



City of Westminster

# Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** Monday 22 March 2021

**Report Of:** Councillor Timothy Barnes

**Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning

**Report Author and  
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## 1 Summary

As per the new agreed Cabinet Member report structure, this update provides highlights on my City for All priorities, areas of current focus in the Young People and Learning portfolio and pertinent performance information. I have made no key decisions to update the committee on since my last report.

## 2 City for All – Young People and Learning Priorities

The council launched its refreshed City for All vision early in March, to ensure our strategy for improving the city now and for future generations is responsive to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Vibrant Communities

#### 2.1 Pre-birth to Five Pathway

Work continues to progress on redesigning our Pre-birth to Five offer. We are looking at proposing a new integrated pathway and delivery structure and are aiming to launch in April 2022. This February we began drafting the specification for our new community health service, including the evaluation criteria, and contract which will take us to our next phase in the project in May 2021.

#### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy Refresh

2.2 We are at the early stages of updating this strategy to take us to 2024. Over the course of the next few months we will be engaging with a wide group of stakeholders to shape ambitious priorities for the 2021-2024 strategy. We aim to build on the success of the SEND area inspection to ensure we are making progress with the areas identified for improvement. We are currently in the middle of our first consultation phase which is set to end at the end of March. Our launch date for this strategy is aimed to be September 2021.

#### 2.3 Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Offer

A recent West London Health Watch report highlighted that 83% children are highlighting that Covid-19 has impacted on their mental health; interestingly most outlined that they would ordinarily turn to their parents or peers for support and in the absence of this would talk to their school. We have continued to promote services that are available locally and sent out a wellbeing brochure to residents supporting their children learning from home. We continue to work with our emotional wellbeing and mental health providers and wider stakeholders to communicate and promote the local offer to young people. We expect to see a significant uptake in this offer in the upcoming months as children return to school.

## 2.4 Tackling Youth Unemployment

A new priority in our City for All strategy is tackling youth unemployment. Twice as many young people have dropped out of college this year and youth unemployment is up by approximately 250%.

## 2.5 18 to 25 Mental Health Service Pilot Wellbeing Pilot

The pilot of an integrated service that will provide young adults with a holistic support in the community from mental health practitioners and other workers is progressing as expected. Due to the impacts of Covid-19 on young people we have also been focusing on employability strategies. We have commenced discussions with potential providers to test the market and have begun the drafting of a business case and commissioning strategy.

## Smart City

## 2.6 Children's Learning: Digital Futures Project

We continue to promote children being able to learn from home by ensuring they have a digital device and access to the internet. As of 8<sup>th</sup> March, **4939** laptops have been distributed to children in Westminster schools – through a combined effort from the DfE and through our local Digital Futures Programme, working with a local voluntary service and connecting with local businesses.

## 3 **Areas of focus**

### 3.1 COVID Winter Grant Key Updated Figures

- Over **6,800** Free School Meal vouchers were distributed over Christmas and February half term holidays.
- We ensured that over **1,650** of our families in greatest finance need received grant support ahead of Christmas.
- Our housing department has extended this to an additional **1,100** low income families in Feb/March.

### 3.2 Outbreak Control Process

The figures below represent positive Covid-19 cases among pupils and staff in schools, nurseries and Early Years/ Children's Centres from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Setting type	No. of cases in pupils	No. of cases in staff	Sum of Total
Independent	0	1	1

Secondary	1	0	1
Primary	23	21	44
Special	2	6	8
Nursery / Early Years & Children's Centres	23	39	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>117</b>

### 3.3 Library Updates

Following the announcement of national lockdown 3.0, government guidelines have allowed some libraries to remain open to provide limited essential services. We also have received £10,000 from the National Archives to support business archiving. Since February we have been piloting a 6-week trial of virtual afterschool activities aligning with DfE advice and guidelines including book club and various creative sessions.

### 3.4 Working with Children, Young People and Families

**Social Care** staff continue to support families during lockdown 3.0. Our front-line workers have continued to visit those most at risk and multi-agency child protection conferences continue to be facilitated virtually. **Family Hubs** are remaining open for walk-in support. **Youth Clubs** in Westminster are providing a virtual offer and onsite contact for our most vulnerable groups.

## 4 **Performance Updates**

### 4.1 Social Care

Social care continues to perform well against key indicators. Our numbers of looked after children have not risen during the pandemic and the virtual school programme continues to provide additional educational support. Placements for children in our care have remained stable and our care leavers continue to be accommodated appropriately with education, employment and training pathways continued to be tracked.

The Tri Borough adoption agency arrangements with Hammersmith ceased in January 2020, when the Bi Borough joined the 'Coram Ambitious for Adoption', Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). 4 children were placed for adoption from the Bi Borough in Q1 – Q3 and a further 5 are currently subject of permanency planning.

### 4.1 Appointments to Register Births Available Within 5 Days of Enquiry

There has been increased demand for birth registrations due to clearing backlog of birth registrations from lockdown 1.0 (where births were restricted to those in urgent need only).

### 4.3 Increasing demand for services to support children with SEND

We have seen increased referrals for our SEND Short Break services which puts pressure on our team's capacity and on funding. Short Break referrals have continued to remain high during the pandemic at 6 per week. Recent referrals for assessment of pre-school aged children mirror the national spike in referrals due to Covid-19. Although we are able to meet the statutory timescales in 100% of cases, an increase could mean that this is unsustainable.