



# Making Children Visible



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

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June 2023

# Foreword

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The Islington Together 2030 Plan sets out the council's aspirations to create a more equal future for those living in the borough. The Plan includes the commitment that by 2030 Islington should be a place where all children and young people are rooted in a community where they feel safe, can thrive and are able to be part of and lead change.

Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 2022-3 (the Committee) were interested and curious in how this aspiration relates to children who, for a variety of reasons, might be less visible to council services. These might be children who have experienced the care system or who have a social worker. It includes children educated at home and those with special educational needs as well as those who have experience of the youth justice system.

In 2021 The Children's Commissioner's conducted a consultation exercise called The Big Ask which entailed asking children about their lives, their priorities, their worries, and their hopes for the future. The report highlighted,

*"the importance of in-depth qualitative research in bringing children's voices to the forefront of policy development and evaluation. Children are the experts in their own life experience, and they know best what needs to change to improve the lives of children."*<sup>1</sup>

The Committee concur that children are the experts in their own life experience which is why we undertook to meet as many children and young people as possible, along with the family members and professionals who care for and support them in different ways, and to ask them whether they felt listened to and how they could be better supported.

We wanted to understand the extent to which, across services that affect children, there is a focus at the council on improving the visibility of vulnerable children and ensuring there are equitable processes and inclusive practices in place that enable the voice of the child and young person to be heard and to influence services.

In undertaking the review, the Committee met with young people, community partners and colleagues from across the borough.

We heard at first hand how transitions of any kind are especially difficult for vulnerable children and how a relational approach, with continuity of staff and placements, and consistency of approach, works best for children who have had difficult experiences. We saw that interventions work well when professionals meet children and young people where they are - whether that be physically – in their local neighbourhoods, youth hubs or sports grounds – or emotionally.

We found that children and young people have plenty to tell us about their experience of living in Islington and lots of ideas for how things can be done better. Many of them are already making the effort through a variety of forums to feed in their ideas and share their lived experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings from The Big Ask, Children in Care (January 2023)

(<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/childrens-social-care-putting-childrens-voices-at-the-heart-of-reform/>)

We met young people who were assured and ambitious and resilient and we got a strong sense from them that they are looking for a sense of belonging and community.

The evidence gathered reveals some excellent and inspiring work being done by officers in the Children's Services department and by local community partners. In fact, during the scrutiny year Ofsted undertook a focused visit to look at the local authority's arrangements for care experienced children and young people<sup>2</sup>. It found that,

*“Care experienced children and young people in Islington benefit from teams of highly committed, ambitious and determined professionals who work extremely well together, helping the children and young people to remain safe and to achieve in life. Strong collaborative work with partner agencies is reflected through shared corporate priorities in strategic plans.... Most pathway plans strongly reflect the voice of the young person and sensitively explain the complexity of the issues that they face.”*

This is encouraging, but, knowing that Islington Council aspires to do even better for our children and young people, we offer 10 recommendations that have emerged from our year of scrutiny.

The recommendations are grouped under three broad objectives, (i) to further understand and consider the current and future challenges for children and young people who may be at risk of invisibility to the children's system and how the council is responding to these; (ii) to explore how support to attend school, learn and prepare for the world of work can be strengthened for children and young people with a social worker, who are care-experienced and vulnerable adolescents; and (iii) to assess how the voice of children and young people can be strengthened across the children's system to further influence the planning and delivery of support and services, in equitable and inclusive ways.

The Committee would like to convey its sincere thanks to the schools and youth clubs that invited us to visit them and to the foster carers, youth workers, council officers, parents, policy experts, and other professionals who provided their insights and expert input.

We are especially grateful to the children and young people and their parents who took the time to share their lived experiences with us. Meeting with the children and young people as part of this piece of work was really inspiring and it has left us all feeling optimistic for the future.



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**Councillor Sheila Chapman**

**Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor for Junction Ward

London Borough of Islington

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<sup>2</sup> The letter summarising the findings of the focused visit to Islington local authority children's services on 19 and 20 October 2022 can be accessed online: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80505>

# Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 2022-23 Membership

## COUNCILLORS



**Councillor Valerie  
Bossman-Quarshie**  
(Vice-Chair)  
Bunhill ward



**Councillor Janet Burgess**  
**MBE**  
Junction ward



**Councillor Sheila Chapman**  
(Chair)  
Junction ward



**Councillor Fin Craig**  
Arsenal ward



**Councillor Ernestas  
Jegorovas-Armstrong**  
Highbury ward



**Councillor Rosaline Ogunro**  
St Peter's & Canalside ward



**Councillor Gulcin Ozdemir**  
Tufnell Park ward



**Councillor Saiqa Pandor**  
St Mary's and St James' ward

## CO-OPTED MEMBERS

**Mary Clement**  
(Roman Catholic Diocese)

**Jon Stansfield**  
(Parent Governor rep:  
Primary Schools)

**Zaleera Wallace**  
(Parent Governor rep:  
Secondary Schools)

## Acknowledgements

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

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**ARSENAL IN THE COMMUNITY**

**DISABILITY ACTION IN ISLINGTON**

**HOME EDUCATED FAMILIES**

**ISLINGTON FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION**

**ISLINGTON'S  
LIBRARY SERVICE**

**ISLINGTON'S  
TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT WORKERS**

**JOSH HARSANT, BARNARDO'S**

**THE STAFF AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF  
THE YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE.**

**THE STAFF AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF  
LIFT YOUTH HUB.**

**THE STAFF AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF  
NEW RIVER COLLEGE (PRIMARY)**

**THE STAFF AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF  
PLATFORM YOUTH HUB.**

**THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

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## Officer Support

Akeel Ahmed, Assistant Director of Community Learning & Libraries

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services

Curtis Ashton, Director of Young Islington

Gwen Fitzpatrick, Head of Bright Start & Community Wellbeing South

Jon Abbey, Director of Children's Services

Jo Collins, Operational Lead for Children & Young Peoples Services, Family Nurse Practitioner & LAC

Matthew Blood, Head of the Virtual School

Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning & Culture

Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy

Zoe Lewis, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Theo McLean, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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# Executive Summary

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## Making Children Visible

### Aim:

To assess the way the council works to improve the visibility of vulnerable children and ensure that there are equitable processes and inclusive practices that enable the voice of these children and young people to influence the support and services for them to thrive.

### Evidence:

The Committee commenced the review in July 2022. Evidence was received from a variety of sources:

#### Evidence Sessions with:

- Arsenal in the Community
- Islington Foster Carers Association (IFCA)
- Lift Youth Hub
- New River College Primary
- Platform Youth Hub
- Youth Justice Service and its Peer Advocates
- Disability Action in Islington (DAII)
- Electively Home Educating Families
- Islington Libraries
- Targeted Youth Support
- The House Project
- The Virtual School

#### Evidence From Council Officers

- Akeel Ahmed, Assistant Director, Community Learning & Libraries
- Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services
- Curtis Ashton, Director of Young Islington.
- Laura Eden, Director, Safeguarding and Family Support
- Raj Jolota, Children and Young People's Participation Officer
- Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning and Achievement
- Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy

#### Other Evidence

- Children's Services Scrutiny Meeting, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022 – Presentations from Akeel Ahmed, Assistant Director of Community Learning & Libraries, Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services and a joint presentation from Gwen Fitzpatrick, Head of Bright Start & Community Wellbeing South and Jo Collins, Operational Lead for Children & Young Peoples Services, Family Nurse Practitioner and Looked After Children
- Children's Services Scrutiny Meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – Presentations from Curtis Ashton, Director of Young Islington, Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding & Family Support, and Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning & Achievement
- Children's Services Scrutiny Meeting, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 – Presentations from Josh Harsant, Head of Voice & Influence at Barnardo's and Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy

#### Documentary Evidence

- Policy: Insight Briefing, February 2023 – Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy.

# Introduction

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- 1.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee reviews one main topic each year. For the 2022-23 Municipal Year, the topic was "Making Children Visible".
- 1.2 This was a broad review, focused on how the council works to improve the visibility of vulnerable children and ensure that there are equitable processes and inclusive practices that enable the voice of these children and young people to influence the support and services for them to thrive.
- 1.3 The Committee also agreed to the following objectives:
  - To further understand and consider the current and future challenges for children and young people who may be at risk of invisibility to the children's system and how the council is responding to these.
  - To explore how support to attend school, learn and prepare for the world of work can be strengthened for the following children and young people at risk:
    - Children with a social worker.
    - Care-experienced young people.
    - Vulnerable adolescents.
  - To look at whether where a child attends primary school affects outcomes (for example, in terms of securing earlier diagnosis/support/intervention).
- 1.4 The review was undertaken by the Committee between July 2022 and March 2023
- 1.5 In undertaking the review, the Committee met with young people, community partners and colleagues from across the borough, to look at the support services in place for children and young people; how it was provided, whether there were any areas for improvements, and particularly, how the voices of children and young people can be heard in decisions that affect them.





# Summary of findings and main evidence

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- 2.1 The Committee's evidence was collected via a series of visits, calls, meetings and papers, which were collected throughout the duration of the 2022-23 municipal year and is detailed in the sections below.
- 2.2 From the evidence received, the Committee made several findings in respect of the review into Making Children Visible and from this, have made recommendations, which are outlined on Page 50 of this report.
- 2.3 Several common themes emerged from the evidence. These include:
- (i) Transitions, which can be especially challenging for vulnerable children.
  - (ii) The impact for looked after children of being cared for out-of-borough in terms of making it harder to access support/services.
  - (iii) The importance of the council taking every opportunity to be a collaborative and proactive partner.



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## 2.4 Evidence Gathering Sessions - Findings

### 2.5 The Virtual School

2.6 In Autumn 2022, the Committee began their evidence gathering by meeting with the Head of the Islington Virtual School for care experienced children and young people (The Virtual School).

2.7 Since 2014, there has been a legal requirement for every local authority to promote the education of current and former looked after children (LAC), and every local authority was required by law to have a Virtual School Head.

2.8 Local authorities are legally required to appoint one officer (a virtual school head). Islington has a team of twelve professionals including teachers. The team monitor the educational progress and outcomes of looked after children and provide advice, support and challenge to schools and social workers.



2.9 Children supported by the Virtual School attended many school settings. Their progress was tracked and monitored, and they were supported as if they attended one school. Islington's

Virtual School supported young people up to the age of 25, whereas some virtual schools only supported young people up to the age of 16 or 18.

- 2.10 Since September 2021, Virtual Schools have had a remit to promote the education of children with a social worker. The service provided did not replicate that of the service for looked after children, as the council was not the Corporate Parent of this group. The Virtual School had a more strategic role for this cohort around developing best practice in schools and with social workers.
- 2.11 In terms of how the voice of the child was captured at the Virtual School; each term, each child had a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting. As part of this meeting, a pupil's views were considered, with a series of prompts e.g. asking about the pupil's experiences of school, their attitude, whether they felt they needed any further support, their aspirations and which people helped them most.
- 2.12 Lots of children attended their PEP meetings, but some did not want to e.g. if they did not want to be taken out of lessons. Where children chose not to attend, the Virtual School tried to capture their voice by encouraging carers, social workers or Virtual School staff to talk to them.
- 2.13 Every child had an advisory teacher who was usually a consistent person throughout their school career. They knew the child well and captured the journey of the child meeting them three times a year.
- 2.14 In terms of how the voice of those aged 18-25, specifically, was captured, Islington was proactive at keeping in touch with these young people and contact was made regularly, over and above the 8-week statutory requirement. The service is there for them if they had any difficulties. Young people were very complimentary of the service when they gave Ofsted feedback at their recent inspection
- 2.15 A wide range of enrichment activities were held, with many held in the school holidays where staff could meet children directly.
- 2.16 A project called the Chrysalis Project will soon be starting and run with Highgate School Foundation. Children would attend on a Saturday once a month, would develop skills and there would be motivational speeches and opportunities for staff to talk to children. A weekly homework club was run with Arsenal in the Community. Two, weekly residential trips were held annually; one for younger children and one for care experienced young people.
- 2.17 In terms of engaging those not engaging with schools, this was more of a challenge. However, these young people still had PEP meetings and the Virtual School's advisory teachers undertook home visits to speak to young people and foster carers, invited them to Elwood Street to talk to staff, provided careers advice and built relationships with young people.
- 2.18 Work with schools on issues of inequality and disproportionality was undertaken in partnership with them, to help them develop good practice, advise them about undertaking a needs analysis and adopt a trauma informed approach when managing challenging behaviour. Matthew Blood advised that he was part of the headteacher's network, was invited into schools to speak to senior leadership teams, ran whole school training and supported schools to develop best practice e.g. in relation to gender, ethnicity and LGBTQIA+ issues. The Virtual School, worked with any school and not just those with looked after children.
- 2.19 Many looked after children had challenging needs and had complex childhoods. Inevitably there could be problems with attendance, exclusions and behaviours. The Virtual School monitored and tracked attendance daily and if patterns of non-attendance were found, these were followed up straight away.

- 2.20 Where the Virtual School considered that the needs of a young person were not being met, they would advocate on behalf of the child and challenge the school to do things differently. As the Virtual School controlled the pupil premium, they could advise how this should be spent.
- 2.21 It was an amazing achievement that there were no permanent exclusions in 2021, and this was partly due to schools knowing that exclusions would be challenged by the Virtual School and where schools had advised they were unable to meet a child's needs, the Virtual School worked with them to help meet the needs or help find alternative provision. The Virtual School also worked with schools on alternatives to fixed term exclusions as these children had usually experienced rejection in their lives and fixed term exclusions could be counterproductive. Work took place with schools on their approach to behaviour; some schools had a trauma-informed approach and others had a behaviourist approach with rewards and sanctions.
- 2.22 Concerning children with severe neurodevelopment disorders, the Virtual School's LAC cohort included children with severe impairments, some who required specialist care, and some who were non-verbal, physically disabled or had autism/ADHD. There was a broad spectrum of neurodiversity, and these children were supported within the framework. 30% of the cohort had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the needs of children were high and increasing. Work took place with colleagues working in Special Educational Needs (SEN), care, and learning disabilities. There were tools to capture the voice of non-verbal children and specialists could help with this.
- 2.23 There were approximately 350 looked after children and 650 care leavers. Unfortunately, financial and capacity issues meant those with severe neurodevelopment disorders weren't able to take part in enrichment activities, had to be signposted to other services.
- 2.24 The Virtual School's in Education, Employment or Training (EET) target was set three years ago at 70% for Care experienced young people aged 18 -21. In the 2020-21, the actual figure was recorded as 63.7%, which is higher than that of statistical neighbours. An ambitious programme is being undertaken to improve this figure.
- 2.25 Challenges for LAC include poor mental health, being unaccompanied asylum seekers, going missing from care and experiencing custody. This was a complex group of young people. Becoming an adult after being in care is difficult. Care leavers are expected to live independently, work and manage housing and benefits and their health from the age of 18 which is not the case for young people living within families.

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## 2.26 Arsenal in the Community

2.27 The Committee continued its evidence gathering, with a visit to Arsenal in the Community.

2.28 The Arsenal Foundation was a grant-giving trust, but Arsenal in the Community does not have charitable status as it is attached to the football club.

2.29 The purpose of Arsenal in the Community was 'Sense of Belonging' and they formed a small department of the larger Arsenal football club.

2.30 Arsenal in the Community was involved in pan-London work as well as national work and runs more than 30 projects including primary, secondary, post 16 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), Pan Disability and Inclusion Programmes.



Figure 1 A session at Arsenal in the Community

2.31 There were nine estate-based and park-based programmes. Most of these were funded by the Council.

2.32 Work took place with the police and the council to identify areas with higher rates of youth crime and unemployment where programmes could most benefit the local community. The programmes were essentially youth clubs where football was the main activity. Attendees were supported and there were links with other services.

2.33 Arsenal in the Community worked with the Brandon Centre which offered counselling and psychotherapy for young people up to the age of 25.

2.34 There were programmes for women and girls. It was acknowledged that many girls dropped out of sport as teenagers, and it was hoped programmes such as these would lead to a reduction in the numbers dropping out of sport.

2.35 In general programmes were male dominated but Arsenal in the Community was working with groups with female cohorts e.g. The Scouts, to try and increase female engagement, and did engage with Muslim girls also, with Committee members pledging to help boost engagement for this group. In addition, there were four or five female staff and trained counsellors offered support in an informal way.

2.36 In general, the social inclusion programmes were drop-in sessions. There was a diverse cohort. Attendees were helped to overcome barriers. Staff engaged young people, listened to them, built trust and rapport with young people and helped address their concerns.

- 2.37 Most programmes were long term and were designed to meet local need. They created a safe space on a consistent basis.
- 2.38 Promotion of programmes was mainly through schools and word of mouth as this generated a good turnout and wider promotion could encourage a lot of non-local interest.
- 2.39 Parents did not have to disclose if their child had additional needs if they did not want to.
- 2.40 Arsenal in the Community took referrals from schools and services such as Targeted Youth Support.
- 2.41 There were 60-65 sessional coaches. A large percentage of these were local young people who were previous participants and were now involved in coaching or youth work. In addition, there were professional staff who were able to support the team with young people with complex issues.
- 2.42 A member asked if young people aged out of the programmes and was advised that they did not and consequently more age group sessions were added to the programme. Some attendees were in their late 20s and were still very engaged. This benefited younger attendees who had positive role models to look up to. Arsenal in the Community had a good record of participants who had become staff.
- 2.43 The football coaching provided was not high-level coaching. The sessions were about connecting with local young people, having fun and giving young people positive role models.
- 2.44 There was an employability programme to provide support, work opportunities e.g., in the stadium on match days and through links with the council.
- 2.45 The connection to Arsenal Football Club helped engage young people.
- 2.46 A member asked if Arsenal players were involved in the work of Arsenal in the Community and was advised that they were sometimes involved. There was a new project funded externally for players personal and social development. Many players donated to the Arsenal Foundation or their own foundations.
- 2.47 The council had recently put more blue badge parking on Queensland Road which had improved accessibility.
- 2.48 At a recent park session, some young people were nearby inhaling nitrous oxide. Council services were contacted, and detached youth workers attended to speak to these young people about their choices.
- 2.49 While Arsenal in the Community would consider working with youth hubs such as Platform, these hubs already had established programmes of their own, so it was more beneficial to work elsewhere.
- 2.50 There was a programme run in partnership with the council for care experienced young people and it was possible that some care experienced young people attended other sessions without declaring that they were care experienced. Young people only declared what they wanted to declare to staff.
- 2.51 Work took place with New River College and staff visited each week to undertake football training and classroom work. Once a year, an accredited course was undertaken. This provided the young people with a sense of achievement.

- 2.52 There was an adult mental health programme run with the NHS and there was also a programme for amputees.
- 2.53 There was a sensory room in the Emirates Stadium for families to enjoy football matches without sensory overstimulation. Training manuals had also been developed for all stewards for engaging with children with autism.
- 2.54 There was more parental engagement at primary level than at secondary level as once young people reached their teenage years, they did not always want their parents involved. Arsenal in the Community aimed to have as few barriers to participation as possible.

### FIRST HAND OBSERVATIONS

Several staff were on-hand to engage with both the young people and parents.

Most children in the younger groups wore their own kit to sessions. For the older groups, a lot of football boots and trainers were donated.

The session observed, was a mixed group and although there were no girls present at the session, there were four girls who were regular attenders.

As the session was a drop-in session, attendance varied week to week. Some young people attended just for a few weeks and others were long term participants.

Members met a coach who was previously a participant. He had been playing football since 2003 and had joined a blind football session as he had an eye condition.  
He had started coaching in September 2022.

Coaching was a sessional role. Training and development opportunities were provided and if sessional workers were interested in full time employment, they can obtain full time experience elsewhere and be in a good position to apply for a vacancy at Arsenal in the Community.

A member spoke to a parent of a child with additional educational needs who was participating in the football session. She said the programme had been life-changing for her son who had made real progress. She said the high staff-to-student ratio and special rapport the coaches were able to build with participants were key. She was full of praise for the programme.

The session was open to all children. Those with and without additional needs were all supported to learn and enjoy the session by coaches with whom they clearly had good relationships

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## 2.55 Foster Carers

### Islington Foster Carers Association (IFCA)

- 2.56 The next evidence gathering session took place in early January 2023, when members of the Committee attended a coffee morning of the Islington Foster Carers Association (IFCA)..
- 2.57 IFCA is a voluntary group run by Islington foster carers for Islington foster carers. The findings outlined below stem from the Committee's discussion with them.
- 2.58 Foster carers were often taken aback at the differences between boroughs when it came to foster care. For example, it was cited that some local authorities provide holidays, and some didn't.
- 2.59 Some foster carers would take on additional children if they had the space. Housing is a key problem in every London borough including Islington.
- 2.60 Many children were said to struggle with conventional classroom management strategies, and Foster Carers thought that giving teachers two days training in trauma informed practice is not enough.
- 2.61 All carers and family and friends are offered training in trauma informed practice; this is also offered by the Virtual School to schools however some schools are much better than others in being able to focus on our children who need a higher level of care.
- 2.62 Children in care were said to be easily identifiable in school which made some children uncomfortable. One reason is because of the number of meetings that are held about children in foster care at schools. In primary school, the teachers were found to be more aware of foster children's circumstances and their needs. This was less the case in secondary school.
- 2.63 Many of the foster carers' children did not tell their friends they were looked after and were reluctant to bring their friends home as they didn't want anyone to know they were in care. Additionally, some of the foster children were reluctant to be part of groups designed specifically for care experienced young people.
- 2.64 Foster carers testified to the Committee that the teenagers in their care had suffered from negative societal perceptions and stereotypes of being a teenager in care.
- 2.65 There were many activities and groups that were labelled as being for 'families', which was said to cause distress to their children because of the prospect of having to say that "*they don't live with their parents*". One of the foster carers noted that "*they will attend a bereavement group but not a group for foster children*", because of the stigma.
- 2.66 Foster Carers were often on the receiving end of brazen comments and prejudicial assumptions. This was said to be particularly the case when the foster carer didn't physically resemble the child they were caring for. However, it was said that training and support was available (on skin and hair, also) when fostering a child from a different ethnicity.
- 2.67 It was said that foster children had reservations about attending Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, due to many factors including staff not introducing themselves, and staff already having prior knowledge of their circumstances. Children as young as 5 years old are expected to attend PEP meetings, and it was said that this was to accustom the child to the process.

- 2.68 Support to help deal with the emotional toll of meetings on the child sometimes took the form of access to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and CAMHS<sup>3</sup>, but the children concerned do not always want to go these. This is an ongoing challenge, and it was said that it was important to remember that while other workers can switch off from these challenges at the end of the day, the foster carer has to deal with it, 365 days a year.
- 2.69 Foster Carers sought reinforcement on messaging on key issues to their children, particularly from social workers and Council staff, which would help put on a front of unity.
- 2.70 Younger children in care were said to have less reservations about approaching adults because of their experience of being handed to different adults.
- 2.71 Fostering for the Council was said to be a hard sell, because of the commitment required, and the competition from independent providers distorting expectations on pay.

### TESTIMONY FROM THE DAY

**“The nuclear family in society is a big thing, If you are outside of the concept of a nuclear family it’s difficult for those children”.**

**“When a meeting is called, the repercussions can go on for weeks. The child knows a meeting is coming up and the build up can mean among other things, a falling out with friends at school, they are walking around like a ball of emotion, there is no bridge between the meeting being called and the support the child needs to deal with it”**

**“We are the carers and the counsellors. We do both.”**

### FOSTER CARERS’ SUGGESTIONS

**Youth Clubs were said to be “good for development but there is stigma when they are termed ‘youth clubs’, so it was better to refer to them as hubs and add a selling point to entice them in”.**

**The Council needs to go where young people are, with staff that are reflective of the community, and ask young people themselves. They will feel happy that they were listened to and would then gradually be receptive to different ideas. Once trust is built and a long-term commitment shown, young people will engage.**

**Young people want to earn money, so perhaps consider some form of incentive to take up opportunities to learn a skill or build experience through apprenticeships and work placements.**

**Build young people’s confidence by giving them opportunities to take part in, such as the Duke of Edinburgh award and work experience.**

<sup>3</sup> [CAMHS – NHS Children and young people's mental health services](#)



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## 2.72 Electively Home Educating Families

2.73 In January 2023, the Committee held calls with six individual, home-educated families from across the London Borough of Islington. This collection of direct testimony from families was additional to the evidence heard from Council officers (this can be found on Page 38 and 46 of this report).

2.74 During the calls, families were asked of their experiences and asked to provide suggestions for the Council on where to improve.

2.75 Some parents described themselves as “reluctant home educators”, in that they felt pushed to home education because the mainstream school environment was not suitable to their needs and/or were unhappy with how the traditional education model responded to issues such as anxiety, bullying and exclusion.



2.76 One parent stated that home education was not something considered before they noticed a marked change in the child’s behaviour.

2.77 One parent noted that home education was not a light undertaking and would advise any family to consider it carefully, and that with the right support, their child could have flourished and achieved more at school.

2.78 Another family noted that their child struggled in mainstream school, and it wasn’t picked up until much later that they had autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia. Because of this, the family took that into home education up until they began attending a specialist music school.

2.79 The COVID-19 pandemic was said to have had a profound impact on the community, empowering parents to consider the home education model for the first time and enter the community. This is reinforced by data<sup>4</sup> showing a general increase in home-educated children since the start of the pandemic.

2.80 The Home Education community was found to be fragmented, with splits along cultural, economic and religious lines. All of the families interviewed had different reasons for home educating and were from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.81 As reinforced by one parent’s testimony, wealthier families were able to buy in resources and support whereas families on lower incomes could face hardship in meeting the cost of teaching materials, trips and public examination fees.

2.82 Parents cited changes to the welfare system as one challenge, wherein *“it used to be the case that if both parents worked 24 hours a week, the household was able to access financial support, however now each individual parent present in the household must work 24 hours a week before the household is able to claim that support”*.

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<sup>4</sup> Data published by Schools Week in their [March 2023 investigation](#)

- 2.83 New home educators were said to be very vulnerable because it takes time to find community and a style that works effectively for them specifically. A parent told the Committee that *“traditionally, entry into home education was driven more by ideological beliefs than what is seen today”*.
- 2.84 Once a family elects to home educate, the local authority has little scope to be prescriptive but can offer support and, if wanted, a pathway back into mainstream education.
- 2.85 It was heard in testimony from a parent that “there was a general distrust”, nationally, between home educators and authorities, and as such some would be apprehensive about engaging with the local authority.
- 2.86 Because of the fragmented nature of the home education community, not all home educators were able to share resources with others or able to keep abreast of the latest news and offers applicable to them.
- 2.87 One such resource was the home education hub offered by City & Islington College in Angel, which provides support, resources, learning and equipment for GCSE English, Maths, History and Double Science, as well as facilitating entry for public examinations in these specific subjects. The hub also provides general mentorship and careers advice. Work experience placements and field trips are also not part of the offer at City & Islington College and is for the parent to organise, something which families with less connections and/or resources were said to find much more difficult to do.
- 2.88 The Committee found that awareness of it and its offer varied significantly among the six families interviewed.

#### THEIR SUGGESTIONS

The Council should provide facilities that could provide resources to home educators and co-delivered communal sessions.

Leisure centres and other Council services should have an awareness of the needs of the home education community.

That home educated families should be eligible for food vouchers during the school holidays

There should be a more proactive approach in terms of advice and support from the Council. The limited interaction with the local authority has generally centred on inspection, with little offered in terms of practical support.

Families should be given maximum resources to choose what path is most appropriate for them to ensure that they do not fall behind.

#### Written Testimony

*“I came across this today and... home-schooled children I believe are excluded from this programme and as the council hold a register for home schooled children, I am sure something could be added to the database to identify those that would be getting free school had they been enrolled in a school”.*

Please note that places are very limited during the winter holiday period.

You need to book your place directly with the activity provider. You do not need a code to make a booking, but providers of activities may ask you if you are eligible for a free place. If they ask, just let them know that you have received this letter.

If you would like to find out about the full range of services and support Islington provides for children, young people and families, please visit our award-winning Family Directory [www.islington.gov.uk/fis](http://www.islington.gov.uk/fis). If you need help to get online, you can visit your local library who will be happy to assist you.

*Figure A Letter from Islington Council re: Holiday Activities*

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## 2.89 Lift Youth Hub

- 2.90 The Committee next took evidence from Lift Youth Hub. Members visited the facility in February 2023 and met with its' staff and young people.
- 2.91 Lift, the Committee was told by its staff, was run on mutual trust, respect and understanding with the young people.



2.92 The space is run on a free-flow basis, where once a young person has signed in at the front desk, they have independent and unsupervised access to the entirety of the space – except for any sessions that require advance booking.

2.93 Lift aims to provide platforms and opportunities for their young people to feel equal, important, respected and valued.

- 2.94 Lift is highly focused on capturing and amplifying young people's voices. Its young people inform and influence the overall marketing and promotion strategy and are always given the opportunity to discuss and suggest changes to the centre's programme. Lift is also in the process of developing recording studios to further enable young people to have their voices heard and already facilitate the production of podcasts and other media. It was as the suggestion of Lift's young people, that their testimony be captured in a podcast with members of the Committee.
- 2.95 Lift is a facility where all attendees are offered opportunities for training and personal development, such as sessions on building life skills, support around employability, counselling, budgeting, and cooking, all of which are delivered by qualified facilitators. An example cited was a cooking session on breadmaking from scratch.
- 2.96 Several staff/volunteers at the facility were once attendees themselves and accessed opportunities either directly or indirectly through them. Lift Islington employs young people aged 16-25.
- 2.97 Attendees feel heard and able to express themselves in ways that may not be presented elsewhere, such as to teachers or families. As a result, the team at Lift are often recipient of children's honest views about all subjects, including any personal issues they're facing.
- 2.98 The young people at Lift Islington are known to also develop mechanisms of support amongst themselves.
- 2.99 The transition between provision was a major issue in the community that Lift was aware of and actively picking up on through greater outreach, which included approaching adventure

playgrounds, to ensure all those who can benefit from the services provided at Lift are aware of it. They are always looking for new ways to spread this to the community.

## **TESTIMONY FROM THE DAY**

**For one attendee, Lift had enabled them to build solid friendships, benefit from activities such as qualified defence classes, and “doesn’t want to stop coming here”.**

**For another attendee, this was the first environment since leaving school in which they had a positive experience with other young people and felt a sense of loyalty to Lift, because of that.**

**For another attendee, Lift was a safe space where they can relax and be themselves. They feel comfortable with the staff and are grateful for the support that Lift provided (through counselling) that helped them overcome personal trauma.**

**Another attendee had recently started their first job in IT with the support of Lift. Their journey of personal development was described by staff as exceptional.**

## **THE YOUNG PEOPLE’S SUGGESTIONS**

**There should be more publicity of Lift, particularly to those who are reaching the cut-off for adventure playgrounds.**

**There should be more emphasis on the wide range of activities offered at Lift Islington and greater promotion of Lift, by increasing the amount of awareness and marketing material at Councillor surgeries, Libraries, Council Offices (i.e., the front desks of Islington Town Hall and 222 Upper Street), and in partner organisations such as the NHS through GP practices and hospitals, particularly to those who may be recovering from illness / surgery.**

**There should be an equivalent facility serving districts such as Archway and/or communities on the borough’s boundary with the London Boroughs of Camden, Hackney, and Haringey.**

**Greater support from the Council to school and college leavers in exploring options beyond secondary and further education, including help on setting up businesses / entrepreneurship.**

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## 2.100 Youth Justice Service (YJS)

- 2.101 The Committee next took evidence from the Youth Justice Service, in a visit to their offices in Isledon Road, which is shared with Targeted Youth Support Service and the Gangs team.
- 2.102 The Youth Justice Service provides support for young people who have been convicted of an offence. All young people with the YJS have been to court and formally sentenced. Effectively, it was summed up as probation for children and the only difference is that the YJS is a multi-agency team and works very holistically with young people and their parents and carers.
- 2.103 The age group the YJS works with is between 10 and 18, but the average age is between 15 and 17. If a young person has little time left on their order or if they have learning needs, the YJS at times continues to work with them even after their 18th birthday. This is being assessed individually for each young person.
- 2.104 Whenever possible, when a young person gets convicted of other matters and receives a different court order, they will remain with the same case manager, as this is much better in terms of engagement and having a relationship-based approach.
- 2.105 The YJS and social care have a more holistic approach, i.e. team around the child and they are more involved and nurturing. Once they turn 18 years of age, the level of intervention was not at the same level as with the Youth Justice or Children's Services. This is likely due to much larger caseloads with the Probation Service and Adult services.
- 2.106 There were four young people involved in the main discussion, with an additional young person absent briefly attending via a phone call at the end. They shared their experiences and journey prior to being supported by the Youth Justice Service and in some instances, in the journey since. The Committee would again like to thank these young people for sharing this with us.
- 2.107 Two of the young people present, were "Peer Advocates" – this is a role in which they speak up on behalf of other young people to ensure that their voices are being heard, they also get involved in interventions which are being devised and contribute in terms of if they are helpful or not and they make suggestions to improve them.
- 2.108 They attend police cadet training sessions to speak to police officers on how best to engage with young people when they are either being stopped and searched or arrested. Another example is, that they sit on interview panels when the YJS or TYS interview staff.



**Written Evidence Submission**  
**Raj Jalota**  
**Children and Young People's Participation Officer**

Young people being supported by the Youth Justice Service and Targeted Youth Support Service have access to 3 main youth voice vehicles. This is in addition to any individual direct feedback opportunities, which their workers make available.

The voice of young people is critical to the work undertaken at YJS-TYS.

Young people are encouraged to take part in participation opportunities in order that their voice is heard, whilst being supported by YJS/TYS services. This is essential in order to make sure that the services continue to improve and adapt to young people's needs.

A recent example of an opportunity includes young people from YJS-TYS being invited to take part in the Empower Project. This project launched in Jan 2023 is a collaboration between University College London and LBI. The Empower Project aims to look at how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted young people's mental health, education, and employment access. Young people share their views and experiences in 1-1 interviews and by attending a focus group. The first interviews took place on 17 February 2023.

The 3 main youth voice vehicles provided by Young Islington are **You Lead**, **Youth Forum** and **Islington Youth Council**.

**You Lead**

This is a youth voice group which commenced on Thursday the 5th of July 2018.

This is a service user group for young people being supported by YJS//TYS.

Workers encourage young people that they have on their caseload to attend.

The purpose of You Lead is to provide an opportunity for young people to have their say on issues that matter to them and that this feedback shapes and feeds into the enhancement of services they are provided with.

You Lead informs managers what additional support young people would like and how to express their experience and needs.

You Lead is facilitated by Raj Jalota (Children and Young People's Participation Officer)

A You Lead meeting was held on 25 January 2023 and agenda items are listed below:

- Safe Spaces and Places Survey
- Youth Employment

Meet new Police Recruits (Metropolitan Police) Extract from the Safe Spaces survey below:

Following You Lead meetings, actions are recorded in a "You Said We Did" document to ensure the voice of young people is being validated.

### **Islington Youth Forum**

Islington's Youth Forum was launched in 2021. It aims to provide a safe space for the borough's young people to discuss issues which matter to them. The meeting is chaired by Islington's Young Mayor and Deputy Young Mayor. Council leaders and decision makers, such as the Executive Member of Children, Young People and Families and the Director of Young Islington, also attend the meeting.

A safe space for Islington's young people aged 11 to 25 to discuss issues which matter to them. Council Leaders and decision makers are able to hear the concerns of young people first hand and are therefore well placed to address these concerns during the meeting or with follow up actions.

Attendance and actions are recorded for each meeting.

The meetings have open membership in so far as young people can attend without any barriers to participation. There is no formal membership requirements and the Forum has a dynamic audience. Young people who attend the meeting are rewarded with a £10.00 voucher.

Meetings occur every two months. Due to the on-going Covid restrictions the meetings have occurred online via Zoom, but this is being reviewed. The meetings are scheduled usually on Wednesdays and are for 1 hour. The start time is 5.30pm.

### **Islington Youth Council**

The aim of the Youth Council is to provide a central mechanism for young people to influence the services that are available to them and on how money is spent across the council and the borough and to contribute to ensuring that services respond to the needs of young people and are of good quality. They also help to review progress of key LBI led/partnership strategies produced to assist young people such as the Youth Safety strategy (2020 -25) and the Education strategy (2022).

A key function of the Young Mayor and the Youth Council is to champion the needs of young people in the borough and raise awareness of issues affecting them. The Young Mayor and the Youth Council have a key role in setting commissioning priorities and in procuring services.

The Youth Council was established in 2012.

The most recent Youth Council Election was held in November 2022 and 14 young people were elected as Youth Councillors and will serve a 2 year term (2022-2024).

#### **The major aims of the Islington Youth Council:**

- To represent the views of all children and young people in Islington.
- To work to ensure that every child and young person in Islington is happy, healthy and safe.
- To give views to the Council and partners on various issues affecting children and young people
- To contribute to the operation and monitoring of the Islington Children and Families Strategy.
- To work to improve the quality of life and opportunities for children and young people in Islington.
- To work to improve the range and quality of activities and places to go for young people in Islington.
- To work for improved understanding and unity between different groups of young people.

## CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED

**That transitioning from the Youth Justice Service at age 18, often resulted in less support being received, with young people feeling that if that supportiveness continued, it would produce better outcomes.**

**That there was generally a lack of male case managers / youth workers in the profession**

**That a high turnover of case managers can greatly affected young people's level of engagement and motivation to engage with their court order.**

**The work the YJS does is relationship based and considers trauma and if there is a change in case manager, this can impact on outcomes for young people.**

**That there was a disparity between Adult Social Services and Children's Services, and between the Youth Justice Service and the Probation Service.**

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

**The personal approach that case managers took with their young people was beneficial to the development of young people known to the Youth Justice Service.**

**The provision from WIPERS<sup>5</sup> was useful in providing mentoring and support when transitioning between agencies / services, and in some instances the young people said they were more effective than social workers.**

**During the evidence gathering session, members of the committee were presented with the creative work of a young person who had worked with a student social worker to produce a piece of art reflecting their personal and emotional journey through childhood and into young adulthood. Members were greatly impressed with the work.**

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<sup>5</sup> WIPERS Youth CIC / The Wipers Foundation



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## 2.109 Islington Libraries

- 2.110 In the Spring of 2023, the Committee next took evidence from the Council’s library service to learn how they engaged with young people and gather suggestions about where improvements could be made.
- 2.111 Islington’s library service has many branches throughout the borough, as well as outreach services and skills centres.
- 2.112 North Library and West Library have rehearsal spaces, there are also small spaces at Cat and Mouse Library, a gallery at Central Library and the Ben Kinsella Trust is based at Finsbury Library, which is open by appointment and provides an immersive educational experience about knife crime that schools can book.
- 2.113 There are approximately 18,000 active members across the library service. “Active members” refers to registered library card holders that have used their ticket in the last twelve months. Pre-COVID, this was approximately 27,000



*Figure 2 Islington Central Library*

### KEY STATISTICS

**Of those 18,000, about 8,500 were between the ages of 18 & 59, 2,5000 were over the age of 60 and teenagers totalled 831. Children between the ages of 0 and 12, totalled 6,000.**

**There were also 1,000 ‘Class Tickets’ which were used by schools.**

**Data collected from new members include ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability but this information is elective. Out of the 18,000 active members, only about 10,000 would have included this, as it is not one of the compulsory categories of information required when registering.**

**Data for active members does not equate to the numbers physically entering and exiting the library which is recorded separately using a people counter.**

- 2.114 Children and young people were said to access and utilise the library service via several different avenues:

- Accompanied by parents and carers, either for independent use and/or to attend programmes for Under 5s
  - Visits from Schools and Nurseries. It was noted that schools are finding it increasingly logistically difficult to visit, particularly at secondary level.
  - Independently, whether after school, at weekends or occasionally during the school day.
- 2.115 Libraries have a good offer of homework clubs, but these hadn't been restarted due to recruitment and other issues. However, support is offered through other means. Traditionally, homework clubs have not been staffed by teachers but through locally recruited Saturday Assistants working overtime.
- 2.116 The drop off in membership numbers between young children and teenagers could be partly explained by all secondary schools having libraries within them. While a lot of teenagers use the library for studying, not all would have an active library membership, so wouldn't feature in statistics.
- 2.117 The Primary to Secondary school transition has been a focus for the library service and officers were trying to encourage reading for leisure among this cohort of users. Officers were working on setting up sessions focusing on creative writing as that links in with reading for pleasure. A project was recently started with Highbury Fields School, using the novels of Andrea Levy as inspiration for creative writing.
- 2.118 There was also Islington Reads, a programme which has five secondary schools attached to it, where library visits were incorporated into the schedules. It was recognised that pressures particularly around GCSE examinations, may impact secondary schools' ability to conduct visits to the libraries.
- 2.119 The Committee identified a possibility of publicising the libraries as safe spaces to vulnerable young people after school hours.
- 2.120 The main areas of the library were not strictly silent spaces despite the general impression that it was, which was identified as possibly being one of the reasons(s) SEND / Foster carer groups identified to the Committee that they felt excluded from the space.
- 2.121 In the past, the library service facilitated sessions for childminders with children aged five and under and it was proposed that this session could be adapted for foster carers also. However, to conduct a session for SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disability) children, an assessment would be required on whether staff were adequately trained to provide this, and what resources would be needed to do so.
- 2.122 The library service provides apprenticeships and work experience placements. The service also participates in the Duke of Edinburgh awards and advertises its' Saturday Assistant posts locally through other Council services, sixth forms and youth hubs.
- 2.123 Officers were receptive to the idea of having a detached youth worker in the libraries at exam time, to help young people manage with stress. Officers stated that this could be a possibility, but this is dependent on collaboration and resources.
- 2.124 While the Islington Museum was currently closed for refurbishment, the possibility remained to engage young people from Black and Asian minority backgrounds through other programmes and organisations.

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## 2.125 The House Project

- 2.126 The Committee next took evidence from The House Project in a virtual call held in Spring 2023 with its staff and young people.
- 2.127 Islington's House Project started in August 2018 as a pilot franchise of The National House Project established at the same time, which formed part of phase two of the Department for Education (DfE) Innovation Programme.
- 2.128 As described in their official profile, The House Project supports care experienced young people as they make transitions to greater independence by helping them to develop a community of support, gain essential skills for independent living and move-into their own property and make it their home.
- 2.129 Islington's House Project follows the national model of guidance, although Islington have been able to double the numbers eligible to join a cohort on its scheme to 20.
- 2.130 The House Project actively helps its young people in discovering and doing something that they enjoy (in terms of employment, education and/or training) and that this was one of the goals of the scheme.
- 2.131 Each young person had a dedicated officer that supported them across all areas of their life, preparing them for the realities of living independently, and to find ways of boosting young people's confidence and wellbeing. The House Project also works closely with the Employment & Youth Support team,
- 2.132 The House Project required attending workshops, online meetings, and completing portfolios before finishing the programme which was AQA accredited
- 2.133 The Committee were able to meet several young people (five in total) who were either currently being or have had been supported by Islington's House Project. They shared personal testimonies in which they highlighted their journeys prior to joining The House Project. The Committee would again like to thank each of the five young people for doing so.

### **THEIR SUGGESTIONS**

**Finding better ways to support young people who were allocated placements outside of the borough for safety reasons, placing greater emphasis on and consideration of the welfare of the child within that placement.**

**There should be greater communication with the child before placing them in placements that are outside of the borough. Out of borough placements can make keeping in touch with existing friends difficult, which in addition to the difficulty in making friends in the new area can result in greater isolation.**

**There should be long-term therapy available for care experienced young people that is external to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the system in general.**

**The recruitment of higher quality social workers who stay in post for longer. The continual turnover of social workers was cited as a major cause of instability.**

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## 2.134 Disability Action in Islington (DAII)

- 2.135 The Committee next took evidence from Disability Action in Islington, in a call with its service manager in Spring 2023.
- 2.136 Disability Action in Islington has a wide remit, predominantly serving users who were adults. Their aim was to be of service to all members of the community that sought their assistance.
- 2.137 The minority of parents that attend on behalf of children generally did so due to an issue stemming from a professional, service, or authority's lack of understanding of disability.
- 2.138 Children were known to fall out of the frameworks that health professionals work within because the needs of those children were not understood. There was a lack of incentive or desire for many professionals to work outside of what they envisaged their role to entail and would often try to fit disabled children into a box more palatable to the professional than it was to the child.
- 2.139 An example was cited of a service user aged four years old who was unable to speak due to autism, but the family was instead told by a speech language therapist that it was due to being from a bilingual household. This incident was cited as a symptom of the blame culture at large within the sector.
- 2.140 A myriad of complexities led people to seek out Disability Action in Islington, who will reference guidance, laws and policies that help us to support and protect these client groups to challenge stonewalling among other issues.
- 2.141 Those who come to Disability Action in Islington are generally in crisis, and the lives of a family of a disabled person are often lived through the context of that crisis. What are considered everyday necessities such as public transport and respite become luxuries for these families because of the facilities required to accommodate their needs. This often necessitated the use of cars, the requirement of wheelchair accessibility at public buildings, and changing facilities for those with incontinence needs, among others.

### KEY STATISTICS

**501 active cases in total, at the time of the call**

**Approximately 200 concerned users under the age of 25**

**Approximately 50 concerned users under the age of 18.**

- 2.142 Normally, where there was an institution involved in a young person's life, certain pathways were followed, which would keep that individual(s) from requiring DAII's assistance. For example, children under the age of eighteen generally already had comprehensive support in most areas through their school or social services. It was when a young person fell outside of an institution such as that or any other mainstream settings, that issues arose, particularly for those with disabilities, as they often became caught between agencies/bodies/services not accepting responsibility for their support.
- 2.143 One of the two main challenges cited was around benefits/welfare, which while a big and complex issue on its own, was even more challenging to those with disabilities, and even greater to those who were also young people that may not know where to start. This was

particularly the case where the young person had transitioned from a framework of support / institution and now had the burden to do things that once were taken care of for them. Housing was the other challenge, and for a multitude of reasons. Those who wanted to live independently and should be able to do so, were often facing barriers holding them back.

- 2.144 In the case of both challenges, a lack of transitional support while children were still within the school setting, and delays in assessing children for support workers beyond school were cited as adding to the issue.
- 2.145 Adequate doctors' letters are a very valuable tool in Housing Applications and DAII often advise an individual's informal care network that they need to tell the GPs what the letter needed to like.
- 2.146 Most people who accessed Disability Action in Islington's services were White British. The service had multilingual staff versed in Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, German and other eastern European languages, and word had spread into those communities.
- 2.147 There are instances whereby the data in official statistics suggests that some groups are on the whole, in less need of Education, Health & Care plans than others, because of the low numbers recorded against them. These statistics don't always provide the full picture, as often there are families within these communities that were in need, but not accessing services. Orthodox communities, with alternative views on disability that contributed to stigmatisation, was cited as an example.
- 2.148 The Service Manager, was thanked for their time, complemented on their passion for their cause and community, and encouraged to remain an influential voice within the community for the long-term. The Committee was extremely grateful for their contribution and would again like to express their thanks for her contribution.

### **SERVICE MANAGER'S SUGGESTIONS**


Flyers should be used to inform marginalised communities about the service.

Council to provide dedicated Housing Advice support

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## 2.149 Detached Youth Work

- 2.150 The Committee next took evidence with Islington's Targeted Youth Support (TYS) workers, on the subject of detached youth work, in an online call held in Spring 2023.
- 2.151 Detached Youth Work is undertaken by Islington Council's TYS team.
- 2.152 While TYS' offices are located on Isledon Road, the work of TYS takes place in every corner of the borough. This is split into three key areas of outreach:
- Area 1 covers the north of the borough, i.e., Archway and Tollington
  - Area 2 covers the centre of the borough, i.e., Highbury and Mildmay
  - Area 3 covers the south of the borough, i.e., Angel, Barnsbury and Clerkenwell
- 2.153 Despite the three areas noted above, TYS workers across each area regularly collaborate and work in partnership on common themes and projects that can stretch borough wide.
- 2.154 Detached Youth Work made use of not being confined to a building, particularly given that the use of a building would usually come with stringent terms of use attached. Detached Youth Work takes place on young people's patch and is flexible to their needs.
- 2.155 There always will be groups of young people that see youth hubs as being too shiny and not accessible to them.
- 2.156 Detached Youth Work was stated to be unique in that it attracts young people who rarely access mainstream settings. The relationship TYS has with these young people was different to that with other forms of authority, such as park rangers or police officer.
- 2.157 TYS workers regularly make themselves present at communal locations, in order for the young people in that area to build a gradual familiarity of their presence.
- 2.158 TYS workers conduct Detached Youth Work in wherever required, whether that was a physical building, place of worship, shopping precinct and/or other relevant communal spaces. Young people were even sometimes given contact details for the TYS workers in their area, who they could contact in times of need.
- 2.159 TYS workers made themselves visible in neighbourhoods where some of the young people were known to not be accessing services and/or were more vulnerable to harm in whatever setting was required and engaged with all members of the community.
- 2.160 On the Andover Estate, TYS workers had access to Platform Youth Hub and the youth club, in addition to their presence around the basketball and football pitches. In the Caledonian Road and Angel areas, TYS workers were able to utilise the facilities at Lift Youth Hub.



"There is no such thing as a hard-to-reach young person.

It is instead, simply a matter of not having yet found the right skills to reach them.

This is a challenge that TYS would always rise to"  
**Service Manager**

- 2.161 Utilising these spaces is dependent on the circumstances and availability. TYS workers cited the need for more hubs/facilities that could be used in all weathers, for short periods of the day and where they could maintain a central presence.
- 2.162 The lack of youth hubs/spaces in certain areas, results in young people having to travel out of their localities – sometimes at great risk – to access those services and facilities, as well as causing young people to gather in otherwise unsuitable locations.
- 2.163 Detached Youth Work was about having additional eyes on the community and being able to signpost vulnerable, less-visible young people to services where needed. TYS workers often had knowledge of the issues young people were facing and also aware of common locations where young people congregated. TYS would also share important information with families through door-knocking and other means as and when required.
- 2.164 To build and maintain a relationship with young people takes trust and time, usually a few months at least. TYS workers often had to explain to young people that they were not there to monitor them, but to support them. After that trust had been built, it could then be possible to draw them into group work and/or bring in various professionals. It would also be possible to refer the young person to a male/female TYS worker if required.
- 2.165 There were many young people who were reluctant to access services such as sexual health, counselling and therapy. The nature of Detached Youth Work makes it possible to bring some of these services to them, with TYS workers being accompanied by various professionals as and when needed.



- 2.166 Sometimes young people would even refer TYS workers to other young people who may not have had support before.
- 2.167 TYS are focusing on intervening with younger children (13/14 years old as opposed to 16+). This age group find they have aged out of provision such as adventure playgrounds and don't know where else to go.

- 2.168 Detached Youth Work was about being providing stability, and for some vulnerable young people, a TYS worker may be the one person that a vulnerable young person can be open with.
- 2.169 Making use of additional funding, TYS had also recently commissioned some very targeted youth work with Jigsaw<sup>6</sup> in localities that had high levels of anti-social behaviour and high risk to young people. This included out of hours detached youth work in the summer of 2022.
- 2.170 When measuring success, it was acknowledged by the service that there can be too much focus on formal, evidenced statistical outcomes. Success can take all forms and could be something as simple as knowing a young person is safe and inside the home, rather than on the street. Such an outcome isn't reported under current data practices.
- 2.171 The data management system in use by TYS is not set up to capture these wider measures of success, but this is something that they are working to address, with colleagues even going so far as to create an app as a means of collecting that data. A conversation about incorporating that more broadly was taking place.
- 2.172 In making young people's voices heard in consultations, such as on green spaces, planning and transport matters, the Council needed to be honest with young people regarding how greatly their voice and influence in consultations would affect the outcome. TYS workers were able to cite previous examples where young people felt their voice had been ignored.
- 2.173 TYS workers faced difficulty getting young people who lacked traditional qualifications or experience, into education, employment and training opportunities because of strict eligibility requirements. As such, TYS would like to see the Council consider implementing employment schemes for young people that for one reason or another, don't have the required grades.
- 2.174 It can be overwhelming for a 16 -17-year-old to sign up to something they don't have experience in. Additionally, for those absent from school, or adversely affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns, they would have missed the school-brokered work experience programmes.
- 2.175 There was a general lack of exposure to different careers that our young people had, and the suggestion was made that the Council could consider emulating The Prince's Trust's hands-on taster days, i.e. a week in mechanics.
- 2.176 There was also a need for mentoring spaces, which were often taken quickly. Given the aim for TYS was to get their young people to access universal services, a mentor or a coach would be beneficial in that process.
- 2.177 Sometimes the effect of detached youth work may not be seen immediately. TYS cited an example of receiving graduation pictures from the family of a young person, six years after last having contact with them.
- 2.178 The Committee would again like to thank all staff and the service manager for their participation and contributions.

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<sup>6</sup> Jigsaw GC



## 2.179 New River College

2.180 The Committee next took evidence from New River College, in a visit to its primary school site in the Spring of 2023, in which members met and held a discussion with its' staff and young people.

2.181 New River College (NRC) is a collection of four pupil referral units, PRUs, in Islington working with pupils from the age of five to sixteen who are Islington residents and have been placed at risk of permanent exclusion or have been excluded because of their behaviour from mainstream schools.

2.182 NRC also works with pupils referred because of medical needs which prevent them from accessing mainstream education - either for a short period of time or longer.

2.183 As described in its official profile by the co-heads of centre, New River College Primary School supports children from Islington primary schools with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs who have been permanently excluded, allocated a place through SEN consultation or via the Securing Education Board on a short-term placement.

2.184 Committee members were able to tour the entirety of the premises, which included a breakfast room; classrooms which were adaptable based on need; displays, including a science wall and an outdoor area, of which all rooms had access to.

2.185 There were 19 students on-roll at the time of the visit, with 16 attending the school each day. The 3 non-attending had transitioned to mainstream / SEND specialist provision.

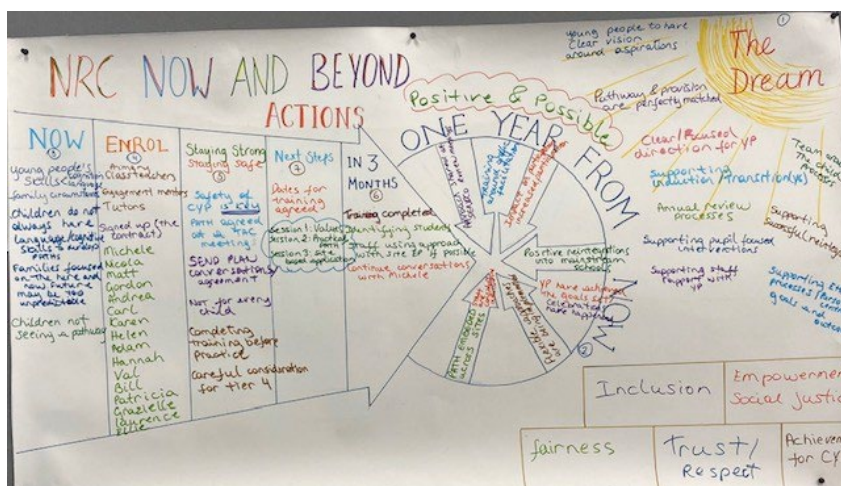


Figure 3 Board inside New River College Primary

2.186 NRC's outreach team had built strong relationships with most schools in the borough. The impact on exclusions had been felt profoundly, and where a school was looking to refer a student to their care, the outreach team would work with the school to consider whether all alternative options had been appraised first. This preventative approach thus built capacity in schools by reducing exclusions and aiding reintegration.

2.187 NRC also employed a family support worker that maintains good working relationships with families.

2.188 The majority of students were Islington residents, including those who had previously attended schools outside of Islington.

2.189 There had been an influx of students from out of borough being referred to NRC. While these students were not Islington residents, NRC did not exclude these students from its services, for the purpose of helping children in need.

2.190 Post-pandemic health issues were a particular issue, and immediately following the lockdowns, there was a large cohort of children with social, emotional & mental health needs. The gradual

return to normalcy and preventative outreach work by NRC has helped to reduce the number of referrals.

- 2.191 NRC was open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting home visits, dropping off food, and had continued in home teaching for pupils until remote learning was fully operational.
- 2.192 At the time of the Committee's visit, 78% of students had an Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP). It was stated that it was rare for NRC to not request a statutory assessment for a student, given that many are not in possession of one when they transfer to NRC. This was often due to schools not passing on information other than what they were legally required to. NRC then have to assess the child's needs and ascertain what methods of learning works best for them in the absence of that information.
- 2.193 If a child came to NRC without an EHCP, it would be usual for NRC to request a statutory assessment for that child.
- 2.194 NRC's person-centred approach ensures that the voice of both pupils and families are heard.
- 2.195 Across the NRC centres, most students were known to Early Help
- 2.196 Reintegration of students into mainstream education, or into specialist schools where appropriate, was at the core of their ethos. While reintegration into these settings that were within the borough were generally successful, this was less so when the setting (mainstream or specialist) was outside of the borough. It was noted that being in a setting within the borough came with the benefits of local networks that could more easily respond and adapt to a child's needs.
- 2.197 It was noted that a challenge to reintegration was the anxieties that some schools displayed about re-accepting a student due to the student's issues/behaviour at departure from their setting, rather than how they were presenting at the time of transition. The outreach team actively work to address this with schools.
- 2.198 Integrations at secondary level had been disrupted due to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.199 It was rare for students to be referred back to NRC at the primary level, and particular praise was reserved for the team at Canonbury Primary School.
- 2.200 Most referrals were due to excessive disruption and that these students often benefitted from a smaller, focused settings.
- 2.201 EHCPs could sometimes be a hindrance because schools were sometimes put off by the paperwork involved. It was also cited that secondary schools and colleges weren't always appropriately set up to handle complex and special educational needs, hence the process usually being started and more effective at the primary level.
- 2.202 Many success stories of reintegration were captured by NRC, even among those with complex needs, and cited incidences of former students and families sending updates on achievements and progress beyond NRC. The Executive Headteacher expressed a desire to build a more formal alumnus for NRC.
- 2.203 NRC welcomed the prospect of having more visitors in future, as it would help to tackle stigmatisation.
- 2.204 The Committee would again like to thank the staff and young people who participated in the discussion, for their contributions.

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## 2.205 Platform Youth Hub

2.206 The Committee took its final evidence from Platform Youth Hub, in the form of a visit to its' centre, in Spring 2023.



Figure 4 Platform Youth Hub

2.207 Platform Youth Hub is based on the site of the former Hornsey Road Baths at the western edge of the Andover Estate. It regularly has more than 30-40 young people in attendance on a given night.

### **Facilities included:**

Multi-use dance, performance, and 85-seater theatrical spaces  
Media suite  
Recording studio  
Free space  
Karaoke, table tennis and other leisure equipment.  
Step-free access to all floors.  
Open access youth sessions run daily from 4pm to 8.45pm each weekday

2.208 In addition to the service provided by Platform staff, commissioned services also using the space include Gain Ctrl, a music studio and development programme for young people, The Brandon Centre who provide counselling to young people aged 12-24 with a range of emotional,

behavioural, and relational problems, and Music Education Islington who provide sessions where young people can learn an instrument with trained facilitators from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

- 2.209 Additionally, detached youth workers from Targeted Youth Support use the premises to provide youth support and counselling sessions, and Mosaic also run LGBTQIA+ sessions from the centre as well. Company Three have also used the space.
- 2.210 The programme is shaped by the young people's need and that they have an active say in how things are run.
- 2.211 The Committee were then given the opportunity to engage with some of the young people who were present at the time of the visit. The ages of the young people varied from 13 to 18.
- 2.212 Members sought their general views, asking them how they felt about Platform, if there was anything that could be improved, whether there was anything they'd asked for but hadn't received and whether they felt that Islington Council listened to them and/or how the Council could be improved.

## **PLATFORM USERS' SUGGESTIONS AND RESPONSES**

Their needs and requests were honoured by Platform.

Youth spaces should be open on weekends as well as weekdays, as this would be hugely beneficial to them. The need is often as great, if not greater at times, during the weekend as it is after school

The Council could provide greater support in accessing employment and training opportunities.

Issues that young people were helped to deal with included autism, education, and emotional difficulties

Their voice was heard in the community through Platform.

Different social media channels should be used for communication.

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### 3. Other Evidence

#### 3.1 Scrutiny Meeting, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022

- 3.2 The Committee heard evidence from Akeel Ahmed, the Assistant Director for Community Learning & Libraries at Islington Council, on Young People who were likely to become Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).



*Figure 5 Islington Town Hall*

- 3.3 The Committee heard that under the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation all young people were required to be participating in some form of education, training or employment with training (EET) after they had completed compulsory education. This could be in school, college or through work-based learning. RPA also required local authorities to reduce the number of young people whose status was NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) or not known.
- 3.4 A vision in the Islington Education Plan: 14-19 was to reduce the number of NEET young people by developing a collaborative, 'Team Islington' approach to early identification and intervention.
- 3.5 The number of Islington's 16- and 17-year-olds that were not in employment, education or training was 1.9%, which was greater than the London average of 1.5% but below the national average of 2.4%.
- 3.6 Analysis over four years of Year 11 leavers from Islington schools showed approximately 1.4% of the school roll went on to become NEET in the year they left school.
- 3.7 The current NEET indicators fluctuated each year but there was a consistent over representation of those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), SEN Support needs, children who were educated at home (EHE) or in alternative provision (AP) and looked after children (CLA).

- 3.8 A Task and Finish Group had been convened to shape and develop a new model for identifying young people becoming NEET. The findings were that:
- 1) The Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) were very generic and did not take into account local issues or the prevalent characteristics of those most likely to become NEET.
  - 2) RONI indicators were currently applied in Year 11, at which point the council's progress team provided additional careers information, advice and guidance to assist with post-16 transition.
  - 3) Schools were aware in Key Stage 3 of those who raised concerns and were demonstrating behaviours akin to those most likely to become NEET post-16 years old.
  - 4) Schools were delivering some excellent programmes and initiatives to support their most vulnerable pupils but lacked the capacity to expand this work or resource it full time.
  - 5) The needs of those most at risk were varied, meaning a targeted and proportionate approach was necessary
  - 6) Parental engagement was essential to improving outcomes for these students.
  - 7) Many at risk students were home educated and received limited or no careers guidance.
- 3.9 A new set of NEET indicators would be drawn up, looking at Islington's NEET data from the last four years and would be developed through a weighted score.
- 3.10 A "No NEET" pilot was being run with St Aloysius and Beacon High schools. This involved working with Year 10 students who were at risk becoming NEETs, (as identified using the new RONI) at St Aloysius and Beacon High schools. This was in conjunction with the existing work already being undertaken with Year 11 students. Wider interest in the pilot had already been expressed from other schools and the Department for Education (DfE). St Aloysius and Beacon High schools was chosen for the pilot as the service had engaged with these schools previously.
- 3.11 Adopting a test and learn approach, the pilot would be reviewed in January, April and June 2023 with recommendations made for the 2023/24 academic year. The programme would then be rolled out to younger year groups and additional schools with the ambition of a No NEETs programme in all secondary schools by the academic year 2024/25.
- 3.12 The intervention would be a combination of intensive careers information, advice and guidance sessions with a qualified Progress Advisor and world of work activities curated for individual pupils and groups. The level of support and activity would vary based on the identified risk level.
- 3.13 One of the key takeaways from the task and finish group was how challenging parental / carer engagement could be for at risk of NEET pupils
- 3.14 Engagement with parents and carers to support young people was essential but could be very challenging as many of these families had experienced a breakdown in their relationships with schools and the local authority, meaning there was a lack of trust.
- 3.15 Parent and carers were often the primary influencers when it came to young people's aspirations and decisions about post 16 education and employment. Identifying effective methods of engagement was therefore crucial to improving outcomes.

- 3.16 The Committee next heard evidence from Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services on Elective Home Education.
- 3.17 Elective Home Education (EHE) was the term used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe education provided by parents at home, rather than providing education for their children by sending them to school.
- 3.18 Many Islington parents were providing successful home education, but home-educated children were not observed or monitored with the same frequency as children in school. Therefore, there was the potential for EHE children to be invisible and isolated, and for safeguarding concerns to go unnoticed.
- 3.19 The Committee were told that recent research<sup>7</sup> conducted by a home educator, and based on information returned by 132 Local Authorities under Freedom of Information requests, suggested that home educated children were approximately twice as likely to be referred to Social Care services, but five times less likely to be made the subject of a Child Protection Plan. The researcher used this data to argue that home-educated children were not invisible to the system and being 'over-scrutinised'.
- 3.20 There is no legislation that deals specifically with home education, although Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that: "the parent of every child of compulsory school age should cause him or her to receive efficient full-time education, suitable to age and aptitude etc., either by regular attendance at school or otherwise".
- 3.21 Elective home education is a form of 'education otherwise than at school' and this piece of legislation was the basis for the obligations of parents. There was no definition in law of 'efficient', 'full-time' or 'suitable'.
- 3.22 The local authority (LA) had no formal powers or duty to monitor the provision of education at home. It did though have a statutory duty (under s.436A of the Education Act 1996) to establish the identities of children in its area who were not receiving a suitable education (so far as it was possible to do so).
- 3.23 Locally, the most common reasons for elective home education, included:
- The parent wanted to educate their child in a way that they thought was best, in line with their own social or religious philosophy.
  - The child had been unhappy at school.
  - The child was not allocated a place at the school of choice. In these cases, parents might view elective home education as a stop-gap measure or, possibly, a way of applying pressure on the Local Authority to provide the place they sought.
  - The parents were dissatisfied in some way with the school the child was previously attending e.g., bullying or perceived failure on the part of the school.
  - The parents wished to avoid a potential prosecution for poor school attendance or to avoid exclusion.
- 3.24 There were no legal requirements for home-educating parents to have any of the following:

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<sup>7</sup> [Home Education and the Safeguarding Myth](#)

- Specific qualifications, or to have premises equipped to any particular standard,
  - Teach the National Curriculum,
  - Make detailed lesson plans,
  - Provide formal lessons,
  - Mark work, formally assess progress, or match school-based, age-specific standards.
- 3.25 Parents who choose to educate their child at home must be prepared to assume full financial responsibility for their child’s education, including bearing the cost of any public examinations. Locally, the council provided discretionary assistance for public examinations.
- 3.26 Local authorities could consider giving support when special educational needs were being met through home education and additional costs were incurred because of those special needs, but this was discretionary.
- 3.27 Locally, information and advice were provided (including links to on-line resources and support groups) for home-educating families but again, this was discretionary.
- 3.28 The Council employs an EHE Adviser who would contact / visit families at least annually. There is also a dedicated ‘school’ nurse for EHE children.
- 3.29 The numbers of children being electively home educated rose significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and peaked at 280. Although they had been expected to decrease post-pandemic, they had only recently started to slowly reduce.
- 3.30 Over 50% of those being electively home educated were female. In any other vulnerable group, girls were underrepresented. There had also been an increase in girls experiencing anxiety and other mental health issues. Black African young people were also over-represented.
- 3.31 Many home educating families enrolled their children in clubs where they could have the opportunity of social interaction with others and broadening their experiences.
- 3.32 A discussion took place with each family who wanted to home educate their child. In that discussion, the requirements are explained, and families are advised that their child could return to formal education in the future – a process that could take as little as ten days. An assessment of the proposed programme also takes place and statutory action could be taken if that programme was not considered suitable.
- 3.33 Schools were suffering financially and every child out of school was a reduction in funding of £4000 per year.
- 3.34 The Committee next heard evidence from Laura Eden, Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support on disabled children within the social care system.
- 3.35 The Committee heard that data was gathered from both social care records and the SEN (Special Educational Needs) Education Service, to explore whether there was any evidence to support the hypothesis of disproportionality that Asian families in Islington with a disabled child were more likely to receive a lower cost service than other families and were also less likely to access an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 3.36 5.1% of Children and Young People (CYP) at SEN Support that were known to social care, were from the Asian-Other ethnic group, whereas only 1.9% of all pupils at SEN Support were from this ethnic group, was statistically significant.
- 3.37 3.4% of those CYP known to social care with an EHCP were from an Asian ethnic group was significantly lower than the 6.7% of all those with EHCPs from an Asian ethnic group. • Analysis of national research alongside local data concluded that families from Asian communities were



less likely to be engaged with services to ensure their children's SEND needs were met. Those with an Asian child were more likely to have a personal budget of a lower amount.

- 3.38 The draft Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan and outcomes had the following aims
- To ensure children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from Asian communities were aware of SEND support services and Personal Budgets and access this support when in need
  - To ensure that children from Asian communities with SEND were engaged with via Early Help or Children's Social Care at the earliest opportunity so that their needs were met, and that intervention was provided at the earliest opportunity
  - Only 10% of total cohort of Children with a Disability (CWD) accessing a personal budget were of Asian heritage and this cohort also accessed the lowest financial banding for personal budgets, so there was an aim to increase this by 15% by the end of 2023 and also increase banding of personal budgets
  - Only 3.45 % of CWD with an EHCP of Asian heritage were accessing a Children's Social Care SEND support service, so there was an aim to increase this to 7% by the end of 2023
  - Only 3.7 % CWD with an EHCP of Asian heritage were accessing an Early Help service so there was an aim to increase this by a further 5% by end of 2023.
- 3.39 A consultation questionnaire for Parent Carers has been drafted and would be distributed across Asian community organisations, Parent Carers groups and parents of CWD. The feedback from this questionnaire would be collated and analysed.
- 3.40 The information currently available on the Islington SEND local offer webpage was updated to ensure it was accessible for all families and that published information was available in different languages for Islington's Asian communities.
- 3.41 A review of the information currently available on the Islington SEND local offer webpage was being updated to ensure this was accessible for all families, particularly published information in different languages for Islington's Asian communities.
- 3.42 A co-produced, SEND family information pack was being drafted for Somalian families and discussions were taking place to create a SEND Somalian parent carer group.
- 3.43 A CWD Asian Parent carer group is to be created and practitioner links agreed for Asian Communities.
- 3.44 Co-production meetings were being held with Asian Parent Carers and Asian community representatives to consult on drafting culturally specific and sensitive SEND information for families.
- 3.45 Diversity training was planned in 2023 for practitioners to further develop their practice skills and become more culturally competent to support families of CWD.
- 3.46 An equality, diversity and inclusion section would be added to the statutory social work Children and Family Assessment in order to capture children and young people's lived experience of inequality and discrimination and how the team around the child could support and empower families to challenge inequality and overcome these barriers.

- 3.47 A 12-month review of SEND data would be completed to explore if there had been any impact and increase in engagement with Asian families accessing Early Help or Children’s Social Care support.
- 3.48 Families were being supported to use resources already available to them and access services they did not know about.
- 3.49 The Committee next heard evidence on Early Childhood: Seldom Heard Groups from Gwen Fitzpatrick, the Head of Bright Start and Community Wellbeing South at Islington Council, and Jo Collins, the Operational Lead for Children & Young Peoples Services, Family Nurse Practitioner and Looked After Children, at Whittington Health NHS Trust.
- 3.50 The Committee heard that research suggested that high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) could have positive and long-lasting impacts on children’s outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children; although recent, national data suggested the evidence of actual benefit was more mixed and that the positive benefits were dependent on several factors, including the quality of care and parental engagement.
- 3.51 Pre-school provision could have positive impacts on early childhood cognitive and non-cognitive skills. This was particularly true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds when quality was high, and provision was accessed at a young age and for a sustained period.
- 3.52 Although 93% of three and four-year-olds accessed their 15 funded hours a week in 2019, the most disadvantaged families were least likely to take-up their places. Take-up was also lower among children from some ethnic minority backgrounds, and among children with English as an additional language and those with SEND (Nuffield 2021). In Islington there was lower take up within the Somali and Turkish communities.
- 3.53 There is, (as of November 2022), 71 care experienced young people in Islington who are parents. 46 are mothers and 25 are fathers.
- 3.54 Over the last three years, 87 families had accessed priority early learning places under the criterion ‘children of parents who are or were previously looked after’. Take up of 2-year-old places increased last year due to partnership working with Bright Start colleagues across the universal, early help, education and health sectors.
- 3.55 Manor Gardens Welfare Trust<sup>8</sup> had undertaken a project to capture the experience from seldom heard groups of Bright Start services. Overall, the average scores were relatively high, showing Islington had good practice in many areas.
- 3.56 Key perspectives were identified as follows:
- Services were complex and difficult to navigate.
  - Families did not always know that services were free.
  - Families might have an expectation that services were there to check up on them and find things they were doing wrong, rather than there to help. This made them less likely to ask questions and engage.
  - Many families assumed services were not accessible to them in their language.
- 3.57 The Rees Project<sup>9</sup> aimed to better ensure family engagement. It identified enablers of change and looked to retain engagement and build relationships. The work undertaken so far included:

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<sup>8</sup> [Manor Gardens Welfare Trust](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The Rees Foundation](#)

- Ensuring all materials were available in multiple languages and displayed as widely as possible.
- Holding more events and activities in places families were already engaging.
- Taking services to the community such as Andover Community Centre Bright Start offer and regular family support surgery at Finsbury Park Mosque.
- Having targeted services including Minik Kardes commissioned to deliver outreach and parenting programmes to the Turkish/Kurdish community and Somali parenting programmes.

3.59 In order to retain engagement the following measures had been taken:

- Cultural awareness workshops were run for staff.
- There was trauma informed practice awareness.
- Exploring the use of family outcomes star across partner agencies as a standardized strengths-based measure.
- Utilising a full range of tools and opportunities to capture the child and parent voice.

3.60 Innovative ways to reach seldom heard groups in the community were:

- A Gillespie Park event in partnership with Finsbury Park Mosque, Greenspace, Bright Start and Bright Futures-over with 130 children between the ages of 4-16.
- Coffee mornings facilitated by Manor Gardens Welfare Trust, promoting the early childhood offer including Bright Start.
- The development of family kitchen champions who co-delivered the family kitchen programme ensuring it reflected the diversity in food and traditions.
- Young parents stay and play in response to their request to meet regularly with other young parents and their children.

3.61 Next steps would include:

- Having a parent carer panel set up through family hubs and with co-production and engagement at every stage.
- Enhancing the role of parent champions by professional development and opportunities for co-delivery of universal services.
- Embedding a systematic approach to gathering feedback and using it to inform services at a every level.
- Having ongoing targeted and translated marketing of the offer via practitioners across Bright Start and the voluntary sector and parent champions using all communication platforms including videos with parents from the Turkish and Somali communities.
- Using Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data to identify and work with eligible families within the Stronger Families cohort and within a wider social care cohort.
- Contacting eligible families directly, using DWP data, to encourage them to contact the Family Information Service for support in applying for a place.
- Increased visibility of the Bright Start early childhood offer at the Young Parents forum.

3.62 Consideration was being given to broadening the Bright Start offer to include evening and weekend sessions.

3.63 Family hubs were working to improve engagement with fathers and families where parents were LGBT.

3.64 An audit had taken place of all 73 care leavers, and it was found that a good service was being provided and care leavers were being referred where appropriate.

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## 3.65 Scrutiny Meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023

- 3.66 The Committee heard evidence from Curtis Ashton, the Director of Young Islington at Islington Council, on vulnerable adolescents within the borough



*Figure 6 Upper Street, Islington*

- 3.67 On the subject of Commissioned Services in 2021-22, the Committee heard that there were several specialist services providing support to vulnerable young people in Islington, such as Abianda<sup>10</sup>, Chance UK<sup>11</sup>, St Giles Trust<sup>12</sup>, and WIPERS<sup>13</sup>.
- 3.68 Chance UK focus on an intervention and prevention service and provide mentoring to primary school children who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties, and/or are at risk of educational exclusion, anti-social behaviour, or criminal behaviour in adolescence or adult early life.
- In 2021-22, Chance UK supported 51 families and delivered 68 one-to-one parent-carer sessions to completion.
  - 100% of participating parents reported an increase in confidence and skills in parenting.
- 3.69 Abianda's Star Project provides a specialist one-to-one service for young women aged 11-24 affected by gangs, providing support to develop healthy relationships and prevent violence, sexual violence, and exploitation.
- The project delivered one-to-one support to 25 gang affected young women and 63 young women engaged in group work
  - The project also delivered group work in two Islington secondary schools.

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<sup>10</sup> [Abianda](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Chance UK](#)

<sup>12</sup> [St Giles Trust](#)

<sup>13</sup> [WIPERS Youth CIC / The Wipers Foundation](#)

- Outcomes included 71% of participants feeling able to keep themselves safe after the intervention ended and 100% feeling their knowledge of sexual violence and exploitation had improved.
- Islington were one of the few local authorities to obtain additional funding from the Home Office pertaining to interventions for young women that will ensure that Islington can continue to work with Abianda for a further three years.

- 3.70 St Giles Trust supports people facing severe disadvantage into sustainable employment, housing, and other appropriate support.
- In 2021-22, 190 people were referred and 184 young people were successfully engaged.
  - 324 successful outcomes were achieved for young people with 90% supported around Education, Training & Employment.
  - 80% achieving a positive outcome in health and wellbeing.
  - 90% supported with interventions around offending behaviour and 70% supported around family and social life matters.
- 3.71 Wipers Mentoring Service supports young people aged 11-17, and helps provide a bridge to education, training, and employment.
- In 2021-22 they delivered mentoring and one-to-one sessions to 39 vulnerable young people, with over 390 hours of mentoring support provided.
  - Support was extended from 3 to 6 months to ensure vulnerable young people's needs are met.
  - 90% of participants received a minimum of 24 hours support
  - 60% presented an increase in their 'hopes, dreams and aspirations'
  - 70% increase in 'Education & Work'
  - 55% received extended monitoring supported
  - 100% made significant progress across all areas of the programme.
- 3.72 The London Borough of Islington is the lead borough of a consortium consisting of the London Boroughs of Camden, Hackney, and Haringey, that has been allocated £250,000 to run a Disproportionality Leadership Project, by The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime<sup>14</sup> (MOPAC), utilising their Disproportionality Crime Fund.
- 3.73 The Disproportionality Leadership Project will be a year in duration and is already taking referrals across the four boroughs. Participants will also be interviewed by researchers from City & Essex Universities about their experience and what can be done to help them.
- The funding has come from a partnership of MOPAC, London Councils and the Youth Justice Board.
  - The purpose of tackling systemic issues that contribute to disproportionality in the youth justice system at a local level.
  - In Islington, mixed-heritage children were recorded to have higher custody rates than most other groups from 2017-18 to 2020-21
  - Across all boroughs of the consortium, the rates of school exclusion recorded for black and mixed-heritage children were disproportionately high.
  - Additionally, while the serious of offences committed by children of black heritage in Islington was lower than that committed by children of White or Asian heritage, they were more likely to be remanded in custody.
- 3.74 The Committee also heard that Islington Council will be further rolling out the Violence Reduction Unit's Parental Support Champion Network as funding has been received to continue this work for the next few years.

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<sup>14</sup> [Greater London Authority – The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime \(MOPAC\)](#)

- 3.75 The Parent Champion Network Project is commissioned to Minority Matters in Islington. It offers self-development classes and awareness engagement workshops for the Somali community delivered in partnership with Islington Council and Al-Abrar Foundation.
- 3.76 The Council is working with Minority Matters to ensure that participating parents have the confidence to overcome the barriers that might be preventing them from accessing education and/or employment and is also working to engage more fathers in the programme.
- 3.77 The Youth Counselling, Substance Misuse and Alcohol Service (YCSMAS) was created from two Council services to provide a holistic health service for young people that will allow for closer partnership work between the two interventions provided – Youth Counselling and Substance Misuse.
- 3.78 In the Council's Youth Justice Service (YJS), the number of their young people who were engaged in Employment, Training and/or Education was 72% in July 2022, against a target of 65%. The target of 65% was deemed to be a realistic measure of success, given that some of the young people engaged are extremely vulnerable and there is much difficulty in keeping them in education and employment.
- 3.79 Targeted Youth Support (TYS) work with young people aged 10 to 21 years old (12 – 21 for Youth Counselling), who require support to enable them to make informed choices and decisions and maintain positive pathways.
- 3.80 YYS complements the work of Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)<sup>15</sup> and also works closely with the local clinical commissioning group, who are also a contributor of funding.
- There is a proactive approach to ensure that there aren't large numbers waiting for these interventions, and the service is working with partners to ensure that children who need support are able to access this as soon as possible.
- 3.81 The Committee next heard evidence from Laura Eden, the Director of Safeguarding and Family Support at Islington Council, on Children with a Social Worker.
- 3.82 The Committee heard that research had shown that by the time children reached Key Stage Four, there was a real difference in the wellbeing of children who were known to social services and those who weren't, regardless of attainment or attendance.
- 3.83 The average attendance for Children Looked After in 2021-22 was 88.1%. In the same period there was 800 Children in Need, 150 on a Child Protection Plan and 351 Children Looked After.
- 3.84 61% of care experienced-young people were in Employment, Education or Training (EET), which is among the highest in the country. top quartile for care experienced young people in EET in country. This success was attributed to the Council's drive for Corporate Parenting for Life and commitment from councillors and officers.
- 3.85 £100,000 in funding had been received from the Department for Education (DfE) which funds the Deputy Head and a virtual teacher for the virtual school. Islington were at an advantage because of a previous, successful bid to the DfE to trial this programme (virtual school), which then became national guidance shortly after.
- 3.86 The Committee heard that some of the factors that can affect attainment included trauma, and that Islington's looked-after children fared better when there was a trauma informed approach to their care, and schools and colleges that adopted trauma informed approaches were also shown

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<sup>15</sup> [CAMHS – NHS Children and young people's mental health services](#)

3.87 The Committee next heard evidence from Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning and Achievement on Children Missing in Education.

3.88 The Committee heard that national research had identified patterns in children who were disproportionately represented in not accessing formal education.

3.89 The Children’s Commissioner’s report investigated off-rolling and identified that in the period between 2015 and 2019, there was a 50% increase in children being electively home educated, and that there was disproportionality in the number of SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disability) children being ‘off-rolled’.



3.90 While there were examples of good practice in home education, it was still one of the ways in which children can fall off the local authority’s radar.

3.91 The research also identified that some schools were encouraging families whose children were at risk of exclusion, to ‘off-roll’ them from mainstream education.

3.92 Exclusions in Islington were said to be a last resort, but nationally the approach to exclusions, varied between local authorities. The research identified that some groups of children were overrepresented in exclusions. Locally, in Islington’s own data, 39% of exclusions had some form of educational support / health and social care plan attached.

3.93 Permanent exclusions were not a particular issue in Islington. 73% of the borough’s exclusions stemmed from just three secondary schools. If those were to be removed, then Islington would be in the top quartile for performance nationally. Instead, Islington has an issue with recurrent patterns of fixed-term exclusions, whereby schools can impose fixed-term suspensions of up to 45 days in an academic year.

3.94 Another issue highlighted was “unexplained pupil exits”, where children may have moved schools for reasons that could include better OFSTED ratings – the process of which could also serve to make children less visible to the local authority.

3.95 A new, dedicated post within Children’s Services was being put in place to strengthen the monitoring of home-educated children and work with parents where appropriate to re-engage them with formal education.

3.96 The Department for Education (DfE) visited Islington Council in 2022, to discuss new guidance on exclusions. In the new guidance, the Council will be required to hold half-termly meetings with schools, to challenge their levels of attendance.

3.97 The Committee heard that a forum has been recently established in which participating school leaders have agreed to share data on exclusions.

3.98 The Committee also heard that innovative work with several was being undertaken in several schools across the borough, to create a more supportive environment, which includes engaging with pupils to understand their views on what created an inclusive culture, and peer surveys on what helped create belonging.

## 3.99 Scrutiny Meeting, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023

3.100 The Committee heard evidence from Josh Harsant of Barnardo's and Tania Townsend of Islington's Children Services, at our scrutiny meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023.



*Figure 7 Islington Town Hall*

- 3.101 The Committee heard that children are often labelled pre-emptively, and Josh Harsant encouraged the Committee to instead consider the points below when approaching the subject of voice and influence of children and young people: What is the problem you're trying to solve? Who are the right people to help you understand and address the problem? What are the values and ways of working that bind everyone together? Who has power to act and who has power to inform and influence?
- 3.102 The Committee were also encouraged to consider how children's rights can be put front and centre, what mechanisms there are for increasing the voice and influence of children and young people, and where the voice and influence of children and young people in the context of decision making. An example highlighted was a suggestion given to other local authorities to include a sub-section of the implications section of corporate reports for this.
- 3.103 Josh Harsant made the point to the Committee that children and young people will identify differently depending on the environment they were in, and that they were often not talked of outside of the statutory framework. Labels were not a good starting point when approaching the subject of voice and influence and the Committee should look at them as a young resident.
- 3.104 Josh Harsant cited UNICEF's Child Friendly Programme which operated in schools in two London boroughs, one of which was Redbridge, who are involving children and young people in planning matters for the first time. In response, it was noted that Islington had also involved



young people on planning matters in the past, citing the Holloway Prison redevelopment as one example.

- 3.105 The Committee next heard evidence from the Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy, Tania Townsend, on the Voice and Influence of young people and parents/carers
- 3.106 All children and young people have the right for their voice to be heard, as was the importance of moving from participation to co-production in terms of the services used by decisions affecting and decisions regarding children and families.
- 3.107 Examples were given of what Islington currently had in place concerning the voice and influence of children and young people in Islington.
- 3.108 It was important that learning and best practice was embedded so that it can be retained long-term and not lost to officer turnover / electoral lifecycles.
- 3.109 Josh Harsant commended the consultative approach taken by officers on Youth Council questions, as an example of the good practice he was encouraging the Council to adopt.

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## 4. **Documentary Evidence**

- Policy: Insight Briefing, February 2023 –Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy
  - This briefing provides background information from existing literature on this subject to inform the Committee’s review.

# Recommendations

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## OBJECTIVE

To further understand and consider the current and future challenges for children and young people who may be at risk of invisibility to the children's system and how the council is responding to these

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### Recommendation One

#### Our finding was:

Islington's electively home educating families generally found the information concerning the local authority's offer in terms of the assistance it was able to provide, ambiguous.



#### The evidence supporting this was:

##### Our meetings with home educating families:

An issue raised in each testimony was the exclusion from universal services, offers and discounts such as the holiday meals programmes and access to leisure centres. There was also differing levels of awareness among the families regarding the resources open to them as home educating families, such as the home education hub at City & Islington College.

Most of these families were previously engaged with mainstream education providers but took up home education because they felt it did not adequately meet their child's needs. There was still a desire expressed among these families for the local authority to be more of a collaborative, proactive partner, stating that the current relationship was purely regulatory. Some parents were also open to the possibility of their child returning to mainstream education in the future.



#### The Committee recommends that:

The Council should consultatively establish an Elective Home Education Charter that clearly sets out the role and responsibilities of the Council in relation to children being educated at home and the support it can provide; the general position concerning benefits, discounts, holiday activities (for example, Lunch Bunch) and public examinations, signposting families to central resource hubs such as City & Islington College. The Charter should make it clear that the local authority will always be ready to explore options should a family wish to return to mainstream education.



#### How this supports the Council's priorities

By making this process as consultative as possible, and ensuring all members of the community feel seen, heard, supported and informed, we would be meeting the Council's objective of Fairer Together <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [Fairer Together | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Two**

### **Our finding was:**

Community awareness of the Council's offer to children and young people across the borough was variable, specifically among the home education community.



### **The evidence supporting this was:**

#### Our meetings with electively home educating families:

Some home educating families that members met, were unaware of various offers open to them as Islington residents such as activities on home cooking and cultural foods.

#### Our meeting with Disability Action in Islington (DAI):

In the session with DAI, it was highlighted that traditional marketing (leaflets, posters) were still quite effective at reaching marginalised or isolated groups (i.e. those for whom English was not their first or spoken language, those with disabilities), and that clients would often bring copies of these printed materials into offices to ask for further explanation of the offer.

#### Our meetings with Platform Youth Hub and The House Project:

Young people expressed that they would be more included to engage with Council services that were visible to them through social media channels.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

The Communications Team at the Council should review marketing practices, means of communication and engagement to ensure that all sectors of the community continue to be made aware of local authority news, promotions and community programmes, specifically working in collaboration with children's services to ensure that home educating families in particular, are receiving updates on the general offer open to them as Islington residents.

The Council should also consider, in consultation with young people, exploring and utilising different social media channels that could possibly reach this cohort more effectively.



### **How this supports the Council's priorities**

By working to ensure all young people feel part of the community and informed of the opportunities available to them, we would be meeting the Council's objectives of Child Friendly Islington <sup>17</sup> and Fairer Together <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

<sup>18</sup> [Fairer Together | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities



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### **Recommendation Three**

#### **Our finding was:**

Outreach work, particularly that of Islington's detached youth workers, was often constrained by a lack of available or known communal facilities where this outreach could be further developed to draw in vulnerable young people who might otherwise congregate in unsuitable and unsafe locations.



#### **The evidence supporting this was:**

##### Our meeting with Targeted Youth Support (TYS):

Both members of the Committee and TYS workers highlighted that in the north of the borough there were fewer youth spaces from which they could further engage with young people, particularly in the Archway area.

##### Our visit to Lift Youth Hub:

During the visit to Lift, the workers and young people expressed their desire to see an equivalent safe space/facility in the northern districts of the borough. Young people also reported that when they transitioned from facilities suitable for younger children such as adventure playgrounds, to those for older children, the pathways, and spaces open to them specifically catering to their needs, was unclear.

##### Our visit to Platform Youth Hub:

During the visit, young people expressed a desire for youth spaces to open on weekends.



#### **The Committee recommends that:**

Services across the Council should collaborate internally across directorates and externally with community partners to identify the borough's community assets and spaces that can be opened up to young people and support workers, including on weekends, evenings and in school holidays.



#### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to ensure that young people have safe spaces they can access throughout the year, we would be meeting the Council's priority of creating a Child Friendly Islington<sup>19</sup> and a Safe Place To Call Home<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

<sup>20</sup> [A safe place to call home | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Four**

### **Our finding was:**

Members found that the library service's programme and usage was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had not yet been fully restored to its pre-pandemic level.



### **The evidence supporting this was:**

#### Our meeting with Islington Libraries:

Library officers noted that young people visit all of the libraries, but the actual number might not be reflected in our library membership as this data is based on active memberships only; visitor counts were not sufficient for this purpose. Library officers had a desire to build on the service's partnerships and restore elements of pre-pandemic programme but are constrained by resources.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

The Council should consider allocating the resources necessary to allow officers to implement measures to transform Islington's libraries into safe havens for children and young people; specifically, to establish the feasibility of:

- Informally commissioning detached youth workers to frequent the library space at peak periods.
- Promoting the borough's libraries as a safe place of refuge for vulnerable young people.
- Strengthening the promotion of mental health support, counselling and health and wellbeing support services during the exam season(s).
- Cross-promoting library services with that of youth services at adventure playgrounds, Platform, Lift and other hubs, as a space for the 13-plus cohort.

The Council should also consider allocating resources to allow officers to evaluate the possibility of introducing measures to bolster the library service's youth offer such as:

- Advertising bookable, group study spaces.
- Restarting homework clubs.
- Collaborating with colleagues from other Council services on delivering a programme of skills sessions on studying, revision, and research.
- Providing library activities, clubs, and events for particular cohorts such as children and young people with special education needs and disabilities, looked after children and/or home educated children and their respective families



### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to bolster the offer available to, and spaces open to young people, to learn, feel safe and supported, we would be meeting the Council's priorities on creating A Safe Place to Call Home<sup>21</sup>, and A Child Friendly Islington<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> [A safe place to call home | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

<sup>22</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Five**

### **Our Finding was:**

Corporate data, reporting and key performance indicators – particularly those presented to Committee – are predominantly quantitative and focused on statistical measures, consequently not capturing qualitative, equally-successful, outcomes and progress.



### **The evidence supporting this was:**

#### Our meeting with Targeted Youth Support (TYS):

Testimony from staff on the frontline corroborated members' concerns that traditional methods of reporting were not capturing all forms of success – an example given was that sometimes a child remaining in a safe place or simply making efforts to return to school were worthwhile outcomes not currently recordable under existing reporting methods.

#### Our meeting with Islington Foster Carers Association (IFCA):

Foster carers reported the closing of youth clubs in their neighbourhoods due to those organisations being unable to evidence required outcomes and therefore not being granted funding.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

Officers should consider re-evaluating how reporting of success is measured and recorded across Children's Services to capture hidden outcomes.



### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to highlight all forms of success and encourage the development and progress of the borough's young people, we would be meeting the Council's priorities on creating A Child Friendly Islington<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

## OBJECTIVE:

To explore how support to attend school, learn and prepare for the world of work can be strengthened for the following children and young people at risk:

- a. children with a social worker
- b. care-experienced young people
- c. vulnerable adolescents

### **Recommendation Six**

#### **Our finding was:**

During the review, young people and those working with vulnerable young people, across Islington, were found to be keen for the local authority to broker more opportunities in terms of employment and business advice. Young people from marginalised groups can find it difficult to access employment and/or training – including the borough's own apprenticeship and learning programmes.



#### **The evidence supporting this was**

##### Our visit to Platform Youth Hub:

When asked by members what more the Council could be doing to support young people, the young people at Platform voiced a desire for the Council to provide more employment and training opportunities.

##### Our visit to Lift Youth Hub:

when asked the same question by members, the young people at Lift voiced a desire for more support to young people who were entrepreneurial and wanted to start their own business.

##### Our meeting with Targeted Youth Support (TYS):

TYS workers highlighted the difficulty in accessing employment and training for young people who had not followed traditional pathways. Lack of grades or lack of completion of the school-brokered work experience programme (which was disrupted during COVID-19 lockdowns) were cited as barriers. An example was given of a student supported by TYS who committed to their course on the basis of a flexible work placement being facilitated at a local garage, to which members noted the Council's facility in Cottage Road could fulfil that purpose. TYS workers also highlighted difficulty in securing mentoring for their young people.



#### **The Committee recommends that:**

- (a) The Council should build on the 100 Hours World of Work programme by reviewing and adapting it so that it is more flexible and accessible to marginalised groups such as those not in mainstream education. In doing so, the Council should also consider whether that expanded offer could include opportunities to allow young people to build skills in entrepreneurship, learn how to set up a business, build a website and provide mentoring/coaching for young people through established partners/providers in the Islington area.

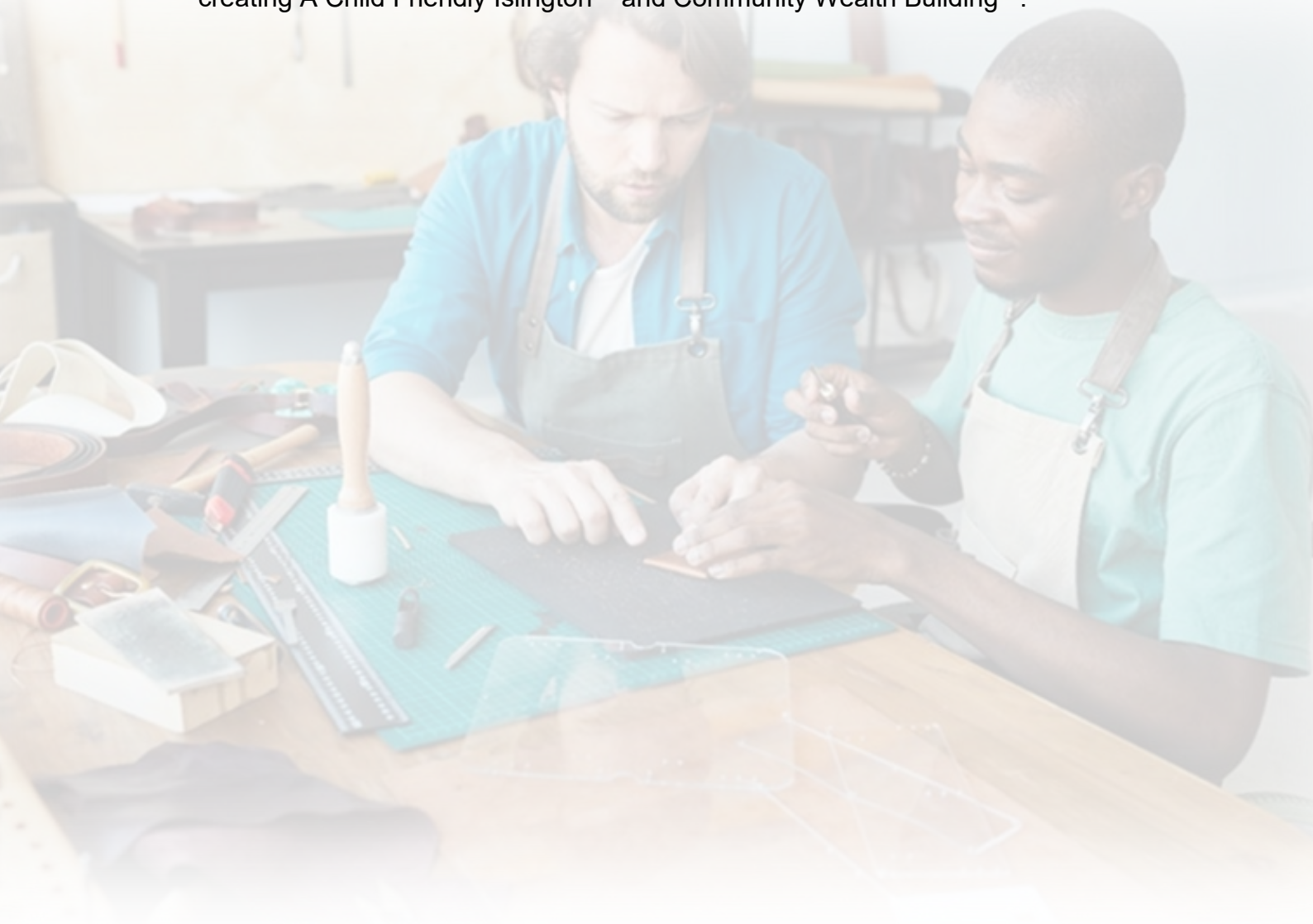


- (b) The Council's Inclusive Economy & Jobs service should improve the visibility of clear pathways for marginalised young people to access career pathways and employment support, including the Council's own in-house apprenticeship programmes. In addition, the Council should seek through its procurement processes to secure maximum youth-focused social value, e.g., World of Work opportunities, to enable local businesses to support the borough's marginalised children and young people.



**How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to bolster the opportunities available to young people and supporting a local economy that works for everyone, we would be meeting the Council's priorities of creating A Child Friendly Islington<sup>24</sup> and Community Wealth Building<sup>25</sup>.



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<sup>24</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

<sup>25</sup> [Community Wealth Building | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Seven**

### **Our finding was:**

Certain cohorts of children and young people experience higher levels of school absence and lower academic attainment compared to their peers.



### **The evidence supporting this was**

Our reports for scrutiny committee meetings:

The Committee heard about the impact absence can have on a young person's education and the need for targeted intervention.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

The Education Board should conduct granular analysis of absence data so that schools can work with their local communities to devise bespoke interventions for specific cohorts of children.



### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to ensure that all children and young people are getting the best out of their education, we would be meeting the Council's priorities of creating a Child Friendly Islington.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

## OBJECTIVE

To assess how the voice of children and young people can be strengthened across the children's system to further influence the planning and delivery of support and services, in equitable and inclusive ways.

### **Recommendation Eight**

#### **Our finding was:**

While many of Islington's youth services were generally reflective of the community they served, some areas still appeared at surface to be unequal or underrepresented in this regard.



#### **The evidence supporting this was**

##### Our meeting with the Youth Justice Service:

first-hand observation from members of the Committee of the staff in Islington's Youth Justice Service, for which it was noted that case managers were predominantly female. This contrasted with the client group which was male dominated. Staff confirmed that this was typically the case.

##### Our meeting with Targeted Youth Support:

first-hand observation from members on how reflective the TYS workforce was of the community served.



#### **The Committee recommends that:**

In order to provide a service that is representative of the community it serves, the Council should increase efforts to recruit and retain social workers, youth workers and other positions that work extensively with vulnerable young people, from global majority backgrounds



#### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By working to ensure that children and young people feel represented, we would be meeting the Council's priority of creating A Child Friendly Islington<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Nine**

### **Our finding was:**

There is a profound impact on the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children and children with a social worker from staff turnover within social services. Targeted interventions may be highly effective but when they end, children and young people can face a “cliff edge” where support falls away.



### **The evidence supporting this was**

#### Our meeting with The House Project:

Young people currently and/or previously supported by the House Project gave testimonies on the effect on their mental health and wellbeing from turnover of social workers, and that it greatly affected their participation and engagement levels.

#### Our meeting with the Youth Justice Service:

Young people outlined the effect on their mental health from a turnover of social workers and case managers on their mental health and wellbeing, and engagement with the programme. Young people reported that transition from the youth justice service to the probation service was difficult and left the feeling unsupported.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

- (a) Explore alternative and innovative strategies should be concentrated on further strengthening Islington’s high rate of retention of social workers to ensure stability is provided for the borough’s looked after children and children with a social worker.
- (b) The Council should ensure that programmes that it runs or commissions to support vulnerable young people (such as The House Project), have some provision for ongoing support.
- (c) The Council should fully realise its aspiration of “Corporate Parenting for Life” so that the most vulnerable young people are supported into adulthood and become part of a mutually supportive life-long community.



### **How this supports the Council’s priorities:**

By supporting the Council’s drive for Corporate Parenting for Life, we would also be supporting its’ priorities on creating A Child Friendly Islington<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> [Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

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## **Recommendation Ten**

### **Our finding was:**

There was more that Islington Council could be doing internally to boost the influence young people have within the local authority, specifically in the decision-making process.



### **The evidence supporting this was:**

#### Our meeting with Targeted Youth Support:

TYS workers noted that young people had been invited to participate in decision making before, but that expectations weren't managed about the impact their contribution(s) would have.

#### Our scrutiny meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023:

During the presentation to the Committee by Josh Harsant of Barnardo's, examples were presented to members of areas in which children and young people's voice could be amplified, citing examples such as:

- (i) The London Borough of Redbridge, which was actively involving its young people on planning matters.
- (ii) Other local authorities that set aside a section in corporate reporting and decision making to consider its impact on young people.



### **The Committee recommends that:**

- (a) Islington councillors should consider adapting their approach to community engagement to incorporate the voice of children, young people, and families, such as bringing key discussions and meetings into young people's hubs and spaces, inviting and encouraging young people to ward partnerships and inviting school children on environmental visual audits.
- (b) In order to better project the voice and influence of children and young people across the borough, the Council should consider incorporating Child Rights' Impact assessments (a section akin to finance and legal implications, but outlining the impact to children, young people and their rights/lives) into all formal reporting that is presented to its committees.



### **How this supports the Council's priorities:**

By adapting our approach to community engagement and consultation to meet the needs of our community, we would be meeting the Council's priority of Fairer Together<sup>29</sup> and of A Child Friendly Islington<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup>[Community Wealth Building | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

<sup>30</sup>[Child-friendly Islington | Islington Council](#) – one of five Council priorities

# Conclusion

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- 5.1 This review focussed on how the council works to improve the visibility of vulnerable children and ensure that there are equitable processes and inclusive practices that enable the voice of these children and young people to influence the support and services for them to thrive.
- 5.2 The Committee noted the wide-ranging work already being undertaken by the Council to improve the visibility of children and young people at risk of becoming invisible to the system. It is hoped the Committee's review will further support this work.
- 5.3 Ten recommendations have been made in response to the evidence received.
- 5.4 The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the review.
- 5.5 The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

<b>SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)</b>
<b>Title of review:</b> Making Children Visible
<b>Scrutiny Committee:</b> Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
<b>Director leading the review:</b> Jon Abbey, Corporate Director, Children's Services
<p><b>Overall aim of the review:</b> To assess the way the council works to improve the visibility of vulnerable children and ensure that there are equitable processes and inclusive practices that enable the voice of these children and young people to influence the support and services for them to thrive.</p>
<p><b>Objectives of the review:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To further understand and consider the current and future challenges for children and young people who may be at risk of invisibility to the children's system and how the council is responding to these</li> <li>2. To explore how support to attend school, learn and prepare for the world of work can be strengthened for the following children and young people at risk: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Children with a social worker</li> <li>b. Care-experienced young people</li> <li>c. Vulnerable adolescents</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. To assess how the voice of children and young people can be strengthened across the children's system to further influence the planning and delivery of support and services, in equitable and inclusive ways</li> </ol>
<p><b>How does this review contribute to the Council's priorities?</b></p> <p>This scrutiny review will contribute to the Council's strategic priority to nurture our vulnerable children and young people in Islington, so everyone has the very best start. Making children visible enables young people have the access to the opportunities they need to feel safe, belong and thrive for a fulfilled life.</p> <p>This scrutiny review will enable the committee to explore issues related to making vulnerable children visible, the work currently being undertaken, and explore areas for further improvements to the children's improvements.</p>
<p><b>Scope of the review and evidence to be received:</b></p> <p>The review will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The disproportionality and disparities for children who may be at risk of invisibility to the children's system</li> <li>• The challenges, opportunities, and developments to improve the visibility of children and the voice of the child/young person identified by the young people and families themselves, and professionals working in Islington</li> <li>• The current support and pathways for identified groups of children and young people at risk of invisibility to the wider children's system e.g., elective home education, within the virtual school, post-16 education, employment and training</li> </ul>

- Different models of child/youth voice and influence approaches and an exploration of how this can be more effective, inclusive and achieve change.

Subject to agreement, the Committee will use the following to receive and gather the evidence:

Documents and data information to include:

- Summary of policy papers, think tank reports, and academic studies that pertain to the subject matter
- How other boroughs and organisations have embedded child/family voice, engagement, and influence approaches
- Attendance, destinations, and pathways to EET
- Summary findings from the Pathway Plans of Children Looked After who were NEET

Insight visits and/or meetings with:

- Young people who are home schooled and their parents/carers
- Care-experienced young people supported by the virtual school with a particular focus on those placed more than 20 miles outside Islington
- Care-experienced young people and their pathway to education, employment, training and housing
- Young people known to the Targeted Youth Support and the Youth Justice Service
- Staff at Lift, Platform and New River College who provide EET advice and support to young people
- Staff from Detached Youth Work and Arsenal in the Community
- All relevant senior council officers
- Other organisations and boroughs who embed child/family voice and influence approaches e.g., Participation People, Greenwich Council
- Care Leavers
- Foster Carers Coffee Morning
- Young Carers
- Parents and Carers of 2–4-year-olds
- Parents and Carers who use the charity Home Start

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.



# We have set ourselves **five missions** in order to create **a more equal future** for Islington in 2030:

## Child-friendly Islington:

By 2030, Islington is a place where all children and young people are rooted in a community where they feel safe, can thrive and are able to be part of and lead change.

## Fairer Together:

By 2030, everyone in Islington who needs extra help and support can access the right support for them at the right time and in the right place.

## A Safe Place to Call Home:

By 2030, everyone in Islington has a safe, decent and genuinely affordable place to call home.

## Community Wealth Building:

By 2030, there is a sustainable, inclusive, and locally-rooted economy in Islington, where wealth is shared fairly and residents and businesses feel they have a stake in their community.

## Greener, Healthier Islington:

By 2030, communities in Islington can access, and enjoy London's greenest, cleanest and healthiest neighbourhoods and are able to live healthy, fulfilling and independent lives.

For each of these missions, we will keep challenging ourselves to do better with and for our residents. For example, we've launched the Thriving Neighbourhoods programme, investing £10m to ensure everyone has a safe place to call home. Through Fairer Together, we will ensure anyone who needs extra help has access to a new Access Islington Hub in their local area offering support on money, work, food, family, safety, housing and wellbeing. And our Community Wealth Building programme is providing affordable workspaces for local businesses such as SPACE4 in Finsbury Park, which since opening in 2019 has had 46 regular workspace users. To deliver on our Net Zero Carbon ambitions, we have established Liveable Neighbourhoods and through the Greening Together programme will deliver up to 1.5 hectares of new green spaces by 2030.

Achieving our shared ambition for a more equal future is not just about what we do, but how we do it. We can only bring about the change we all care so deeply about through a collective endeavour with local businesses, other public services, residents and community organisations. Our communities tell us that they want to be much more involved in identifying and addressing local issues. We know they are the experts on their lives and the challenges they are facing and they need to be in the driving seat in terms of coming up with the solutions that will make the biggest difference. It is only by working **together that we can create a more equal future in Islington.**

**Our Islington Promise sets out what local people can expect from us, and also what we are asking from them. No one knows exactly what the future holds, but we can promise that we will confront it together.**

# Glossary

Term	Meaning
AP	<p><b>Alternative Provision</b></p> <p>Places that provide education for children who can't go to a mainstream school</p>
ASC	<p><b>Autistic Spectrum Condition(s)</b></p> <p>Autistic spectrum condition(s) are characterised by difficulties interacting and communicating. The characteristics of autism can be described as the 'triad of impairment':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialisation - poor social skills.</li> <li>• Communication - difficulties with speech language and communication.</li> <li>• Imagination - rigid thought and resistance to change. The commonly used terms 'autism' and 'Asperger's syndrome' are autistic spectrum disorders.</li> </ul>
CAMHS	<p><b>Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services</b></p> <p>Part of the NHS, specialising in providing help and treatment for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.</p>
Code of Practice	<p><b>Code of Practice</b></p> <p>Statutory guidance for early education settings, schools, local authorities and those that help them, on meeting their responsibilities for children with SEND.</p>
DfE	<p><b>Department for Education</b></p> <p>The Department for Education is a ministerial department responsible for education and children's services in England, supported by agencies and public bodies including Ofsted, the Education Funding Agency and the Standards and Testing Agency.</p>
Early Years Settings	<p><b>Early Years Settings</b></p> <p>Providers who receive government funding to deliver early education including maintained mainstream and special schools, maintained nursery schools, independent schools, non-maintained special schools, local authority day-care providers such as day nurseries and family centres, other registered day-care providers such as pre-schools, playgroups and private day nurseries, and accredited childminders.</p>
EAL	<p><b>English as an Additional Language</b></p> <p>Referring to students who were born in Britain for whom English is not the first language at home and for students not born in Britain, having arrived in the country after the acquisition of their first language (typically 5 years old or over).</p>

EHCP, EHC Plan	<p><b>Education, Health and Care Plan</b></p> <p>Some children or young people with more complex educational needs receive support through an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. An EHC plan is a legal document that describes a child or young person's special educational, health and social care needs. It explains the extra help that will be given to meet those needs and how that help will support the child or young person to achieve what they want to in their life. The plan is drawn up by the local authority after an EHC needs assessment.</p>
EP	<p><b>Educational Psychologist</b></p> <p>Educational psychologists are trained in psychology, pedagogy and child development. They provide advice, consultation and assessment to schools and other settings</p>
Governor	<p><b>Governor</b></p> <p>Each school has a board of Governors that is responsible to parents, funders and the community for making sure the school provides a good quality education.</p>
IDLDP	<p><b>Islington Learning Disabilities Partnership</b></p> <p>Islington Learning Disabilities Partnership works with people affected with learning disabilities.</p>
LA	<p><b>Local Authority</b></p> <p>Local government body responsible for providing education and for making statutory assessments and maintaining statutory plans.</p>
LDD	<p><b>Learning Disabilities and Difficulties</b></p> <p>A child has learning difficulties if he or she finds it much harder to learn than most children of the same age or has a disability which prevents them from making use of educational facilities provided.</p>
Local Offer	<p><b>Local Offer</b></p> <p>All Local Authorities must publish a Local Offer. The purpose of the Local Offer is to enable parents and young people to see more clearly what services are available in their area and how to access them. The offer will include provision from birth to 25, across education, health and social care and should be developed in conjunction with children and young people, parents/carers and local services, including schools, colleges, health and social care agencies.</p>
LAC	<p><b>Looked After Children</b></p> <p>A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she is in their care or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority.</p>
Mainstream School	<p><b>Mainstream School</b></p> <p>A school which is not a special school</p>
MLD	<p><b>Moderate Learning Difficulties</b></p>

	<p>Definitions of Moderate Learning Difficulties vary. However, a common understanding is that there must be substantial difficulties (3+ years below standard progress) in two or more of the following areas: literacy, numeracy, speech and language, social skills, memory, concentration - typically in conjunction with an exceptionally low score on an individual test of intelligence and notable low self-esteem / independence in learning.</p>
Municipal Year	<p><b>Municipal Year</b></p> <p>The municipal year is a period used by local government in the United Kingdom, referring to the period from May (usually when the local elections are held) to the same period the following year.</p>
NEET	<p><b>Not in Education, Employment or Training</b></p> <p>A NEET is a young person who is 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training'.</p>
OFSTED	<p><b>Office for Standards in Education</b></p> <p>OFSTED is the inspectorate for children and learners in England and they oversee the quality of the provision of education and care through inspection and regulation. They inspect childcare providers, schools, colleges, children's services, teacher training and youth work.</p>
OT	<p><b>Occupational Therapist</b></p> <p>Occupational Therapists see children who have difficulties with practical everyday activities such as dressing, eating, playing with toys etc.</p>
PEP	<p><b>Personal Education Plans</b></p> <p>PEPs are a means for all those involved with the education of a child in care to help them achieve their potential by providing a focus on the actions required by carers, child, and professionals. Over time, the PEP will provide a continuous record of the child's school history.</p>
Physiotherapists	<p><b>Physiotherapists</b></p> <p>Physiotherapists see children who have difficulties with movement (e.g.: walking, kicking a ball). The therapist will assess the child's movements and identify what the physical problems are and then devise a treatment plan.</p>
PMLD	<p><b>Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties</b></p> <p>Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties have severe and complex learning needs, in addition they have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities or a sensory impairment. Children require a high level of support, both for their learning needs and also for personal care.</p>
PRU	<p><b>Pupil Referral Unit</b></p> <p>Provides education for children who may be out of school for a variety of reasons including exclusion.</p>
SEN	<p><b>Special Educational Needs</b></p> <p>Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which requires special educational provision to be made for them.</p>

SENCO	<p><b>Special Educational Needs Coordinator</b></p> <p>The member of staff with responsibility for coordinating special educational provision within a school setting.</p>
SEND	<p><b>Special Educational Needs and Disability</b></p>
SEN Support/SEN K	<p>Children who have special needs but do not have an EHCP are entitled to help in school under the SEN Support category</p>
Short Breaks	<p><b>Short Breaks</b></p> <p>Short breaks are provided to give children and young people with a disability enjoyable experience away from their primary carers, helping them to develop their personal and social skills and reducing social isolation. These breaks can include day, evening, overnight and weekend activities and can take place in the child's own home, the home of an approved carer, a residential or community setting.</p>
SEMH	<p><b>Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs</b></p> <p>Social, emotional and mental health needs are a type of special educational needs in which children/young people have severe difficulties in managing their emotions and behaviour. They often show inappropriate responses and feelings to situations. This means that they may have trouble in building and maintaining relationships with peers and adults; they can also struggle to engage with learning.</p>
Special School	<p><b>Special School</b></p> <p>A school which caters for the needs of children with Special Educational Needs.</p>