

Cabinet Member Update

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Briefing of: Councillor Tim Barnes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

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1 SCHOOLS REOPENING

- 1.1 **Attendance:** in Week 4 (28th September to 2nd October), primary schools in WCC showed a rise in attendance from Monday through to Wednesday with a slight decrease on Thursday and Friday. Attendance was at 90% at the end of the week, slightly below the national average but above the average for London.
- 1.2 In terms of secondary schools, figures have shown a slight decline in the 4th week with attendance at 84-86%, compared to weeks 2 and 3 where the figures were between 88-92%. Thursday and Friday showed a decrease in attendance compared to the rest of the week. Westminster secondary schools were at 84% by the end of the week which is below the national average but above the London average.
- 1.3 Data on attendance is obtained by the Council from the DfE online portal. The Education Service has also established a by exception reporting system. Schools with below 85% attendance are asked to provide details to the School Standards team. Schools are then contacted by their lead adviser to discuss whole school attendance and the information is also shared with Early Help. The reason for the slightly low primary attendance is due mainly to children being absent due to the usual colds and childhood illnesses where parents are anxious and not sending them in. Schools are working with parents to ensure they understand the symptoms of Covid.
- 1.4 Early Help is working closely with all schools, supporting individual cases where there are concerns about attendance. With the return to statutory attendance in September, the usual referral process is in place, although the Council is

sensitive to the current situation and would not issue any warning letters or penalty notices unless it was felt appropriate.

- 1.5 In line with government and public health guidance, schools have put into place appropriate controls. This has included staggered start and finish times to the school day and the setting up of controlled ‘bubbles’ for teachers and class groups.
- 1.6 New admissions to Reception in September have held up well, with schools not experiencing any significant drop that might have been expected following the lockdown period. These figures are encouraging. However, long term trends remain poor with low numbers reflecting changes in London’s demographics. This presents a significant financial threat to the long-term ability to provide for the education of our young people at the standards we expect. Schools have been engaged through the Schools Forum to consider solutions to meet this challenge, which will likely mean a need for total capacity within Westminster schools to decrease further over time, particularly at Primary level.
- 1.7 **Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Offer:** it is widely acknowledged that Covid-19 is having a detrimental impact on the emotional wellbeing and mental health (EWMH) of many children and young people. In spite of this, referrals into local EWMH services (including CAMHS) dropped significantly early in lockdown. They have increased over time. However they are currently still at a lower level than they were pre-lockdown. This follows the same pattern seen in many services.
- 1.8 Headteachers have recognised the need to support the social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing of children as they have returned to school. Over the past couple of years there has been a key focus on developing and embedding a whole school approach to EWMH and this has meant that our school-based support offer has adapted well to meeting evolving needs during the last 6 months. We have delivered support and training to school staff focused on the resilience and wellbeing needs of children coming back to school after lockdown. We have had specialist input from the Education Psychology Service with webinars on transition, recovery and learning, various bespoke training courses focused on topics such as building resilience, dealing with loss and bereavement, and emotional coaching.
- 1.9 Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) provide additional support in 43 schools/settings in Westminster. The Teams’ tailored whole school offer in each school (focused on low to moderate mental health needs) has continued to evolve to meet needs during lockdown. The support of these teams extends beyond pupils to also include parents, teachers, headteachers and governors as part of a genuinely whole school approach. We are aware of the significant impact Covid-19 is having on school staff. To support this, the School Standards Team commissioned a Headteacher Coaching Circle focused on supporting emotional wellbeing and providing the opportunity to

reflect and learn from peers. In addition, the MHSTs are providing a variety of staff focused support.

- 1.10 Going forward, we will shortly be rolling out the DfE's Wellbeing for Education Return initiative locally. This will take the form of delivery of additional training to school staff across the borough and an enhanced menu of EWMH school support that schools which don't have MHSTs can draw on. This flexible menu of support will be designed to meet schools where they are in terms of their whole school approach to EWMH journey. In addition, we will be delivering further Trauma Informed practice training to school staff and will be delivering EWMH training for school governors to increase their awareness of the key role that they can play in supporting pupil and staff wellbeing as part of an effective whole school approach.
- 1.11 **Outbreak control process and data:** schools have been sent a Unique Organisation Number (UON) by DHSC which they can use to order tests. Schools have been informed of this via the weekly schools bulletin as well as through Heads meetings which are attended by colleagues from Public Health. We have provided them with the link they need to request tests and these kits are supplied in boxes of 10, with one box per 1,000 pupils or students. Schools are able to order additional tests should they need them. In consultation with the local Director of Public Health, where an outbreak in a school is confirmed, a mobile testing unit may be dispatched to test others who may have been in contact with the person who has tested positive. Testing will first focus on the person's class, followed by their year group, then the whole school if necessary, in line with routine public health outbreak control practice. To date (week of the 5th of October), since September there have been 16 positive cases among staff and 35 positive cases among pupils. The early years and schools outbreak management team (OMT) process has allowed us to have "real-time" intelligence.
- 1.12 **Congratulations to Max Haimendorf,** Principal of King Solomon Academy, who has been made an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2020 for his services to education.

2 WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

- 2.1 **Family navigators and wrapping support around primary schools:** the new role of the Family Navigator has been central both in terms of the integration of services that makes up the Family Hub and in terms of supporting a family's early access to services. The role was tested in Bessborough and has recently (April and May 2020) been extended to the hubs in the NE and NW. The skilled practitioners build bridges to and from local schools and GP practices, helping these providers support families into the services they need and then coordinating the network around a family. This was a major topic of discussion with Vicky Ford MP, the Minister for Children, during a virtual visit of the WCC Family Hubs services on 15

October. Westminster was elected for the visit having been identified as a beacon of excellence for family service provision.

- 2.2 Since the role began the navigators have worked with over 170 families and more than 310 children and young people. The two most common reasons for referral have been housing issues and children with SEND. Approximately 50% of the families referred meet at least two of the wider Troubled Families criteria. From end of March until the end of June 2020, the Family Navigators undertook around 500 contacts per month with families. Currently the Navigators are supporting schools by visiting families who are nervous about sending their children back to school.
- 2.3 **Our parenting offer:** the parenting offer to families has continued to develop and is now delivered on-line; many offered in the evening. The programme - between September and December this year - includes delivery of the following evidence based programmes:
- **Circle of Security** - A 10 week attachment based parenting group ideally suited to parents with children under 7 years.
 - **Non-Violent Resistance** - A 12 week group for parents with children 11yrs+ who are displaying challenging or risky behaviour
 - **Who's in Charge** - A 9 week child to parent violence (CPV) programme aimed at parents whose children are being abusive or violent toward them or who appear out of parental control
 - **Freedom Programme** - An 11 week programme for women who have experienced domestic abuse in any of it's forms, providing a reflective space and tools to identify abusive behaviour in the future.
 - **Triple P** - An 8 week positive parenting programme ideally suited to parents with children under 11yrs.
 - The Building Relationships for Stronger Families sessions (funded by DWP) continue to be delivered by Tavistock Relationships and like us, they are providing these programmes remotely.
- 2.4 **Safe spaces for direct contact:** social workers have continued to have face to face contact with children and their families throughout the pandemic, including routinely seeing children alone. Risk assessments are completed to consider whether family members have any Covid-19 symptoms ahead of visits. Social workers have been provided with PPE and have been given guidance around social distancing. Direct contact with children is generally completed in the family home or at an alternative safe space such as the child's school, a park, library where the child feels able to talk freely. Social workers are provided with tools and training to support their direct work with children. Monthly audits review the quality of direct work and that the child's voice is at the centre of practice.

3 SUPPORT TO CHILDREN WITH SEND

- 3.1 **Returning to school:** following support provided to families during lockdown, the Bi-Borough Inclusion Service continues to be available to support children

and young people with special educational needs. The service is working closely with schools to establish the best way to provide support to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND while also minimising risks to public health.

- 3.2 To support the planning for the return of all students this September, the service undertook a survey of over 500 children from across Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council to understand their experience of lockdown and their thoughts, both positive and negative, about returning to school. The results of this survey were shared with local schools and partners. The service will be undertaking a follow-up survey towards the end of the autumn term to understand how things have gone and any further development of our offer that is required.
- 3.3 Schools are working on ensuring that there is a contingency in place for learning at home if there is any local outbreak in the future. The borough's SEND Local Offer website continues to have a specific COVID-19 page, which provides the latest updates on service provision for children and young people with SEND.
- 3.4 Below are some of the ways in which our Education Psychologists are supporting pupils in transitioning back to school:
 - Provision of Resource Booklets
 - Staff Workshops in schools and staff webinars
 - EP Involvement in transition meetings for Year 6 pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and supporting the transition to secondary schools
 - Consultations with parents and carers where the child or the parent is anxious about the return to school
 - Consultations with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and teachers
 - Webinar series on emotional coaching, early years and social development, resilience, and supporting our children to be anti-racist
 - We have also regularly updated the [Services2Schools website](#) – with the latest resources, links to materials, booklets, and signposting for SENCOs to download and share with parents and families e.g. mental health, anxiety, sleep, bereavement, supporting children and young people with autism, sensory issues, homeschooling and supporting the Muslim community. The website had enormous number of hits and web traffic both locally and internationally.
- 3.5 **Short Breaks:** our Short Breaks Service encouraged families to start coming back to the Playschemes to get their children out of the house and to get used to seeing and playing with other children. This was well-received by families and has given them the confidence they need to send their children back to school.

4 PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- 4.1 **WCC Supported Internship 2020/21:** after a successful first year, we are delighted to be hosting the Westminster City Council Supported Internship (for young people aged 16 to 24 with SEN and/or disabilities) for a second year, in partnership with City of Westminster College and Westminster Employment. A dual cohort will run this autumn, consisting of nine returning interns from the 2019/20 cohort and six new interns who successfully underwent a virtual recruitment process. A blended learning approach is being taken this year from City of Westminster College's Maida Vale site, online and staggered starts to physical and remote work placements commencing throughout October. The Westminster Employment job coach team are working closely with council teams and our employer partners (Planet Organic, Elior, Unity Kitchen, Veolia, Bouygues, Ricoh) to finalise and redesign work placements to deliver remotely where teams are not office based.
- 4.2 **Employment Outcomes of young people with SEND:** our SEND Local Offer and Employment Pathways Lead works to improve the pathway planning we do so a greater number of young people with SEND who want to get a job are better able to progress to achieve their employment ambitions. Based in Children's Services and working closely with the Economy Team, she works to support casework and develop accessible training and employment opportunities.
- 4.3 **Bi-borough Supported Employment Forum:** this is our multi-agency strategic network that has the objective to improve the employment outcomes of our young people with SEND. An action plan was co-produced by members and includes a number of priorities identified by young people themselves. Activities have started to be delivered including: Access to Work workshops in schools, production of a Supported Employment Directory and designing of Preparing for Adulthood themed parent/carer events.
- 4.4 **Reskilling for Recovery:** the Westminster 'Reskilling For Recovery' workstream is working to address the economic impact of covid-19 on specific vulnerable groups in relation to skills and employment. A number of specific project proposals have been developed with young people with disabilities in mind.
- 4.5 **EET Panel:** the Virtual School host an EET Panel supporting children in care and care leavers to access Education, Employment and Training opportunities. This includes working closely with WES and partner agencies and supporting access to training, employment and apprenticeship opportunities. 69.5% of our children in this group aged between 19-21 (DfE measure) were EET at the end of Q2.

5 YOUTH OFFENDING AND CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

- 5.1 **Developing a substance misuse strategy:** Public Health presented a paper to the Youth Crime Prevention Partnership Board in August 2020 outlining: what the current problems are in relation to substance misuse, what young people are telling us, what the current provision is and where the gaps are. It was agreed at the Board to develop a drug strategy to achieve harm minimisation and suppress violence. It was also agreed to adopt actions from the JSNA related to this area to develop the strategy. This is currently been explored with Public Health and the policy team.
- 5.2 **Working with Wilmott Dixon:** in conjunction with Wilmott Dixon, Westminster YOT launched our first mentoring programme to bridge the gap between young people and businesses and to support young people to choose positive career paths. The mentoring programme has been developed to provide opportunities for young people to be mentored by an individual employed currently by Wilmott Dixon. As part of this programme a bespoke training programme has been developed for young people as well as their mentors and they have benefited from Trauma-Informed and Safeguarding Training delivered by the Educational Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapist within the YOT. To date 11 young people have been matched to a mentor while 2 young people have gained employment.
- 5.3 **Preparing for Inspection:** the YOT has worked hard over the last year to prepare for the HMIP inspection. The evidence in advance and supporting documents are ready and the team are prepared. There have been various workshops delivered to discuss the domains within the inspection framework, preparing staff to meet with inspectors and to best to showcase their work. In addition, over the last year, there has been a focus within the management team on improving standards within assessments, quality assurance and recording.
- 5.4 **The Work of the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit (IGXU):** the IGXU is a multi-agency co-located team comprised of Children's Social Care, Community protection, Police officers and other specialist roles such as a family therapist and a specialist sexual violence worker. The IGXU supports young people affected or exploited by gangs to exit this lifestyle through swift identification, one-to-one work, family work, group work, street work and community work. We have an engagement rate of 70-80% and we see 60-70% of those seeking support with education, employment and training successfully placed in jobs or vocational courses. The IGXU holds 80+ cases and last year saw over 1000 young people in schools, over 200 parents in parents' group as well as undertaking street work across the borough three times a week.
- 5.5 We originally saw a decline in activity in March and April. We adapted our service delivery to accommodate the needs of the young people and we created virtual meetings using Zoom, WhatsApp etc. As lockdown eased. we went back out in late April doing 'ride outs' to drive to the areas young people are congregating to meet with them. The pattern of gang activity has changed

during this period: the focus has returned to local areas and we have seen an increase in tensions between groups in WCC and the borders and in particular between Mozart and Lisson Grove Men (LGM). Sadly in July we had three murders in 24 hours, all of young adults known to the IGXU. The staff worked to create messages of de-escalation for our young people. Since this time tensions remain quite high however activity has lessened and the team remains actively engaged in analysing intelligence and working to disrupt activity and promote young people's positive engagement in their communities.

6 CAPITAL PROGRAMMES

- 6.1 **Hallfield Primary School:** the works to provide a MUGA and a related Pavilion will start on site as soon as the Planners' pre-commencement conditions are discharged. The contractor is expected to complete both facilities in the spring of next year. The small works to provide a nursery for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder are currently the subject of a planning submission and it is hoped to open the nursery in the summer term of 2021. The College Park Satellite, to be established in an unoccupied building on the site, is scheduled for opening in the Autumn of 2021. This will provide room for two classes of children with autism.
- 6.2 **King Solomon Academy:** on the Older Years' Site the works scheduled to be handed over on 12th October are running to schedule. Foundations are complete and steelwork is being erected for the new dining hall. Listed Building Consent has been received for the remaining works on the Older Years' Site. The contractor started work on the Younger Years' Site on September the 1st.
- 6.3 **Millbank Academy: Windmill Centre:** expanded and much improved provision for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder is being planned for the resource base The Windmill at the Academy. Work is due to start on site in the summer of 2021, for completion by the autumn.
- 6.4 **St Marylebone Bridge School:** the Stage 2 Tender Report will be issued imminently and the Final Business Case is expected to be sent to the DfE at the end of October.

7 LIBRARIES AND REGISTRARS

- 7.1 **Virtual library:** libraries already offered a strong digital resource collection but from the start of lockdown they have been enhancing their online offer to provide a seamless integrated offer. In addition to an extensive collection of e-books and magazines for loan, digital resources such as reference materials, learning resources and business information, and an app allowing users to view the catalogue and reserve items have been created. A phase 1 Virtual Library includes interactive events such as rhymetimes and stories for children, author visits, local history talks and other resources. Improvements include:

- Phone helpline for library users needing information, advice and recommendations
- Social media engagement improvement plan in progress
- Improvements to current web pages for ease of navigation
- Main phase of commissioned website discovery project (which will identify user needs for development)
- Procurement/commissioning/design of new website based on discovery recommendations by late 2020

- 7.2 **Westminster registration service:** since the resumption of marriage and civil partnership ceremonies on 4 July 2020, officers have conducted 584 ceremonies, at Old Marylebone Town Hall and reopened venues across Westminster. This is a 32% reduction in ceremonies in comparison to 2019, but is significantly higher than anticipated at the resumption of the service. It is also double the average number of ceremonies per local authority in England and Wales. Whilst many couples have postponed ceremonies into 2021 and beyond, the service has retained significant numbers of bookings as well as seen new bookings made, particularly in October and November (which is up on 2019 by 38%). This is mainly due to good availability and a large ceremony room which can accommodate the maximum number of guests (currently set at 15 including the couple) and maintaining social distancing.
- 7.3 The service hosted a visit by Andrew Dent, the Deputy Registrar General for England and Wales on 22 September, who wanted to see how the service had adapted during the pandemic and to thank staff for their hard work. A number of topics were discussed with him, including: registration of deaths by telephone (allowed temporarily under Covid-19 legislation), the need to extend to birth registrations in the event of further waves of coronavirus and the Law Commission's review of marriage law, which is likely to result in changes to how and where people can get married. The Deputy General Registrar wrote after the visit: "I was impressed by your collective flexibility and innovation through a very challenging period, and by the evident high morale and commitment from everyone I met. Your results speak for themselves; well done".
- 7.4 **Library usage**
Since entering lockdown in March, library use has changed significantly. The Virtual Library, developed quickly in response to the lack of any face to face library service except a basic access to PC offer at two libraries, quickly gained users by simplifying processes making it much easier to join, and building on the already-extensive offer of e-books, reference and information resources and online IXL learning content, by providing interactive activities – rhyme times and story sessions for children, author visits, book groups and conversation classes, and classes in real time and available to stream.

Use of eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and Newspapers

Compared to pre-lockdown, use of these resources – downloadable by anyone with a Westminster Libraries card, increased by:

- 133% during lockdown period (from 839 to 1,956 average per day)
- 73% during post-lockdown (from 839 to 1,447 average per day)

The service provided additional e-resources to boost the offer including a wider range of titles.

7.5 Events

Before lockdown, libraries were running on average 92 face-to-face events per week with average 22 attendees per event. During lockdown, there was an average of 9 virtual events per week with 87 attendees per event, a tripling of attendance per event, although fewer were run during lockdown.

Contributing to increased attendance was greater reach of virtual events via Teams/Zoom compared with events in physical library spaces

7.6 Limited PC offer

During lockdown, two libraries – Church Street and Victoria – offered a limited PC service with internet access, particularly aimed at residents without their own online access or broadband at home. Sessions were offered for 45 minutes and there were restrictions on what people could use it for eg no streaming. Occupancy was high at around 90% of available slots and once the service was fully operational around 200 sessions per week were being taken up at each site. To comply with government guidance requiring the closure of libraries, no other services were on offer eg no book loans or returns.

7.7 Resumption of face-to-face library services

Since reopening on 4 July, use has been increasing slowly month-by-month, though it remains significantly down at about half the number of visits to pre-lockdown figures. Officers have been promoting the resumed service through social media and the council website, and more activity, such as rooms for hire and classes, is being reintroduced as it is safe and permitted to do so. The maximum number of individuals or families allowed in the buildings at any one time is lower due to space required for social distancing (for example the limit is 15 people in Church St library compared to a normal working figure of 50) and there are fewer PCs and study spaces available. Each site is different due to its physical layout and space. The service is also operating on slightly reduced hours, with most sites open for two hours per day less than normal.

Comparative figures

Total visits

July-Sept 2020: 199,562
July-Sept 2019: 446,468
55% down

Average daily visits

July-Sept 2020: 2,169
July-Sept 2019: 4,853
55% down

Average hourly visits

July-Sept 2020: 294
July-Sept 2019: 556
47% down