

Children's Services

222 Upper Street, N1 1XR

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

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 18 April 2024

Ward(s): All

Subject: Response to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – Making Children Visible Report

1 Synopsis

- 1.1 The Executive received a report from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee which reviewed 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. The scrutiny report proposed 10 recommendations to further improve how we ensure the visibility of vulnerable children. This report proposes actions to be taken in response to the making children visible scrutiny.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To welcome the findings of the Making Children Visible Scrutiny Review
- 2.2 To agree the Executive responses to the recommendations of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4 of this report.
- 2.3 To agree that officers report back on progress to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee at a time agreed with the Scrutiny Committee.

3 Background

- 3.1 The review was undertaken by the Committee between July 2022 and March 2023.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The common themes highlighted through the findings evidenced the following:
- Transitions, which can be especially challenging for vulnerable children.
 - The impact for looked after children of being cared for out-of-borough in terms of making it harder to access support/services.
 - The importance of the council taking every opportunity to be a collaborative and proactive partner.
- 3.4 Those engaged through this review were:
- Arsenal in the community
 - Disability Action in Islington
 - Islington Foster Carers Association
 - Islington Library Service
 - Islington Targeted Youth Support Workers
 - Josh Harsant, Barnardo's
 - The Youth Justice Service
 - Staff and young people at the Lift Youth Hub
 - Staff and young people from Platform Youth Hub
 - The Virtual School

Their input ensured that the voice of children and young people were at the centre of the decisions made to improve the services that were designed for them.

4 Response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations

- 4.1 **Recommendation One: 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.**
- 4.2 **Response:** The Executive recognises the significance of ensuring that a return to mainstream education should be a clear and recognisable choice for children being educated at home and their parents. It is aware that Learning and Achievement department has spoken with parents who have elected to home educate their children to find out what they would find most helpful.

- 4.3 The Executive will ask the Learning and Achievement department to continue to explore ways to enable families to return to mainstream education. The department to consult and consider how the local Charter can respond to the needs of the EHE community, ensuring that they remain visible to the education system and are supported appropriately. There is the opportunity to build on the pilot programme to explore and expand a flexible approach to elective home schooling and attending school. This pilot could pioneer a balance and new perspective in a hybrid approach to children returning full time to school. The charter will endeavour to meet the needs of as many individual children and young people with mental health, SEND, attendance needs etc as possible.
- 4.4 The council will explore how to use the EHE register to track EHE pupils, ensuring there are KIT (Keep in touch) meetings to hear the voice of the family and young person, promoting safeguarding and visibility, furthermore, responding to their needs where appropriate.
- 4.5 The council has also signed up to London's Inclusion Charter, developed by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in partnership with young people, schools, parents and carers and education specialists.
- 4.6 **Recommendation Two: 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.
- 4.7 **Response:** The Executive notes, there is a desire to carry out user research that identifies suitable and effective platforms for young people. There are further opportunities for the children's services to engage with young people, celebrating their successes and enhancing their ability to influence policy and take accountability. There is the opportunity for Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) to now launch their own social media platform which will have further reach and influence, with the Youth Council's voice and that of Youth Hubs (as many opportunities to engage different groups of young people) to be more targeted on pertinent and current issues, like attendance, mental health and community safety. The Executive supports this recommendation and will ask the Communications Department to work closely with the Children and Young People Directorate to explore and propose a way forward on this.
- 4.8 **Recommendation Three: 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.

4.9 **Response:** The Executive is aware of the assets that already exist and various officers who work in a collaborative way with internal and external partners to identify the main areas and wards of concern where young people need support. This can come in the form of reports from the Community Safety or Housing departments, or from VCS organisations or members of the public. To provide more options in working with young people, work will take place to potentially explore and identify other spaces and assets that can be opened up to enable the council workers to work with young people in safe and inclusive spaces. This could result in utilising our youth hubs and spaces that already exist in the borough and may assist in the delivery of work required during weekends, however, we have to be mindful and considered that there is no additional funding available.

4.10 **Recommendation Four: 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

4.11 **Response:** The Executive welcomes the principle of this recommendation particularly the use of spaces to facilitate to support to our young people. It notes that all the libraries are safe havens and display the publicity although further promotion may be needed in a way that works well for young people. The Executive will ask the Community Engagement and Wellbeing and Children and Young People Directorates to develop a joint action plan for the feasibility and implementation of a youth offer within libraries.

- 4.12 **Recommendation Five: Officers should consider re-evaluating how reporting of success is measured and recorded across Children's Services to capture hidden outcomes.**
- 4.13 **Response:** The Executive welcomes this recommendation and notes that the Children and Families Partnership Board are refreshing an outcomes framework for children, young people, and families, including how services capture impact and qualitative outcomes. The Executive will ask the Corporate Director of Children and Young People to review performance monitoring and reporting within Children's Services so that the measurement and recording of success when working with children and families is clearer.
- 4.14 **Recommendation six: 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.**

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.

- 4.15 **Response:** The Executives notes that the council continues to expand its offer of support to Islington's young people, particularly those that are not in employment, education or training (NEET) or considered vulnerable. The World of Work programme is now available to students up to the age of 18 and extends to those outside of mainstream settings, such as New River College, special schools, and those on alternative provision. Work experience has become a larger part of the offer and now includes council-based placements, opportunities brokered through social value agreements, paid placements through the local business community and work with our Anchor Institutions.

Two Youth Employment Hubs have recently opened in Finsbury Park and Cally. These will act as a community hub for all Islington young people to engage with practitioners providing functional skills training, careers guidance and employment support.

The offer around entrepreneurship is still being developed, however there are initial plans to establish a Youth Market for those wanting to become makers and traders, and early conversations with a local partner about a dragons den style investment opportunity for young people with a business idea.

The Executive will ask the Community Wealth Building directorate to ensure that future efforts in this area of work focuses on marginalised groups.

4.16 **Recommendation seven: 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.**

4.17 **Response:** The Executive notes the significance of ensuring that specific groups of children and young people receive support tailored to their circumstances. It will ask the Corporate Director of Children and Young People to work with the Education Board on the analysis of absence data and connect this to the wider work of Family Hub Networks and our supporting families approach.

4.18 **Recommendation eight: 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.**

4.19 **Response:** The Executive is aware that there has been much focus on recruitment processes within the Children and Young People directorate to improve and increase representation from different groups including those from Black and global majority backgrounds and the council needs to make sure that this continues.

The Executive recognises that posts need to be advertised in a variety of different places and forums, to ensure that people from different backgrounds are aware of them. Work is underway to increase these advertising pathways.

At the recruitment and shortlisting stage, it remains an important HR principle that applicants' names are not revealed until after the shortlisting stage. After this, when interviews take place, the directorate makes significant progress with ensuring that all interview panels are racially diverse.

The council needs to continue to monitor the progress of these objectives and processes including reviewing the data to inform how this is working. The Executive will ask the directorate to build further consideration of recruitment and retention from global majority backgrounds into its workforce development planning.

4.20 **Recommendation nine: (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.**

4.21 **Response:** The Executive notes the creation of a Social Work Academy which has expanded and structured the intake of social workers into the Children's Safeguarding department. It includes a variety of routes for newly qualified social workers including apprenticeships (having been successful at a DFE bid), Step Up to Social Work, Frontline and the traditional university route. Staff leave either to gain a promotion, to live outside London or to give up social work, which is a national trend. The Director of Safeguarding is seconded to the DFE to author the national career framework for social workers to assist the national recruitment and retention crisis. The Executive asks the directorate to consider how this could further strengthen our local approach when the framework is published.

All targeted interventions to support vulnerable young people are evaluated in terms of impact. Where positive impact is evidenced, the interventions are further invested in. For example, the House Project has been doubled, expanding to two cohorts of 10 young people per year, and the Adolescent Support and Intervention team has been integrated into core services given its success of preventing young people from becoming looked after.

The Council's aspiration of Lifelong Corporate Parenting is still in progress with [many achievements to date and a future plan of action](#) which will incorporate the principles of this recommendation.

4.22 **Recommendation ten: (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.**

4.23 **Response:** The Executive welcomes this recommendation and endorses the need to ensure that the voice and influence of children, young people and families are central to the way we work and make decision. As part of the implementation of the Child-friendly Islington programme, we will scope and determine the feasibility of Child Rights' Impact assessments as part of reports. The Children and Young People directorate will also be working with Democratic Services and the internal Participation and Engagement Team to advise councillors on community engagement that maximises the voices of children and families.

5 Implications

Financial Implications

5.1 The recommendations and responses laid out in this report reflect a number of the Council's priorities and support the Council's strategic plans for delivering these priorities. As such, the costs of the corresponding services and initiatives are

incorporated within the Council's budgets, largely within Children's Services. The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is already delivering enhanced and joined-up services for children, young people, parents and carers across the borough. These services will continue to be developed and expanded with partners including community groups during 2024/25 using the Government Grant funding allocated to Islington Council, which provides further opportunities to deliver many of the commitments contained within this report in a collaborative way.

Legal Implications

5.2 The ten recommendations in this report can be briefly summarised as:

- Home Education Charter
- Review communication methods with young people
- Identifying community facilities to make available to young people
- Expanding the role of libraries to better engage young people
- Review how Children's Services monitor successful outcomes for young people
- Building on the inclusive economy and jobs service for young people from all backgrounds.
- Analysis of education absence data
- Recruitment and retention of social workers and other employees working with vulnerable young people from diverse backgrounds
- Retention of social workers and promoting corporate parenting for life
- Islington Councillors use methods in community to ensure voice of the child is incorporated into their work.

5.3 The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties. Possibly the most relevant provision to this report is Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 which puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area.

5.4 However, the majority of the recommendations in this report may fit more closely into the power to promote wellbeing in the community through itself and with its partners pursuant to Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended.

5.5 The concept of corporate parenting for life goes beyond the provisions of the Children Act 1989 which place a duty on local authorities for looked after children, children in care and relevant ,eligible and qualifying care leavers but fall short of encompassing the entire life of the young person whilst the wellbeing power may have no such limits and colloquially is said to enable the local authority to do everything an individual would do which should include acting as a corporate parent for the life of the person unless a specific restriction was imposed by another statute.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

5.6 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

5.7 The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of

disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

- 5.8 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, because the information provided proposes actions that will need to be scoped for implementation. However, EIAs will need to be undertaken as part of the process of developing and implementing policies and actions arising from this report.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This report provides the collective response to the recommendations outlined within the Making Children Visible Scrutiny Report have highlighted key areas of improvement to services that impact the overall development and wellbeing of children and young people in Islington.

Final report clearance:

Authorised by: Cllr Michelline Safi-Ngongo

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

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Report Author: Maxine Adesina – Family Voice and Influence Lead
Email: Maxine.Adesina@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Tracy Shaw – Assistant Director of Finance, Children's Services
Email: tracy.shaw@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Peter Coutts, Principal Advocacy Solicitor, Legal Services
Email: peter.coutts@islington.gov.uk