



ISLINGTON

**Strategy Underpinning the Transition
from COVID-19**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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**London Borough of Islington
May 2021**

Foreword:

What had looked in the summer of 2020 to be an ambitious but relatively straightforward aim for this year's review - to interrogate a wide range of witnesses about the impact of COVID-19, make recommendations to reverse the effects 'on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice' and prepare for future outbreaks – became ever more constrained by periods of lockdown, illness and self-isolation.

Nonetheless, members of the Committee were each able to attend at least one Zoom interview session with groups of secondary and post-16 students; members of the BAME Community Group (comprising community organisation and supplementary school leaders and some parents); parents of children attending an early years children's centre; a member of the Children's Active Involvement Service (a group for care experienced and looked after young people) and a group of head teachers from all phases.

A number of common threads in the evidence started to emerge and were echoed in officer reports and in research by academics and Ofsted. Over the three months of interviewing witnesses, two elements came to the fore - the corrosive impact of the virus on the disadvantaged and the near-universal experience of anxiety.

The legacy of austerity and the failure of this Government to predict the extent of the pandemic or to adequately fund councils and schools for the additional expenditure generated by it are a savage indictment of its so-called levelling up policies.

Our recommendations cover five aspects of work for the council and its schools. These comprise mental health and well-being; learning and pedagogy; funding; communications and developments post-COVID. They are grounded in Islington Council's commitment to challenge inequality and to make the borough a fairer place for all.

This review has been conducted under unique conditions and the Committee would like to convey its sincere thanks to the institutions, officers and witnesses that have helped to make it possible.

Cllr Vivien Cutler
Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategy Underpinning the Transition from COVID-19

Aim:

To assess both the long and short term impacts of COVID-19, the measures implemented as a result of COVID-19 including innovative forms of learning and the lessons that have been learned in order to make recommendations to:

- Reverse the effects of COVID-19 on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice.
- Prepare for future spikes/waves of COVID-19 and also develop plans for a COVID-free landscape.

Evidence:

The Committee commenced the review in September 2020. Evidence was received from a variety of sources:

- Y10 students at a secondary school, plus a senior member of staff
- parents whose children attended an early years children's centre
- Y12 and 13 students and some staff from the Upward Bound project (an education project aimed at raising attainment for young people attending Islington schools and organised by Islington Council in partnership with London Metropolitan University)
- members of the BAME Community Group (comprising community organisation and supplementary schools' leaders and some parents)
- Bright Start 0-5s Parent Champions
- a member of the Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) group (a group for care experienced and looked after young people) plus an officer.

Evidence from Headteachers

Anthony Carmel – Headteacher, Ashmount Primary School

Nalar Cosar – Head of the Factory Children's Centre

Jenny Lewis – Headteacher, Thornhill Primary School

Cassie Moss – Head, Yerbury Primary School

Cerys Normanton – Headteacher, Samuel Rhodes School

Becky Powell – Deputy Head and SENCO, North Islington Nursery School

Helen Ryan – Headteacher, Duncombe Primary School

Susan Service – Headteacher, Arts and Media School, Islington

Ana Servilla – Executive Head New River Green and Packington

Tina Southall – Assistant Head, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School

Evidence from council officers:

Curtis Ashton, Acting Director of Youth and Community

Jill Britton, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning

Helen Cameron, Health and Wellbeing Manager

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement – Secondary

Alison Cramer, Head of Partnerships and Service Support

Anthony Doudle, Head of School Improvement – Primary

Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding
Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services
Penny Kenway, Head of Early Years and Childcare
Jane-Amanda Stephenson-Glynn, Children's Health Joint Commissioning
Manager(SEMH/CAMHS)
Tracy Smith – Early Years Service Lead
Andrea Stark, Director of Employment, Skills and Culture
Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy

Documentary evidence:

- Islington Council's Work in Support of School (WiSS) document
- Islington Council's Catch Up To Keep up documents
- Islington Council's Year 6 Tutoring Programme 2020-21
- A Critical Juncture for Public Services – Lessons from COVID-19 – House of Lords Committee Report
- Schools:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933490/COVID-19_series_briefing_on_schools_October_2020.pdf
- Early Years: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-early-years-october-2020>
- Children's social care: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-october-2020>
- SEND: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-local-areas-send-provision-october-2020>

Recommendations:

Mental Health and Well-being

1. For children, young people and young adults for whom it continues to have responsibility, Islington Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) service, building on existing good practice, should audit and extend provision where possible or use existing provision creatively to meet burgeoning need as identified both during and after the pandemic.
2. Schools and early years providers should use council information and other resources to ensure that parents/carers with mental health or well-being issues are signposted to appropriate help from adult and community services.
3. Islington Council should develop the Young Islington proposals, in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Public Health and appropriate providers, to offer a counselling service for children and young people during all holiday periods for the foreseeable future.
4. The council should also enhance its specialist youth, youth employment, careers and progression services to support those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or starting employment in such uncertain times. In addition to the current developments, including the partnership working with local employers, further education colleges and universities, it should continue to engage with partners such as London Councils and Central London Forward to ensure the local offer can respond to the changing skills needs and employment opportunities generated by growth sectors in the post-COVID economy.

It should further look to helping vulnerable young adults beyond the age of 25 years old through continued close collaboration across youth and adult services and with the Islington Working Employment support partnership.

5. Building on the experience of developing and implementing the Recovery Curriculum, Islington Community of Schools should continue to build and promote a bank of resources to support the mental health and well-being of all children and young people returning to school, whether post-lockdown or following extensive individual absence.
6. The council should highlight its support services through the Employment Assistance Programme for teaching and support staff who may be suffering PTSD because of bereavement for colleagues and/or family.
7. A range of witnesses identified the importance of parks and playgrounds in maintaining well-being during lockdown periods. The council should identify capital funding opportunities to invest in any children's play areas that still need upgrading. The Parks team should develop a comprehensive map of all parks and playgrounds, listing their distinctive features and facilities to raise awareness by schools and parents/carers in order to widen usage.

Learning and pedagogy

8. In tandem with schools and supplementary schools, Islington Council should continue to source additional devices, dongles, SIM cards etc. from a range of donors and charitable organisations to safeguard provision across the board and ensure that every child and young person is prepared for further interruptions to learning. It should

develop a culture whereby they recognise learning as easily accessible and not restricted to an educational setting.

9. The council should support schools to gain further understanding of effective teaching and learning pedagogy through additional research and securing best practice models via the Islington Digital Leaders programme. As best practice and further safeguarding guidance (including GDPR issues) is released, officers should support schools to implement these changes in an effective and timely manner.
10. In order to encourage more primary age children to engage positively with remote learning, Islington Council should continue to provide professional development opportunities for education staff (including supplementary school and non-teaching staff) on how to deliver interactive lessons. This should include clear guidance on the purpose and benefits of live or recorded learning and how it may support learners and their parents/carers.
11. The council should provide support for parents/carers who are finding it difficult to help their children with online learning, especially those who have English as a Second Language or have literacy barriers. This support should cover both IT training and basic English and maths skills.
12. Where there continues to be a lack of devices for each individual pupil, or for vulnerable or SEND children and young people who find remote learning especially challenging, paper packs should continue to be provided by schools. Consideration should also be given to those early years children unable to access provision during lockdown.

Funding

13. The Leader and council should continue to campaign vigorously for significantly more funding from the Government to:
 - Support schools and settings in providing COVID-related safe environments and targeted learning help to narrow the widening attainment gaps.
 - With our partners in North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group, extend council services for mental health and well-being both for parents/carers and children and young people.
 - Underpin sustainability for Early Years education services where working from home during lockdown and increased loss of employment threaten the viability of many settings and services.
 - Target financial and in-kind support for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and White British ones.

Communications

14. The number of U-turns by the Government in relation to lockdown, examinations and provision of digital devices has undermined trust. The council, schools and school governors should endeavour to anticipate developments e.g. reduced capacity during holiday periods to support children and young people and their families and communicate these changes to their audiences as early and clearly as is possible in order to reduce anxiety.

Developments post-COVID

15. The experience of life in a pandemic over the past year has highlighted the urgent need for a fundamental re-appraisal of the current education system. Islington Council and its schools should collaborate with academic institutions, local authorities and national organisations such as trades unions to develop alternative models for the future of our communities.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP – 2020/21

Councillors:

Councillor Vivien Cutler (Chair) (to April 2021)
Councillor Gulcin Ozdemir (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Santiago Bell-Bradford
Councillor Janet Burgess (from February 2021)
Councillor Joe Caluori
Councillor Phil Graham
Councillor Michelline Safi Ngongo (to February 2021)
Councillor Flora Williamson
Councillor John Woolf

Co-opted Members:

Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
Mary Clement – Roman Catholic Diocese Representative
Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

Tania Townsend – Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy
Zoe Lewis – Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. Introduction

1.1 The review took place between September 2020 and March 2021. The overall aim was to assess both the long and short-term impacts of COVID-19, the measures implemented as a result of COVID-19, including innovative forms of learning, and the lessons that have been learned in order to make recommendations to:

- Reverse the effects of COVID-19 on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice.
- Prepare for future spikes/waves of Covid-19 and also develop plans for a COVID-free landscape.

1.2 The Committee also agreed to the following objectives:

- To examine the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people.
- To explore the development of different types of learning, support offered to parents/carers and their experiences.
- To analyse the ways in which COVID-19 impacted upon the work of Children's Services and how services were adapted during lockdown.
- To evaluate the work already undertaken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and identify how this could be developed further.
- To use national research and literature to identify best practice in the response to COVID-19.
- To produce workable recommendations for the council and schools to deliver improvements in educational outcomes across schools after lockdown and support those who have suffered abuse and/or neglect during lockdown.

1.3 In undertaking the review, the Committee met with young people, parents of early years children, headteachers, council officers, community leaders and others to gain a balanced view. The Committee also considered local and national data and a variety of documentary evidence. This final report has an emphasis on learning due to the immediate impacts that were experienced. It is anticipated that as we move into a post-Covid world, further impacts will be more visible.

2. Summary of Main Findings

Local and National Context

2.1 COVID has heightened the challenges many children and families already face. All communities and every aspect of children's services have been affected by COVID-19 both nationally and at a local level. The experiences of children, young people and their families have varied and for some the first wave would have been difficult. A number were vulnerable, suffered from digital exclusion or had poor physical and mental health. Others may have found that relationships improved with quality time spent with families. There was resilience in some families and across communities: many engaged in home learning and found that there were further study or work opportunities.

- 2.2 The Committee heard evidence that a loss of routine may have made re-engagement difficult, there would be more NEETs (those not in Education, Employment or Training), exam results could disrupt plans and there could be impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Further impacts included some families suffering from worsening finances, grief-related trauma, restricted access to community health, limited access to food and outdoor play space and, during lockdown, young carers missing out on respite breaks. The social and emotional impact of COVID-19 could affect childhoods for many months and even years to come. The pandemic had exposed disparities between groups of children, young people and their families.
- 2.3 The Committee heard that within the council, partner organisations and schools, professional relationships had been disrupted at the start of the first lockdown. However, the change to using electronic communication had happened quickly and new working practices had been introduced. Although there had been increased risk to the workforce of trauma, burnout and fatigue with staff operating under extraordinary circumstances for a lengthy period, staff had shown flexibility, creativity and determination.
- 2.4 Potential impacts of the wider system supporting children and young people included:
- Some parts of the system having been paused or slowed down e.g. family and magistrates courts.
 - A reduction in funding and income across the children's sector.
 - New ways of working with communities and across public services.
 - A refocus on health and social inequalities, prevention and early intervention.
- 2.5 The Committee considered that it was essential that children and young people were at the front and centre in recovery, restoring and resetting the support to ensure they were safe, cared for and would succeed in learning and thrive. The 'levelling up' of inequalities that affected childhoods and life chances would be important.

Evidence gathering meetings

- 2.6 The evidence gathering meetings were undertaken in November and December 2020 and, unlike in previous years, it was not possible to have face-to-face discussion or see the children and young people in their schools or settings. All discussions took place virtually and there were some minor technical problems. Limitations to the evidence gathered included:
- 1) In three of out of the five meetings, the number of participants was in single figures;
 - 2) As the meetings took place in November and December 2020, the impact of the January - March lockdown was not captured;
 - 3) As a result of COVID-19 and the increased pressures on schools, it had proved impossible to arrange any meetings with primary schools pupils or their parents/carers other than incidentally in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community Group discussion. It would have been useful to speak to primary school pupils or their parents/carers and, as a result of not being able to, the evidence was slightly imbalanced.

- 2.7 The meetings that took place were as follows:
- Year 10 students at a secondary school and a senior member of staff
 - parents whose children attended an early years children's centre
 - Year 12 and 13 students and some staff from the Upward Bound project (an education project aimed at raising attainment for young people attending Islington schools and organised by Islington Council in partnership with London Metropolitan University)
 - members of the BAME Community Group (comprising community organisation and supplementary school leaders and some parents)
 - a member of the Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) group and an officer. CAIS is a group for care experienced and looked after young people.
- 2.8 Members heard that both groups of students had found lockdown difficult. Reasons for this included a lack of routine, no interactive or face-to-face lessons, little feedback from teachers and anxiety about the virus. Some young people reported they had barely left home since the start of lockdown. The extent of Year 10 students' learning was often dependent on parental encouragement. The Year 10 group was worried about not sitting GCSEs; Year 12 and 13s raised concerns about missing exams and a lack of confidence in teacher assessment. Only one student had no access to a Chromebook or laptop but used his iPhone.
- 2.9 The Upward Bound group had received their grades and most felt that they had been marked down. One student was concerned about being marked up as this meant now being expected to be working at a higher base level. The group found the pastoral support they were offered helpful.
- 2.10 Parents from the BAME Community Group identified additional challenges such as a lack of resources and space to study, concerns about spreading the virus in intergenerational households and the difficulties of coping with children who had special and additional needs.
- 2.11 Community leaders stated they lacked sufficient space, funding for teachers and IT devices to offer a broad curriculum and they were worried about sustainability.
- 2.12 The Chair of CAIS had raised the concerns of members. Some were isolated in university halls of residence, some were trying to get into training or employment and there was a lot of uncertainty. There was a request for more clarity around support for post-16s to access the jobs market.
- 2.13 For some young people, the unavailability of adult and/or emotional support was a challenge. There was a need for better and timely communications to prepare them for a different kind of support in a pandemic.
- 2.14 The parents of children in early years settings were very happy with Bright Start online newsletters and activities for children and parents/carers. They requested more information on and reminders of events online. They also commented on how lockdown had meant they could not use the parks which had impacted on socialisation.

Evidence from Headteachers

- 2.15 Members of the Committee held with Headteachers from a number of schools in the borough to discuss their experiences of dealing with COVID-19.
- 2.16 When asked which demographics had been most affected by lockdown, the Headteachers advised that everyone had been impacted. In general, there had been the greatest impact on;
- working families
 - single parents
 - families with more than three children
 - those with SEND children
 - those who had 'fallen through the cracks' and had low income
 - those who were on zero hours contracts
 - those who had little money for resources
 - those with No Recourse to Public Funds
 - those with no quiet space for children to learn
 - those with no access to IT devices or with connectivity issues
- 2.17 Concern was raised, too, about those who were hard to reach and parents wanting to home educate them. The Headteachers advised that remote learning had hit the youngest and SEND children the hardest. Vulnerable children had also struggled.
- 2.18 Headteachers were of the view that schools should be given more discretion to interpret 'vulnerable' in relation to children that could attend during lockdown. A Headteacher stated that it should not be assumed that every child with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was vulnerable; many received support and with this support they should no longer be classed as vulnerable. This Headteacher had also raised concern that the DfE had not considered special schools sufficiently when issuing updates in relation to the COVID pandemic.
- 2.19 The digital divide in the first lockdown was discussed and Headteachers advised members that schools and the council had had to buy many devices, SIM cards, dongles etc. There was a lack of devices in many homes and some parents lacked an understanding of IT. Where there was more than one child, the older child was often prioritised over younger ones to use the device.
- 2.20 Some parents were concerned about the amount of screen time remote learning required and had asked schools for paper packs. Some schools let parents collect packs twice a week. Many schools had managed to obtain 95% pupil attendance in remote learning.
- 2.21 The Headteachers stated that teachers had become much more skilled at delivering remote learning and there had been a positive impact on pedagogy.
- 2.22 When considering the impact of lockdown on SEND children, it was important to remember that each child was unique. Often school was a challenge to them. Those at home frequently preferred to work on paper. They could also struggle with a lack

of routine. Those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) attending school in lockdown liked the smaller classes, less noise and more personal attention. A Headteacher commented that there was a need to ensure that all SEND children were thriving not just surviving.

- 2.23 The Headteacher of a special school stated that, although there had been some loss of learning for children, many had developed new life skills with their parents and carers during lockdown and had developed holistically.
- 2.24 Mental health was discussed. Early years leaders raised concern about anxiety. There was more separation anxiety in babies and parents and staff were affected by this, too. A Headteacher advised that lockdown had impacted upon the learning and mental health of children in Early Years and Key Stage 1. Younger children required social relationships and parent surveys revealed high levels of adverse mental health in them as well as their children. Some Year 11s lacked resilience and were unmotivated. Bereavement was very hard for everyone; children were often concerned about catching COVID and spreading it to family members or the community.
- 2.25 When most children and young people returned to school in September 2020, they were glad to be back at school. A few children had become 'lost to the system' with parents choosing to home educate them. However, these children had now re-entered the system.
- 2.26 The Headteachers were of the view that it was important to minimise pressure on children on their return to school and build on their learning rather than referring to 'catching up'. Priorities for re-opening and beyond included:
- rethinking teachers styles
 - supporting staff
 - optimising resources to support the most vulnerable
 - developing further digital capacity and skills to enhance all learning
 - appealing to the Government for more support in particular for SEND students
 - encouraging socialisation, flexibility, resilience
 - creating fun activities and developing 'qualities for happiness'.
- 2.27 On the whole, there were positive responses about support from the council. The council had taken a holistic view across the 0-18 age range, providing support for devices for the disadvantaged, 11 x 11 materials and 100 hours of World of Work programmes. Headteachers commended Children's Social Care, Safeguarding and Public Health. However, they also stated that sometimes external agencies were less effective in fulfilling their obligations and would not assess/talk to children in schools.
- 2.28 It was acknowledged that arrangements around school closures were difficult for Headteachers and messaging was not always timely. Consultation and clear direction were required during this time. However, council officers had to wait for government guidance and government changes often had to be presented to Headteachers at short notice.

- 2.29 Headteachers stated that there could be more awareness of the needs of leadership teams and new senior staff and that more practical support could be offered. The secondary Headteachers who attended the session stated that they would welcome more networking opportunities with other secondary school Headteachers. The Headteacher of a special school said that in terms of support from the council to special schools, when compared to other boroughs, Islington performed well.

Evidence from council services

- 2.30 The Committee received a range of evidence on work taking place with schools and other settings to help the recovery from COVID-19.

Supporting Families with Children in their Early Years

- 2.31 The Committee heard that COVID-19 had resulted in the dramatic shut-down of most Bright Start face-to-face services for families. Work had taken place with partners to put alternatives in place and there had been a quick move to online services. Families had been reached through virtual platforms including home learning via their nursery.
- 2.32 The Bright Start vision over the last 4-5 years was about building resilience and reducing stressors such as physical ill-health, mental ill-health, drugs and alcohol misuse, harmful relationships and domestic abuse, poverty and housing. Building resilience included engagement with high quality early childhood services, supportive relationships and social networks, good parenting, knowledge, skills and behaviours, positive parent-child attachment and relationship and self-belief.
- 2.33 The main impacts of COVID-19 on children under 5 and their families were poverty and inequalities being highlighted, growing poverty and food insecurity, domestic abuse, lack of usual support networks for new parents, the exclusion of fathers from ante-natal appointments and early labour, cramped housing, no access to play and stimulation, low nursery uptake by the most vulnerable and digital poverty i.e. no access to digital device or data poor. There was a particular impact of COVID-19 on BAME families.
- 2.34 The Committee was advised that services continued to operate during lockdown. These included health appointments and vitamin distribution. Courses and sessions were delivered by the service and partners and most sessions were targeted with particular families invited. The bilingual songs and rhyme sessions had been popular.
- 2.35 Since May, there had been 6,982 virtual contacts with children and families through universal Bright Start early childhood services. Between April and September 2020, there had been 3,697 Bright Start face-to-face health visiting meetings in clinics and 17,532 non face to face health visiting appointments. There had been 16,942 parent champion contacts since April 2020 by 28 parent champions who together spoke 16 languages.
- 2.36 There were 3,583 subscribers to the Bright Start Bright Ideas e-newsletter. This was sent out twice weekly with ideas on how to support early health and development along with links to activities, research and other resources. It was also translated into Turkish, Bengali and Somali.

- 2.37 The figures of those attending nursery were 73 in March, 361 in May, 2,057 in July and 3,552 in October. The number of vulnerable children attending nursery since the start of lockdown was 8 in March, 75 in May, 167 in July and 249 in October. Work was taking place with parents who were reluctant to send their children back to nursery.
- 2.38 Activities had been run for children with special educational needs, play and learn activity packs had been distributed as had healthy start vouchers and food parcels. 190 families had been supported through the crisis by Bright Start family support practitioners. In addition, 1,249 families with 2,720 children with additional vulnerabilities (aged 0-19) known to social care and early help were provided with food hampers.
- 2.39 There had been 281 face-to-face family support contacts with adults and children since September. There had been 678 contacts with children and their parents via face-to-face Bright Start sessions since July.
- 2.40 The Committee was pleased to hear that there had been much positive feedback from parents.
- 2.41 The Committee was advised that there was a need to:
- Build more resilience;
 - Make more use of virtual platforms and social media;
 - Extend partnership working (Fairer Together);
 - Raise awareness of Bright Start with BAME communities, increase visibility of Bright Start in the community and adapt the Bright Start offer to address cultural barriers to participation;
 - Target dads with an online offer;
 - Address the impact of food poverty on young children;
 - Use the right platform for the right activity;
 - Make more use of parks and open spaces;
 - Assess and address the impact of digital exclusion.
- 2.42 The Committee learned that before COVID-19, five year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds were already 4.5 months behind their better off peers. In Islington, there was a long-standing commitment to closing this gap and making the borough a fairer place for all. Through Bright Start there was an effective model of integrated support for children and families in this critical phase but there was still more work to be done. It was important to keep a focus on the impact of COVID-19 on the youngest children to ensure they were not left behind.
- 2.43 A member queried the mitigation measures that were in place for new mothers who were not able to meet up in person. The officer advised that the Government had recognised the need for new parents to meet up and it was permitted to have support groups of up to 15 people. These would be run in a COVID-secure way.

Safeguarding, Early Help and Supporting Vulnerable Children

- 2.44 The Committee heard that the impacts of COVID-19 included gaps in, and disruption to;
- Early childhood outcomes and relationships;
 - Loss of families' engagement due to suspension of services/changes to virtual service delivery;
 - Disruption to the development of social and emotional capabilities connected to issues such as employability, youth crime and preparation for adulthood; disruption to education; loss and bereavement; continued stress and anxiety for families;
 - Higher risks in the BAME populations and the impact that this had had on children seeing higher mortality in their families;
 - Hidden harm, parental mental health, child mental health, abuse and neglect; not finding the best placement that meets children's needs and reduces risk.
- 2.45 Some children were entering care as a result of emergency situations e.g. parents with COVID-19, domestic violence abuse (DVA) and parental mental health breakdown. There were increased numbers of children staying in care and not having permanent plans made for them by the courts and there were changing care plans for children.
- 2.46 COVID-19 presented difficulties in monitoring and safeguarding children at risk of/living in situations of domestic abuse, an increase in the level and severity of abuse and decreased opportunities to identify, report and respond to domestic abuse.
- 2.47 There were more children entering care in crisis which often meant the cases were more complex. There had also been an increase in police referrals. The numbers of children in care had partly increased as court proceedings had slowed down so children were remaining in care for longer.
- 2.48 The Committee heard that new operating procedures involved prioritising cases including face-to-face visits from Early Help to children in need, to children in need of protection, to Children Looked After and care leavers. Thresholds of intervention and service delivery remained the same. Weekly monitoring and tracking of visits to children were undertaken.
- 2.49 A campaign had been launched with partners and the community to increase referrals to social care and early help. There had been increased creativity in terms of ways to reach out to each other and families. Daily communications had been sent out to all staff to keep them updated about new procedures. There were increased resources for children in care, care leavers, foster carers and placement finding.
- 2.50 The Committee was advised that joint support between safeguarding services, school improvement and schools taking vulnerable children had been put in place quickly and the attendance of vulnerable children had been tracked. Changing to a more virtual way of working had increased proficiency with IT systems, accessibility of training and development opportunities and greater opportunities to engage family and friends from outside of Islington in supporting children.

- 2.51 There was now an enhanced joint understanding of safeguarding and increased contact with vulnerable children and families using virtual platforms. Partnership and collaborative working had been strengthened and video conferencing was more accessible to a wider range of professionals than physical meetings.
- 2.52 Laptops had been distributed to children and families in need to enable increased contact with professionals and schools. A wrap-around service was provided to adolescents who were no longer going missing or being exploited. Regular newsletters were sent to families and carers suggesting activities that could be undertaken with children and where they could get support. Parents had reported preferring virtual Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After Reviews.
- 2.53 All referrals by social care were responded to swiftly and early help was maintained in line with legislation. Social workers and practitioners had responded well to challenges and these were communicated to all staff to learn from. Creative ways of responding to the needs of children had been developed. As a result of the service's response to COVID-19, referrals quickly increased to just below what they were the previous year, children were supported to move to their permanent families wherever possible, all children were now seen face-to-face where this was permitted and all children were seen virtually. The response to delayed disclosures of abuse was swift and high quality to combat longer-term harm. Staff reported feeling supported and safe in undertaking their daily work. The staff infection rate was low and services had been operating at over 90% staffing capacity since March 2020.
- 2.54 The Committee heard that Care Leavers had stayed at university and were able to complete courses. Care Leavers had been surveyed and 80% had responded that they felt supported.
- 2.55 Placement stability had been maintained during lockdown and placements which met all of children's needs and risks had been located for most children. Data on individual children and the attendance rate by status of children was monitored and tracked weekly. Prospective foster carers, family members and prospective adopters were still being assessed.

Youth Safety and Crime

- 2.56 The Committee heard that there had been a sustained reduction over three years of knife injury crimes. In October 2017, there were 79 victims and in August 2020 there were 35 victims. This had been attributed to a number of initiatives including the prevention work carried out by Targeted Youth Support.
- 2.57 The Integrated Gangs Team managed intelligence and risk, the partnership approach to youth offending, the out of court disposal scrutiny panel and the joined up police and partnership tasking. This was further supported by the No Knife Shop scheme and the introduction of knife bins. A Knife Crime Prevention film featuring bereaved parents would soon be launched.
- 2.58 Recovery planning took place early on during lockdown so that support could be provided to high risk and vulnerable young people soon after. Many of the most

vulnerable young people were already identified which made it easier to engage with them and their families during lockdown.

- 2.59 The Committee was pleased to hear that there had been good performance in relation to national indicators – First Time Entrants and Custody. The Youth Offending Service and Targeted Youth Support duty systems were maintained which meant the service could be responsive to need and carry out statutory functions such as court duty at Highbury Magistrates Court.
- 2.60 At the start of lockdown, virtual and telephone contact was established immediately with a RAG rating system introduced to determine need. Higher risk and more vulnerable children were seen face-to-face in a safe way through most of lockdown. Partnership working had been effective e.g. ensuring no casework duplication with Social Care and receiving assistance from the police to visit the highest risk young people and adults. There had been a focus on emotional well-being. Detached youth work had been delivered early on in lockdown.
- 2.61 Community engagement events had taken place with young people due to the Black Lives Matter initiative. Planning for young people’s post-16 academic year had continued. The purchase of a video conferencing facility for children who were in Young Offender Institutions or in Secure Training Centre detention had been fast tracked. There was robust contingency planning in order to ensure that universal play and youth provision could provide children and young people with adequate support as part of the ‘earliest help’ offer. Online youth hub forums were designed and implemented to engage with young people.
- 2.62 Domestic abuse had increased nationally and locally during lockdown. There was accessible integrated and effective support for survivors of violence against women and girls and domestic abuse via commissioned and new internal resources.
- 2.63 There was a need to monitor more closely the interactions and behaviours of organised criminal groups online. It was important to maximise intelligence to keep track of the more sophisticated techniques and methods of organised groups and their networks, particularly in relation to county lines mechanisms.
- 2.64 Sadly, there had been an increase in murders in July when lockdown measures were eased. Two young men had been murdered – one in July and one in September. Five men had been charged in relation to one of the murders. In the other case, no one had yet been charged.
- 2.65 There was a continued disproportionality of stop and search during the pandemic and post lockdown. Issues with disproportionality may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Child poverty and deprivation was also likely to increase following the pandemic and the emotional and mental health of young people and families would be compromised.
- 2.66 Much work was taking place in the COVID-19 recovery. Work would take place to build on the cross border and pan-London response due to the transiency of young people. Young people within the secure estate would be supported so that they did

not feel forgotten. Young people and their families were being prepared for the economic down turn and job losses. Young people had said that they were worried, but that they wanted the service to be optimistic in its outlook. The new youth safety strategy would be launched in the near future and would reference COVID-19 and the likely after-effects.

- 2.67 It was important to continually engage communities who felt marginalised and disaffected e.g. the Somalian community, to continuously promote Modern Day Slavery awareness and referral pathways and to ensure that there was a continued focus on the needs of young women and girls from a youth safety perspective. There should be a whole-family approach and support to parents, especially in communities who felt left behind.
- 2.68 In response to a member's question about engaging communities who were marginalised and disaffected and whether youth violence figures related to young people over school age, the officer advised that the service wanted to engage all communities. There were not many Algerian, Egyptian or North African young people involved with the service but the service was seeing more people from the Somali community. The Mother Tongue Supplementary School was helping to engage with this community. The serious youth violence statistic included youths up to 24 years of age.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

- 2.69 The Committee was advised that the Children and Young People SEMH integration had taken place over a year ago. There was an integration central point of access with the Children's Services Contact Team/Whittington Health CAMHS and Barnardos.
- 2.70 Daily triaging and allocations of referrals took place, there were weekly SEMH intake meetings with SEMH therapeutic and emotional wellbeing providers and there was an expanded community therapeutic and emotional wellbeing offer. Partners included CAMHS, Barnardos, Targeted Youth Support (TYS) Counselling, Brandon Centre, Isledon Emotional Well-being Service, Early Help, Mental Health in Schools Teams and Kooth.
- 2.71 Some children and young people and their families had coped well with the COVID-19 restrictions whereas others had struggled. Impacts included stress and anxiety caused by disruption to schooling; lack of personal/private space had been challenging for some; virtual/telephone interventions; some had limited access to virtual equipment and data; low moods, sleep disruption, some with social anxiety using lockdown to 'hide'; deterioration in progress made pre-lockdown; reluctance to and/or restrictions on travel.
- 2.72 During the pandemic there had been ongoing SEMH virtual provision with face-to-face contact for priority groups. There was a policy of no closure of cases until the child or young person had been seen face-to-face. Assistance with virtual access had been provided and phone calls had been made to children and young people and families who were shielding.

- 2.73 Collaborative partnership working between all SEMH therapeutic and emotional well-being services and Public Health, Early Help, Bright Start, School Nursing and the School Improvement Service Health and Wellbeing Team took place to support return to school including resources for young people and families.
- 2.74 Access to SEMH was being encouraged through We Are Islington. The children and families section on the council's coronavirus website pages included information on emotional wellbeing and coping at home.
- 2.75 Service user feedback on the impact of COVID-19 would inform required changes/additional support. Monthly SEMH meetings would address gaps and identify solutions by sharing best practice. Since the first lockdown, face-to-face therapeutic/counselling support had been resumed for priority groups. Following lockdown, referrals had increased to a similar level to those at the beginning of the year.
- 2.76 The Islington Schools Wellbeing Service was delivering evidence based interventions to children and young people and families. This was supporting schools to develop their whole school approach to mental health and emotional well-being, increasing access to other SEMH services and sharing updates and good practice e.g. through the Children and Young People Emotional Wellbeing Network (Young Minds).
- 2.77 SEMH leaflets for children and young people and families were being distributed to community nursing services and schools. All SEMH services were monitored for equality of access to different ethnic groups.
- 2.78 There would be a fully inclusive and equitable offer to all young people who required additional support as they moved into adulthood. Where appropriate, young people would be supported to access early intervention and prevention services with the voluntary and community offer, ensuring they got the right support at the right time. There would be a strong focus on supporting young people to find and keep jobs and a focus on vulnerable groups. A new formal assessment would be trialled, which would be more flexible and proportional to peoples' needs. Personal Health Budgets for Children Looked After, Care leavers and SEMH cases would be merged.
- 2.79 The SEMH pathway offer had been extended from 18 to 25 years which enabled young people to continue to receive appropriate support whilst moving on from school/college and settling into adulthood. Partners from Children and Young People and adults health, social care, cultural, employment, and the third sector had formed a task and finish group to identify gaps and improve holistic provision for 16-25 year olds. There would be a local deep dive on Autism Spectrum Disorder cases.
- 2.80 The two North Central London (NCL) crisis hubs were the Northern Health Centre and Edgware Community Hospital. There was a 24/7 crisis line for professionals working with young people in crisis and the NCL CAMHS Board had established two task and finish groups – crisis and community.

- 2.81 A solution-focused approach was currently underway, both locally and across NCL, to address the rise in children and young people presenting in crisis, the increase in referrals, stays and social care cases.

Early Years: Children's Learning and Development

- 2.82 The Committee was advised that 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.
- 2.83 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.
- 2.84 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.
- 2.85 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.
- 2.86 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.
- 2.87 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.
- 2.88 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.
- 2.89 If providers closed due to what could be a short-term lack of demand, there could be a longer-term lack of supply that 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.

- 2.90 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 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.
- 2.91 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.

The Catch Up To Keep Up Strategy

- 2.92 Members were advised that 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.
- 2.93 In the Autumn term, pupils returned to full time education and a recovery curriculum was followed. A range of assessments were 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.
- 2.94 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".
- 2.95 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.

- 2.96 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.
- 2.97 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.
- 2.98 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.

Supporting Vulnerable Students and Attendance

- 2.99 The Committee heard that work followed three stages: 1) preparation; 2) engagement and encouragement and 3) enforcement.
- 2.100 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.
- 2.101 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.
- 2.102 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.
- 2.103 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). 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.

- 2.104 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.
- 2.105 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.
- 2.106 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.
- 2.107 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.
- 2.108 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.
- 2.109 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.
- 2.110 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.
- 2.111 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. 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.

Supporting Children's Wellbeing in Schools

- 2.112 The Committee were advised that 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.
- 2.113 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.
- 2.114 The Committee were pleased to hear that 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.
- 2.115 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.
- 2.116 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.
- 2.117 The 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 and EPS/CAMHS support. Bereavement support was offered to children who wanted it. Schools had received guidance and there was an educational psychologist available to them.
- 2.118 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.

Digital Inclusion and Blended Learning

- 2.119 The Committee heard that, 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 many settings. Good practice was regularly shared across schools by the council through leadership and practitioner networks.

- 2.120 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.
- 2.121 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.
- 2.122 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.
- 2.123 Schools were mainly using Google Classroom as the platform for remote learning. Chromebooks were a cost effective and secure way of providing digital access and access to Google Classroom.
- 2.124 Chromebooks had been distributed and it was understood that all Year 10 and Year 11 students from last year had all the resources they needed. In total, over 3,000 devices had been distributed and almost every secondary pupil had a device and every family with primary school children had at least one device. There had been supply chain issues in the government laptop scheme. While waiting for these, those provided by charities had been distributed as well as those purchased directly by the local authority.
- 2.125 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 Reeve's Foundation.
- 2.126 A bid had been put into the Dame Alice Owen Foundation for more devices. It was hoped that if a bid for more devices was successful, gaps in device provision could be filled and there could be staggered provision for Year 5, 4, 3 and 2 children so that they could each have her/his own device. Families having access to a device meant they were able to join a library and access online books.
- 2.127 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.
- 2.128 The council had increased support for the Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools and provided curriculum materials, some devices, guidance on remote learning, safeguarding and risk assessment 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. A hundred new books would be distributed to each of the 12 supplementary schools. These included picture books, short stories and longer ones.

- 2.129 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.
- 2.130 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.
- 2.131 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.
- 2.132 The council was working individually with schools to ensure contingency planning was robust and any underdeveloped plans were rapidly improved. The council was holding ongoing practice sharing sessions and a wider conference was being planned. The council was also focused on ensuring schools targeted those most in need and on addressing unconscious bias in teacher assessments.
- 2.133 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.

Supporting Education, Employment and Training (EET) Outcomes

- 2.134 The Committee was advised that 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. Three hundred and sixty-five 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.
- 2.135 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.

- 2.136 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.
- 2.137 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.
- 2.138 The Committee was advised that 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.
- 2.139 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.
- 2.140 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 a 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 and Arsenal in the Community had a well-established 12 week youth employability programme.
- 2.141 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-engaging in learning and vocational training. 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 the technology and digital sectors would continue to provide job opportunities.

- 2.142 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.
- 2.143 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.
- 2.144 The NEET figures for in-borough Children Looked After were 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.

The Richard Reeve's Year 6 Project

- 2.145 The Committee was advised that in 2020, the Year 5 group was not a target group for returning to school and therefore they had not been in school consistently between March and September 2020. Most of them resumed full time education when they entered Year 6 in September 2020.
- 2.146 Between 19 October and 23 October 2020 the overall attendance in Islington primary schools was 95%. For White British Free School Meals (FSM) children the figure was 89.2% and for Black Caribbean FSM children it was 93.5%. This could have been due to anxiety about their safety.
- 2.147 Between 9 November and 13 November 2020 the figure for White British FSM children was 93.3% and 94.7% for Black Caribbean FSM children it was 94.7%. This may have been due to parents feeling more secure about sending their children to school.
- 2.148 Since 4 January 2020, the government expectation had been that remote learning mirrored the learning taking place in schools.
- 2.149 The Richard Reeve's Foundation funding was targeted at reducing the digital divide for disadvantaged pupils (White British and Black Caribbean) in Year 6. The group had received 689 Chrome books with Wi-Fi until May 2021. All Year 6 teachers had received training and were taking part in regular networking meetings.
- 2.150 Home learning resources had been posted online. Every family had received an overview of the 10 weeks of learning and a letter from the officer outlining expectations of parents and children. Teachers also sent home exercise books. In addition to the 10 weeks of learning, three hours of additional learning was published which included maths, reading, spelling and writing.
- 2.151 In Reading, Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS) and Maths, there were three grades – working towards (WT), working at (WA) and greater depth (GD). In primary school, the aim was for most children to be WA, working at. Greater depth

was for those demonstrating skills beyond those expected. Islington did well at greater depth and was significantly above the national average and in line with the Inner London average.

- 2.152 Each grade was based on a raw score converted into a scaled score e.g. GD was 110 and WT was 100. These grades did not change. However, the raw score did change e.g. in 2017 the word count in reading was 1935 words, in 2018 it was 1717 words and in 2019 it was 2310 words.
- 2.153 At the time the baseline assessments were undertaken, the transmission rate of COVID increased and many children were self-isolating for 14 days. Since the data set was produced, ten more schools had undertaken the assessments.
- 2.154 A high number of children were working towards but this was not uncommon in the autumn term. The children were likely to have forgotten some knowledge and might not yet have covered some areas of the national curriculum. There was capacity to move many pupils who were WT to WA and many who were WA to GD by May. This had been demonstrated in the last three years. Writing would be assessed by teachers in June.
- 2.155 An Attitude to Learning Survey was undertaken which asked Year 6 pupils how often they read, whether they:
- read for pleasure
 - were confident with spelling Year 5 and 6 words
 - were confident with their times tables and answering maths questions
 - enjoyed home learning and were confident to complete home learning independently
 - could manage their time
 - knew their strengths and challenges
 - learnt from mistakes and discussed difficulties with the teacher and/or parent/carer.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 This review has focused on the impacts of COVID-19, the measures implemented as a result of COVID-19 and the lessons learned in order to make recommendations to reverse the impacts and prepare for the future. As part of its commitment to challenge inequality and make the borough a fairer place, Islington Council must seek to address the impacts of COVID-19.
- 3.2 The impacts of COVID-19 are wide-ranging and complex. Addressing these would not be simple, particularly as the future under COVID-19 was unknown. The Committee notes the progress made in relation to the measures implemented, including innovative forms of learning and reversing the effects of COVID-19. It is hoped that the Committee's review will further support this work.
- 3.3 Fifteen recommendations have been made in response to the evidence received. These are related to mental health and wellbeing, learning and pedagogy, funding,

communications and developments post-COVID. The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the review. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Strategy underpinning the transition from COVID-19
Scrutiny Review Committee: Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the review: Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director – People
Lead officers: Tania Townsend, Children’s Partnership Development and Strategy Manager
<p>Overall aim: To assess both the long and short term impacts of COVID-19, the measures implemented as a result of COVID-19 including innovative forms of learning and the lessons that have been learned in order to make recommendations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverse the effects of COVID-19 on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice. • Prepare for future spikes/waves of Covid-19 and also develop plans for a Covid-free landscape
<p>Objectives of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. • To explore the development of different types of learning, support offered to parents/carers and their experiences. • To analyse the ways in which COVID-19 impacted upon the work of Children’s Services and how services were adapted during lockdown. • To evaluate the work already undertaken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and identify how this could be developed further. • To use national research and literature to identify best practice in the response to COVID-19. • To produce workable recommendations for the council and schools to deliver improvements in educational outcomes across schools after lockdown and support those who have suffered abuse and/or neglect during lockdown
<p>Scope of the review:</p> <p>The review will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attainment • Safeguarding • Equalities • Youth safety and justice • Vulnerable children

- Wellbeing/Mental Health
- Catch Up Curriculum
- Digital Inclusion: different types of learning and a blended curriculum
- Mitigating Risks
- Support to parents and carers
- NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Participation and engagement levels from young people and parents/carers
- The equalities impact of COVID- 19 including on the BAME community

Type of evidence:

It is proposed that witness evidence is taken from:

- Representative headteachers, teachers and learning practitioners
- Council officers
- Community groups
- Children and young people
- Parents of children of a range of ages, those with SEN and children who were shielding.
- Targeted youth support officers

Written evidence will include:

- Report from Ofsted
- Case studies from schools
- Brightstart work case study

Additional information:

In carrying out the review the committee will consider equalities implications and resident impacts identified by witnesses. The Executive is required to have due regard to these, and any other relevant implications, when responding to the review recommendations.