

Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	07 October 2021
Report of:	Councillor Timothy Barnes
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning
Report Author:	Jack Shaw, Portfolio Advisor
Contact Details:	jshaw@westminster.gov.uk

City for All – Young People and Learning Priorities

1. Vibrant Communities

1.1 Keep Children at the Centre of Everything We Do

As part of our ambition to put children at the heart of everything we do, over the last three months our libraries have held over 158 events. The full service of our libraries has now resumed, and they are also distributing rapid lateral flow tests for the public. Church Street Library partnered with the National Health Service (NHS) to offer vaccinations on 1 September.

In partnership with City Lions, the Westminster Creative Collective project exhibited art works from our young people in Paddington, Victoria, Maida Vale and Westminster Reference Libraries from 28 June for a month. The exhibition then moved to the Saatchi Gallery for a finale with a selection of 30 pieces on display throughout August, showcasing the brilliant creative work of our young people.

Our Libraries Summer Reading Challenge was also held over the summer with over 620 young people taking part. Libraries supported the Holiday and Activity Food programme with 14 events taking place at Church Street, Paddington, Pimlico and Queens Park Libraries, which was a huge success, and young people attending received either a pack lunch or a food parcel to take home.

1.2 Transform our Pre-birth to Five Programme

Our transformation plans, workstreams and strategies for our Pre-Birth to Five Programme have now been agreed. As part of that exercise, we consulted staff members and the community through engagement workshops. Doing so has been

invaluable. We are also currently working with Central London Community Healthcare partners to modernise and digitise our health visiting offer.

The number of two-year-olds taking up funded education in Westminster through Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE) has fallen by 2 percentage points from last year. This is a smaller drop than seen in elsewhere in London, meaning that two-year-old take-up in Westminster in January 2021 was well above the London average despite COVID-19. Take-up among three- and four-year-olds in Westminster continued to follow the downward trend also seen in London and England. The Early Education and Childcare Service is introducing a number of promotional and communication strategies to increase take up of FEEE places across the borough.

1.3 Improve our Offer for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities

We are currently working with key local stakeholders to refresh our Local Area Special Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy for the period 2021-2024. This is due to be published this autumn. There is an ongoing focus on reducing waiting times for autism diagnosis and improving access to face-to-face speech and language therapy support. Work is underway on these two areas of improvement and an action plan is being finalised.

2. Areas of Focus

2.1 Refugees from Afghanistan

There are a number of young refugees from Afghanistan currently in Westminster. A multi-agency task group has convened to deliver a response plan detailing local wrap around support and associated costs. Westminster Connects are currently leading on much of the on the ground co-ordination, with clothes and prayer rooms having already been set up. On site health needs assessments are being carried out and we are working closely with the government.

2.2 Sir Simon Milton Westminster - UTC

Due to continued low pupil numbers, the Department of Education has now taken a substantive decision to commence a phased closure of the UTC in August 2022, pending a listening period which will run from 15 September to 15 October. This will provide an opportunity for students, parents, staff and stakeholders to give their views, which will be considered fully before a final decision is taken by the Department for Education (DfE) about the future of the UTC. Support and advice is being provided by the local authority to the UTC to help Year 11 and Year 13 students plan the next stage of their education once they complete their studies at the UTC next summer.

2.3 Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support

We have been seeing an increased number of children and young people accessing support from local early intervention emotional wellbeing and mental health support services including Kooth Online counselling and Mental Health Support Teams in schools. Despite seeing rises in most other London boroughs, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals have not increased in Westminster. This may be testament to the strength of the local early intervention and early help offer.

Officers gave evidence at the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group in September on what we are seeing locally in relation to presenting needs as we have moved out of lockdown and what we expect levels of emotional wellbeing and mental health need to look like moving forward. Our local clinical CAMHS provider, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, on the success and strengths of our close partnership working. We also have a new Youth Mental Health Worker embedded in our five Westminster Youth Hubs and we are expanding our Looked After Children (LaC) CAMHS Team to support Care Leavers.

We are putting in place an enhanced integrated 18-25 emotional wellbeing, mental health and employability offer to support young people with mental health and wellbeing, employment and training, substance abuse, sexual health, housing and benefits advice.

2.4 Holiday Activity and Food Fund (HAF)

Westminster City Council has been allocated a total of £709,120 for the provision of a school holiday food and activity offer to support disadvantaged young people on free school meals between 1st April and 31st December 2021. Over the summer we supported 1,675 young people, which was delivered across 33 providers. The programme aims to encourage young people eat more healthily over the school holidays, be more active, and take part in enriching activities which support the resilience, character, and wellbeing and educational attainment of young people.

2.5 Youth Unemployment

Westminster City Council has a comprehensive offer of more than 40 services across the council to tackle youth unemployment, including employment support, mental health services, physical activity and social care. Due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, 12% of residents aged 18-24-year-olds are currently not in employment. Since March 2020 our claimant count has also increased, but this is from a very low base and the numbers are still low enough that we can develop individual support plans for all of our young people. We are in the process of launching an internal Taskforce to bring together officers from across multiple services so that we're best placed to support young people not in education, employment or training.

2.6 Youth Sector

In 2021, the Council's £500k youth sector funding has been used to support organisations and initiatives that support the implementation of the local Early Help Strategy. This includes:

- Core funding for five Youth Hubs across the City.
- The largest single contribution to the Brighter Futures Fund that offers small project grants to VCS partners.
- "Strengthening the Sector" funding that is designed to support 5 (non-hub) VCS partner organisations to leverage additional funding and strengthen their offers to young people.

2.7 COVID Safety Measures

A number of new safety measures are in place as young people return to school. Following government guidance, they are no longer organised into bubbles and masks are not required to be worn. Schools are expected to facilitate two onsite tests at the start of term and from then on young people will be expected to continue twice weekly lateral flow testing from home. Should a young person test positive they will be required to self-isolate and take a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. If this is positive, they should continue to self-isolate for 10 days and then return to school. There is no longer a requirement for young people who have been in contact with the positive case to self-isolate, but they will be encouraged to take a PCR test. Outbreak management plans are in place alongside procedures for managing and isolating any confirmed cases. The council will continue to monitor and keep a record of COVID-19 cases on a weekly basis, and also provide support and guidance for schools and early years settings. Contact points have been established for schools.

This term Ofsted will be undertaking their full programme of inspections and it is likely that some of our schools will be inspected. In preparing for their inspections, all schools have access to advice and support from their School Standards Lead Adviser.

2.8 Support for families through Family Hubs

All three Family Hubs were focal points for support for children and families during periods of lockdown and are now offering more face-to-face sessions through the different agencies which form the service offer. The three multi-agency leadership teams have agreed annual plans which include local activities to deliver priorities from Westminster's Early Help Strategy. While the South Hub building at Bessborough has been operational since 2018, the new purpose-built site for the Portman North East Family Hub has opened recently. The new site for the North West Family Hub is due to open in Spring 2022.

The role of our team of five Family Navigators have expanded as demands have changed. They have provided support for families where children have been reluctant to return to school following lockdown and they have helped children who require additional support to transfer from primary to secondary school. They have led much of the coordination of support for increasing numbers of refugee families placed in Westminster hotels over the last year including helping them to access services such as primary healthcare, school, support charities, faith groups as well as organising trauma-informed training for hotel staff and school holiday activities for children. Westminster's Family Hubs model continues to receive interest from the Department for Education and the Family Hubs Network. The House of Lords Public Services Committee have also requested a visit.

2.9 Youth Violence

The Youth Offending Service and the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit are working closely with young people across Westminster. This work is supported by family therapists who take a whole family approach to reduce risk of youth violence and we continue to deploy a specialist sexual violence practitioner to work with young women at risk of sexual harm and exploitation.

There have been fewer incidences of serious youth violence compared to last summer and in addition to this we are working with 82 young people and their families. At the end of July, 34 young people were engaged with our work coaches. As a result, we have been able to support a number of young people into employment or new training opportunities.

Our enforcement remains robust, and where necessary injunctions have been obtained against anti-social behaviour. There is also significant community and schools engagement ongoing, including wellbeing programmes in Church Street due to higher levels of crime, a series of events with Central London Mosque which were co-delivering and discussions with Young Westminster Foundation to support young people with low school attendance ongoing.

3. Education Recovery

Schools are continuing to use the additional education recovery funding they have received to support the progress of children who fell behind during the lockdown. The funding is being used to help the intervention programmes that schools already have in place and helping children with additional catch-up learning. In some cases, schools are also using their funding to access support from the National Tutoring programme.

In late July and at the start of the holidays, our secondary schools ran summer schools for their new year 7 students. The programmes focused on helping the students with English and mathematics skills. They also helped familiarise the students with their new school.

Catchup funding for Westminster schools is broken down below.

	Sum of Autumn 2020 Payment	Sum of Spring 2021 Payment	Sum of Summer 2021 payment
Local Authority Maintained	166,030	210,220	268,550
Academies	219,980	301,050	372,090
Grand Total	386,010	511,270	640,640

3.1 Primary School Capacity

We continue to proactively work with a number of schools to manage pupil number shortfalls, particularly in primary schools. Schools have already taken positive action to reduce risk, including attracting more pupils, filling vacancies, managing financial shortfalls, restructuring and permanently reducing published admissions numbers. We continue to work with schools and are supporting them find long-term solutions.

4. Cabinet Member Decisions (July - September 2021)

Since the last Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee, the following decisions have been made.

- Victoria Business Library
- Alternative Provision and Behaviour Outreach Contract Award