



Report of: Corporate Director of Children's Services

Health and Wellbeing Board	Date: 18 October 2017	Ward(s): All
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**SUBJECT: Islington Fair Futures Commission:
Making Islington a great place to grow up, learn and work**

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Islington has committed to create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life – a fairer Islington. This also means fairer for the forty thousand children and young people living in over twenty thousand households in Islington to ensure that they are life-ready. Children and young people still have to compete for political priority and resources without an accountability mechanism directly to them for a place they have to grow up in. The local authority has a statutory duty to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the Council and its partners with a view to improving the five statutory well-being outcomes of children and young people. This means reflecting and challenging ourselves to do better in the way we exercise our role as the place leader, shaper and maker of Islington for children and young people.
- 1.2. To enable a focused and independent reflection on our ambitions to build resilience through prevention and early intervention for this key group in Islington, Cllrs Richard Watts and Joe Caluori via the Children and Families Board requested a Commission inquiry focused on children and young people that will help to fast track our journey to making Islington a great place to grow up in.
- 1.3. The Fair Futures Commission was successfully launched at the end of February 2017. This report outlines the progress and key highlights to date.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note the progress and the next steps for the Commission.
- 2.2. To encourage all Health and Wellbeing Board partner organisations to fully engage in the next phase of the Commission.
- 2.3. To consider how the Commission can inform or progress other initiatives such as the Haringey and Islington Wellbeing Partnership and the NCL Sustainability and Transformation Plan.

3. Key issues, highlights and next steps: moving from challenges to action

- 3.1. The Commission chose three themes to guide its discussions and research: place, power and possibilities.
 - **Place** is about the physical environment. It will look at what children and young people need from their local area in order to thrive. Particular issues include safety, housing, outside space and travelling across Islington.
 - **Power** focuses on how children, young people and families can shape and support their own lives. There will be a focus on the role of the wider community and different types of networks including digital support.
 - **Possibilities** focuses on how we can ensure that children and young people develop the life skills that they need to thrive. This includes inclusive economic growth, preparation for the workplace, independent living and other key transitions in life.
- 3.2. Over the past five months we have conducted a programme of insight and intelligence gathering to enable the Commission to understand the issues for Islington's children and young people. At the Commission's launch, organisations and individuals were spurred to debate the challenges and opportunities to make Islington a great place to grow up in.
- 3.3. We issued a [Call for Evidence](#) asking departments within the council, organisations and individuals to send in submissions that answered questions about Place, Power and Possibilities. We have received submissions covering a range of perspectives.
- 3.4. A data profile which presents a picture about how well children, young people and the community are doing against the three themes is nearly complete and will be ready shortly. Similarly, existing evidence, information and intelligence from published and 'grey' literature is almost complete for all three themes. This has identified knowledge and awareness about what is already happening and promising practice.
- 3.5. We are now running a [ViewPoint essays](#) initiative which outline the opinions and stories of young people, parents and those who work with or devise policy for children and young people. These will form part of the evidence for the Commission. Jermain Jackman, Chair of the Fair Futures Commission, has also produced a [thinkpiece advocating the need to put children and young people's issues and needs back on the agenda](#).
- 3.6. Several external organisations and several councils have expressed an interest in meeting or working with the Commission to contribute intelligence and ideas. There have also been enquiries about replicating the Fair Futures Commission. Promotional and update meetings have happened with the Islington Partnership Board, the Business Board, schools and services within the council.
- 3.7. Several place-based commissioning and leadership 'promising practice' local areas have been identified. Some of these have identified ways to join up conversations and decisions for the health, care, education and other determinants of health for children and young people.
- 3.8. One success of the Commission's process so far is that values such as the involvement of the voice of children and young people are now at the forefront of non-Children's Services officers' ambitions e.g. in Greenspace and Leisure.

3.9 A core thread that brings together the emerging issues and themes is **using the opportunities and assets Islington has – as a community and a network of organisations - to make social mobility real particularly for the children and young people who face challenges as they grow up.**

3.10 **PLACE: A safe and prosperous community with space and room to grow, live, play and work**

3.10.1 We hosted the **Place Summit** on 27 June. This was attended by architects, planners from Islington council, the GLA, developers, housing associations, council officers, FF Commissioners and young people. It followed two successful youth-led borough tours which brought council officers and young people together to reflect on places and spaces in Islington. The Summit reflected on good practice and key findings. Participants visited the local area and identified how it could be designed differently. The outcome of these events can be read at: <https://storify.com/FairFutures>

3.10.2 [Dinah Borat](#), who worked with us on the borough walking tours and the Place Summit, is now a Design Adviser for the Mayor of London and has advocated the Commission's approach to progressing children and young people's needs in urban planning and the forthcoming London Plan. Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron is also working on the creation of child-friendly neighbourhoods to feed into the development of the London Plan.

3.10.3 **Emerging issues:**

Built environment

- Islington is a borough of lots of people and very little land, meaning space is hugely valuable to people and under an enormous amount of pressure. Whether we are talking about public space, infrastructure or housing, the lack of space is something which looms over Islington's ability to adapt and change to accommodate children, young people and families' needs. We have to start thinking about other ways to meet need through small changes, such as the way we use an existing space, behaviour change, or community empowerment.
- **Contested Space:** Space means different things to different ages and those with particular needs. The conflict between generations and the purpose/use of space can be an issue in a borough with such limited space.
- **Ownership of space:** It's not always that space is contested for different uses, but that sometimes, children, young people and family needs are misunderstood (for example, safety vs risk)
- **Inclusive Design:** a way of making space usable for all is a good use of space
- **Public/Private Space:** Some developments with social housing cut off access to open space to these tenants. Many new developments feature private space that has public access but there is threat that this access could be revoked by official owners. Planning Policy tries to protect it, but more could be done to convey the importance of it.

In this context, where our spaces are under such pressure, with competing demands and a strong sense of ownership, how do we ensure that these spaces benefit and work for children and young people and their parents and carers?

Travel and safety

- There is perception that much crime in the borough is committed by young people (whether to other young people or the wider general public)
- Children surveyed at our Adventure Playgrounds identified that they hardly travelled or played out without their parents.
- A strong feeling of safety on a street or access route may result in the area being used for play and socialising rather than simply for access, but this has to be cultivated

Housing

- The lack of space in the borough combined with an ever increasing population and high levels of poverty has led to problems such as overcrowding and challenging living conditions for families.

- There is a feeling of being forgotten in Islington's regeneration and agitation with the gentrification around them. Several young people have suggested that they cannot see themselves living here to raise a family due to the cost of living and unaffordable housing. However, it was also suggested that Islington is part of a big city with great access links.
- This set of issues means we need to build more homes that are truly affordable, including enabling young people to either rent or buy, in a borough that has some of the most premium property prices in the country and with very little space left for development.

3.11 POWER AND POSSIBILITIES

- 3.11.1 We have conducted several focus groups and interviews with young people to complement the thematic analysis of evidence submissions from organisations and the public, previous consultations, needs assessments and local intelligence about the issues for this theme.
- 3.11.2 The exploratory phase for this theme is ongoing and will be further complemented by results from a Health and Wellbeing Survey conducted in schools earlier this year and continuing the focus groups programme.
- 3.11.3 The focus on readiness for life and work includes independent living, emotional wellbeing, relationships with peers and adults and readiness for work will be at an event on the 8th of November.
- 3.11.4 There is a focus on the lived experiences and hidden voices of:
- Young carers
 - Young LGBTQ people
 - BAME young people
 - Disabled children and young people
 - Young children
 - Life before vulnerability and those who have overcome challenges

3.11.4 Emerging issues:

Children and young people in Islington

- The younger age groups are more culturally diverse than the older age groups
- A significant number of children live in poverty
- Young people and families are mobile. There are also a range of vulnerabilities experienced by children and young people in Islington. The issues for children, young people and families are becoming more complex e.g. youth crime, special educational needs and disability, problems within families
- National policies such as housing and welfare reform are intensifying the challenges of growing up in Islington
- The challenges are affecting middle-income as well as low-income families

Living in Islington

- There is positivity about living in Islington
- There is also a sense of feeling removed or disenfranchised by external forces such as gentrification, money and people in control (local and national decision-makers, schools, police, etc)
- There are a range of assets and resources in Islington – it just depends on whether you know about them
- Some young people felt unsafe in Islington; others thought that this is being “over-hyped” by the media and others

Early childhood, children and the transition to adolescence

- The foundations set in early childhood are significant and [Bright Start Islington](#) is intrinsic to a sustained focus on this.

- Before and after the birth of the child is a crucial time to support families to give children the foundations for good health, as they are especially receptive to offers and advice. Early identification and intervention can identify families at risk of problems escalating into neglect and abuse
- The active involvement and full participation of parents including fathers contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of early childhood interventions for vulnerable children.
- Playful children are securely attached to significant adults. Play deprivation can be from:
 - Poverty and urban living, resulting in stressed parenting and lack of access to natural and outdoor environments
 - Over-scheduled and over-supervised children, as a consequence of perceptions of urban environments as dangerous for children
 - Growing culture of risk-averse parenting.
- Children suffering from severe play deprivation suffer abnormalities in neurological development. However, provision of play opportunities can at least partially remediate the situation
- Positive factors which might support wellbeing during transition to early adolescence include positive parent-child relationships, attainment, and children's friendships.
- Families, particularly those contending with a significant number of problems (e.g. parental depression, low income), benefit from accessible and non-stigmatising support.
- Schools play a positive role in fostering engagement and enjoyment of learning, improving school wellbeing, particularly important for children who have particular pressures in their lives (e.g. difficulties at home, poor parental support or experiencing stressful events).
- Special education needs status is consistently the most powerful predictor of worse than average change in wellbeing for both boys and girls, affecting all dimensions of wellbeing, but particularly social and behavioural aspects.

Supporting adolescents

- The focus during adolescence tends to be on the negative things to do with this phase in life e.g. involvement in crime, risky health behaviours, rather than how we build on young people's assets and strengths
- Young people have expressed a sense of disempowerment as if power is not a personal ability
- Relationships when working or engaging with young people and parents were key and understanding the lived experiences and realities has been called for at all levels including those who make decisions
- Islington needs to have people and places (services) that empower imagination and possibilities
- Interactive support such as using digital technology to complement and extend how services are delivered. This is a slightly different approach from digital skills education and what is provided in settings to support that. It focuses on how organisations who work with children, young people and their parents can use digital technology to support them, active citizenship and social action. An example of this is [Newham University Hospital DAWN project](#).

Life-skills and readiness for work

- Some young people felt left behind by gentrification. However, for some, living cheek by jowl to wealthier residents/families encouraged their aspirations to succeed in life
- Young people have expressed that there is mainly a focus on academic skills and felt there was limited support for teaching life-skills which are connected to issues such as employability and youth crime, particularly:
 - Independence
 - Managing relationships including conflict resolution
 - Managing a home and money
 - Emotions and managing stresses
- Where young people could no longer afford to live in Islington, this could lead to a brain drain which could be detrimental to local economic growth

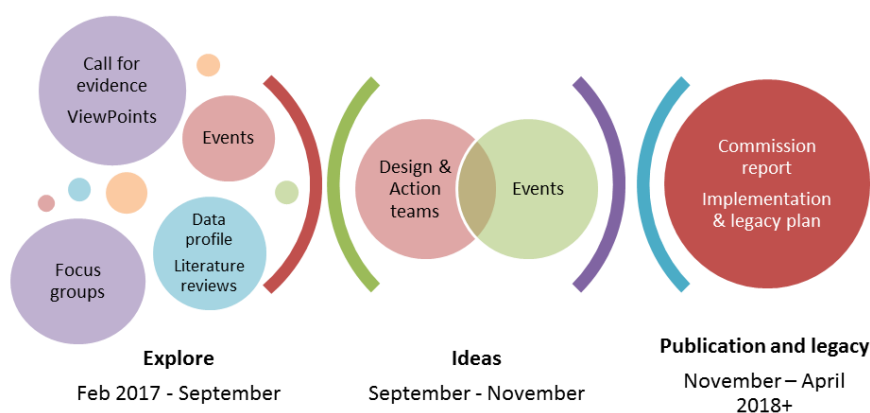
- Young people would value independent careers advice and guidance from those who work in the different sectors at the right time
- Young people highlighted that it can be about who you know and that if a young person is from a disadvantaged background, they are several steps behind young people whose parents have the connections in the business world or different industries. This also includes connections for good work experience.
- They don't feel prepared with employability skills to compete with others or for the future of work (the 4th industrial revolution) e.g. flexible working, skills particularly technological innovation and adapting to this
- There were not many opportunities to consider being an entrepreneur and this wasn't encouraged as much as it could be. It was also identified that to do so would take finances to tide young people over at the start and some young people were from families that are not in a position to do that.

Other

- Adopting a focus on health and care for children and young people in the same that it is now viewed for adults and older people
- A different way for leaders across the public, business and third sectors to constructively drive and invest in children and young people
- Engineering a strategic shift of this kind when the pressures on public funding are intense is challenging.
- For the benefit of children, families and a thriving community it is a challenge that those involved in all areas of children and young people's lives must continue to invest in.

3.12. The Commissioners are now entering their final phase, considering the findings from the previous 6 months and developing recommendations for building a fairer Islington for children and young people (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fair Futures Commission Roadmap



4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.2 Legal Implications:

The council has a duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 to promote cooperation with relevant partners (including health, education, police and probation services) regarding children's well-being in Islington, and relevant partners have a duty to cooperate with the council. The focus of the arrangements referred to is children's physical and mental health and emotional, social and economic well-being; protection from harm and neglect; and education, training and recreation.

4.3 Environmental Implications

None.

4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment will be completed when the Fair Futures Commission has developed its recommendations for submission to the Council and its partners.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

The overall goal of the Commission is promoting the necessary social and health development of all children and young people to ensure a sustainable community which is fit for all. It embeds the original imperative of the Children Act 2004 and subsequent Every Child Matters programme where the wellbeing of children and young people is everybody's business.

The Children Act 2004 places a statutory duty on local authorities to lead co-operation arrangements that will improve the five statutory children's wellbeing outcomes:

- Physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- Protection from harm – both from a safeguarding children and community safety perspective;
- Education, training and recreation
- Opportunities and support to make a positive contribution to society; and
- Social and economic well-being

This can only be achieved by:

- enabling the statutory roles of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children to fulfil their place leadership function by steering, promoting and creating opportunities for co-operation within the council and with local partners;
- working together across the Council departments;
- working with other public, private and social sector organisations; and
- working with children, young people, families and the wider community

The aim is to have the Commission's initial recommendations ready for Universal Children's Day on the 20th of November. Consideration of the issues within the Fair Futures Commission will support progression towards becoming a UNICEF child-friendly community and the place leadership and legacy required for children and young people for the future.

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Signed by:



Corporate Director of Children's Services

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Date

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