

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE

Cllr Michelline Safi Ngongo – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

It has been a very busy first month in the role. I would like to thank Cllr Kaya Comer-Schwarz for her support with the handover. I have been busy getting a handle on the job, meeting with officers and continuing Kaya's work in co-ordinating our Coronavirus response.

Headlines in my first month include:

- **Adventure playgrounds** are now reopen, with secure Covid-compliant measures in place from to ensure children have opportunities to play and socialise to support their mental wellbeing and development. All play will be held outside to ensure safety.
- **Procedures for safeguarding and contact with social workers** have been reviewed and reissued in accordance with current best practice from the sector to ensure every child at risk has good oversight. Face to face contact has been reviewed again to ensure all children who need this level of support have access to it and it is carried out in Covid-secure ways.
- **There are fewer children leaving care** currently due to continuing delays in the court system. This is causing some pressure on the number of children in Leaving Care service but is currently being managed.
- **Violence against women and girls** - we have seen a rise in women seeking support from commissioned services and the Council is acting on this accordingly.
- **Special school staff have been delighted to be included in the Vaccination programme** - at very short notice - 223 vaccinations will have been offered to them and the take-up has been extremely good. One Headteacher burst into tears at the news and called it a 'game changer'.
- **Mainstream school staff are currently not eligible for prioritisation for vaccination** under the current vaccination criteria but we have supported calls for them to be prioritised in the next stage of vaccinations and we will mobilise quickly to support this if the JCVI decides to take it forward.
- **Schools staff continue to be prioritised for community testing** and have been allocated priority slots at community testing sites. Schools have been told to expect lateral flow testing kits and will be expected carry these out at 8.00 on Mondays and Thursday to allow them to remain at home and inform the school if they test positive on the day. We will continue to support schools while this gets up and running.

- **There is a Covid-secure out of school** provision offer which has been drawn up for half term to support parents and children access play and childcare opportunities. Final details are being completed.
- Sadly 15 year old Romario Opia was murdered on Monday evening. Events have moved swiftly during the week and at 3am on Friday morning a 17 year old was charged with his murder. The 17 year old has been referred to the Youth Offending Service who will oppose bail. There is extensive support in place for those affected by the murder. The Leader and I went to visit Romario's family to offer our condolences and support, with appropriate liaison with the police.
- Sadly, we also mourn the passing of Yvonne Connolly, Islington's first black female headteacher and reportedly also the first black female head nationally. Yvonne's achievements inspired a 3-5 year project at FutureZone - a network of 22 Islington schools. The team have built a Wikipedia page https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yvonne_Conolly to publicise her many achievements, build further on her legacy through the curriculum, and support building her rightful place in history and to celebrate her life.
- The Islington Annual Education Awards is currently being planned for a virtual event, currently scheduled for April, but with flexibility to adjust to Covid changes.
- Alexandra Burke (winner of the X factor, representing the Melissa Bell Foundation in honour of her mother) is working with officers to fund further chrome books/laptops for our children. She is also interested in publicising our Fostering campaign. Work is being co-ordinated with comms.
- 100 new books have been bought for each of the Mother Tongue Supplementary school groups to support reading and catch up
- The number of Care Leavers open to Children's Social Care is being closely monitored and interim arrangements in place to meet increased numbers. Courts are still operating slowly and some of our young people's anticipated discharge from care is therefore delayed. This is causing a financial pressure on the service which is being closely monitored.

1) Early years

Autumn term 2020 takeup of the early education entitlement for disadvantaged 2 year olds:

- Islington 70%
- England 69%
- Islington is first amongst statistical neighbours and second regionally and first time we have been above England average

These results are thanks to the sustained work of the Family Information Service, Bright Start outreach teams and Parent Champions to ensure eligible families access the offer

Lateral Flow Testing of early years practitioners:

Between 26 Jan – 1 Feb:

- 638 early years workers had a test (an increase of over 200 from the previous week), out of a population of 1411 EY workers
- 14 EY providers where no staff members took a test

Work underway to improve takeup of testing. Main barriers are releasing staff who are needed to ensure appropriate ratios, opening hours of test sites, staff concerns re: using public transport to attend test sites

We continue to lobby DfE for home testing kits to be made available to EY provisions, as for schools and nursery schools, as this is currently not allowed under existing national protocols

2) Update on Digital Access for Islington school children

Our exceptional funding bid to Dame Alice Owen Foundation was successful we have been awarded £132,000 to enable us to provide devices to students attending our secondary schools who do not have access. The devices have now been ordered and will be rolled out to schools next week. Based on data collected from secondary schools we estimated a further 600 devices were required to ensure that all secondary students who need a device at secondary school have access to one. The funding secured will facilitate the purchase of 600 Chromebooks.

The DfE announced last week that they will be making another allocation of devices to schools and are due to issue information about the number of devices each school will be offered. The further allocation will firmly secure digital capacity at secondary schools to ensure all children in households have access to a device and will support primary schools to reduce the remaining gaps.

Our current estimate is therefore that no further devices are required for secondary school pupils when all of the above allocations have been issued, and for primary schools we estimate c.1400 more chromebooks are needed and we will refresh this figure when the new DfE allocations are known.

There remains a need for devices for families of younger (early years) children to support access to services for families, which we are currently collating more information on and are sourcing ways to address this.

Detailed discussions are underway with the London Grid for Learning for a more effective connectivity solution for schools as the range of solutions across the region is currently patchy, short term and sometimes confusing for schools to access

3. Update on Food Provision for half term

Guidance has been issued to schools for the provision of a £15 supermarket voucher for each FSM eligible child under the national benefits criteria to cover the February half term

A pilot will be running in the February half term of 'Take and Make' boxes for families providing food to take away as part of the holiday schemes.

4. Attendance at school

- School reports to DfE indicate that the attendance of pupils over the last week with social workers increased from 32.6% to 43.1%.
- Pupils eligible for free school meals who are vulnerable or children of key workers also increased attendance from 11.2% to 15.3%.
- All vulnerable pupils are being followed up at least weekly to address any reasons for non-attendance. 69% of schools are regularly reporting to DfE

5. Islington Education Awards

Planning has been underway for this year's Islington Education Awards ceremony which is currently scheduled to take place in April (a virtual ceremony is planned currently). A save the date invitation will go out shortly. It is particularly important this year to mark and celebrate the work of all schools in the pandemic.