

Date:	13 September 2023
Portfolio:	Young People, Culture and Learning
The Report of:	Councillor Tim Roca, Cabinet Member for Young People, Culture and Learning
Report Author and Contact Details:	Nikki Costain ncostain@westminster.gov.uk

1. Key decisions made in the preceding period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated June 2023:

- Extending the Free Meal Offer to Nurseries and Secondary Westminster Pupils

2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date of the administration

3. Children's Services

3.1 Pressures in Children's Social Care

Nationally Children's Social Care continue to face multiple challenges and complexities post pandemic. At a national level there are significant pressures on local authorities' recruitment of experienced social workers leading to greater reliance on the agency market. In Westminster, whilst we have a very low reliance on agency social workers and staff turnover comparative to other London councils and have a high level of capability throughout our workforce this remains an area that we need to closely attend to and monitor.

Additional pressures in the system are impacting on all local authorities. These include the length of care proceedings within the Family Courts, largely impacted by an overall increased volume in care proceedings nationally and judicial and expert assessor availability. This increases work and time pressures for staff, results in some children remaining in care placements for longer before achieving permanence and causes increased uncertainty and stress for some families whilst decisions are reached about their children's future care arrangements. Westminster has its own in-house assessment model and so we are not reliant on external assessors to the same extent as other authorities but overall our care proceedings are taking much longer than expected because of capacity constraints within the courts.

Placement shortages too are a national and well-known problem. Local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to source appropriate placements for looked after children in a timely way, which impacts children, their care plans, social worker capacity, and budgets. There are some national initiatives involving more regional collaboration which may have a positive impact on this, and we are involved in discussions in the London region.

We continue to experience a high number of visits to our office by families and young people who may be homeless, many of whom are not owed a housing duty because they have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or have no local connections. Although for the majority we are able to identify alternative options rather than providing accommodation, these presentations each require significant social work time and complexity, liaising with Housing and Legal services, the Home Office, embassies, other Local Authorities and organisations. Where we are providing families who are NRTPF with accommodation and subsistence these financial commitments are taking longer to reach a conclusion because of delays in the Home Office in reaching immigration decisions.

3.2 Kent County Council and Home Office Judgement regarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Refugee arrivals by small boats across the English Channel result in a very high concentration of UASC presentations in Kent County Council compared to other Local Authorities in the country. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was set up to enable equitable and safe transfer of unaccompanied children from the care of one Local Authority to another receiving Local Authority, based on a quota that each LA has a UASC population of up to 0.1% of its general child population. The NTS has remained a voluntary scheme and to date not all Local Authorities are at the full 0.1% quota.

In view of the high numbers of UASC arrivals in Kent, Kent County Council advised the Home Office that they would need to cap the number of UASC they could support. The Home Office have subsequently been using hotels to accommodate the numbers of children arriving in Kent above their 'cap'. On 27th July 2023, the High Court found the Home Office and Kent County Council to be in breach of the law, as they were not providing these vulnerable children and young people with the support services or appropriate accommodation as outlined in the Children Act 1989.

In Westminster, we are above our quota of 30; looking after 52 UASC at this time. It is important to note that all Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children in our care are in appropriate placements; either Semi-Independent Living placements (SIL) or foster care depending on their age and needs. When the Home Office have placed young people in contingency hotels and they subsequently present as under 18, we undertake an initial age enquiry and if deemed that they are under 18, or may be under the age of 23, they come into our care. If they may be under the age of 23, a more thorough age assessment (called a Merton Compliant Age Assessment) is completed and the young person will remain in our care until the assessment is concluded and until future arrangements are made on occasions when they are assessed to be an adult.

The High Court Judgement means that Kent County Council are legally required to take responsibility for all UASC presenting in their area. To manage the significant numbers of UASC presenting in Kent, they have asked Local Authorities to take children from Kent up to their quota. Additionally, the Director Children's Services has made a request for assistance outside the NTS, for LAs to take additional unaccompanied children into their care. Westminster has offered assistance, removing two children from the NTS so that priority can be afforded to Kent, and we have taken two additional children into our care.

There are approximately 200 children in Kent awaiting a move through the NTS. Westminster is generally at or above the 0.1% threshold for NTS and we are fully committed to accommodating our share of unaccompanied children. Westminster plays a leading role in the NTS and we co-ordinate the NTS across all London boroughs.

3.3 Preparation for Inspections

An inspection of our Youth Offending Service is overdue, and we continue to expect notification from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) every Friday. Children's Services is also on alert to anticipate a full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) within the next 12 months. We are continually auditing the quality of our practice and services, including routinely seeking feedback from families and partner agencies of their experience of our practice and staff to ensure there is continued improvement across all areas that will be inspected and receive judgements - children in need, child protection, looked after children and care leavers.

We have been contacted by Skills for Care, which is the strategic workforce development organisation for Social Work and provides the framework for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs). ASYE is a national programme which every top-tier local authority is required by the government to deliver to ensure that new social workers have sufficient experience and support to practice and develop. As part of their Quality Assurance, Skills for Care will be visiting us in November to meet with social workers undertaking the ASYE (of which we currently have eleven), their assessors and managers. We are already preparing our documentation ahead of these visits and are planning 360 feedback and evaluation with our current and recent ASYE employees, assessors and managers.

3.4 Westminster Provisional Exam Results

Results day was a day of celebration for many students and schools across the borough, with GCSE and A-level students performing exceptionally well in their exams this year. Bucking the trend in the national headlines, provisional results for Westminster schools for 2023 indicate strong performance overall with outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11), GCSE and A Levels being well above national comparators. Outcomes in Early Years Good Level of Development are more in line with national.

Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes at the end of the Reception Year in Westminster (65.7%) have remained similar to those achieved in 2022 (65.9%). This is slightly below the national average of 67.3%.

In Key Stage 2, the percentage of children reaching Expected Standard in the combined Reading, Writing and Mathematics measure at the end of Key Stage 2 (67%), has improved compared to 2022 (64%). Performance continues to be well above national (60%).

GCSE performance has continued to improve with the return to public examinations. Provisional results show local performance is above both the 2019 and 2022 national averages, with 61.5% of Westminster pupils achieving grades 5-9 in English and mathematics in 2023 and 67% achieving grades 5-9 in All Subjects compared to the national average of 52%.

A level performance in Westminster in 2023 for the top grades A*- A is 33.4%, which exceeds the national average of 26.5%. The percentage of A*- C grades is 79.9% in Westminster, which is also above the national average of 75.4%.

These excellent results are testament to the hard work and dedication of our children and young people through a particularly turbulent time in their education, and the ability of our schools to prepare pupils for external examinations despite disruption in recent years.

3.5 School Uniform Support Fund

The School Uniform Support Scheme is now in its second year and provides financial support to eligible families with the cost of school uniforms. The scheme provides up to £85,500 of funds to Westminster

residents who are eligible for Free School Meals and on roll of a Westminster primary school. This summer, £10,044 has been allocated to 324 families (319 last year) for children that will be starting reception in September, providing £31 per child. A further £68,250 has been allocated to support 455 families (451 last year) for children moving onto secondary school, at a rate of £150 per child. The total spend to date is £78,294 (£77,539 last year).

In this second year of the scheme, and following feedback from schools, checks were made with each school in May to establish the accuracy of the eligible children registered as on roll in Year 6. A methodology to determine the funds to be allocated to schools for the incoming reception cohort was also adapted to ensure the most accurate funds could be allocated to schools. This approach was well received by schools, with funds distributed the week commencing 12 June allowing time for schools to set up their chosen method of disseminating the funds to families, including vouchers or direct payments to families.

The positive impact on families was captured last year when schools were asked for some feedback on the scheme. Some comments are as follows:

‘We’re really glad for this grant as it will be helping us this time a lot. I can’t express my feelings how happy we are. Thanks a lot, to the authorities who are trying to help us in this difficult time. It means a lot to us’.

‘Uniforms can be expensive, so any help is great. My boy started school looking smart and he was happy!’

‘The secondary school uniform was going to cost me well over £250, with the PE kit. This meant that I got everything, I don’t know what I would have done without it. Along with the food vouchers, it made summer bearable.’

3.6 Summer Holiday Activity and Food Programme

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Summer programme has been a success, with up to 49 local organisations providing activities across the borough. Activities included adventure playgrounds, football, basketball, boxing, table tennis, cricket, cooking sessions, arts and crafts, music and dance, youth club and offsite trips. Organisations such as Adventure Play Hub, Al-Ola Supplementary School, Westbourne Park Family and many more, offered inclusive activities for children with additional needs. The Tresham Centre and The Caxton Youth Organisation provided specialist SEND activities for children with higher levels of need.

Additional Funding from the Council allowed 24 of the organisations to expand their HAF provision to families who just fall short of FSM eligibility but are experiencing financial hardship. This funding also allowed 8 organisations that would not have the capacity to run a 4-week HAF programme (required by the DfE) to offer summer provision. For example, Sketch Appeal was able to run a 2-week programme focused on building confidence through creative expression and give participants the opportunity to submit their work to an exhibition. Youth Clubs were able to expand the number of sessions they ran throughout the summer and offer a safe and engaging environment for young people in the evenings and weekends. Additionally, we were able to work closely with the Family Hubs and Family Navigators (who support families to navigate and access services provided by the council and other organisations) to ensure asylum-seeking families placed in hotels accessed holiday provision.

It is anticipated that the combined total of children and young people reached through HAF and the additional summer funding will be around 3,200 – 4,000. Organisations have shared positive feedback

about their programmes, stating that children and young people had the opportunity to try new activities, spend time with friends and enjoy healthy snacks and meals throughout the summer.

3.7 'We Got U, U Got This' Young Person's Mental Health Campaign Update

As reported in previous Policy and Scrutiny Committee papers, 'We Got U, U Got This' is a digital awareness campaign, co- designed and led by local young people, to promote mental health support to young people across Westminster. We have seen widespread interest in the campaign as a result of its promotion across the borough. Printed material has been shared in secondary schools, libraries, leisure centres and youth clubs/hubs. Digital content has received a huge amount of interest, largely thanks to promoting posts and advertisements for the campaign. We have exceeded the target number of visits to the campaign web page at this point in the campaign, with a healthy average visit time of two minutes 42 seconds on each page and clicks on to providers' pages to find out more about their specific support.

- Website visits: 4000 as of July 2023
- TikTok: 42,400 impressions, 181 clicks
- YouTube advertisements: 115,000 impressions
- Google search advertisements: 22,000 impressions, 768 clicks
- Instagram and Facebook: 179,435 accounts reached, 2,427 clicks

The last round of paid advertisements has now come to an end, which concludes the initial campaign.

Our next steps include a full evaluation of the reach and impact of the campaign which we anticipate will be completed by mid- October. This will include referrals to mental health agencies, and continued work with settings to raise awareness of mental health support.

3.8 RAAC guidance for schools

The Department for Education changed its guidance in the last week of August in relation to the management of RAAC where it has been identified in school buildings. So far, only two classrooms in one school in Westminster have been identified as containing RAAC. The school, St Mary Magdalene and St Stephen's CE Primary, has ensured that all of its pupils continue to access full-time education at school whilst the diocese as the responsible body carries out the necessary works. Westminster's surveys of community schools where the council is the responsible body are well underway and no RAAC has been identified to date. Local academy trusts and both dioceses continue to carry out surveys of their own schools and have not reported any evidence of RAAC in their buildings so far, apart from in two classrooms at the primary school referred to above.

3.9 Planned Youth Engagement Summary

There is a lot of ongoing work to ensure that services across the Council are seeking and listening to the voices of young people in our borough. To achieve our commitment in the CYPP, that 'all our young people feel listened to, empowered to take action and have opportunities to co-produce/co-design services that affect them,' we are looking to organise a Youth Voice Summit which will bring together senior stakeholders across the Council, the Youth Council, and young people across the borough to explore how the youth voice is taken into account in the development of all Council services. We continue to work closely with Young Westminster Foundation on their youth review which is underway; this will culminate in a Question-time style event. We are also working with colleagues across the organisation to develop a Youth Voice Network to ensure that all youth engagement is joined up, and can influence the work of the council more broadly.

4. Culture

4.1 Inside Out Festival engagement

The council's free Inside Out outdoor arts festival, taking place throughout August, has been running successfully with most ticketed events being sold out in advance and drop-in events well-attended even during adverse weather conditions. The full programme is found on the council webpage: www.westminster.gov.uk/arts-and-culture/inside-out

The success in attracting audiences has been mainly due to the marketing activity undertaken by cultural partners. However, by 12 August the council's Inside Out programme webpage had received over 12,000 views (well above the 1,000 achieved in the pilot year of 2021) and the resident newsletter Inside Out features had received 1,728 clicks. Local community engagement events were highlighted above others in the newsletter (following councillor direction) and posters were distributed to Libraries.

Paid social media has successfully driven much of the website engagement. There were 62,497 impressions on Twitter and 121,967 impressions on Facebook by 8 August. Press coverage for both Inside Out and its individual projects by 12 Aug included Time Out, The Londonist, London Post and Culture Whisper, Fitzrovia News, BBC London and London LIVE. GLA have added Inside Out to their Great Things to See and Do blog, have featured it in their Culture Newsletter and asked the Mayor's social team to schedule a post.

Each of the partners are required to submit a project monitoring form at the end of the project so the council can evaluate total visitor numbers and demographic data. We expect to have this data available in a report by the end of October.