

London Borough of Islington  
**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 28 November 2023**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 28 November 2023 at 7.00 pm.

**Present:**           **Councillors:**           Chapman (Chair), Craig, Jegorovas-Armstrong, North, Ogunro, Pandor and Zammit

**Also Present:**       **Co-opted Member**           Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

**Guests**                    Superintendent Jack May-Robinson, Detective Superintendent Charmaine Laurencin

**Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair**

**152       APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bossman-Quarshie and Councillor Ngongo.

**153       DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)**

Councillor Chowdhury substituted for Councillor Bossman-Quarshie.

**154       DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**155       MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

**156       CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)**

The Chair highlighted that the Committee had undertaken a scrutiny visit to the Rose Bowl Youth Hub and encouraged members to attend future scrutiny focus groups and visits where possible.

The Committee were informed that the Chair was working with Democratic Services to recruit to the vacant co-opted member positions on the Committee. This includes writing to the Church of England Diocese of London for the faith representative vacancy and to all Islington-maintained schools for the primary and secondary school parent governor representative vacancies.

The Chair then invited Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong to update the Committee on the visit to Highbury Fields' fathers' group on Saturday 11th November, who started by expressing thanks to all participants in the session and outlined that some of the challenges that had been identified, included:

- Pay, with support staff sometimes having to seek employment elsewhere to stay afloat.
- A perceived imbalance between teaching and support staff, including support staff not being designated as key workers leading to issues with housing, and

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the perceived shortfall of incentives for support staff in comparison to teachers; to which it was suggested the Committee consider educators as a single group during the review.

- Wraparound childcare, specifically that some of the staff that work with or for Islington, are not always able to access this for their own families.

Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong went on to state that there was a general appreciation among the staff, of the investment, job security and professional development that came with the role, and that they felt a freedom to try and to fail and to challenge. Also discussed was a marked difference between working for the Council as direct employees and working with the Council as partners, as there were several Islington staff that had been pulled back as consultants.

### 157 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)**

One member of the public was in attendance.

### 158 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 7)**

None.

### 159 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 8)**

None.

### 160 **THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE FROM THE METROPOLITAN POLICE (VERBAL UPDATE) (ITEM NO. B1)**

The Chair invited the Metropolitan Police to present their verbal update to the committee, stating that the Committee had invited them to offer their recommendations on how the Council could do things differently, as part of the committee's review into "The Children's Workforce". The committee were also keen to hear the experiences of officers and how they are supported, trained, recruited and retained, so as to understand the challenges facing the Metropolitan Police. The Superintendent addressed the committee, outlining that their portfolio had responsibility for neighbourhoods and partnerships, including Islington's Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Safer Schools Officers (SSOs) and youth engagement. His update included the following points:

- It was the Superintendent's view that the Metropolitan Police were very fortunate to have the strength of partnership in community safety and youth engagement that there was in Islington. It was said that the relationship was such that each organisation worked as each other's critical friends, aiming to achieve what the best possible outcomes for young people and the community at large.
- Recent structural changes had bought back neighbourhood specific superintendents.
- Upcoming structural changes include the partnership and prevention arrangements being split in January 2024 to give Camden and Islington their own hyper local team.
- Regarding Safer Schools Officers, it was stressed that the priority was to fill the vacancies with the right people, who were passionate about supporting and engaging with young people, that could communicate effectively with them, and that this was the most important attribute they were looking for. The three vacancies were in the process of being filled, with the aim for this be complete by January 2024, thus giving the borough a full complement of SSOs for the first time.
- Additionally, in January 2024, there will also be three Youth Engagement Officers. These officers will go out into primary schools, to provide education

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about safety, the police and build positive relationships with the borough's young people from an early age. One of these officers that is currently in training, conducts Metrobox boxing sessions with young people at Sobell Leisure Centre.

- An area of improvement that the Police had felt was needed, was the involvement of them in the planning of the curriculum, so that their input was built into PHSE lessons and feedback sought from young people. This was already being addressed in discussions with Islington Council officers, designated safety leads and school leaders, where the Police now had the opportunity to input into curriculum conversations.
- Safer Schools Officers were also able to share information with a school, so as to allow greater vigilance and safeguarding of students.
- Safer School Officers also perform daily checks for their schools, such as providing confidential awareness of and support to pupils that have been either a victim or perpetrator of crime. The school also has the opportunity to flag pupils that they have safeguarding concerns around.
- There was also a priority list of which schools required the greatest focus, which was based on a mixture of crime data, school statistics, and the advice of Safer School Officers and local authority partners.
- Another need of the Police, which was already being addressed, was a point of contact for SSOs and who their designated safety lead was. Additionally, there was a need for a touchdown point for SSOs could conduct work and support in providing input into PHSE lessons.
- It was the Superintendent's view that the youth engagement provision needed to be better. Where there was pre-existing engagement with a youth centre, the partnership was found to be strong, such as at Lift Islington, but it was much harder to build such a relationship from scratch, particularly with youth centres that were not under the management of the local authority because of differences in the information sharing relationship.
- It was also acknowledged that sometimes officers were not seen as friends to young people and a greater representation among staff could help improve this. The Superintendent sought to make the relationship between Police and young people in the borough positive and was seeking the local authority's help in this regard.
- From January, officers will be mapping youth centres within their ward and maintaining relationships with those youth services. This is being worked on in partnership with officers from Islington Children's Services.
- An area it was felt could be better signposted was police cadets, which will form part of that youth engagement strategy mapping and work.
- The superintendent praised the work of the Youth Council as fantastic and gave specific praise to the work of the Young Mayor also, citing the work on bringing in the stop and search charter.
- Wider example of partnership. Arsenal in the community lucky to work with closely. Trying to look at how we can step more into that space, brokering relationships with coaches so that it's already there and hopefully give an entry into conversations with young people.
- The post-incident and targeted youth support was highlighted to members as an area that exceeded that present in other authorities, with an example cited of officers being able to speak to young people affected by a tragic murder in the borough recently in particular.

The Detective Superintendent then addressed the committee, outlining that their portfolio had responsibility for public protection for Camden and Islington, covering domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, missing persons, and mental health. Her update included the following:

- There had been a staff increase under the Commissioner's Met for London plan, which had enhanced the number of officers in public protection, which for

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some officers would mean that the case load per officer goes down. It also ensures that victims can be better supported through traumatic and life changing scenarios. Those staff will be in place by beginning of January.

- Missing persons teams had been busy dealing with a wide range of cases. In terms of partnership, there were multi-agency teams working out of the Upper Street offices some of whom were routinely involved in initial reviews. It was expressed that any support in providing additional room for officers that come into that sort of settings, or to cater for an uplift in officers working out of those locations, would be welcome, although conversations were already underway.
- If Families First does come to Islington, there was the possibility for officers to be involved.
- The Metropolitan Police had been under intense regulatory scrutiny and there were a number of reviews ongoing, regarding critical themes such as children that were missing or at risk of child sexual exploitation. One outcome from a recent review was that the Police were evaluating how they graded missing children to ensure that their safeguarding was paramount in all that it did.
- Discussions were being held with Council officers about how children that go missing one or two times, are more effectively monitored from a partnership perspective.

In the proceeding discussion, the following points were raised:

- In response to questions from members, the committee were told that in terms of training for their staff, the neighbourhood and emergency response teams – which had the greatest interaction with young people – would have opportunities such as access to an ongoing CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programme, and professional development days (PDDs). The Police were looking to better frame these programmes in terms of the content provided, in conjunction with the local authority. There was also cultural competency training, which approximately 260 officers had received in the last four months, through the young black men and mental health programme and a student college brokered by the Council, which were co-designed sessions featuring the lived experience from the young black community and officers.
- For officers that had responsibility for investigating matters relating to rape and sexual offences, they followed the latest national model for training in England and Wales. All officers had a number of sessions that they would have to complete. It could take officers a year to complete in certain modules, and it was available to other units, also.
- Detectives had coaches and protected learning time.
- Officers with responsibility for investigating domestic abuse, would have all had training about approaches and responses to domestic violence.
- As part of the Met for London plan, all frontline supervisors were getting frontline leadership training.
- In response to questions from the committee about the spaces for officers being embedded within the community, members were told that from the Police perspective, there were challenges around kit and equipment safety, particularly on storage. Considerations would also need to be made regarding officers needing a secure environment to deal with sensitive matters. The Police had already partnered with Access Islington hubs across the borough and one of the Commissioner's priorities was to ensure officers were within twenty minutes' walk of their ward. The Police were already exploring opportunities with Islington to be co located in community spaces that met their needs, but it was acknowledged there was a general difficulty in operating from buildings that were not directly or partner owned.
- Co-location was also said to not be a substitute for effective partnership interactions and that the importance of being able to have conversations with partners was just as, if not more valuable.

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- On how the Police developed and supported its staff, members were told that officers often dealt with traumatic incidents and were not one consideration taking a trauma-informed approach to policing. Not dealing with trauma among officers or the young people they engaged with wouldn't make for a cohesive relationship and as such, the Police were looking at addressing wellbeing more seriously, but a difficulty remained in getting officers to access or acknowledge that they needed help.
- The committee were told that female representation within Islington's police force had improved, with about a third of the force identified as female, but it was that both this and the ethnic diversity of officers needed to be higher to not only be more reflective of the community they served, but to also inspire new talent to join. A suggestion from a Councillor at a separate committee cited involving a young person representative at ward panels. The Superintendent was open to further suggestions about how the Police could attract new talent in Islington.
- It was stressed that officers were not routinely posted to the area immediately local to them for a number of reasons and that unfortunately, the Police were not yet in a position to recruit exclusively from the London area.
- The committee were told that one of the reasons the Police chose the degree pathway, was to recognise that the skillset of officers is at degree level, and that the ability to learn and earn opened the door of policing to recruits that would otherwise not apply.

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### **EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE UPDATE (ITEM NO. B2)**

Officers presented an update on the Early Years and Childcare provision to the committee. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Officers had set out to the committee what the national childcare offer was, what was currently offered in Islington in addition, and what the future opportunities and challenges were.
- Officers told the committee that in terms of the national offer, there was currently a universal offer for all three and four-year-olds of fifteen hours, and a targeted offer for two-year-olds of 15 hours which is salary dependent, the threshold of which was particularly low for London, as it hadn't been updated in the last decade. There were many families that were missing out because of not meeting that threshold. There was also a 30-hour offer.
- Islington complemented the national offer by providing a childcare subsidy to the value of £5 million.
- Priority learning places were aimed at working parents and at those that were particularly vulnerable as it was known that if families were able to access quality childcare without delay, there was a greater chance a disorder would not develop.
- Islington's childcare offer was also offered to children who were aged six months old and not restricted to just working parents but was also available to parents or carers who were in training.
- Officers were in the process of reviewing the current offer and evaluating the new national offer.
- Officers acknowledged that the Islington offer was complicated and told members that they had recently commissioned an external review which led to a number of recommendations. Officers also acknowledged that accessibility and simplicity was important, and together with the recommendations, the new offer presented an opportunity to streamline the local offer.
- Priority learning places were not rigid and could be worked around developmental delay or Special Educational Needs (SEN) requirements.
- The free entitlement for working families (30 hours) worked well for families that were in permanent stable employment, but less so for those on less stable

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employment, that could fall in and out of eligibility on a termly basis as the entitlement operated on a per-term basis. This posed a real challenge for Islington families and officers were assessing how the subsidy could be redistributed to best support those in need.

- Officers informed members that there was an issue in that there was quite a high reliance on agency staff, and they were currently working on a workforce strategy for this sector. It was acknowledged that there needed to be a creative approach to marketing this as a career choice that does provide career pathways into areas such as health visitors and other early years positions. Currently, roles in this area were said to be low paid and difficult to recruit and retain to. Officers were also working closely with providers on this matter and given the new rates will be really favourable to childminders, officers were hoping that there would be more interest in these roles.

### **ACTION:**

Officers to keep members updated on outcome of workforce strategy for childminders and early years staff.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.00 pm

Chair