



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## 29 April 2024

### SECOND DESPATCH

Please find enclosed the following items:

**Item 3** The Children's Workforce - Draft Recommendations

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## **The Children's Workforce Draft Recommendations**

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### **Recommendation One**

#### **THE FINDING**

That the offer from some of the borough's education's providers, some of which presented a pathway into the Children's Workforce, was not being sent to the borough's youth workers and youth centres to advertise to young people.

#### **THE EVIDENCE**

Our focus group with City & Islington college where it was highlighted that awareness of their pathways were not reaching youth clubs and spaces. Councillor testimony of promotional posters in and around the London Borough of Camden that centre on their frontline workers.

#### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

The Council should review its existing workforce planning, communication and marketing practices to ensure that it is encouraging the next generation of talent in Islington are aware of the pathways into the local children's services sector, by collaborating with its schools through assemblies, careers advice and job fairs, and also with the borough's community organisations, youth clubs and spaces. This could include an awareness campaign highlighting the routes into the Children's Workforce currently available, such as through apprenticeships, training, voluntary services and employment, with case studies of staff that have followed these routes in.

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## **Recommendation Two**

### **THE FINDING**

That one of the major draws of talent to Islington's children's workforce was the proximity of the workplace itself.

Key worker housing had been an incentive used by the local authority to capitalise on that, which had been regarded as one of the popular benefits incentivising social workers to work for Islington as opposed to agency work and/or other local authorities.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The testimony received from senior officers on the Social Care workforce at the Committee meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> February, the anonymous surveys from teachers and our meetings with social workers and Rose Bowl.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

The Council should investigate the feasibility of restoring the allocation of housing to key workers under its allocation policy in addition to any possible mitigation measures that can be taken to avoid this having an adverse impact to its care leavers.

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## **Recommendation Three**

### **THE FINDING:**

That among the Council's carers, adopters, and special guardians that the committee had met, there was a general sentiment expressed that they were in need of more support from the local authority in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, advocacy and support in pursuing the best options for their children.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The testimony received from foster carers at the IFCA Coffee Morning, testimony from the committee's focus group with teaching staff highlighting an increase in mental health in children since the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council considers reviewing and potentially adapting its existing resources and initiatives to create a specific pathway to enhanced support for adopters, foster carers and special guardians on mental health, wellbeing and housing, in-turn supporting their resilience and the children in their care. The Council should also consider enshrining this support as standard practice in its contracts and its culture to make its carers feel safe in accessing that assistance.

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## **Recommendation Four**

### **THE FINDING**

That the ability to have access to sufficient, in-person working spaces was vital to the work of social workers as it gave them a chance to learn from colleagues and feel supported. It was also found that further to in-person working, meeting room capacity was also vital to their work as social workers would often need to physically meet the children and families that they were supporting.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The testimony received from social workers at our focus group with them in Spring 2024.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

The Council should review its corporate estate to assess whether there are opportunities to increase the number of appropriate spaces that its frontline social workers can access to hold confidential and sensitive meetings with families.

The Council should also review the physical workspace capacity of its social workers to establish whether it is sufficient to enable a culture of support, development and sharing of best practice, and to consider increasing this capacity if it is not.

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## **Recommendation Five**

### **THE FINDING**

That there was sentiment, said to be industry-wide, of inequality and inequity among the Children's Workforce professions, in that some fields of work had the semblance of being celebrated and/or held in higher regard than others.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

Testimony from staff across our Children's Workforce given to us as part of our anonymous surveys; our focus groups with the staff of Rose Bowl and Targeted Youth Support, and our visit to the Father's Group on Highbury Fields.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council investigates the ways in which it can pre-emptively tackle perceived professional hierarchy among its children's workforce, and also establish empowering ways to specifically recognise and celebrate the hard work and achievements of the entire children's workforce, including the Council's commissioned staff.

This can include the Council enshrining it as standard practice for its Children's Services officers to involve non-statutory advocates in discussions regarding the child when appropriate and recognising the achievements of its workforce through award ceremonies and public promotion.

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## **Recommendation Six**

### **THE FINDING**

That there were many success stories in the Children's Workforce of progression into leadership across the sector and the borough, but many of these testimonies featured instances of informal guidance and mentoring at each stage of progression.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The committee's focus groups with the staff of Targeted Youth Support, Rose Bowl Youth Hub and City & Islington.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

The Council should seek to mirror the career and leadership development framework for professions such as social work across the directorate by expanding and formalising opportunities such as shadowing or the mentoring of staff by senior leaders. This should form part of its workforce planning, and its commissioned services should be encouraged to match this commitment.



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## **Recommendation Seven**

### **THE FINDING**

It had been testified to the committee that there had been both a rise in students and their families suffering with mental health and wellbeing crises since the COVID-19 pandemic and also abuse against staff. These factors contributed to some staff feeling isolated, disconnected and in need of support.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

Our anonymous staff surveys and focus group with teaching staff.

This has also been reported in media articles such as those at the links below:

[Trust CEO warns parents to stop abusing teachers online \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](#) – Mowbray Education Trust CEO outlines risk of losing talent.

[Schools demand national campaign against abusive parents \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](#)

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

When reviewing its family help provision, the Council should review the feasibility of providing an intermediary single point of contact for teachers that can support them in managing persistent absence and provide a central resource of advice and correspondence templates.

That the Council fosters a culture of respect by reinforcing through disclaimers in its correspondence, its zero tolerance for abuse and harassment against staff.

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## Recommendation Eight

### **THE FINDING**

That some governing bodies had struggled with attracting talent and diversity to its board and could benefit from local authority assistance in their initiatives to tackle this.

That some teachers were deterred from entering, or staying in the profession, due to there being a lack of flexible working options available to school staff.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The committee's meeting with the governors of the Islington Futures federation. Our focus group with teachers and our anonymous surveys with teaching and support staff.

This has also been reported in media articles such as those at the links below, where evidence of best practice has been cited:

[Four-day school week: could it work in the UK? | Tes](#)

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council consider strengthening support to schools in promoting opportunities to become a school governor, establish a toolkit for governing chairs on how to make the culture and language of their governing bodies more welcoming and inclusive of talent from different abilities and backgrounds, and mentoring opportunities for new governors.

To attract and retain talent, the Council, as part of its wider commitment to diversifying its workforce, should consider investigating the feasibility of the possible means in which it could broker flexible working practices among the sectors of its children's workforce that are currently unable to do so, such as in schools, using best practice as a guide.

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## **Recommendation Nine**

### **THE FINDING**

That among staff in some of the borough's schools, there was a sentiment reinforced in several testimonies given to members, that there was only limited access to personal development; an issue compounded not just by resource constraints but also from what was expressed as a feeling of a lack of a unified approach from school and council leadership.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

Testimony from staff across our Children's Workforce given to us as part of our anonymous surveys and our focus group with teachers.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

The Council should consider revising and expanding its offer of personal development training to schools, in collaboration with school leadership, to better reflect their individual needs, changing priorities and where possible, assist with facilitating the necessary spaces and/or infrastructure to accommodate this.

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## **Recommendation Ten**

### **THE FINDING**

That the housing crisis was having a profound impact on families in the borough, in-turn impacting the officers that supported them, particularly social workers, requiring them to navigate the housing system also. This was said to be difficult given the pressures faced by both Children's and Housing Services officers.

### **THE EVIDENCE**

The testimony received from social workers at our focus group with them in Spring 2024.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council should consider appointing a named officer link to enable greater information sharing between its Children's Services and Housing Services.