

Lead Member Annual Report

2023/24

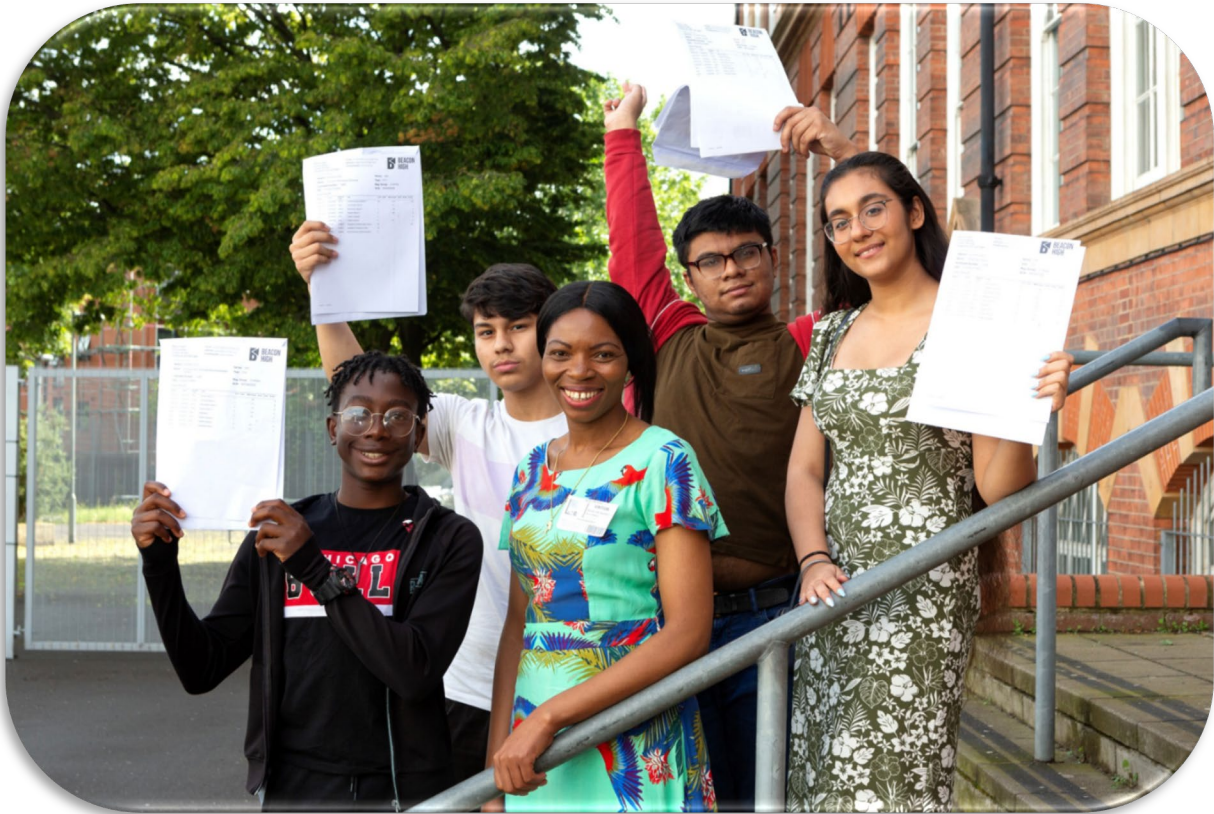
Cllr Michelline Ngongo, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

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INTRODUCTION



Over a number of years, there have been significant improvements in early years, social care and youth services. Many of our services are judged as good or outstanding through external quality and improvement challenge organisations such as Ofsted.

However, Islington's population of children and families is changing. Islington is expected to see a decrease in the under 5s population whilst experiencing an increase in the number of older school-aged children. This is compounded by factors such as falling birth rates, falling EU migration, the impact of Covid in terms of a potential net loss of families to the wider region and the continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis and Covid which have aggravated inequalities. We have seen a year-on-year increase in the number of school-aged children and young people identified with SEND, particularly those who have an Education Health and Care Plan.

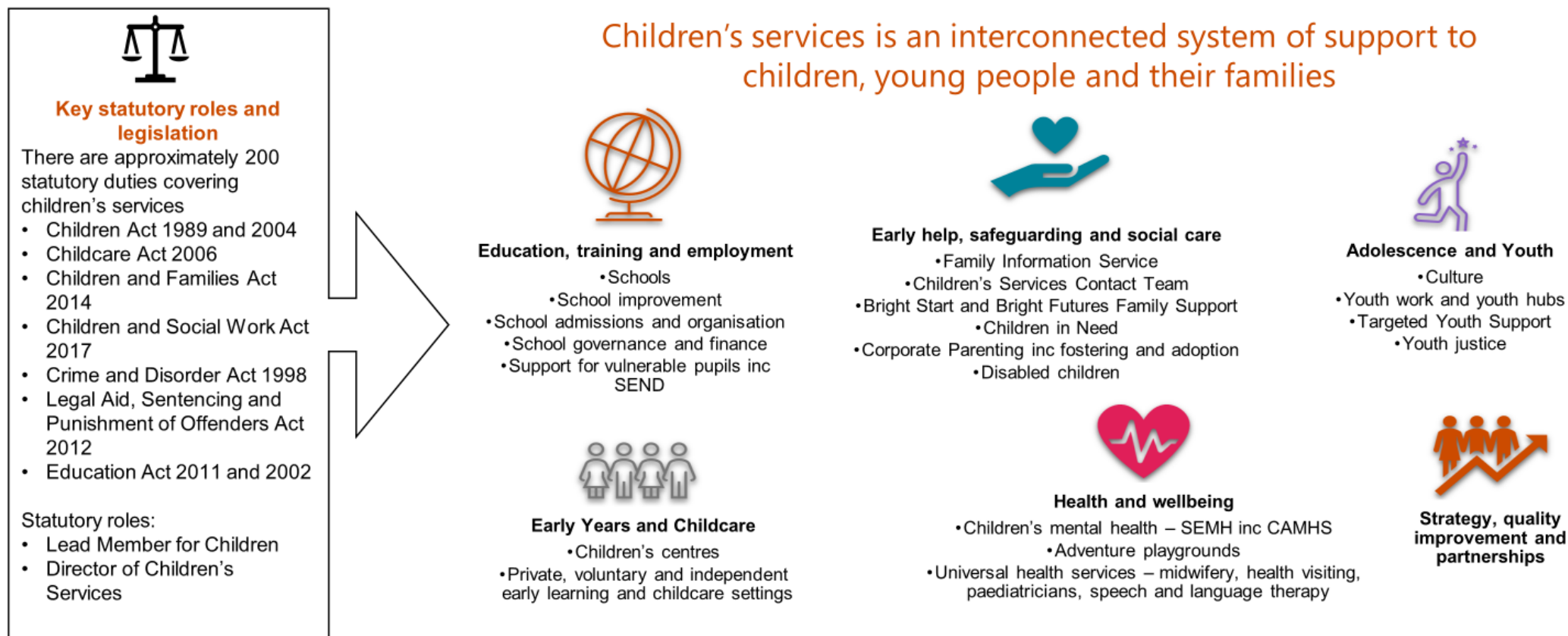
This is likely to impact the quality of life for children and their families, as well as the potential for children's services to provide the help and support they may need.

Islington is still one of the most deprived local authorities in London with one of the highest levels of child poverty in the country.

The impact of welfare reforms and lack of affordable secure housing can increase the numbers of children living in poverty and at risk of difficult childhood experiences. This affects increased demand for early help and children's social care services.



The changing population and challenges facing both the families and the council has shaped a stark demand for children's services. More can also be done to make sure that children and young people in Islington start well in life. Despite the current and future local and national challenges, I want us to keep on challenging ourselves to unlock every opportunity possible to benefit our children, young people and their families.



Many of the council's services for children, young people and their families are delivered in partnership with other organisations such as the NHS, schools, the Metropolitan Police, probation services and the community and voluntary sector.

My role and responsibilities as a Lead Member for Children is set out in law. As a member of the Council Executive, I have political responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of Islington's children's services. I have a key role in defining the local vision and setting political priorities for children's services within the broader political context of the Council.

I am responsible for ensuring that the needs of all children and young people in Islington, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers, are addressed. To do this, I must work closely with other local partners to improve the outcomes and well-being of children

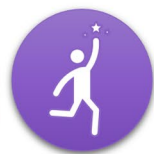
and young people. I must also have regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and ensure that children and young people are involved in the development and delivery of local services.

Finally, I am required to provide strong, strategic leadership and support and challenge to the Corporate Director of Children's Services and relevant members of their senior team as appropriate. Together, we have strong foundations and values that relentlessly pursue equity and excellence for our children and their families. The journey towards this must continue.

Children aged 0 to 18 in receipt of an early help service with the aim of avoiding escalation into statutory services ● Children in Need including in need of help and protection ● Families with multiple and complex needs ● Children Looked After by the council ● Care-experienced young people ● Islington parents, parents-to-be, foster carers, adopters and special guardians ● Young unpaid carers aged under 16 ● Vulnerable adolescents aged 10 and over ● Victims of violence against women and girls ● Young people subject to statutory YOS interventions and court orders

Over **71,000** children and young people aged 0 to 24 years old

Over **22,000** households with dependent children



Islington is home to a wonderful mix of children, young people and families. It can be a fantastic place to grow up in but it is also challenging.

Children with a long-term health condition ● Children and young people with a social, emotional or mental health need ● Children and young people with disabilities ● Children with statements or an Education, Health and Care Plan

Children and young people who go to an early years, childcare or education setting / school ● Children and young people who live, go to school or visit Islington and use services to develop skills for personal growth, creativity and relationships e.g. play, youth provision, arts and culture

2030: A CHILD-FRIENDLY ISLINGTON

We are determined to ensure that 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.

We and our partners will put in place the building blocks for our children and families to build resilience. Our children will start well from conception, thrive by five, and develop and progress to adulthood well, to be ready for life by 21 in safe, healthy, nurturing and families. We will develop a child-friendly borough for our children to live and grow up in.

We will do this by working with partners and communities to design and deliver approaches that equip our children and families with the tools they need to grow. We will make sure the way we design and deliver services gives support to those who need it the most and in doing so, tackles inequality.



What Islington will feel like for residents

- Children will feel safe in the community, will keep physically active and eat healthily, which will all promote good mental health.
- Every child, including the most disadvantaged and whatever their background or ability, will have the same opportunities and ambitions beginning in early years to reach their educational potential in a good Islington school.
- All children and young people who attend our education settings will be well-equipped and empowered with the necessary learning and skills for life for their future in the world of work.
- Children, adolescents, and young people are kept safe across Islington through effective safeguarding, including preventative and violence reduction arrangements which respond to both familial and extra-familial harm. There will also be a focus on early identification and escalation of concerns.
- Young adults, particularly those we are corporate parents for and those with disabilities, transition well to and/or live healthy, independent, and fulfilled lives with strong networks.

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION TOWARDS A CHILD-FRIENDLY ISLINGTON

Resilient children and families

What this means: The resilience of children, young people and families is strengthened through system-wide approaches with local partners to intervene early and prevent problems from escalating.

Challenges

- Islington is expected to see a decrease in the under 5s population. However, it is estimated that there will be an increase in the number of older school children particularly the 15 to 19 years olds.
- Projection data indicates that a lower number of births for Islington residents is likely to remain a trend in Islington.
- The continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis, welfare reforms and the 2019 Covid pandemic have aggravated inequalities. This is likely to impact the quality of life for children and their families and also the potential for local authorities' children's services to provide the help and support they may need.
- Islington has a high outcome for early help with approximately 10% of early help cases being referred to children's social care.
- Between 2018 and 2022, adults experiencing domestic abuse, poor mental health and/or substance misuse, remain among the most common reasons why children come to the attention of children's services.

2023/24: Key achievements

- Our collaborative partnership early childhood offer (Bright Start) is embedded so families can access Start for Life (0-2) services within Family Hubs across three localities and they benefit from the four Bright Start Strategy pledges.
- Year 2 of the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme delivered so that our family help and support is developing into a seamless integrated offer of support for all families delivered through a family hub model, with tailored support for those who need it most. Two family hub sites have been launched with the final site ready to launch in 2024/25.
- Child-Friendly Community: Together with other organisations in Islington, the characteristics and framework has been scoped to create a child and youth friendly Islington where the voices, needs, priorities, and the rights of children play an integral part in our policies and programmes, as well as being involved in the decision-making process.
- There has been increased promotion of our offer in Adventure playgrounds across the borough in recent times in order to make sure that more parents are aware of how they can ensure that their children access this service. It is a priority of the service to ensure that this promotion continues, as the adventure playgrounds have the capacity and there is an increased level of need of children in the borough due to a variety of social factors.
- There are new tenants for Platform Youth space whilst we also ensure that young people in the north continue to benefit from a strong and cohesive youth offer.
- Some of the young people have taken some time to fully reengage with the youth spaces since the pandemic commenced. As these young people become more comfortable in living with Covid as a common condition/virus, more of them have returned to the youth clubs. In addition, some of the young people using the youth clubs have 'aged out' and have been replaced by a newer and younger cohort. Promotion of the youth hubs will also continue in order to ensure that the number of participants continues to increase steadily.

2024/25: Future plans

- Widening the impact of Baby-Friendly Islington and a follow up reassessment with UNICEF BFI
- Three Family Hubs Locality Networks to support everyone who works with children and families, including non-children's services teams and the community and voluntary sector, can collaborate on supporting children in local areas
- Lead Members and senior officers for health, environment, community safety, communities and inclusive economy will work with young people to own, shape, and lead a child-friendly initiative in their areas so that everyone makes child-friendly a reality within their work
- Subject to notification from the Department for Education, we will be considering how to reshape our family help and support offer to be ready for new statutory responsibilities from the national Children's Social Care Review.

Lifelong learning, skills and enrichment

What this means: Children, young people and their families are empowered with the learning and skills for life, work and the future of work supported by a high quality and high performing, inclusive education and skills system.

Challenges

- Falling rolls is a pressing issue and is leading to a decline in funding for some schools.
- There is a complex interplay of factors which impacts on the demand for formal childcare. The interaction between these factors has changed over time and depend on a range of personal and household characteristics. There is a need for a resilient model for early years childcare which ensures minimal vacancies, minimal 'waiting list time' and maximum occupancy.
- Nationally, the rise in absenteeism among pupils has been startling and seen to be one of the most damaging legacies of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The demand for SEND services has changed over time, with numbers rising each year since 2016. The reasons for this increase in demand are complex but likely to include improved identification of need – particularly in the area of sensory processing, increased complexity of need in all areas, increased levels of poverty impacting on family health and wellbeing and pressure on school budgets. We are also seeing the effects of the COVID pandemic, particularly on the mental health of the population and the development of communication and social younger children

2023/24: Key achievements

- We are proud to have a high percentage of good and outstanding schools in Islington. Schools are allocated an Islington Professional Partner (IPP) who have been providing external advice and support in preparation for Ofsted inspections. A programme of School Improvement Groups (SIG) also supplements the work of the Islington Professional Partners and provides the strategic oversight of the school improvement work being provided to the schools so that all strands of support are aligned and focused on the priorities required to secure good judgements at each setting's next Ofsted inspection.
- We have implemented a reshaped approach to supporting school attendance. We have met with schools to identify specific groups for targeted support. Support has been prioritised for schools where attendance is most impacted.
- A model for school catering has been explored and developed
- Phase 2 of the School Organisation Plan delivered to manage school places and support financial viability of schools
- The potential for remodelling the current subsidised childcare offer to better meet the needs of parents and carers and support the financial sustainability of nurseries through full occupancy, considering the national expansion of childcare for under 3s, has been explored
- Collaborative working arrangements have been strengthened between education settings and other services to deliver the Education Plan's six priorities which aims to develop a sustainable school system and drive educational excellence for all children
- We have taken forward the SEND Strategy and continued to explore collaborative partnership working arrangements so that these can be strengthened for children and young people with SEND. All our specialist providers are good or outstanding, and we are ranked in the top 10% (11th highest) of all LAs nationally for the proportion of schools graded good or outstanding by Ofsted across all schools.
- We successfully piloted three Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) for children with ASC in mainstream primary schools, supported by additional SEND Capital, with much learning. The further development of our ARP programme is currently under review to enable us to reflect with parents and schools on our shifting context.

2024/25: Future plans

- A relentless focus on attendance, facilitating collaboration between schools, other council services and the community
- Implementing an agreed approach to school catering
- Implementing the School Organisation Plan so that we have financial viable schools and good school places for our population of children and young people
- Implementing a childcare offer that continues to better meet the needs of parents and carers together
- Looking for more ways to improve co-production and collaboration with SEND parents, children and young people.

Care, support, and safeguarding

What this means: Children, adolescents and young people are kept safe through effective safeguarding, preventative and violence reduction arrangements which respond to familial and extra-familial harm, early identification and reduce escalation of concerns

Challenges

- Since the start of the 2023/24 financial year, there has been an average of 1,110 contacts each month. The view of the service is that the rise this year reflects the impact of the pandemic and the current economic crisis that result in increased stress factors family experience. The view of the service is also that contacts made are appropriate and families receive early help services or social care services where needed.
- Between 2018 and 2022, the rates of children looked after by the Council and care leavers were consistently higher than the Inner London and London average respectively.
- The number of children who are the subject of a child protection plan appears broadly in line with the needs of children in Islington. Care proceedings and children needing to be looked after has also reduced, leading to more emphasis on supporting children at risk of significant harm at home with their family, wherever safe to do so

2023/24: Key achievements

- Overall, the numbers of children looked after by the council has reduced with these children remaining supported at home or with family members. The teams continue to audit this to check that the decisions not to look after some children are correct and safe.
- We have a strong understanding of the quality of social work practice in Islington, informed and assured by robust practice data, twice yearly practice weeks, regular audit activity, a social work health check, feedback from families and external scrutiny provided by Ofsted.
- The Exploitation and Missing team continue to prioritise quality assuring the service's response to young people who are missing or away from placement without authorisation. This work includes professional training, daily reviewing of missing episodes, collating missing briefings for senior managers, and chairing the strategy meetings when a young person is missing.
- We are shaping much of the pan-London regional commissioning work to ensure children and young people with complex needs have timely access to health and social care, including placement services. This will help us to better identify the 'hard to place' older age cohort of young people presenting as children looked after or with complex SEND, who combine mental health and behavioural issues and rapidly trial and evaluate initiatives for working with them.
- It is important to me that young people aged 10-17 triaged well to divert them away from the criminal justice system. Targeted Youth Support and the partnership continue to focus on early intervention and diversion through effective Triage delivery. This ensures that relevant young people receive an appropriate, well-balanced and suitable tailored level of support that addresses their needs. The aim is to prevent any further escalation in their circumstances and behaviours.

2024/25: Future plans

- Ensuring we are inspection-ready for the next Ofsted and HMIP inspections on children's social care and youth justice
- Continued and enhanced focus on attendance and attainment of children in need, children in need of protection and children requiring early help services from the Virtual School, Learning and Achievement department and Safeguarding and Family Support department
- Review of the Edge of Care Service for Adolescents and those 0-11 years old.
- Expansion of Adolescent Support and Intervention Project with adolescent females at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation.

Progressing well to adulthood, independent and fulfilled lives

What this means: Young adults, particularly those whom we are corporate parents for, those with disabilities, women and girls transition well to and/or live healthy, independent and fulfilled lives with strong networks

Challenges

- Transition into adulthood and adult services for young people with SEND, in care or in need of safeguarding is key for the following reasons:
- Young people entering adulthood can experience a 'cliff-edge' in terms of support.
- Adolescents may experience a range of risks and harms, and so may require a distinctive safeguarding response.
- Harm, and its effects, do not stop at the age of 18.
- Many of the environmental and structural factors that increase a child's vulnerability persist into adulthood, resulting in unmet needs and costly later interventions.
- The children's and adults' systems, including safeguarding, are arguably conceptually and procedurally different, and governed by different statutory frameworks, which can make the transition to adulthood harder for young people facing ongoing risk or vulnerability

2023/24: Key achievements

- We have established a refreshed transitions approach between children's services and adult social care for young people with a health and/or social care need and their families to have the best experience possible when they transition from children's to adult social care services.
- The development and creation of new partnerships within the Council and key organisations such as the NHS, London Metropolitan University, Ayming, Arsenal in the community & Element that deliver targeted interventions and programmes for young people
- Embedding the Lifelong Corporate parenting approach across the council:
 - Council wide scheme around work experience, apprenticeships and jobs has been developed to create more opportunities for care experienced young people
 - 72% of 19–21-year-old care experienced young people are engaged in Education, Employment or Training and increase of 12%
 - 60 care experienced young people moved into their own permanent accommodation. Islington's housing by back scheme has created 20 additional homes for our care experienced young people. Wrap around support is being set up to support their transition into adult life.
 - Care experienced young people post 25 will receive additional support from Housing if needed to support their tenancy. No care experienced young person will be made intentionally homeless. This has included work with Housing Association providers who are committed to this principle as well.
 - Implementation of the Unnecessary Criminalisation of Children looked After with a localised joint protocol with the police. In 22/23 5 (3%) of children looked after for more than a year were convicted of an offence a reduction of 4%.
 - Becoming part of the Care Leavers Covenant in order to secure more opportunities for care experienced young people.
 - Through social value exploration with contracts the council has secured furniture for care experienced young people..

2024/25: Future plans

- Consideration of a proposal for care experienced young people to be a protected characteristic
- Lifelong Corporate Parenting task and finish group to consider Islington becoming a foster friendly council and mental health support for care experienced young people
- Further embedding the Lifelong Corporate parenting approach across the council and establishing this across partners.
- All care experienced young people receiving free prescriptions from March 2024.
- Further embedding social value approaches through all contracts the Council has, including free wi-fi for care experienced young people in their own accommodation.