



Report of: Executive Member for Children and Families (for Executive report)

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Executive	9 February 2017	All

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SUBJECT: Alternative Provision – Response to the report of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Synopsis

1.1 The Executive received a report from the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee which reviewed Alternative Provision (AP). The scrutiny report proposed 15 recommendations to address the following review objectives:

- To identify how we can reduce the numbers of children on alternative provision.
- To identify how we can ensure that provision is of the highest quality.
- To make recommendations to further improve the outcomes, attendance, and accountability for those in alternative provision.
- To identify how schools and academies are ensuring the best possible outcomes for the most vulnerable children, including their emotional wellbeing, and make recommendations about how best practice can be in place in all schools and Academies.
- To evaluate the quality, standards and value for money of alternative provision providers, and the range of provision.
- To identify how early intervention and ‘Think Family’ approaches can be mainstreamed once the pump priming funding is no longer available.

This report proposes actions to be taken in response to the Alternative Provision scrutiny.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To welcome the findings of the Alternative Provision Scrutiny Review.
- 2.2 To agree the responses to the recommendations of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4 of this report.

- 2.3 To agree that officers report back on progress to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee in one year's time.

3. Background

- 3.1 In September 2015 the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee commenced a review of Alternative Provision. The aims of the review included identifying how the number of children in alternative provision can be reduced, how we can ensure that provision is on the highest quality, and how schools and academies are ensuring the best possible outcomes for the most vulnerable children. The Committee considered evidence from a range of witnesses and carried out several visits before forming its recommendations and finalising its report in June 2016.
- 3.2 Overall, the Committee concluded that mainstream school is the best setting for the vast majority of pupils, however appreciated that alternative provision is beneficial for a small number of pupils disengaged from mainstream education. The Committee made 15 recommendations related to the review objectives. Several of the recommendations intend to minimise the need for and use of alternative provision. Recommendations were also made to increase the effectiveness of alternative provision for the pupils who do require this style of education.

4. Response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations

Referral and assessment for Alternative Provision

- 4.1 **Recommendation 1: That the alternative provision referral process is strengthened in order to increase the accountability of schools and potentially reduce the number of pupils referred. It is recommended that a formal referral panel be established to consider applications for referral, the membership of which should include senior school representatives and relevant council officers. This panel should have the authority to approve or decline applications and make recommendations associated with the child's education where appropriate.**

There is commitment to support research into how pupils arrive to alternative provision and to strengthen the referral mechanisms and that there is a clear rationale understood by all stakeholders for alternative provision referrals as well as an overall policy for referrals to AP.

The Executive agrees that reducing the numbers of children referred to alternative provision is vital to improving outcomes and that more rigorous referral system could help to deter some referrals. A formal referral panel will be established to consider applications for referral which will include head teachers and relevant officers from the council.

- 4.2 **Recommendation 2: To ensure that the needs of pupils are identified and that they have access to appropriate support, a standardised assessment framework to be introduced for those pupils proposed to be referred to alternative provision. Such assessments should be carried out by schools before pupils are referred to alternative provision.**

The Executive recognises the essential role of the early targeted interventions that secondary schools should undertake in preventing academic failure, disengagement and externalising behaviours of pupils who are often considered for AP. The Executive will ask the Children's Services Department to explore the potential for a standardised assessment framework.

- 4.3 **Recommendation 3: Guidance be produced to support schools in making applications to the referral panel, and to assist the referral panel in decision-making. When considering a referral the panel should consider factors such as the needs of the pupil identified via assessment, the support available to the pupil inside and outside of school, pupil aspirations and attainment levels and the wishes of the pupil.**

To support recommendations one and two, a guidance document will be created to support schools with making applications to alternative provision including clear and relevant information about the student's needs.

Early intervention

- 4.4 **Recommendation 4: The council should encourage schools to implement targeted interventions for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision. Such interventions should not narrowly focus on attainment, but should seek to raise aspirations, identify pathways and develop pupil resilience. The Committee is especially keen for such interventions to begin in primary school.**

The Executive will encourage all schools to identify students for AP as early as possible through a thorough assessment of pupils' needs and provide additional support to these pupils at an earlier stage as this may reduce the need for alternative provision referrals at a later stage. Secondary schools will continue to be encouraged and supported to provide comprehensive and integrated support to pupils at risk of referral and their families at the earliest possible stage.

The Executive will also instruct the Children's Services department to explore how early targeted interventions might be developed to raise aspirations of pupils and to also use providers who have high aspirations and who can develop academic achievement, positive behaviour and personal skills.

- 4.5 **Recommendation 5: The council should continue to develop its wrap-around early help services for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision in partnership with schools. It should be the aim to provide comprehensive and integrated support to pupils at risk of referral and their families at the earliest possible stage, in order to reduce the need for alternative provision by Key Stage 4.**

Families First now link to each primary school in the borough, with IFIT doing the same in the secondary schools. The Family Support Worker attached to the schools connects with their pastoral care staff or team around the school so that children and families with additional needs can be identified and support plans made with the consent of the family. They can also facilitate coffee mornings or attends playground meet and greets with parents to promote easy access to help. A specialist worker in IFIT also links to families where a young person has been identified by the school as at risk of requiring alternative provision. The Children's Services department will continue to monitor and review support to adolescents including enabling schools to identify and support pupils and families in school.

- 4.6 **Recommendation 6: As alternative provision pupils tend to have a higher level of need and vulnerabilities, the council should review the SEN and CAMHS support available to alternative provision pupils and consider increasing the level of support if required.**

The Executive agrees that support for mental health and wellbeing and to children with SEND play an important role in meeting the needs of AP pupils. Mental health and wellbeing are priority areas for both the Council and the NHS, and is one of the four priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Executive is committed to ensuring that these issues are effectively tackled and will ask the CCG and the Council's Children's Services and Public Health departments to investigate ways of addressing the support required for AP pupils.

- 4.7 **Recommendation 7: The council should seek to further develop information sharing systems between the alternative provision service and other relevant areas of the council to ensure that the best interests of children are secured.**

The Executive will ask the Children's Services department to lead on ensuring that there are good information sharing systems between the AP service, schools and other relevant service areas of the council.

- 4.8 **Recommendation 8: All pupils should have the opportunity to study GCSEs and should be encouraged and supported to do so. The council should aspire for all pupils to achieve at least a grade C in GCSE English and Maths.**

The Executive is committed to ensure good commissioning for AP. A balanced, broad and appropriate curriculum is one development area to realise together with both schools and providers.

The Executive will ask officers to work with providers to ensure that students have suitable opportunities to achieve the best possible outcomes in GCSE English and maths. Schools will also be strongly encouraged to facilitate alternative arrangements for pupils who want to continue to study GCSEs.

- 4.9 **Recommendation 9: The council review the options and pathways available for pupils wanting to study vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4, to ensure that the demand for vocational education does not contribute towards the need for alternative provision.**

The Executive will ask council officers to work with Islington schools to review their curriculum offer for KS4 students.

- 4.10 **Recommendation 10: The council should review its post-16 employment and skills outreach support offer to alternative provision pupils. The level of advisory support offered by alternative provision providers varies and a minimum offer should be agreed to ensure the best outcomes for pupils.**

The Executive will instruct officers to review the post-16 progression support offer. It is also aware the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is currently undertaking a review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training where there may be further consideration of support in this area.

- 4.11 **Recommendation 11: The Committee believes that alternative provision pupils should be achieving the benchmark of 95% attendance. There should be clear escalation policies around pupil attendance, with a robust accountability framework supporting this.**

The Executive recognises it is crucial that pupils regularly attend their place of learning to achieve their full potential. For AP pupils, this has been challenging for a variety of reasons.

The Executive will ask officers to ensure there an accountability framework is put in place to support our clear and aspirational expectation around pupils attendance.

- 4.12 **Recommendation 12: The Council should only use alternative provision providers that have a broad outlook and high aspirations for their pupils; providers should focus on academic achievement and personal skills as well as pupil behaviour.**

The Executive will instruct officers to review and evaluate AP providers to ensure they have a focus on academic achievement and personal skills.

- 4.13 **Recommendation 13: Shared learning should be facilitated between schools and alternative provision providers to increase standards in both settings. This could develop the teaching skills of alternative provision providers and assist schools in implementing the most effective behaviour management techniques for challenging pupils.**

The Executive supports the idea of collective responsibility and strong local partnerships in which all have a part to play in bringing about improvements and raising standards. The Executive will ask officers to explore ways of facilitating a sharing culture of practice between referring schools and providers. This may include:

- creating an agreement between AP and schools and providers outlining roles and responsibilities in view of working collectively to improve provisions for children;
- schools remaining actively involved with students once they are placed on AP such as through a nominated school link and school staff invited to half-termly reviews and encouraging school staff to attend QA visits in order to get a better understanding of each provision they refer their pupils to; and

- sharing best practice between schools and providers (for example, some providers could learn from mainstream schools about teaching and standards and some schools could learn behaviour management from some of the providers).

Accountability

- 4.14 **Recommendation 14: The Committee identified the “never give up” approach adopted by schools such as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Highbury Fields to be best practice. Alternative provision should only be used as a last resort once all other attempts to engage the child in mainstream education have been exhausted. However, to ensure the best outcomes for the children that are referred due to exceptional circumstances, the council should work with schools and providers to improve the perception of alternative provision. It is important that alternative provision is viewed as a fresh start and a legitimate alternative to mainstream education for those who truly need it and not as a setting for failed pupils. Alternative provision should not be used as a threat.**

Recommendation 15: It is important that schools do not consider pupils to be “out of sight, out of mind” once they are referred to alternative provision. Whilst referral back to mainstream education is not always possible or desirable, it may be appropriate and beneficial in some instances for the pupil to remain a member of the school community, especially as schools are still accountable for their outcomes. Schools should remain actively involved in the welfare of pupils, especially on matters such as safeguarding and attendance, and should consider involving pupils in extracurricular activities as appropriate.

The Executive wholeheartedly agree that AP should be used as a last resort and the importance of schools remaining actively involved in the welfare of their pupils as well as accountable for their outcomes.

The Executive will ask officers to review the referral process and practices to ensure that AP is used by schools when all other interventions have been tried and they have exhausted other ways to support pupils to achieve their potential. This will include revising the AP referral process to ensure schools remain actively involved in supporting their pupils until the end of Year 11 and agree ways for ensuring consistent levels of accountability with the schools. Schools will be encouraged to provide the continuum of pastoral support to ensure that students are not isolated and can seek advice back at school when needed.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial implications:

There are no additional resources required to implement the majority of the recommendations. However, further financial advice will be sought on proposals which implement actions requested by the Executive.

5.2 Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report. The actions support the implementation of statutory duties relating to alternative provision.

5.3 Resident Impact Assessment

Alternative Provision seeks to address a range of inequalities in the school population to help them to achieve their potential and build resilience to factors that may disadvantage them. Resident Impact Assessments will be undertaken as part of the process of developing and implementing policies and actions arising from this report.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

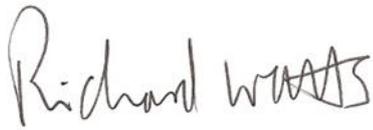
- 6.1 This report details the Executive’s response to the recommendations from the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee.

Appendix 1: Alternative Provision – Report of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



30 January 2017

Leader of the Council

Date

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