



## **Report of: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families**

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Ward(s):</b>
Executive	24 March 2022	All

<b>Delete as appropriate:</b>	Exempt	Non-exempt
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## **SUBJECT: Covid 19 Recovery Strategy - 12 Month Update**

### **1. Synopsis**

In March 2021, Executive received a report from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee which examined the Covid 19 Recovery Strategy. The scrutiny report proposed fifteen recommendations to offer the best support to pupils and its residents in Islington.

This report provides an update on action taken in response to the recommendations and must be considered in the light of the pandemic and the impact this has had on the community, but particularly in relation to schools.

### **2. Recommendations**

To note the progress made against the recommendations from the Review

To note the further work proposed to consolidate and build on the improvements to date

### **3. Background**

Between October 2020 and March 2021, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee conducted a review of COVID-19 Recovery Strategy. The purpose of the review was to interview 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. This was further 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.

The Committee recognised that schools and settings had responded with pace in light of the changing guidance. Schools and settings have demonstrated a robust response to put in place many mitigating strategies to minimise the impact of moving to remote learning and how they might support their local communities throughout the various lockdowns experience by the country as a whole. A number of common threads in the evidence emerged 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.

This is a formal response to the fifteen recommendations that have been collated from the evidence received. Since the report was published the DfE to schools guidance has changed. Schools returned to full time face to face learning from the 8 March 2021. In September 2021, schools and settings were required to put in place arrangements for remote learning to ensure any pupils required to self-isolate as a contact and therefore unable to attend school could continue to access the national curriculum. This was a notable change from previous lockdowns, where schools and settings were not required to continue to provide access to the national curriculum to pupils unable to attend.

The recent LA SEND Inspection took account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEND arrangements in the area in reaching their judgements (November 2021). Inspectors confirmed that 'Despite the challenges that the area has faced through the pandemic, leaders have sustained their commitment. Leaders have remained true to their values and maintained the momentum of continuous improvement. Throughout this time, they ensured that the area's most vulnerable children, young people and families were continuously in 'sight.'

The Council remains absolutely committed to addressing inequality and ensuring that our children have the best start in life. We are proud of the collective response of Council teams, schools, our local voluntary sector and health partners to mitigate and minimise the impact of the Covid pandemic on children. However, we know there is more to do to achieve our ambitions and ensure that every young person in Islington has access to the opportunities they need to thrive in life, including an excellent education.

### **4 Response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations**

Officers welcome the 15 recommendations from members as a very helpful steer towards mitigating the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in Islington. It is particularly helpful to note the focus on mental health within these recommendations that has been evidenced in the increase of referrals for Education, Health and Care Plans in the borough.

This increase reflects a national surge in Social Emotional and Mental Health in young people and this, along with the other risks arising from the pandemic, is driving a shift towards a broader definition of 'education' in Islington that takes account of the barriers to learning so that children and young people are supported to be able to learn before they arrive in school.

This refreshed approach aims to facilitate quicker access to services to schools and settings so that the issues that impact on children in school are identified earlier.

Working closely with the established preventative offer through Bright Start and Brighter futures, services in School Improvement, Early Years, SEND and Culture are adopting a joined up approach to mitigating the impact of the pandemic under the umbrella of a developing Education Strategy.

Stronger collaborative working with schools and settings is central to this developing approach that supports the recommendations in this report.

The Children and Young People's Partnership has also been established as the strategic forum for bringing together all the key services and partners that aim to support children and young people. This partnership includes health, social care, education, and the voluntary sector to work collaboratively to enable all young people to thrive in the borough regardless of their starting point, ethnicity or personal circumstances.

This approach reflects the political and corporate commitment to a more equal borough.

#### **4.1 Mental Health and Well-being**

Recommendation 1: For children, young people and young adults for whom it continues to have responsibility; Islington Council Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) service, building on existing good practice, should audit and extend provision to meet the burgeoning need as identified, both during and after the pandemic.

##### **Response:**

Analysis has shown an unprecedented surge and upward trajectory in demand for Mental Health services at both a local and national level. The pandemic has further impacted on a pre-COVID trend of increase in referrals, resulting in operational challenges in responding to changing demand.

To respond to this surge in demand, a more collaborative and preventative approach has been adopted across council services. Examples of this approach are evident in the development of locality hubs driven through the Fairer Together partnership that aims to make services more accessible within communities to reduce isolation. Similarly, the SEND Strategy is being refreshed so that there is a stronger focus on preventative support so that

more children are supported to remain in mainstream school, where appropriate. This approach will see more resources in school budgets to support at SEN support level.

Whilst wait times for CAMHS therapies have increased during the pandemic, not all children with require CAMHS therapies to address their mental health needs. Islington children can access a wide ranging offer of mental health support at the point of referral, with immediate access or very short waiting times, and this continues to develop:

- A 'CAMHS in Schools' offer, unique to Islington, which means that every Islington school has a named link CAMHS practitioner working with them
- [School Wellbeing Service](#) (Islington's Mental Health Support Teams - MHST) – Islington is a trailblazer site for MHSTs, with two hubs providing support to every Islington mainstream school through a multi-disciplinary model
- The [iMHARS](#) (Islington mental health and resilience in schools) programme supports schools to research their strengths and challenges in their whole school approach to supporting positive mental health and resilience and plan change
- Trauma-informed practice – this model is embedded across schools and services and informs whole school approaches as well as support to individuals
- Emotional Well-Being Workers – a role conceived and designed by local young people; Emotional Well-Being Workers can be accessed by young people through our Youth Hubs and the SEMH partnership
  - Kooth on-line counselling service – this can be directly accessed by young people and is well used by them
  - Bright Start/Bright Futures Early Help offer, to which families can self-refer
  - TCaPS intensive behaviour support programme to help families manage challenging behaviour in the home
  - Outreach support from New River College and The Bridge to support schools

To further support mental health issues, in August 2021, Islington was a recipient of the Public Health England (PHE) Better Mental Health Fund. This fund was allocated to the 40 most deprived local authorities in the country and formed part of the government's Mental Health Recovery Action Plan 2021/22, focussing on the mental health impacts of COVID 19, and ensuring that these are rapidly addressed. Islington received a grant of £346,619 to be spent in year 2021/22. A programme of work was mobilised rapidly with a strong focus on support to children, young people and families. Local projects supported by this grant enhanced existing provision including:

- Training in Trauma Informed Practice (TIPS) to VCS organisations working with vulnerable children, young people & their families
- Building local networks of peer and clinical support to embed iTIPS practice among a wide range of VCS practitioners.
- Delivery of targeted youth service counselling with a focus on YP at risk of self-harm
- ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) training to teaching assistants in schools, supervision and support to embed learning
- Delivery of evidence-based Emotion Coaching workshops to groups of staff and groups of parents in schools
- Delivery of a parenting programme "Love and Limits" designed to improve parental confidence in managing their teenager's challenging behaviour

For further applications of this grant see responses to recommendations 7 and 11.

## **4.2 Recommendation 2: Schools and early year's 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.**

### **Response:**

Improved collaboration between education and health professionals, parents and children and young people has led to a range of new provision to address these concerns e.g. new roles of social prescribing and Emotional Wellbeing Workers, Kooth on-line counselling. Access to these services is promoted through schools, support services, the Council and Health websites, GP practices, Mother Tongue Supplementary School colleagues, on line webinars for parents/carers, the SEND Local Offer and Parent Support Groups.

This work is being built on as part of our [Schools Wellbeing Service](#) (Mental Health Support Teams 'Trailblazer' programme), and Education Mental Health Professionals (EMHPs) were recruited and began training in January 2020 with a roll out to all schools in September 2021. SWS work with parents of children in primary schools whose children have an identified mental health need – which often also positively impacts the parent's mental health and wellbeing. Alongside this SWS signposts to services for parents e.g. ICope or other community counselling, growing together (for children of under 5s) The PHE Better Mental Health Fund funded the translation to community languages of resources for parents created by the schools wellbeing service. These resources help to build mental health literacy and understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's mental health, improving access to learning

Analytics data from IslingtonCS shows that schools are regularly using wellbeing pages – in order to support parents and carers with mental health issues.

In addition the Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Grants Programme 2021-2024 provides core funding to fifty organisations in Islington. These include organisations working with parents and families from Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the borough (such as The Parent House, Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group, Maa Shanti, KMEWO and IMECE Women's Centre).

Further information on the organisations funded through the VCS Grants Programme can be found here <https://www.islington.gov.uk/advice/voluntary-and-community-sector/funding-support/partnerships-grant-funded-organisations>

## **4.3 Recommendation 3: Islington Council should develop the Young Islington proposals, in partnership with appropriate providers, to offer a counselling service for children and young people during all holiday periods for the foreseeable future.**

### **Response:**

The TYS counselling service has recently been restructured in order to be more responsive to the needs of young people across the borough. The TYS Counselling service provides free counselling for any child or young person aged 10yrs – 21yrs who lives, works or studies in Islington (or any young person aged up to 25 years with Special Educational Needs). The service has been reorganised in order to increase capacity and responsiveness, but also to deal

with and address the comorbidity issues that adversely impact on large numbers of young people.

The **SEMH** pathway is a key component of the council's approach to ensuring the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. The pathway uses a multi-disciplinary approach which supports young people through the range of emotional wellbeing needs offering social prescribing, mentoring, key work support, on line options, counselling and clinical interventions delivered across a range of providers. This is a significant part of the Young Islington approach and response to supporting young people with their emotional wellbeing. A key feature is accessibility and offering support services in community places and spaces where young people feel comfortable and in which they have a stake.

The role of the Emotional Wellbeing Worker (EWB), which young people can access via the new Young Islington universal youth work offer, was developed alongside young people who said that they valued the relationships that they have with their youth workers and that they wanted one trusted person to help them navigate their way through support, rather than having to repeat their story multiple times. The EWB worker seeks to engage with young people in youth hubs such as Lift, Platform and Rosebowl, and develops a relationship with that young person that intends to understand their lives, needs and ambitions.

The EWB service works alongside other services in the SEMH pathway such as the TYS counselling service, Barnardos and Brandon Centre counselling services and young people can access these options concurrently. The counselling offer is available in a range of community locations to suit the young person and in practice much of it is delivered at Platform Youth Hub due to the availability of quiet, private rooms suitable for counselling and young people feeling comfortable in a youth-orientated space. The Brandon Centre will soon be providing additional emotional support for young people from Platform in a drop-in arrangement.

The children and young people's social prescribing service has been recommissioned as part of the Young Islington offer from January 2022. This prescribes very early help to young people at risk of developing mental health problems by supporting their access to youth services and opportunities in the borough. The service operates all year round including school holidays.

**4.4 Recommendation 4: The council should also enhance its specialist youth and youth employment 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 working with local further education colleges, it should engage with partners such as London Councils and Centre London Forward to ensure the local offer matches training and apprenticeships to growth sectors in the post-Covid economy. It should further look to helping vulnerable young adults beyond the age of 24 years.**

**Response:**

The Youth Employability and Skills (YES) programme was launched to provide a targeted package of employability and skills support to NEET young people aged 18-25 at risk of long-term unemployment as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and other entrenched challenges. With a focus on the most disadvantaged groups, namely; care leavers, those with experience of the criminal justice system and NEET referrals from VCS partners, the programme offers

outreach activity, employment coaching, careers guidance and IAG, skills tuition, world of work experiences, access to therapeutic support, access to employment, education and training opportunities and support to sustain these outcomes.

Working with Central London Forward, the council has also secured funding to deliver the Covid response Connected Communities programme. Due to go live in the coming months, this piece of work will provide the capacity for additional and targeted support for vulnerable young adults aged 18-24 and 25+.

There has been a healthy level of interest to support the YES Programme across a wide variety of sectors, including growth areas with 63 employer partnerships developed to provide placements, training, and employment opportunities to beneficiaries.

**4.5 Recommendation 5: Building on the experience of developing and implementing the Recovery Curriculum, Islington Community of Schools should create 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.**

**Response:**

The Islington Recovery Curriculum was co designed by New River College and the Council's School Improvement Team to support schools and pupils on the return to face to face education as a result of national lockdowns.

A bank of resources was created by officers across the Council including Cultural Enrichment, World of Work, Music Education, Early Years, School Improvement and Health and Well Being Teams to support the mental health and well being of children and families. These resources were created weekly and focussed on physical and outdoor activities to support children's return to school following the first national lockdown. The resources can be found at <https://www.islingtoncs.org/home-learning>

Additional resources were created to support transition of Y6 to secondary school. These resources were available for families and schools in order to support those pupils in Y6 who had been most affected by the first national lockdown. These resources can be located [here](#). All resources were supported and underpinned by the Islington Recovery Curriculum

Resources were also created for families to access during the summer holidays in 2020. These resources supported children and young people engage with a range of activities that centred on mental health and wellbeing.

The mental health and wellbeing in schools group, established early in the pandemic, has continued to support schools by developing, curating and sharing appropriate guidance and resources, as well as keeping schools up to date with service changes and offers. The group has also led on the delivery of the 2021/22 Wellbeing for Education Recovery grant from the DfE.

Resources and training were shared with schools via Schools Bulletin, posted on Islington CS and referenced to at Head Teacher, Governor meetings, as well as through CPD events for all Islington teachers.

These resources were particularly supportive during the first national lockdown, but guidance changed in January 2021 and schools were required to provide learning linked to the national curriculum.

**4.6 Recommendation 6: The council should highlight its support services for teaching and support staff who may be suffering PTSD because of bereavement for colleagues and/or family.**

**Response:**

At the start of the pandemic the Schools HR team, School Improvement team and Education Psychology Service reviewed the Schools Guidance on Bereavement and updated this to reflect the impact of the pandemic. Whilst the RHR guidance developed to support schools are not PTSD specific, they provide support to schools for staff impacted by the pandemic. The Schools HR service is a traded service so does not support all schools but the feedback from those that access the service does not suggest that there is an unmet need for support for PTSD. The updated guidance was circulated to schools, together with useful booklets and guidance from specialist bereavement organisations and specific Covid-19 guidance.

All schools have access to the Employment Assistance Programme that is offered by the Council. The Employee Assistance programme (EAP) provides free counselling and other support for school staff. Arrangements for additional bespoke support can also be made through the EAP and Occupational Health (e.g., on-site / remote counselling for staff). Support for pupils is available through CAMHS and Education Psychology Service. Links to additional support organisations are available through the guidance sent to schools and information on IslingtonCS.

**Loss and Bereavement Guidance for Schools**

- <https://www.islingtoncs.org/node/12804>
- <https://www.islingtoncs.org/node/12803>

**Staff Wellbeing:**

**<https://www.islingtoncs.org/node/18575>**

The Educational Psychology Service in Islington also offer crisis response to any school experiencing a critical incident, and this includes bereavement.

In addition to this, Public Health provided training in bereavement awareness delivered by Cruse bereavement Support. Many schools staff accessed this training which gave simple information about supporting others who are bereaved and signposting to bereavement support staff.

Going forward all schools will be required to appoint/nominate a Senior Mental Health lead who is part of the senior leadership team in schools. Training to support this new role is being offered by the Islington Health and Well Being Team. An information session for schools was held on 3 February 2022. Approximately 30 schools attending this meeting to gain an overview of the training that will be provided. This will be a significant piece of work going forward to support schools.

**4.7 Recommendation 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 in parks or adventure playgrounds that still need upgrading. The parks team should**

**develop a comprehensive map of all those areas, listing their distinctive features and facilities to raise awareness by schools and parents/carers to widen usage.**

**Response:**

Throughout the pandemic, Islington kept under review the position on access to parks so that as soon as national Covid guidance and evidence of risk and conditions permitted safe access, communities were able to access open spaces to mitigate the risk of mental health issues exacerbated by isolation and to promote play and physical activity.

[The Parks Service](https://islingtoncouncil.sharepoint.com/:b/s/HealthyParks/ESf0M-mVemFGvcczbGaGJDUBLB-f_8fjm9xdbH2YcswtWw?e=kLKbtb) have a number of funded projects strategy that are delivering play improvements for young people in the borough. More information of this Council commitment can be found in the Parks for Health Strategy accessed through the following link:

[https://islingtoncouncil.sharepoint.com/:b/s/HealthyParks/ESf0M-mVemFGvcczbGaGJDUBLB-f\\_8fjm9xdbH2YcswtWw?e=kLKbtb](https://islingtoncouncil.sharepoint.com/:b/s/HealthyParks/ESf0M-mVemFGvcczbGaGJDUBLB-f_8fjm9xdbH2YcswtWw?e=kLKbtb)

The following improvements have been completed or are currently in progress:

The following projects have now been completed:

- Radnor Street Gardens
- King Square Gardens
- Replacement Water Play features at Whittington Park, Highbury Fields and Barnard Park

Further playgrounds are scheduled for improvement. The service is also working with the Islington Communications Team as part of the Parks for Health Programme to make significant improvements to how the facilities in our parks are communicated and how they can benefit children's and all residents' health and wellbeing. Through our collaboration with Bright Start and The Garden Classroom, more activities and programmes for young people are being hosted in our parks which bring young people into those spaces and encourages them to use them more personal lives.

The use of the PHE Better Mental Health Fund (see response to recommendation 1) in Islington has had a focus on access to green space and collaborative working between Bright start, Bright Futures and our parks team. This included a programme of activity (including outdoor learning) for 0-5s, for 5-19s, as well as intergenerational events (including the activities detailed above). In addition, funds supported increased weekend access to adventure playgrounds for families in overcrowded households, and to schools during the school day. The Acorn club was also supported through this fund to provide 2 weekly holiday programmes for disadvantaged young people to connect with nature.

**Learning and pedagogy:**

**4.8 Recommendation 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 lockdown periods over the next year and beyond.**

**Response:**

Between May 2020 and April 2021 over 7000 devices were distributed to Islington children, through working in partnership with charitable organisations and through the provision of devices by the Department for Education (DfE). Work was carried out during this period with schools and council services to establish how many devices were needed to ensure all children had access to a device. Internet connectivity increased during this period with the provision of SIM cards and Wi-Fi dongles from different providers.

Since this recommendation, the situation regarding school closures has altered as schools are now fully open and have less dependency on remote learning. A small number of schools have had to close temporarily owing to staffing capacity and, in all instances, have been able to move swiftly to remote learning because they have access to devices and learning resources.

A survey of schools will be carried out in the summer term to establish if this position remains the case and if it is identified that additional devices are required, partnership work with charitable organisations and schools will resume to try to secure additional devices and fund internet connectivity for children who do not have access.

**4.9 Recommendation 9: The council should support schools to gain further understanding of effective learning platforms through undertaking additional research and obtaining best practice models. Officers should also provide better guidance on GDPR aspects of remote learning.**

**Response:**

Schools supported each other through informal network arrangements to share good practice and put in place CPD opportunities to upskill staff. This was supported by the School Improvement service through provision of a model remote model learning policy. In addition to this, The London Grid for Learning ICT Acceptable Use Agreement was updated to reflect the implications of remote learning.

Following the return of schools in March 2021, the DfE requested all schools review and update their remote learning provision. While not a statutory requirement, schools were encouraged to undertake this evaluation so that they were better prepared should the need arise again. Some of our primary schools participated in the Plan London Evidence-based research project working with School Improvement and EYFS teams, LGFL and the DfE Technology Demonstrator Team to produce a best practice policy and guidance for teaching and learning to support subject leaders in schools.

A School Teaching and Learning Policy and planning guidance has been updated to include outcomes from <https://sites.google.com/leacademytrust.co.uk/remoteteachinglegacy/home> and updated safeguarding guidance for staff and parents <https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety/default.aspx>

**4.10 Recommendation 10: In order to encourage more primary age children to engage positively with remote learning, Islington Council should provide training for teachers on how to deliver live interactive lessons as part of its CPD programme. Supplementary school and community organisation teaching staff should also be able to access training.**

**Response:**

Schools supported each other through informal network meetings to agree good practice for sessions with Primary aged children. Schools considered timetabling arrangements so that all

pupils had the opportunity to access live interactive lessons. In many situations this proved challenging particularly for those families that were trying to support more than one child. Feedback from schools indicated that they prioritised daily face to face registration at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day as well as online assemblies. This enabled children and young people to see themselves as a community despite the lockdown restrictions that were in place.

During the summer term 2021, 10 schools (primary and secondary) met with School Improvement to review the impact of delivering live interactive lessons. All schools who responded highlighted that the response to moving to remote learning required significant CPD at pace to meet the needs of learners. When pupils were interviewed they indicated that they preferred a diet of live and recorded sessions to support them during extended periods of lockdown. Many pupils felt that watching recorded sessions supported them better so that they could practice and understand more complex learning, in order to then apply the learning to independent tasks set by their teachers.

As a consequence of recommendation 4.9, plans are in place to share this work more widely with schools. The first planned event to share effective practice is scheduled for the 27 January 2022. This offer will be made to all teachers, teaching assistants and supplementary schools and community organisations.

**4.11 Recommendation 11: The council should provide support for parents/carers who find it difficult to help their children with online learning, especially those who have English as a Second Language (ESOL) or have barriers to literacy. This support should cover IT training and basic English and maths.**

**Response:**

Support for parents and carers with English as a second language is promoted on the [Islington Council website](#) signposting a range of support to learn English.

[Islington Adult Community Learning \(IACL\)](#) provides a range of resources to support parents and carers through the Covid-19 pandemic with an exciting skills and employment training offer that is free for Islington residents. This includes the following:



**Digital Skills**  
10 courses available  
Need to learn about emails or the internet? Our computer classes takes you on your first steps in a supportive and friendly environment.



**English**  
2 courses available  
Range of courses, starting from Entry level 1 right up to level 2 that will help you along your journey towards Functional Skills L2 English, further education and employment.



**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**  
2 courses available  
Designed for those whose first language is not English. Classes are run in a variety of venues in Islington, starting in September, January and April, and offered at pre-entry to level 1.



**Family Learning**  
5 courses available  
We run a range of programmes supporting parents, carers and children to learn in fun and safe environments. Some of our courses are accredited but most are just for the joy of learning and to help families grow and enjoy their lives together. We run courses in children's centres, schools, parks and community venues all over Islington.



**Maths**  
2 courses available  
Range of Maths courses, starting from Entry level 3 right up to level 2, which will help you along your journey towards Functional Skills L2 Maths, further education and employment.

The ACL service has enrolled 296 parents of children aged 0-18 over the Autumn term 21/22. This represents an increase of approximately 25%, or 64 learners, when compared to the same period last year. The lifting of social restrictions enabling Family Learning provision that traditionally attracts parents has been a major factor in this increase. In addition, as ways of working revert to more typical models, schools are more open to having family learning, with Family Language sessions taking place at Drayton Park and New North Academy are planned; ESOL classes at Hungerford and family learning reading at Ambler Children's Centre.

ESOL and English classes have also improved, with the number of learners enrolled on courses at this point in the year above this time last year. The service is delivering weekly face-to-face initial assessments in English and Maths from February and ESOL face-to-face initial assessments from March.

The Council's Adult Community Learning Service has been supporting the new Afghan refugee parents with language classes based at Finsbury Library. In addition, a wider need was highlighted by staff from Hungerford School, which led to the service offering basic ESOL classes for parents there.

**4.12 Recommendation 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 the council and schools. Consideration should also be given to those early years children unable to attend centres during lockdown.**

Early Years settings and schools reported that they hand delivered books or other learning materials directly to families where they were aware that they wouldn't be able to access these remotely.

[During the first national](#) lockdown, the School Improvement Service supported schools to provide [hard copies for learning](#). These hard copies focussed primarily on English and Maths from Reception to Year 6. Approximately 8,000 learning packs were distributed by the School Improvement Service during the first lockdown. This was then moved online but schools were able to print and share hard packs where required. This was further developed in creating the [Islington CS Home Learning Page](#). As a result schools were then able to access a bank of resources that extended beyond [English and Maths](#) that they could download and print for their individual communities. Feedback from schools through network meetings was positive and it helped school leaders respond to the individual needs of families.

## **Funding**

**4.13 Recommendation 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 its partners in the north Central London Clinical Commissioning Group (NCLCCG), extend council services for mental health and well-being both for parents/carers and children and young people.
- Underpin sustainability for early years and Bright Start provision 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 (BAME) and White British ones.

**Response:**

The Leader and council secured Central London Forward funding to deliver the COVID response Connected Communities programme. Officers have continued to support the Leader and the council to campaign for increased funding. This has included meeting regularly with the regional DfE advisers to escalate local issues.

**Support to schools and settings to provide COVID related safe environments was provided by:**

- Coordination with the BECC, officers were able to ensure that there was sufficient PPE available to schools and settings.
- Additional digital devices were readily available and co-ordinated by officers to support schools to provide targeted resources to the most vulnerable (see Recommendation 8)
- Officers supported schools to ensure that the national tutoring programmes were swiftly implemented and supported council to lobby the Department of Education for additional funding for the National Tutoring Programme which influenced the decision by the DfE to allow schools to employ tutors directly through the school rather than through teaching agencies and funding for the National Tutoring Programme increased.
- Coordinating a system wide response to the delivery of meal vouchers/food parcels to support families during the pandemic
- Coordinated the borough wide implementation of the Holiday and Food programme during the Easter, Summer and Winter holidays of 2021 and the continuation of this programme
- The implementation of the borough wide Safer Streets Campaign that supported schools and settings to be a safer/quieter place for dropping off and collecting pupils throughout the pandemic

**Support to extend council services for mental health and well-being both for parents/carers and children and young people was provided by:**

- An undertaking by NCL to put in place an immediate resource to reduce wait times for mental health assessments with a longer term plan to reduce wait times to 18 weeks (NICE guidelines) by 2023. See recommendation 1.
- Additional funding was secured for a project focussing on young Black Men and Mental Health to be delivered through schools and the community

**Support to underpin sustainability for early years and Bright Start provision where working from home during lockdown and increased loss of employment threaten the viability of many settings and services was provided by:**

- Early years providers, including childminders, were supported to apply for the Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG), Covid funds distributed by the Council for loss of income. £1,063,300 was distributed as a main grant and top up grant to 114 providers in total (46 private, voluntary and independent nurseries and 68 childminders).
- Providers were also encouraged and signposted to attend sustainability and business workshops run by external sector specific organisations
- Officers reported concerns from Early Years providers directly to the DfE

**Financial and in kind support for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and White British ones was provided through:**

- We are Islington – Islington response to food and welfare needs in the borough
- Bright Start Services providing food parcels and period products to families involved with family support and children social care services
- With support of council services, officers worked closely with Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools and other voluntary organisations to engage with families and young people
- An extensive Mother Tongue Supplementary School summer programme was made available during summer 2021
- Additional reading resources were provided to all Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools to support children and young people to have access to high quality texts during lockdown periods
- Through the coordination support provided by the Islington Library Resource Centre, all schools received additional reading boxes to support the most vulnerable families in primary schools
- Through the Richard Reeves Foundation additional support was provided to schools and pupils in primary schools to participate in the Year 5 catch up programme, written and prepared by School Improvement

Despite reduced funding from Central Government over the last 12 years, the Council has continued to protect vital youth services in the borough. The Leader and the Council have campaigned for increased Government funding for Council services for many years, including passing a motion at Full Council in December 2021. We commit to continuing to campaign for better funding for local government, to support the council in making Islington a more equal place.

**Communications:**

**4.14 Recommendation 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 governing bodies 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.**

**Response:**

Islington Council, School Improvement, schools and settings have worked collaboratively and swiftly to communicate changes to guidance throughout the various lockdowns, examinations and the provision of digital devices. Weekly meetings with education leaders (including governors) across Islington, provided the opportunity to hear concerns and to facilitate a rapid response. This included such matters as food vouchers, digital devices, summer holiday programmes, supporting parents and various voluntary sector groups so that solutions to concerns and issues were resolved quickly.

Regular meetings with the Department of Education (DfE) were an opportunity for School Improvement Officers to provide feedback on changing guidance and when necessary, escalate emerging issues.

### **Developments post-COVID:**

**4.15 Recommendation 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.**

#### **Response:**

The pandemic has helped to strengthen the relationships with schools, and this has helped shape our new approach. This has included the sharing of a draft Education Strategy and the priorities within it. These priorities will address the inequity of experience for vulnerable children and young people that has been exacerbated during the pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the need for collaboration and the strength of Local Authority Support. An Education Board is being established to drive the delivery of the Education Strategy through collaboration with all schools and settings.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Financial implications:**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

The projects to deliver play improvements for young people in the borough under recommendation 7 are part of the Council's funded capital programme across both the Greenspace and Leisure Service and the Council's Adventure Play Service. £4m of capital investment is planned for the parks estate over the next two years, £700k is being spent on Martin Luther King and Cornwallis Adventure Playgrounds by Summer 2022, with further investment planned in Hayward Adventure Playground. The adventure play facilities at Toffee Park will also benefit from the wider refurbishment of facilities at Toffee Park / Radnor Gardens. This scheme has an overall capital budget of £3m.

There has been significant spend during the pandemic to support children and families in relation to attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice. This includes, but is not limited to:

	<b>2020/21 Spend £k</b>	<b>2021/22 Estimate £k</b>	<b>Total £k</b>
Provision of home learning packs, laptops and reading support to for pupils while they were undertaking schooling from home.	156	54	210
Provision of free school meals during school holidays when the government did not provide support	166	0	166
Support to carers to meet the increased cost of caring for young people while they were at home	162	0	162
Additional costs in relation to safeguarding young people due to the pandemic	312	0	312
Underwriting net loss of income in Children's Centres and holiday childcare provision due to the pandemic	1,559	565	2,124
Additional support to maintain the universal youth offer by offsetting income pressures due to the pandemic	325	355	680
Additional support to Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools over the summer	15	0	15
Additional cleaning in BSF schools	83	84	167
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,778</b>	<b>1,058</b>	<b>3,868</b>

In addition the Council received:

- The Covid Winter Grant of £1.182m for the period 1 December 2020 to 16 April 2021 which enabled local authorities to provide support households experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty during the pandemic. This included the provision of free school meals during the school holidays. 80% of the grant was ring-fenced for households with children.

- The Covid Local Support Grant of £1.032m for the period 17 April to 20 June 2021 to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

These grants have now been superseded by the Household Support Fund of £2.218m to support households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills meet other essential living costs or housing costs. This grant is for the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The Public Health England (PHE) Better Mental Health Fund is focussed on the mental health impacts of COVID 19, and ensuring that these are rapidly addressed. Islington received a grant of £347k to be spent in 2021/22.

Schools have received the following funding from the government to support them with covid recovery:

<b>Grant</b>	<b>2020/21 £k</b>	<b>2021/22 £k</b>	<b>Total £k</b>
Catch-up funding	1,058	755	1,813
National Tutoring Programme – Academic Mentors	24	83	107
School-led tutoring grant	0	765	765
Recovery premium	0	814	814
	<b>1,081</b>	<b>2,417</b>	<b>3,498</b>

Further funding for schools has been committed to by the DfE for future years – estimated allocations are below:

<b>Grant – estimated allocations</b>	<b>2022/23 £k</b>	<b>2023/24 £k</b>	<b>2024/25 £k</b>
School-led tutoring grant	1,249	642	146
Recovery premium	1,918	1,105	0
	<b>3,167</b>	<b>1,747</b>	<b>146</b>

## 6.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report

## 6.3 Environmental Implications

The actions proposed in this report do not have any environmental implications beyond those associated with standard office usage and are unlikely to significantly change the existing impacts of the services.

## 6.4 Resident Impact Assessment

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and

those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

## **7 Reason for recommendations**

This report details the response to recommendations from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

**Background papers:** None

**Appendices:** None

Final report clearance:

**Signed by:**



*15 March 2022*

**Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families**

**Date**

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