

Update of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families

Children, Schools and Families Committee – 19 December 2023

1. Purpose of the Cabinet Member update

- 1.1. This paper provides a short round of updates from across the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families. It presents an opportunity for the cabinet member to speak directly to the CSF Scrutiny Committee and highlight key pieces of work, both to share successes and identify challenges and opportunities in the coming months. The Committee are invited to consider the information below and ask questions of clarification at the meeting, subject to the Chair's discretion. Requests for additional information can be addressed to the relevant director/s outside of the meeting. The Committee may also use the cabinet member updates to inform their scrutiny work planning for the coming year.

2. Ofsted Focused Visit

- 2.1. On the 24 October we received a call from Ofsted announcing a short 'Focused Visit' to be held across 31 October and 1 November, with the area of focus 'the local authority's arrangements for children in need and children subject to a child protection plan'.
- 2.2. Colleagues across Children's Prevention, Early Help and Safeguarding and Supporting People Strategy Teams mobilised to prepare for the visit and provide Ofsted Inspectors with the necessary data and documentation to support the inspection process including over 100 reports, policies, data lists and examples of front-line practice.
- 2.3. The visit ran smoothly with Inspectors thanking staff for their support and efficiency and creating the conditions for workers to engage in the process with openness and a willingness to share their knowledge and practice.
- 2.4. Inspectors held 18 interview and case-sampling sessions, including with me, with one of our Young Inspectors and with 12 social workers. Over the course of the visit, Inspectors reviewed in the region of 50 children and young people's cases through a variety of lenses including audit and quality assurance, children and young people with disabilities and the response to domestic abuse.
- 2.5. Early feedback has reflected positively on the leadership of services, as well as corporate and political support. Inspectors were clear that Camden's social workers are skilled, knowledgeable, and passionate and work well in partnership to support and protect children.
- 2.6. Inspectors provided valuable feedback and reflection on Camden's approach to evaluation and challenge of social work practice and our use of quality assurance functions and how we might strengthen these to ensure we

progress our work with children and improve their circumstances in a timely way. The final feedback report was published on 5 December.

- 2.7. Leaders have developed and put in place a targeted action plan to respond to and address the key areas of focus identified across the visit and to set out how continuing improvements can be embedded in our ways of working.
- 2.8. We are also undertaking a learning exercise with colleagues and key stakeholders across the service, to identify what went well, what could have been done better and where we could make changes to improve our response to inspections in the future. This is particularly useful as we continue our preparations for a pending inspection of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service.

3. FFC Pathfinder and Sector Led Partnership Bids

- 3.1. Camden has recently submitted two bids to the Department for Education (DfE), to be a sector-led improvement partner and a Families First for Children (FFC) pathfinder.
- 3.2. If we are successful in the sector-led partnership submission, this would mean sharing our work and expertise with other local authorities across the country. We have offered four sector-led improvement packages within our bid, based on our strengths – Early Help Partnership and Infrastructure, Relational Practice Leadership, Care Leavers Support and Contextual Safeguarding and Exploitation.
- 3.3. The pathfinder bid submission aims at making Camden one of the trailblazer local authorities who would be taking a test and learn approach to the new reforms set out in Government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' implementation strategy, which was building on the findings from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.
- 3.4. We are awaiting the outcome of the two bid submissions and expect to hear back in early 2024.

4. Upcoming DfE visit

- 4.1. Camden is proud to host visits from national government departments and other local authorities, as part of our work to influence national policy. Officials from DfE are visiting Camden on 14 December to see a combination of our education, youth and social care settings. Camden is also part of a SEND Change Programme with DfE and other North London boroughs, which gives us the opportunity to influence national policy on SEND reforms.

5. Children and Learning all-staff event

- 5.1. On Thursday 16 November, the Children and Learning directorate held the first all-staff since its formation. It was an opportunity for the new directorate to come together and discuss direction and priorities for the future – and to hear from staff about how they have been feeling about recent changes and the future of the service.
- 5.2. In the morning, I joined staff from across the newly formed directorate – including colleagues from Children’s Services, Family Help, Public Health and Supporting People Strategy – to welcome the opportunity for staff to come together and connect with each other and to thank them for their hard work on behalf of our residents.

6. Education Strategy Board

- 6.1. There have been two meetings of the Education Strategy Board, on 31 October and 30 November, which focussed on the development of the Board’s Year 2 implementation plan, which will run throughout 2024. The Board also considered its final monitoring report for the Year 1 implementation plan, which runs until December 2023.

7. Children’s Trust Partnership Board (CTPB)

- 7.1. Our CTPB meeting in November, which I chair, focused on the themes Belong and Contribute which are all about how residents, families, children and young people are involved in the work we do. We held the meeting in the Old Diorama Arts Centre, where Fitzrovia Youth in Action run some of their peer mentoring and activities for young people. We heard from housing colleagues about their work to tackle damp and mould, from Fitzrovia Youth in Action about their varied work with young people and the opportunity for schools to get involved, from Family Action about their work with young carers and from Tim Fisher, Service Manager for Family Group Conferences and Restorative Justice, and Parent Champion Kar-Man Au about the peer and parent advocacy work within children’s social care.

8. Staffing changes

- 8.1. We are pleased to have appointed a permanent Head of Service for SEND and Inclusion, who is due to start in early 2024, joining us from Greenwich. Under the leadership of the Director for Education, Commissioning and Inclusion, Vikram Hansrani, and the current SEND and Inclusion interim Head of Service, Jessica Juon, we continue to progress work to prepare for the pending SEND Inspection and to implement our SEND Strategy.

9. Annual Public Health Report

- 9.1. The Annual Public Health Report is an independent report produced by the Director for Health and Wellbeing. The 2023 report has recently been published and focuses on adolescent health and wellbeing. I attended the launch event for the report on 28th November and I am committed to help raise awareness of its findings. The launch event, entitled “Step into our Shoes”, was co-produced with Camden Youth: Tell Them, a new voice for young people in Camden.
- 9.2. The report provides an important source of intelligence and contains recommendations for action across the borough in improving adolescent health and wellbeing. These cover five areas: physical activity, food and healthy weight; mental health; safety and violence; education, employment and training; and long-term conditions.
- 9.3. Members of Camden Youth: Tell Them have been paid the London Living Wage for their work as part of a communications and events training programme. In addition to helping launch the report at an interactive event, they have also produced supportive material including a graphic novel, a panel question and answer session with senior decision makers, and an artistic interpretation of the findings, which will all help raise awareness of the important issues covered in the report.
- 9.4. We will continue to work with the group on adolescent health, including work to identify how we can support adolescents in Camden to navigate the health system, especially primary care, more effectively.

10. SEND Quality Assurance

- 10.1 Over the autumn term, there has been a strong focus on assessing the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Through the implementation of a new multi-agency assurance tool, officers are seeking to ensure that plans are comprehensive, accurate, consistent and high quality. Through the course of the year, plans have been developed to train 60 staff from Education, Health and Care as auditors and to carry out quality assurance of 120-180 EHCPs. This will allow offices to measure progress and build learning back into the system.

11. Camden Inclusion Forum (CIF)

- 11.1. SEND officers attended a regional event, on 28 November, to explore High Needs Funding models that facilitate timely interventions for children with exceptional special educational needs. Many areas are developing this way of working in response to extremely large High Needs Deficits. It was apparent that Camden was stronger position than other participating boroughs given that Camden’s Inclusion Forum (CIF) is well established having been developed with schools in 2017-2018. The CIF supports the strategic aims of the council to increase the capacity of local provision to

include children and young people with SEND, and to secure the best outcomes for them, by making 'the right provision at the right time' for children in mainstream settings and reduce reliance on statutory services. As with our quality assurance work, this supports the implementation of both Building Back Strong, Camden's Education Strategy and the SEND Strategy.

12. SEND - Co-production

- 12.1. Senior SEND staff attended the SEND Special Parent's Forum, on 22 November, to provide an update on key areas of work and launch the new parent carer survey. Officers valued connecting with parent carers and learning more about areas of strength and areas of focus.
- 12.2. Early themes identify areas for development that include SEND Information, Advice, Guidance, and short breaks. However, an analysis of the qualitative data will provide further, more detailed insights.
- 12.3. The expansion of the SENDIASS team has resulted in more targeted and tailored efforts to engage in community groups. The partnership now wants to go further to engage the widest possible range of community groups; particularly those who face barriers to engaging and accessing services. As such, a SEND Engagement and Communication Lead role has been advertised.

13. High Needs Sub-Group

- 13.1. The first High-Needs Sub-Group took place last week involving senior officers within the Education Commissioning & Inclusion division and school leaders. This group has been established to review how best the high-needs block can be utilised to ensure that the needs of children and young people in Camden are met.
- 13.2. The first meeting focused on providing school leaders with updates on funding, those children and young people accessing pre-statutory service as well as those with EHC Plans.
- 13.3. A forward plan is being developed that will scope how we can further strengthen support and improve outcomes for children accessing mainstream provision as well what additional provision we can develop across the borough to ensure that we meet the needs of our children and young people locally.