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London Borough of Islington Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 14 December 2020

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 14 December 2020 at 7.00 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Cutler (Chair), Ozdemir (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Graham, Ngongo and Williamson
Also Present:	Co-opted Member	Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary) Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair

212 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Woolf.

213 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)

Councillor Jeapes substituted for Councillor Woolf.

214 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)

None.

215 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 2) That it be noted that the answers to all the questions asked of officers during the meeting had been received by members.

216 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)

The Chair reported that evidence gathering sessions had been held with BAME community representatives and Bright Start parents. There had been no response from primary schools, probably due to them having the additional pressures of COVID but officers would contact them again next term.

The Chair reported that Islington schools would close early for the Christmas break and re-open on 11 January. The Director, People stated that this was due to the graver public health messaging in relation to COVID and the infection rate increase. Officers had held a meeting with the DfE and the latter

was supportive of the council's remote learning provision. However, it was still possible that the decision could be overturned and it was not known how quickly this could happen. If it did happen there would be swift communication with schools. A member of the public asked whether schools agreed with the early closure and was advised that there had not been much resistance.

A member asked whether officers communicated with all schools in Islington as she had observed young people from a private school not socially distanced outside of school. The Director, People would follow this up.

217 ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)

None.

218 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7)

None.

219 CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 2 2020/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B1)

Carmel Littleton, Director, People and Curtis Ashton, Acting Director of Youth and Community, presented the report which set out the Children's Services Quarter 2 2020/21 progress against targets.

In the discussion the following main points were made:

- The percentage of young people aged 10-17 who had been diverted from the criminal justice system had increased to 94%. This was an improvement on the figure for the same period last year.
- The number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system was 15 in quarters 1 and 2 compared to 24 in the previous year.
- The percentage of repeat young offenders aged under 18 had increased from 53% to 55%. This would be closely monitored and further work was taking place with this cohort.
- There had been two young people given custodial sentences. This was an improvement on the five given custodial sentences in the same period in the previous year and Islington had outperformed its statistical neighbours in this area.
- There had been an increase in the number of reported domestic violence incidents. This was expected during the pandemic. There had been a 37% increase in women being referred to Solace in April-July 2020 which may have been due to campaigns which had taken place to reach out to women and encourage them to seek help.
- The number of schools engaged with the 100 hours of the world of work programme was 21 compared to 14 in the same period in the previous year.
- The number of children in alternative provision was falling as it was agreed that mainstream schooling offered the best outcomes and life chances for most children.

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- The percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months was low.
- Placement instability had increased but some moves were positive. A deep dive was being undertaken into the figures and a more detailed update would be given at a future meeting.
- There had been a significant rise in the applications for free school meals and work was taking place with these families.
- There was no target for the number of children attending early years' settings as, due to the pandemic, the figures were fluctuating greatly.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B2)

Penny Kenway, Head of Early Years gave a presentation on Early Years: Children's Learning and Development.

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

- In January 2020, 67% of two year olds and 83% of three year olds were in government funded places. These places brought money into the borough and supported the whole early years system.
- The take up of early education entitlements had remained stable over the last three years.
- Since the easing of lockdown, the take up of places for two year olds had increased with 70% take up for Autumn 2020. Numbers always increased between Autumn and Spring but there were 177 fewer three and four year olds in provision this Autumn compared to last year.
- There had been a steady increase in the number of children returning since 1 June and vulnerable children and those with SEND had also returned in good numbers. There were now approximately 3,500 children aged 0-5 in early years settings. This figure did not account for those children in bubbles that had been sent home to isolate. If they had been included, the figure would have been approximately 4,000. This was lower than the expected 5,000.
- An Ofsted briefing in November 2020 stated that providers were concerned that the pandemic had significantly impacted the learning and development of children and there was particular concern about vulnerable children.
- Attending high quality early education positively impacted upon children's outcomes to GCSE and beyond and many disadvantaged young children had missed several months of their early education. Further equalities analysis was being undertaken to determine which groups were most affected.
- There was no government funding available for an equivalent catch up programme in the early years as there was for school-aged children.

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- The vacancy rate across all setting types had increased from 12% in January 2019 to 20% in November 2020. Voluntary sector nurseries and school-based provision had the highest vacancy rates.
- The childcare sector was experiencing significant flux due to the impact of COVID; changing working patterns, furlough, redundancy and unemployment rates. It was too early to know how long this would last or what the longer-term impact would be but childcare and employment were closely linked.
- Increasing numbers of providers were reporting sustainability issues and concerns about viability. The council was awaiting a DfE decision on Spring term funding methods and whether existing protection for providers would continue. Without protection, funding losses were likely and this would impact upon the whole system including supporting arrangements for securing high quality places for two year olds, supporting children with SEND and priority places for vulnerable children.
- If providers closed due to what could be a short-term lack of demand, there could be a longer-term lack of supply which would impact on families' ability to take up and sustain work.
- Providers most at risk of temporary or permanent closure were voluntary sector nurseries (many of which offered affordable childcare through LBI subsidy) and school nursery classes. This would disproportionately affect lower income working families and Free School Meals eligible children who were more likely to attend this provision.
- In response to a member's question about whether fewer children taking up places meant SEND and speech and language difficulties were not being picked up, the officer advised that there was a high level of need among those not taking up provision. Work took place with Bright Start to encourage uptake.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about childminder provision and how many had the Healthy Early Years London award, an officer advised that there were 166 childminders: 53 had a bronze award, 28 had a silver award and 5 had gold awards. During the pandemic, there had been a worrying reduction in the number of childminders. Some were unwilling to have children in their homes where their families lived due to the risk. The council was looking to promote childminding as a career.
- In response to a question from a member about the equalities impact assessment, the officer stated that work was taking place to look at the groups disproportionately not attending provision in order to help target work in communities.

Anthony Doudle, Head of School Improvement – Primary gave a presentation on the Catch Up To Keep Up Strategy.

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

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- A free home learning webpage had been created for carers and parents.
- There were bespoke lessons for every year group as well as enrichment activities. Hard copies were also provided for those who required them. Outdoor learning units of work were also included for the six weeks of the summer holidays.
- In the Autumn term pupils returned to full time education and a recovery curriculum was followed. A range of assessments was undertaken to gain baseline data. Emerging issues with Key Stage 1 pupils related to reading, oracy and maths. Emerging issues with Key Stage 2 pupils related to remembering all the facts that underpinned confident mathematical ability and increasing reading mileage/reading stamina. Emerging issues with Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 related to literacy/numeracy skills and a lack of clarity of assessment arrangements.
- There was a National Catch-Up Programme (£650 million national funding). There was no formal ring fencing for how this funding must be spent. It was intended to support all pupils who had fallen behind in their learning during the period of school closure. However, it was also explicitly stated by the DfE that "The government expects this to be spent on small group tuition for whoever needs it".
- There was a National Tutoring Programme (£350 million national funding). Schools would be able to access heavily subsidised tutoring from an approved list of tuition partners. These organisations would all be subject to quality assurance, safeguarding and evaluation standards and would be given support and funding to reach as many disadvantaged pupils as possible. In addition, trained graduates would be employed by schools in the most disadvantaged areas to provide intensive catch-up support to their pupils, allowing teachers in these schools to focus on whole class groups.
- Challenges presented by the National Catch-Up Programme and Tutoring Programme included: capacity to deliver the offer - some schools had been told interventions might not commence until Spring 2021. There was anxiety regarding national assessments; schools struggling to implement interventions whilst maintaining COVID-secure bubbles; and the impact of positive cases on the closure of bubbles and interruptions to face to face teaching and learning.
- The Islington Framework had 3 strands: 1) Teaching and whole-school strategies which involved supporting teaching, pupil assessment and feedback and transition; 2) targeted support from tuition partners and academic mentors which would include 1:1 and small group tuition, intervention programmes and before and after school interventions; 3) wider strategies including supporting parents and carers, access to technology and holiday support – learning in school holidays.
- A member asked how the online learning webpage was advertised and was advised that schools were regularly reminded to inform parents

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and there was a large piece in the Islington Life magazine which was distributed to residents.

- In response to a member's question about how many people had used the online learning provided, the officer replied that he would find out how many had viewed the webpage.
- A member asked for an update on the assessments that had been conducted since children had returned to school. The officer stated that all schools had been asked to submit data for Year 6 assessments. This could be broken down into gender and ethnicity and shared with the committee. In January 2021 Year 2 phonics data would be available. However, some children would have been absent due to social isolation and would not have taken the tests.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about mentoring provision, the officer advised that 60 recent graduates would be registered with Teach First and then schools could be provided with an academic mentor.

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services gave a presentation on supporting vulnerable students and attendance.

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

- Work followed three stages: 1) preparation; 2) engagement and encouragement and 3) enforcement.
- Work had been undertaken to address welfare e.g. digital access; food poverty; and mental health - to support those entitled to attend school during lockdown and encourage school attendance. Support was given to prepare all children, families and schools for a return to school in September with a particular focus on those at risk of underachievement or otherwise vulnerable. Work was also undertaken on other crucial work streams e.g. digital access, catch up and travel and transport.
- Enforcement work was undertaken from November, where engaging and encouraging had not resulted in a return to school and where there were no valid reasons for failure to attend.
- Work was still taking place with a small number of families where health concerns for family members remained a source of great anxiety and a barrier to a full return to school.
- Programmes of work had been developed and were being delivered across secondary schools to ensure that underachieving groups (specifically White British disadvantaged and Black Caribbean pupils) were being implemented as part of a wider Equalities in Education action plan.
- Monitoring of the attendance of potentially vulnerable/at risk groups took place e.g. looked after children, children with SEND/long term health conditions and minority groups/children from families where English was not the first language. A risk assessment was carried out for the 1,400 children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP);

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there was daily follow up of 450+ children with an allocated social worker to ensure school attendance and welfare calls were made to 300 families of shielding children.

- Co-ordinated work across services ensured that children could access the support and intervention they required (e.g. 12 transition projects, early help, outreach support for SEND, introduction of a Virtual Team Around The School model).
- The 'Progression to Adulthood' strategy for young people with SEND was being delivered.
- There was support for school leaders to set a framework for the 'Belonging' initiative and prepare for compassionate leadership in the new era.
- The mental health and wellbeing of children was being supported through a range of programmes.
- Since September, there had been support to schools and families for Test and Trace arrangements, support for home to school transport and alternative travel, support for schools to develop targeted 'Catch Up' programmes and support for headteacher and school staff wellbeing.
- Attendance of vulnerable groups at Islington schools built over the lockdown period and was consistently higher than the national average and statistical neighbours. During the first week of full school attendance, the rate was 93.7% across all schools, compared to a national average of 88%. By week six it had reached 94.8%.
- The attendance of those in groups/institutions who required targeted support, e.g. those with an allocated social worker, those known to the youth offending service and those attending the pupil referral unit, had improved as a result of interventions.
- Virtual briefings and workshops for attendance, SEND support and safeguarding leads had been fully attended and well received.
- Successful virtual meetings with community groups to support the 'back to school' key messages had improved relationships.
- Islington Headteachers had taken part in a published, collaborative, research inquiry tracking their leadership experience during lockdown, exploring aspects of their leadership approach and reflecting on implications for the future of school leadership for the benefit of colleagues.
- The successful return of so many children to school in September was a result of careful planning and intervention from the start of lockdown.
- There had been positive feedback from parents and families about the support they received from services across the council.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of children electively home educating their children (120). Approximately half of these had stated their child would return to school once they considered it as safe.
- Schools were assessing the long-term impacts on the learning, mental health and wellbeing of children. However, their resilience and ability to bounce back into school routine had been noticed.

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- The next phase of work would involve working with schools to assess the impact of lockdown and support the recovery through targeted programmes such as 'Catch Up' and the full implementation of the Equalities in Education plan. This would include a review of the SEND local offer as there had been a significant increase in the number of children and young people presenting with diagnosed complex needs over the last 12 months.
- In response to a member's question about how many parent champions were home educating their children, the officer stated she would find out and report back.

Helen Cameron, Health and Wellbeing Manager gave a presentation on Supporting Children's Wellbeing in Schools.

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

- Services involved in social, emotional and mental health in school included Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); the Educational Psychology Service (EPS); the Schools Wellbeing Service; voluntary and community sector; public health; schools outreach services and school nursing.
- The Schools Wellbeing Service comprised two teams to support children with mild to moderate mental health issues. They worked across all secondary schools and some primary schools in Islington.
- During lockdown, services started working better together.
- In March 2020 a survey was undertaken to establish schools' needs. Following this, a recovery curriculum was drawn up, resources allocated and staff received training.
- The vast majority of schools were maintaining regular, individual contact with children and families during lockdown. This was tailored to the needs of individuals. Schools were confident in their processes but it was challenging to identify vulnerability through limited contact. Schools requested information about: 1) available practical help for families e.g. food, finance, internet; 2) emotional support for families in terms of general advice on maintaining good mental health and in relation to bereavement and 3) support for staff.
- Information provided to families as part of 'We are Islington' included information on 'doing your bit', coping at home, emotional wellbeing, physical health, school and home learning.
- Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) services included issuing reminders about a central point of access and providing a summary of the services available including Kooth, an online service for children aged 11+.
- Guidance to school staff included how best to conduct phone conversations, guidance for working with children and young people with anxiety, a CAMHS 'returning to school' video, bereavement resources and EPS/CAMHS support.

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- On the return to school, there was a trauma informed curriculum, resources to support staff in the classroom and online training.
- Recovery included reflective practice, with support from EPS and CAMHS, a trauma network, service provision in and with schools and a school focused needs assessment for pupils and staff.
- The Chair raised concern about a lack of EPS bereavement counselling at a school where she was a governor. She would follow this up with the school and officers.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about the national plan to have a named mental health lead in each school, an officer advised that this had been delayed and there was now a new service – the Schools Wellbeing Service.

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement – Secondary and Alison Cramer, Head of Partnerships and Service Support gave a presentation on digital inclusion and blended learning.

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

- Prior to Summer 2020, remote learning was a new experience for some teachers. By the end of the summer term there was innovative practice in a lot of settings.
- Good practice was regularly shared across schools by the council through leadership and practitioner networks.
- A home learning page was established by the council with curriculum materials and helpful links for schools and parents to use.
- Hard copies of primary learning materials were produced, printed and distributed to schools by the council.
- Rates of access to schools' provision by pupils was often good but engagement was hard to judge and the basics of teaching and learning were not always applied consistently. This was a focus of the council's work. In the best examples, schools provided interactive learning opportunities and monitored and acted on attendance and non-engagement.
- Access to devices was a huge issue that required a major and immediate strategic response. Chromebooks were rolled out during the summer to support access to remote learning for disadvantaged pupils in years 6 and 10, children with a social worker, care leavers and other prioritised groups.
- The council increased support for the Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools and provided curriculum materials, some devices, guidance on remote learning, safeguarding and risk assessment guidance and additional funding to operate over the summer.
- There were concerns that those pupils already suffering from the impact of inequalities in society would suffer more during this time.

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Work focused on ensuring schools targeted those most in need and on addressing unconscious bias in teacher assessments.

- Efforts over the summer were focused on identifying needs, sharing guidance, addressing digital poverty, ensuring that schools understood their responsibilities and that their objective was access for the most vulnerable.
- Since September, schools had been fully open and there had been close communication with them to ensure pupils not attending due to COVID-19 should have access to high quality remote education. Schools were also required to submit remote learning plans to the council for quality assurance and to share good practice across schools. Expectation was that provision would follow as far as possible the normal curriculum of the school with teachers and pupils logging in at normal times, including some live teaching, audio slideshows, worksheets and video resources.
- Schools were mainly using Google classrooms as the platform for remote learning. Chromebooks were a cost effective and secure way of providing digital access and access to Google classrooms.
- Schools completed a survey on digital inclusion to support the development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy from which it was estimated that between 15% and 20% of pupils did not have access to a device and between 5% and 10% of pupils did not have access to the internet. Schools were providing hard copies of learning materials where necessary. Vodafone was providing some sim cards with free access to the internet.
- Work was ongoing to ensure all pupils had devices and internet access. Over 1,000 further devices had been procured and distributed in the Autumn term to current year 6 and 10 pupils with grants from Islington Giving, Cripplegate and the Richard Reeves Foundation.
- The Richard Reeves Foundation funding was targeted at reducing the digital divide for disadvantaged pupils (White British and Black Caribbean) in Year 6. They would shortly receive Chromebooks with Wi-Fi until May 2021. Ten weeks of online learning would be provided with a focus on reading, maths and spelling, punctuation and grammar. This would be coordinated through the Year 6 Teacher Network meetings.
- There was now a focus on schools being prepared to operate a rota system if necessary and prepare a curriculum that was planned, sequential and reactive to the learning, welfare and equalities needs of pupils. Schools would also focus on identifying pupils unable to engage effectively in remote education as vulnerable, and having plans in place to enable them to attend school and to continue working on filling access gaps where they existed.
- The council was working individually with schools to ensure contingency planning was robust and any underdeveloped plans were rapidly improved.

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- There was a sense across the community of remote/digital learning moving beyond a response to crisis and becoming part of strategic plans for teaching and learning and digital development within schools.
- The council was holding ongoing practice sharing sessions and a wider conference was being planned.
- In response to a member asking how many laptops had been given to each school and how many each school might still need, the officer stated that she would provide more information on this.
- A member of the public asked whether the Richard Reeves programme was for both boys and girls and the officer confirmed it was for both.
- A member of the public asked whether all officers were compliant with data protection and GDPR and was advised that they were and that an officer worked with schools to advise them.
- In response to a member's question about whether there were any pupils who did not want a device, the officer stated that they were not aware of any. However, work was taking place to target those who did not engage in remote learning and schools followed this up if pupils were not logging on.

Andrea Stark, Director of Employment, Skills and Culture gave a presentation on supporting Education, Employment and Training (EET) outcomes.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- Due to the pandemic, work to support EET outcomes was undertaken earlier than usual. Close relationships with schools and colleges ensured issues could be resolved quickly.
- The Progress Team worked intensively throughout the summer to ensure young people had offers of learning for September.
- 365 people were supported over the summer period, helped by a successful communications campaign.
- The provisional figures showed a lower number of those who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) than in the last two years.
- Prior to the pandemic, a deep dive was done into youth unemployment but, since COVID, youth unemployment had more than doubled.
- The Youth Employability and Skills (YES) programme offered bespoke support for young people aged 18-25 comprising: one to one advice and coaching; world of work experiences, with bursaries paid to young people; English, maths, employability and digital skills tuition from dedicated tutors; enrichment opportunities and access to therapeutic support.
- The programme followed an outreach led model which worked closely with community partners and targeted services to prioritise care leavers, young people with experience of the youth justice system and those identified by community partners as vulnerable and needing enhanced support. The team had been recruited and work with young

people and employers was underway. This programme was part of a successful DfE funding bid.

- The 100 hours World of Work programme had quickly adapted to a remote and virtual offer e.g. virtual help, a video library and virtual work placements which would turn into physical work placements when they could. The website had been newly refreshed with access to careers videos and resources to support a blended learning offer.
- There was increased take up from schools of virtual offers.
- The Enterprise Adviser Network had noted that Islington schools were performing higher than average in meeting the Gatsby benchmarks for quality careers education. All Islington schools surveyed scored 100% for encounters with employers and referenced 100 hours World of Work as a key contributing factor to this.
- The Government would now be paying a modest subsidy for traineeships.
- The council was creating 20 x 6 month paid work placements for 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit and 10+ paid work placements with local external employers – all topped up from government funded National Minimum Wage to London Living Wage, with additional employability and skills wraparound support.
- The council was creating 20 traineeships for 16-24 year olds ranging from a duration of between 2 and 12 weeks as part of the youth employability and skills programme for young people who wanted to find work but lacked the skills and experience sought by employers.
- The council was also working closely with the local college who were brokering additional Kickstart work placements with employers across central London.
- There was a co-ordinated approach in supporting EET outcomes for young people. It was important that there was 'no wrong front door' and whoever a young person spoke to would help them.
- The council convened the Aspire youth employment network in Islington as part of co-ordinated approach to providing a range of accessible support for young people who required it.
- Spear Islington was an intensive 6 week coaching programme for 16-24 year olds with additional support for up to one year.
- The local college had created a new skills programme for 16-24 year olds who were not in education or employment as a stepping stone to re-engage in learning and vocational training.
- Arsenal in the Community had a well-established 12 week youth employability programme.
- The council was working with local industry partners to deliver programmes young people could take part in to start their own fashion, technology and digital enterprises with wraparound employability skills support.
- All the opportunities outlined would create hundreds of opportunities for young people, however, the pandemic would mean youth unemployment would increase by more than this figure. There would need to be a broad, sustained effort to help with this.

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- The NEET figures for in-borough Children Looked After was higher than for out of borough. This was due to the make-up of the cohort. Many in-borough did not have settled status so were unable to get into work.
- In response to a question from a member about extending the range of employment possibilities and training on offer, the officer advised that there had been meetings with the college about potential growth sectors. The college had looked at vocational courses to ensure that they linked with employment opportunities and had been given funding to be flexible and make rapid changes to the courses offered. In Islington in the future, there were likely to be opportunities in health and social care, hospitality and construction including green construction. It was anticipated that technology and digital sectors would continue to provide job opportunities.

Officers were thanked for their presentations and officers working in the People Directorate were thanked for all their hard work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED:

That the presentations be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15 pm

Chair

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