SEND Coordinator, Head Educational Psychologist and the Chair of the Parent Carers Forum. Members had also joined a meeting of Family Carers organised by Centre 404.

A visit to St Mary Magdalene Academy would take place on 7 December and on 13 December, a virtual meeting with the Headteacher of the Virtual School, Service Manager, Independent Futures and Head of Service, Children Looked After would take place.

Surveys had been sent out to parents and carers and Headteachers, SENCOs, SEND governors and SEND professionals. Committee members and officers were asked to encourage people to complete the surveys.

News

(i) SEND Review

The government had named 23 members of a steering group set up to complete its delayed SEND review. It was noted that only one of the 23 members worked in a school and most were civil servants along with people working in the third sector. The review was initially due to be published in September 2019 and Covid had "intensified" issues. The report was now due to be published in the first quarter of 2022.

(ii) Lords Public Services Committee Report

A cross-party House of Lords inquiry had found that more than a million vulnerable children in England were growing up emotionally damaged and with reduced life chances as a result of billions of pounds of austerity cuts to family support and youth services.

The Lords Public Services Committee said the pandemic had accelerated a pre-existing "crisis of child vulnerability" in which increasing number of youngsters and parents were unable to access help before their problems spun out of control.

(iii) Increase in Elective Home Education

The number of children withdrawn from school for elective home education soared by 34 per cent last year, with Covid the reason most frequently cited by parents. Analysis by the Association of Directors of Children's Services estimated that 115,542 pupils were electively home educated at some point during the 2020-21 academic year, up from 86,335 in 2019-20. Consideration could be given as to whether the committee should ask for data on how many children in the borough were being electively home educated

how their education was being quality controlled and what their outcomes were.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

298 ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A6)

None.

299 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

300 SEND SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, gave a presentation on SEND Transitions.

In the presentation the following main points were made:

SEND Inspection

The recent SEND Inspection had been long awaited. The new inspection regime had been introduced in 2015 to see how well the 2014 reforms had been embedded and this was the first Islington inspection under the regime. The introduction of EHCPs was one of the 2014 reforms. The inspection was ungraded which meant the result was either pass or fail. Where a local authority failed, a written statement was provided and there would be a further unannounced inspection. More than 50% of local authorities received a written statement and 91% of the inspections since June 2021 had received a written statement.

The inspection was a rigorous process. There were five inspectors for four days. Their work included meetings with focus groups, interviews with parents and they also undertook a parent survey. They also visited seven schools which were randomly selected by Ofsted. There was a focus on self-evaluation and whether this was accurate. The results of the inspection were confidential until the report was published.

Supported Internships

- One of the areas for development that had been identified locally with parents and young people was that options for post-16 for pupils with the most complex needs were limited in variety. Although individual schools and training providers found future pathways, a more systemic and co-ordinated approach was needed.
- Supported Internships were one way of extending options. Supported Internships involved a structured study programme being delivered by a Further Education provider (such as Mencap or CandI). They were unpaid, lasted a minimum of six months and were based primarily at an employer. Alongside their time with the employer, young people completed a personalised study programme which included the chance to study for relevant substantial qualifications, if appropriate, and English and maths.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 6 December 2021

- Supported Internships enabled young people aged 16-24 with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) to achieve sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills they required for work, through learning in the workplace.
- Supported Internships involved the young person and their family, the business, a training provider, a job coach and the young person's school/college working in partnership.
- The first local internships were in 2017 and there were five interns. This had grown to 32 interns by 2020.
- The Local Offer now included competitive access to a range of supported internships including Mencap, Leisure@National Star College and hospital based programmes (Moorfields, Whittington, Great Ormond Street Hospital).
- Jobs included: Childcare, Hotels, Retail, Catering, Leisure (e.g. Tottenham Football Club).
- On average, 71% moved into employment by 2020, but this dipped during the COVID period, and there were currently interns repeating study programmes.
- Through the development of Internship programmes, some important themes had been identified:
 - For those with EHCPs, the inclusion of Progression to Adulthood outcomes from the earliest stage, rather than just from year 9 onward, helped discussions about employment and raised aspirations.
 - Opportunities for exposure to the world of work and work experience – 100 hours of work, Think Forward / Move Forward programmes had an impact.
 - Transition planning and support, including engaging people over the summer holidays, was key.
 - There was a need for a family curriculum to address concerns such as changes in benefits and how to deal with increased independence of young people.
 - There was a need for follow-on support.
- Challenges included:
 - There remained a low expectation that young people with SEND would enter paid employment.
 - The capacity to keep track of the offer and making sure information about what was available, recruitment days etc. got to those who needed it.
 - COVID restrictions meant that some programmes finished in April 2020 and had not reopened.
 - Too many 'Employment study programmes' at local Further Education (FE) colleges were not actually linked to employers and were not able to offer work based learning. Development work was needed with FE providers.
 - Monitoring progress and job outcomes was an area for further work as there was a need to track people over a longer period and monitor if they stayed in employment.

- The offer of Adjusted Apprenticeships remained under developed for young people with SEND locally, as elsewhere.
- One way of delivering Supported Internships was through Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH was a recognised internship support model that could accommodate different business sectors / regional variation whilst keeping to the critical core model components which were:
 - 1) The sole definition of a successful outcome was competitive employment in an integrated setting for each intern;
 - 2) Being business-led with interns learning relevant marketable skills whilst immersed in the business;
 - 3) There being true collaboration among partner agencies which included businesses, schools/colleges, supported employment and families;
 - 4) Interns experiencing total immersion in the workplace;
 - 5) On-site support provided by a tutor and job coach;
 - 6) Data being submitted to a national Project SEARCH database;
 - 7) Project SEARCH graduates receiving effective follow-along services to retain employment.
- The DFN Foundation was a UK commissioning charity established by David Forbes-Nixon in 2014, inspired by his disabled son, to make a positive difference to the lives of young people with SEND.
- In 2018, the foundation was awarded the franchise rights in the UK to deliver Project Search, forming DFN Project Search. DFN Project Search was a transition to work programme for students with learning disabilities and autism spectrum conditions, aimed at those motivated to achieve competitive employment.
- As of October 2021, they had operated over 70 schemes throughout the UK and Europe and had supported more than 1,300 young people into paid work, including both Lambeth and Hackney Councils.
- As the largest employer in Islington, consideration could be given to becoming a business partner in Project Search.
- In response to a member's question about whether there was an expectation that the supported internship partner would offer permanent employment after the internship, the officer advised it was hoped this would be the case although it was important to find the best fit for a person's skills.
- A member asked if Project Search was open to those who had already left school. The officer advised that the project was open to those aged 16-24. If a young person was still in school it made bridging easier but it was still possible for those not in school to join the project. There were limits on spaces and motivation to take part was a key indicator.
- In response to a member's question about how long the unpaid internships lasted, the officer advised they usually lasted 6-12 months.
- In response to a member's question, the officer advised that 70% went into paid employment after the project but it was not known if they remained there. As EHCPs lasted until a young person was 25, their key workers met them each year up until then and would know if they were still in employment but there was a need to track the cohort as a group to know if they were staying in paid employment.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 6 December 2021

- A member asked about adjusted apprenticeships and was advised that these could be used for some young people. However, no matter how much apprenticeships were adjusted, they would not be right for all young people. Project Search targeted a different group and although the internships were unpaid, they provided an opportunity for those that otherwise would not be working.
- Members raised concern about young people on the project not being paid. An officer stated that the project was about developing skills before progressing to paid employment, including Maths and English tuition. A member suggested that if the Council was the employer, paid work should be guaranteed after 3 or 6 months. The first part of the internship could then be for learning and the knowledge that paid work would follow would help motivate the young people.
- An officer stated that nationally over 50 Local Authorities were involved in Project Search and nationally 60% of interns who completed the project went into full term paid employment.
- Any proposal for the council to become involved with Project Search would require costing and a business case to go through the council's approval process.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That Project Search be included as an agenda item at the March 2022 meeting.

301 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 2 2021/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)**

In the discussion the following main points were made:

- A member asked for clarification on Corporate Indicator targets remaining the same or lower. An officer stated that 2019/20 was a marked year for the Youth Offending Service. There were seven custodial sentences when in 2018/19 there had been 19 and previous to that the number of custodial sentences had been in the mid-20s. The service was pleased with there being only seven custodial sentences but did not predict a plateau and therefore did not reduce the target. As work to wrap around young people and divert them had been successful, it now meant that consideration could be given to reducing the target number. However it was also important that the target was realistic as one incident could lead to four or five custodial sentences.
- A member asked whether as triage had been successful, there were any plans to scale this up. An officer replied that the criteria was set by legislation. However those who were subject to an out of court disposal were also offered triage. Officers would report back on the numbers.
- Consideration would be given to the Domestic violence indicators. The percentage of repeat domestic violence could be more useful than the number of offences as it was hard to see whether an increase or decrease was positive. The rise in the number could show increased reporting which was positive. It was suggested that consideration

should also be given as to whether this indicator should be reported to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee or another committee. A member suggested that it should continue to be reported to the committee as children witnessed violence and were involved in county lines.

- In response to a member's question about whether peer on peer abuse was captured in the domestic violence figures, an officer advised that Social Care collected peer on peer abuse data.
- A member asked about contact with those being electively home educated. An officer advised that they were visited once a year, unless through a risk assessment it was deemed there was a risk. Where this was the case, there was contact with families more than once a year, although this was dependent on the co-operation of families. If they did not co-operate this meant there was additional risk. The council continued to lobby that vulnerable children should not be permitted to be home educated.
- Children who were the most at risk were those who had never been to school. There was no legislation requiring families to notify the local authority. There were other mechanisms to find out about these children e.g. through GP records but if they moved into the borough finding out about them was more difficult. Also, there was no requirement for families to register with a GP. The council did get data of live births and contacted parents when their children were at statutory school age but some parents did not engage. If families claimed benefits, the council would know of the existence of their children.
- Work took place with health colleagues to have home education flagged on GP records so GPs could offer face-to-face appointments etc. where risk was identified.
- Some families made the choice to home educate and these choices were not always for negative reasons.
- Home education was not a risk in itself but triangulation was used to identify patterns e.g. if the child being home educated had been persistently absent from school or excluded and there was concern that parents were being encouraged to home educate their child.
- In relation to persistent absence from school, the service was working with 7 out of the 10 secondary schools in the borough (there were no concerns about the persistence absence level in the other three schools). Covid had been a factor in persistent absence. There was a need to find different solutions for different children. Unlike some other boroughs, Islington asked schools not to take children off roll until they were sure where a child would be going for safeguarding reasons. This affected figures. There had been a 7% improvement in persistent absence in Islington primary schools.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about whether the £5,000 budget schools received per child would be lost for each child being home educated, officers confirmed this was the case.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 6 December 2021

2) That officers report back on the numbers of young people who were subject to an out of court disposal and were offered triage.

302 WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B3)

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.20 pm

Chair

Draft Recommendations

Communication

- 1) Parents/carers struggle to find out what inclusive events are going on across the borough. The council should raise the profile of its online "Things To Do" calendar for children and their families with SEND¹.
- 2) Each year there is a SENCO network day when primary and secondary SENCOs come together to share information. It is not limited to Islington schools and out of borough receiving schools should be encouraged to attend.
- 3) Islington Council's Local Offer website² (co-produced with parents) is where for current information, advice and services for children with SEND can be found. The Council's Corporate Communications Team should work with the Children's Services team to consider how it can better publicise the Local Offer and a translate facility should be made available on the Council's website so that the Local Offer can be accessed by non-English speakers. (See Endnote.)

Education Health and Care Plans

- 4) Islington Council do not require an Educational Psychologist report to be submitted with a request for an EHCP assessment. This is not widely known. The council should communicate this to families and schools thinking about submitting requests.
- 5) Some parents/carers found EHCPs overly long and unwieldy with many strategies and interventions recommended. Every effort should be made to make sure EHCPs are concise and bespoke to individuals.
- 6) Some parents/carers found EHCPs difficult to understand. This is even more difficult for parents for whom English is not a first language. Islington Council should (i) make every effort to use simple, non-technical language and provide explanations of words/phrases not in common use and (ii) offer workshops to parents of children with EHCPs to explain the process and answer questions.

¹ <https://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/results.page?searchtype=event&activity=10>

² www.islington.gov.uk/localoffer

Transition: from Early Years to Primary School

- 7) Islington Council should continue its ongoing work with a group of Headteachers to establish a protocol to ensure that children with SEND not known to services are identified as early as possible so that the relevant early years setting can be informed.
- 8) Primary schools sometimes receive no prior notice that a child with SEND is about to join. Sometimes information is provided but it is incomplete or provided very late. This makes it difficult for the receiving school to plan appropriately. The council should create a "transitions toolkit" to provide guidance to early years settings of what information about a child with SEND should be provided to the primary school the child is moving to. The toolkit should set out best practice in terms of what information should be provided, when and in what format.

Transition: from Primary School to Secondary School

- 9) Similar to recommendation [7] above, there should be a "transitions toolkit" for children with SEND moving from primary to secondary school.
- 10) Islington Council should promote the guidance set out in its *Transition Good Practice* booklet which sets out expectations of schools to ensure there is a consistent transition offer.

Transition: Secondary School to Education, Employment, Training Opportunities and Adult Services

- 11) Islington Council and Islington secondary schools should ensure that all partners work together to consistently begin joint planning of this important transition for children with SEND when the child is 14 years old.
- 12) A social worker from the Transitions team should attend the annual review for any child with SEND who has a social worker, each young person from Year 9.
- 13) The council should develop a specific strategy to support children transitioning from Pupil Referral Units and alternate provision into Education, Employment or Training opportunities.

- 14) Islington Council should work with City and Islington college and with young people and their families to ensure that the college is meeting the needs of young people with SEND and providing what is required by their EHCPs.
- 15) Islington Council should undertake a longitudinal study of a subset of young people at 1 year, 2 year and 5 years after completion of the Progression to Adulthood programme to measure the long-term success of the programme.
- 16) Islington Council should consider becoming a Business Partner in Project SEARCH.
- 17) Members heard the council had a supported employment programme and as part of this disability-friendly jobs were created or found and a disability-friendly recruitment process was used to fill the roles. This had stalled during lockdown as it was not possible to operate the programme virtually. The council should restart the programme post-covid.

Transition: General

- 18) Islington Council should support schools to establish electronic databases to store reports prepared in respect of children with SEND. There should be a specified day each year when all such reports are transferred electronically to the receiving school.

Other

- 19) Islington Council should complete the audit of school buildings currently underway, so that improvements to create a more SEND-supportive schools' estate in the borough can be planned and prioritised, as and when funding becomes available.
- 20) When any physical space intended for use by children and young people is being designed, commissioned, or refurbished, Islington Council should ensure that the space is as inclusive as possible.
- 21) To embed inclusion, Islington Council should work with schools to ensure all teachers and not just SENCOs, understand attachment theory and trauma informed approaches.
- 22) During the covid pandemic some services stopped visiting schools. All services should return to in-person delivery as soon as feasible.

- 23) On a visit to The Bridge it was noted that the swimming pool at Beacon High next door were not available to be used by students at The Bridge. The possibility of offering sessions to students the Bridge should be explored by Islington Council.

Looked After Children

- 24) Islington Council should produce local guidance outlining guiding principles it will use and that it will encourage other local authorities to subscribe to in respect of looked after children with EHCPs. Such local guidance should set out the circumstances in which Islington Council will retain responsibility for an EHCP in respect of a child who is moving to another authority.
- 25) Islington Council should consider whether all young people entering care should be assessed for SEND screening.
- 26) In relation to a child not in a stable placement, Islington Council should liaise with the relevant Clinical Commissioning Group with a view to an Islington mental health professional being allocated to that child, if appropriate, until the child is in a stable placement.
- 27) Islington Council should roll out the Progression to Adulthood framework in Adult Services.

Support for Families

- 28) Members heard that there is currently one disability swim session per week at one swimming pool in Islington for children with SEND and their families. Islington Council should extend this model across all Islington swimming pools and leisure facilities such as trampoline parks, adventure playgrounds and encourage cinemas to provide viewings for SEND children and their families.
- 29) Islington Council should promote more social events for adolescents and young adults with SEND.
- 30) The SEND Parent and Carers Forum already exists but consideration should be given by Islington Council as to (i) how to make more families aware of it's existence and (ii) how the Forum can help fathers and siblings connect with each other.
- 31) Members heard that in general, parents welcomed social care assessments to look at the needs of the whole family. However consideration should be given to the wording of the form to ensure the form used was not the same as for child protection.

- 32) Members were advised that the wording of the short breaks form currently referred to "severe and complex needs" which could prevent some entitled families from completing the form. Islington Council should therefore review the wording of the form.
- 33) Some Islington Council and Islington School SEND support groups had stopped meeting due to the Covid pandemic and where possible these groups should be restarted post-Covid.
- 34) Members heard that there was a Camden transition pack and pathway Islington might be able to learn from. The Council should work with the Family Carers Action Group to produce transition packs including case studies of families of children with SEND who were willing to share their stories with other families of children with SEND. This would enable parents and carers to imagine future options for their child and help them gain knowledge from others who had been in similar situations. Work should also take place to distribute packs more widely.

Endnote

The Local Offer Website contains current information, advice and services for children with SEND. Below is some areas that are covered on the Local Offer Website but that some parents were struggling to get information on.

- Islington SEND Community Support Service:
<https://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/service.page?id=W3osEWwjFGk>
- Education, Health and Care Assessment – Parent Carers Guide:
<https://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/advice.page?id=HtotHWNAyCU>
- Education information required by the Local Authority to consider an EHC needs assessment request:
<https://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/advice.page?id=0-u9y7LcyGs>

This is why it is important parents/carers are aware of the site and that it is available in different languages.

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