

London Borough of Islington
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 3 November 2020

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 3 November 2020 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Cutler (Chair), Ozdemir (Vice-Chair), Ngongo, Williamson and Woolf

Also Present: **Co-opted Member** Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese
Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair

201 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)**
Apologies were received from Councillors Bell-Bradford, Caluori and Graham. Apologies were also received from Carmel Littleton.

202 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)**
None.

203 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)**
None.

204 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 September be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

205 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)**
The Chair reported that, as she was concerned that some of the wording of the recommendations on the scrutiny review into educational outcomes was not clearly enough focused on the target groups, she had attended an Executive meeting to clarify this and the Executive had taken it on board.

206 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A6)**
None.

207 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)**
In response to a public question the officer gave an update on digital devices for young people. The number of devices expected from the DfE was now lower and other sources were being looked into, a survey to check access to devices was being undertaken and work was taking place to reach 100% access. The council was ahead of other boroughs in its work to achieving this.

208 **CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020 (ITEM NO. B2)**

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Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding, presented the Child Protection Report which provided an update on the progress being made in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Islington's most vulnerable children.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- As of August 2020, Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service (SFSS) was working with 900 children in need, 377 children who were looked after, of which 26 were disabled children and 62 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), 538 care leavers and 180 children with child protection plans.
- In 2020 Islington had a full Ofsted inspection. The inspectors considered the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families and concluded Islington's overall effectiveness as outstanding.
- Islington had a Motivational Practice Model which was relationship based and feedback from children, families, staff, services and Ofsted had been positive.
- The report outlined quality assurance through data and auditing activities.
- Safeguarding was a high priority for the council.
- The Chair asked about the performance outcomes in relation to paragraphs 6.14, 6.15 and 6.16 of the report. The officer advised that all auditing activity highlighted areas for improvement, senior officers discussed this and action plans were signed off. The officer would provide data relating to this.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

209

SACRE ANNUAL REPORT 2020 (ITEM NO. B1)

Anthony Doudle, Head of School Improvement - Primary, presented the report which outlined the work of SACRE.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- The four recommendations in the report were outlined.
- Increasing diversity and membership of SACRE would mean more voices would be heard and more perspectives would be included. Using partners and resources could make studies more attractive and relevant at Key Stages (KS) 3 and 4. More members were required to help share the workload.
- Work had taken place in relation to remote and blended learning. During lockdown some Religious Education (RE) materials had been provided online but this required more work.
- Developing professional development opportunities for staff across Islington had stalled during lockdown but this was now being progressed.
- The RE Syllabus and Scheme of Work would be implemented in light of

the Islington Recovery Curriculum and the Children's Scrutiny Education Inequalities 14 recommendations with a particular focus on KS3 and KS4.

- There had been no secondary membership for three years. This meant SACRE was lacking the secondary perspective.
- The 2020 GCSE results were a reflection on the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown of schools, partial reopening and the challenges of the teacher assessment processes that secondary schools were asked by the DfE to implement. The number of GCSE entries decreased by 45 in 2020. Pupils achieving the highest grade (9) remained stable compared to 2019. Work was being planned to work with secondary schools to raise the profile of Religious Education studies at KS3 and KS4.
- There had been no complaints about RE and no requests for withdrawal. There had also been no requests for change of designation and no complaints about collective worship.
- There were two Freedom of Information (FOI) requests which were responded within the statutory time frame.
- The current syllabus would expire in July 2022 so SACRE would have to start reviewing the syllabus soon. There would be considerable cost to this.
- In response to a question from a member on the relevance of a Philosophy for Children approach in RE, the officer advised that collective worship meant schools providing an opportunity to reflect and contemplate. This could be in relation to a word, emotion or situation and what this meant to the individual. It was not necessarily praying.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

**210 COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE
(ITEM NO. B4)**

Penny Kenway, Head of Early Years and Childcare, gave a presentation on supporting families with children in their early years.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- COVID-19 had resulted in the dramatic shut down of most Bright Start face-to-face services for families.
- Work had taken place with partners to put alternatives in place and there had been a quick move to online services.
- Families had been reached through virtual platforms including home learning via their nursery.
- The Bright Start vision over the last 4-5 years was about building resilience and reducing stressors such as physical ill-health, mental ill-health, drugs and alcohol misuse, harmful relationships and domestic abuse, poverty and housing. Building resilience included engagement with high quality early childhood services, supportive relationships and social networks, good parenting, knowledge, skills and behaviours, positive parent-child attachment and relationship and self-belief.

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- The main impacts of COVID-19 on children under 5 and their families were poverty and inequalities being highlighted by COVID-19, growing poverty and food insecurity, domestic abuse, lack of usual support networks for new parents, the exclusion of fathers from ante-natal appointments and early labour, cramped housing, no access to play and stimulation, low nursery uptake by the most vulnerable, digital poverty i.e. no access to digital device or data poor. There was a particular impact of COVID-19 on BAME families.
- Many services continued to run including health appointments and vitamin distribution. Courses and sessions were delivered by the service of partners and most sessions were targeted with families invited. The bilingual songs and rhyme sessions had been popular.
- Since May there had been 6,982 virtual contacts with children and families through universal Bright Start early childhood services.
- Between April and September 2020 there had been 3,697 Bright Start face-to-face health visiting meetings in clinics and 17,532 non face to face health visiting appointments.
- There were 3,583 subscribers to the Bright Start Bright Ideas e-newsletter. These were sent out twice weekly with ideas on how to support early health and development along with links to activities, research and other resources. It was also sent out in Turkish, Bengali and Somali.
- There had been 16,942 parent champion contacts since April 2020 by 28 parent champions who together spoke 16 languages.
- The figures of those attending nursery were 73 in March, 361 in May, 2,057 in July and 3,552 in October.
- Activities had been run for children with special educational needs, play and learn activity packs had been distributed as had healthy start vouchers and food parcels.
- 190 families had been supported through the crisis by Bright Start family support practitioners.
- There had been 281 face-to-face family support contacts with adults and children since September.
- There had been 678 contacts with children and their parents via face-to-face Bright Start sessions since July.
- 1,249 families with 2,720 children with additional vulnerabilities (aged 0-19) known to social care and early help were provided with food hampers.
- The number of vulnerable children attending nursery since the start of lockdown was 8 in March, 75 in May, 167 in July and 249 in October.
- There had been much positive feedback from parents.
- There was a need to build more resilience and make more use of virtual platforms and social media, extend partnership working (Fairer Together), raise awareness of Bright Start with BAME communities, increase visibility of Bright Start in the community, adapt the Bright Start offer to address cultural barriers to participation, target dads with an online offer, address the impact of food poverty on young children, use the right platform for the right activity, make more use of parks and open spaces, assess and address the impact of digital exclusion.

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- Even before COVID-19, five year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds were already 4.5 months behind their better off peers. In Islington there was a long-standing commitment to closing this gap and making the borough a fairer place for all. Through Bright Start there was an effective model of integrated support for children and families in this critical phase but there was still more work to be done. It was important to keep a focus on the impact of COVID-19 on the youngest children to ensure they were not left behind.
- In response to a question from a member about whether outreach work was being done with the families of children who were not attending nursery, the officer advised that attendance was below pre-COVID levels however some parents had lost their jobs and were not using childcare in the same way as previously. Work was taking place with parents who were reluctant to send their children back to nursery.
- A member requested data on the number of children attending nurseries over the last two years. The officer stated that this could be arranged.
- A member asked what mitigation measures were in place for new mothers who were not able to meet up in person. The officer advised that the government had recognised the need for new parents to meet up and it was permitted to have support groups of up to 15 people. These would be run in a COVID secure way.

Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding gave a presentation on early help and supporting vulnerable children.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- Impacts of COVID-19 included gaps in, and disruption to, early childhood outcomes and relationships; loss of families' engagement due to suspension of services/changes to virtual service delivery; disruption to the development of social and emotional capabilities connected to issues such as employability, youth crime and preparation for adulthood; disruption to education; loss and bereavement; continued stress and anxiety for families; higher risks in the BAME populations and the impact that this had had on children seeing higher mortality in their families; hidden harm, parental mental health, child mental health, abuse and neglect; not finding the best placement that meets children's needs and reduces risk.
- Some children were entering care as a result of emergency situations e.g. parents with Covid-19, domestic violence abuse (DVA) and parental mental health breakdown.
- There were increased numbers of children staying in care and not having permanent plans made for them by the courts and there were changing care plans for children.
- There were difficulties in monitoring and safeguarding children at risk of/living in situations of domestic abuse, an increase in the level and severity of abuse and decreased opportunities to identify, report and respond to domestic abuse.

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- New operating procedures involved prioritising cases including face-to-face visits from Early Help to children in need, to children in need of protection, to Children Looked After and care leavers. Thresholds of intervention and service delivery maintained the same.
- Weekly monitoring and tracking of visits to children was undertaken.
- A campaign had been launched with partners and the community to increase referrals to social care and early help.
- There had been increased creativity in terms of ways to reach out to each other and families.
- Daily communications had been sent out to all staff to keep them updated about new procedures.
- There were increased resources for children in care, care leavers, foster carers and placement finding.
- Joint support between safeguarding services, school improvement and schools taking vulnerable children had been put in place quickly and the attendance of vulnerable children had been tracked.
- Changing to a more virtual way of working had increased proficiency with IT systems, accessibility of training and development opportunities and greater opportunities to engage family and friends from outside of Islington in supporting children.
- There was now an enhanced joint understanding of safeguarding and increased contact with vulnerable children and families using virtual platforms. Partnership and collaborative working had been strengthened and video conferencing was more accessible to a wider range of professionals than physical meetings.
- Laptops had been distributed to children and families in need to enable increased contact with professionals and schools.
- A wrap-around service was provided to adolescents who were no longer going missing or being exploited.
- Regular newsletters were sent to families and carers suggesting activities that could be undertaken with children and where they could get support.
- All referrals by social care were responded to swiftly and early help was maintained in line with legislation.
- Social workers and practitioners had responded well to challenges and these were communicated to all staff to learn from.
- Creative ways of responding to the needs of children had been developed.
- As a result of the service's response to COVID-19, referrals quickly increased to just below what they were the previous year, children were supported to move to their permanent families wherever possible, all children were now seen face-to-face where this was permitted and all children were seen virtually.
- The response to delayed disclosures of abuse was swift and high quality to combat longer term harm.
- Staff reported feeling supported and safe in undertaking their daily work.
- Parents had reported preferring virtual Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After Reviews.

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- Care Leavers had stayed at university and were able to complete courses. Care Leavers had been surveyed and 80% had responded that they felt supported.
- Placement stability had been maintained during lockdown and placements which met all of children's needs and risks had been located for most children.
- Data on individual children and the attendance rate by status of children was monitored and tracked weekly.
- Prospective foster carers, family members and prospective adopters were still being assessed.
- The staff infection rate was low and services had been operating at over 90% staffing capacity since March 2020.
- A member asked how many children had been taken into care because their parents had been ill with COVID-19 and also their ethnicity breakdown, how many children had lost parents and grandparents from COVID-19 so bereavement services could be targeted to these children and how many school children and staff had tested positive with COVID-19 and their ethnicity breakdown. Officers did not have these figures but would liaise with colleagues to see if this data was available.
- There were more children entering care in crisis which often meant the cases were more complex. There had also been an increase in police referrals. The numbers of children in care had partly increased as court proceedings had slowed down so children were remaining in care for longer.
- Bereavement support was offered to children who wanted it. Schools had received guidance and there was an educational psychologist available to them.

Curtis Ashton, Acting Director of Youth and Community gave a presentation on Youth Safety and Crime.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- There had been a sustained reduction over 3 years of knife injury crimes. In October 2017 there were 79 victims and in August 2020 there were 35 victims. This had been attributed to a number of initiatives including the prevention work carried out by Targeted Youth Support.
- The Integrated Gangs Team managed intelligence and risk, the partnership approach to youth offending, the out of court disposal scrutiny panel and the joined up police and partnership tasking. This was further supported by the No Knife Shop scheme and the introduction of knife bins.
- A Knife Crime Prevention film featuring bereaved parents would soon be launched.
- Recovery planning took place early on during lockdown so that support could be provided to high risk and vulnerable young people soon after. Many of the most vulnerable young people were already identified which made it easier to engage with them and their families during lockdown.

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- There had been good performance in relation to national indicators – First Time Entrants and Custody.
- The Youth Offending Service and Targeted Youth Support duty systems were maintained which meant the service could be responsive to need and carry out statutory functions such as court duty at Highbury Magistrates Court.
- At the start of lockdown, virtual and telephone contact was established immediately with a RAG rating system introduced to determine need. Higher risk and more vulnerable children were seen face-to-face in a safe way through most of lockdown.
- Partnership working had been effective e.g. ensuring no casework duplication with Social Care and receiving assistance from the police to visit the highest risk young people and adults.
- There had been a focus on emotional wellbeing.
- Detached youth work had been delivered early on in lockdown.
- Community engagement events had taken place with young people due to the Black Lives Matter initiative.
- Planning for young people's post-16 academic year had continued.
- The purchase of a video conferencing facility for children who were in Young Offender Institutions or in Secure Training Centre detention had been fast tracked.
- There was robust contingency planning in order to ensure that universal play and youth provision could provide children and young people with adequate support as part of the 'earliest help' offer.
- Online youth hub forums were designed and implemented to engage with young people.
- There was accessible integrated and effective support for survivors of violence against women and girls and domestic abuse via commissioned and new internal resources.
- There was a need to monitor more closely the interactions and behaviours of organised criminal groups online.
- It was important to maximise intelligence to keep track of the more sophisticated techniques and methods of organised groups and their networks, particularly in relation to county lines mechanisms.
- There had been an increase in murders in July when lockdown measures were eased. Two young men had been murdered – one in July and one in September. Five men had been charged in relation to one of the murders. In the other case, no one had yet been charged.
- Work would take place to build upon the cross border and pan-London response due to the transiency of young people.
- There was a continued disproportionality of stop and search during the pandemic and post lockdown. Issues with disproportionality may have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Domestic abuse had increased nationally and locally during lockdown.
- It was important to continually engage communities who felt marginalised and disaffected e.g. the Somali community, to continuously promote Modern Day Slavery awareness and referral pathways and to ensure that there is a continued focus on the needs of young women and girls from a youth safety perspective.

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- The new youth safety strategy would be launched in the near future and would reference COVID-19 and the likely after effects.
- There should be a whole-family approach and support to parents, especially in communities who felt left behind.
- Young people within the secure estate would be supported so that they did not feel forgotten.
- Child poverty and deprivation was likely to increase following the pandemic and the emotional and mental health of young people and families would be compromised.
- Young people and their families were being prepared for the economic down turn and job losses.
- Young people had said that they were worried, but that they wanted the service to be optimistic in its outlook.
- In response to a member's question about hate crimes and domestic violence increasing during lockdown, the officer advised that sanctions and detections had risen and women could be supported at an early stage. It was not known if the hate crimes were as a result of people thinking BAME communities were more likely to suffer from COVID-19 but officers could look into this.
- In response to a member's question about engaging communities who were marginalised and disaffected and whether youth violence figures related to young people over school age, the officer advised that the service wanted to engage all communities. There were not many Algerian, Egyptian or North African young people involved with the service but the service was seeing more people from the Somali community. The Mother Tongue Supplementary School was helping to engage with this community. The serious youth violence statistic included youths up to 24 years of age.

Jane-Amanda Stephenson-Glynn, Children's Health Joint Commissioning Manager(SEMH/CAMHS) and Jill Britton, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning, gave a presentation on Children and Young People Mental Health and Wellbeing.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- The Children and Young People Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) integration had taken place over a year ago. An annual review report would be completed by mid-November 2020.
- There was an integration central point of access with the Children's Services Contact Team/Whittington Health Children's and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Barnardos.
- Daily triaging and allocations of referrals took place, there were weekly SEMH intake meetings with SEMH therapeutic and emotional wellbeing providers and there was an expanded community therapeutic and emotional wellbeing offer.
- Partners included CAMHS, Barnardos, Targeted Youth Support (TYS) Counselling, Brandon Centre, Isledon Emotional Wellbeing Service, Early Help, Mental Health in Schools Teams and Kooth.

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- Some children and young people and their families had coped well with the COVID-19 restrictions whereas others had struggled. Impacts included stress and anxiety caused by disruption to schooling; lack of personal/private space had been challenging for some virtual/telephone interventions; some had limited access to virtual equipment and data; low moods, sleep disruption, some with social anxiety using lockdown to 'hide'; deterioration in progress made pre-lockdown; reluctance to and/or restrictions on travel
- During the pandemic there had been ongoing SEMH virtual provision with face-to-face contact for priority groups.
- There was a policy of no closure of cases until the child or young person had been seen face-to-face.
- Assistance with virtual access had been provided and phone calls had been made to children and young people and families who were shielding.
- Collaborative partnership working between all SEMH therapeutic and emotional wellbeing services and Public Health, Early Help, Bright Start; School Nursing and the School Improvement Service Health and Wellbeing Team to support return to school including resources for young people and families.
- Access to SEMH was being encouraged through We Are Islington.
- The children and families section on the council's coronavirus website pages included information on emotional wellbeing and coping at home.
- Service user feedback on the impact of COVID-19 would inform required changes/additional support.
- Monthly SEMH meetings would address gaps and identify solutions by sharing best practice.
- Since lockdown, face-to-face therapeutic/counselling support had been resumed for priority groups.
- The Islington School Wellbeing Service was delivering evidence based interventions to children and young people and families; supporting schools to develop their whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing; increasing access to other SEMH services and sharing updates and good practice e.g. through the Children and Young People Emotional Wellbeing Network (Young Minds).
- SEMH leaflets for children and young people and families were being distributed to community nursing services and schools.
- All SEMH services were monitored for equality of access to different ethnic groups and more detail would be provided in the Annual Report.
- Following lockdown, referrals had increased to a similar level to those at the beginning of the year.
- There would be a fully inclusive and equitable offer to all young people who required additional support as they moved into adulthood.
- Where appropriate, young people would be supported to access early intervention and prevention services with the voluntary and community offer, ensuring they got the right support at the right time.
- There would be a strong focus on supporting young people to find and keep jobs and a focus on vulnerable groups.

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- A new format assessment would be trialled, which would be more flexible and proportional to peoples' needs.
- The SEMH pathway offer had been extended from 18 to 25 yrs, which enabled young people to continue to receive appropriate support whilst moving on from school/college and settling into adulthood.
- Partners from Children and Young People and adults health, social care, cultural, employment, and the third sector had formed a task and finish group to identify gaps and improve holistic provision for 16-25 year olds
- There would be a local deep dive on Autism Spectrum Disorder cases.
- Personal Health Budgets for Children Looked After, Care leavers and SEMH cases would be merged.
- There two North Central London (NCL) crisis hubs were the Northern Health Centre and Edgware Community Hospital, there was a 24/7 crisis line for professionals working with young people in crisis and the NCL CAMHS Board had established two task and finish groups – crisis and community.
- A solution focused approach was currently underway, both locally and across NCL, to address the rise in Children and Young People presenting in crisis, the increase in referrals, stays and social care cases.

The officers were thanked for their presentations and congratulated on their successes so far in mitigating the effects of COVID-19.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

211 **STUDY ON DISPROPORTIONALITY OF BAME YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (ITEM NO. B3)**

Curtis Ashton, Acting Director of Youth and Community, gave a presentation on The Disproportionality Project: Addressing issues relating to the disproportionately high representation of Islington's and Haringey's BAME young people in the Criminal Justice System.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- Crime had decreased and serious offences were curtailng.
- The project had been initiated as a result of the disproportionality of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in the Criminal Justice System. These young people were more likely to be treated more harshly and more likely to be sent to custody than White young people.
- The programme sought to strengthen the multi-agency approach to addressing disproportionality.
- The project was the second partnership project involving Islington Council and criminologists at City, University of London. The first project – Enhancing the work of the Islington Integrated Gangs Team was published in 2019. The third project was exploring the Andover estate and offending originating from there.

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- There four service aims were: 1) To provide training around Adverse Childhood Experiences within BAME communities for staff; 2) To set up an initiative whereby parents from BAME backgrounds had a safe space to discuss the pressures associated with their children's involvement in ASB and/or offending behaviour and the structural and societal pressures they faced; 3) To better support young people and their families from the poor outcomes and lack of opportunity which was more prevalent in BAME individuals and families e.g. in education, employment, income, health outcomes and treatment etc. The criminal justice system, unemployment and Covid19 were also examples of this; 4) To strengthening communities who had been marginalised - helping to influence Islington and Haringey to shape and improve the services provided, so that young people and their families were supported to 'live their best life'.
- The 11 recommendations of the project were included in the report and the action plan had been submitted to the previous meeting of the committee.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about whether the study had found any racial discrimination at the council, the officer advised that no young people had said they had been discriminated against by council staff. Staff had been trained to understand possible biases and unconscious bias training was being rolled out across the council. The study had focussed on courts and the police. The Borough Commander was from a BAME community and was determined to tackle disproportionality issues.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.55 pm

Chair