

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families: December 2024	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 10 th December 2024
SUMMARY OF REPORT The Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families provides the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee with his annual report for discussion. The report gives an overview of our work and achievements made across schools and learning, health for children and families, adult and community learning, children services and safeguarding, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Corporate Parenting and Early Years & Family Hubs. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report Contact Officer: Hannah Bennai, Cabinet Officer, Corporate Services 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG Telephone: 020 7974 1750 Email: hannah.bennai@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATION The Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.	

Signed:



Councillor Marcus Boyland
Date: 26 November 2024

1. Purpose of the report

1.1. This annual report provides an overview of the activities and achievements of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families over the past year. It summarises key initiatives and strategic priorities aimed at improving the lives and wellbeing of children and families across the borough. The report is presented to Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee to fulfil constitutional requirements for accountability and transparency, ensuring that stakeholders are informed of progress made across the portfolio.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Best Start for Children and Families portfolio plays a central role in fulfilling Camden's commitment to protecting and empowering our children, families and communities across the borough. At its core is a dedication to reducing child poverty, strengthening family support, and maintaining a high standard of education across all schools in the area. By fostering collaboration within Camden's family of schools, services across the portfolio work to ensure that young people have the opportunity to excel academically and grow into active engaged citizens.
- 2.2. Within Best Start for Children and Families portfolio, comprehensive social care, early intervention and prevention are key parts of the work. These initiatives are designed to not only protect but also equip children with the resilience and skills they need to succeed. A strong focus on early years services further reinforces this, ensuring that children have access to the support they need from the very beginning.
- 2.3. Adult and community learning continues to be a priority for this portfolio focusing on furthering Camden's mission on ensuring all residents receive the education and opportunities they deserve. Through these expanded responsibilities, the portfolio continues to drive positive outcomes for Camden's children, families and broader community.
- 2.4. The arrival of a new government brings a fresh sense of possibility for positive change and advancement, offering renewed hope to many. While we know that meaningful transformation requires time, we remain dedicated to the services that empower our young people and families to thrive.
- 2.5. This report summarises the good work across the Portfolio from November 2023-December 2024.

3. Schools and Camden Learning

Education Strategy

3.1. Building Back Stronger is Camden's Education Strategy promoting principles of academic excellence and equity affirming that schools do not have to choose between academics and supporting children who start from a position of disadvantage. This is rooted in the belief that an education system which is better for disadvantaged children is better for everyone. The strategy sets our three key ambitions:

- A Fair Start – *which covers from conception until Reception*
- An Excellent School Experience – *covering primary and secondary education up to 16*
- Flourishing Lives – *which covers post-16 education and pathways to further education and careers.*

3.2. We are currently in the second year of the strategy's implementation, which is overseen by the Education Strategy Board. It meets twice termly and considers a detailed monitoring report on progress every term. Many of the initiatives set out within this report sit under the umbrella of the Education Strategy and form part of the overall Education Strategy Implementation Plan.

School Place Planning

3.3. Since 2018 the Council, in partnership with its family of schools, has removed 10 forms of entry from our reception intake, responding to a reduction in birth rates of over 30% across the borough. These difficult decisions including four school closures, the most recent being the closure of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School, ensure that our family schools remain both sustainable and responsive to the needs of their communities.

3.4. In November 2024 officers provided the latest demographic information to Schools Forum and Scrutiny Committee. The new forecast data continues show suppressed birth rates within London and Camden alongside the continued effect of reductions in families moving into Camden during the COVID-19 period. Whilst the peak of surplus anticipated from last year is not forecast to increase, our new forecasts indicate that Camden will reach that peak sooner, and that the marginal increases towards the end of the planning period will not be realised to the same extent.

3.5. Our level of anticipated surplus provision within both phases will require responses overtime to ensure the sustainability of our school offer. The Council in collaboration with schools has established a School Place Planning Group of school leaders to develop a school place planning strategy with aligned implementation plan focused on schools most acutely impacted by falling roles and add challenge and support to the council approach. We will continue to work with our schools and wider partners during the year to ensure that any proposals

are based on high quality evidence and detailed engagement and consultation with our school partners.

Camden's Schools Attainment

3.6. All Camden schools including academies, diocesan schools and voluntary-aided schools continue to be active members of Camden Learning, our innovative and successful partnership between the Council and Schools. This continues to sustain a coherent and locally aligned school system to better serve our communities. Camden Learning uses the considerable expertise within and beyond our schools to enrich learning, raise standards, and drive improvement, ensuring that all Camden schools' benefit from being part of a locally aligned schools' system.

3.7. As a result, Camden Schools continue to be successful, with achievement at both Key Stage (KS) 2 and Key Stage (KS) 4 about National Averages. 97% of all Camden Schools, and 100% of Camden Primary Schools are graded Good or Better by Ofsted, with 41% of Primary schools graded outstanding. Over the last academic year there were 25 inspections of Camden schools, all of which found Good and in many cases Outstanding provision. Achievement outcomes for 2024 are provisional, with final validated outcomes released later in the year. Because of this, there is currently limited analysis available on the performance of groups within headline data sets. This will be available for scrutiny in February 2025.

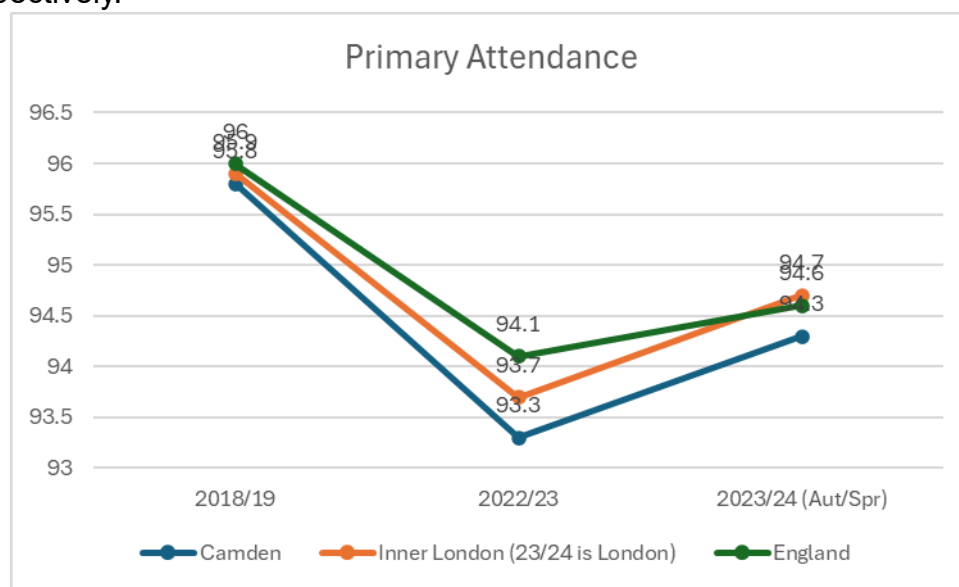
3.8. Caution is advised when considering trends over time due to the legacy of the pandemic. However, Camden Schools continued to perform well and sustained or improved on outcomes in 2019 overall. Concerns remain over the impact of lost learning on disadvantaged learners and the compounded challenges that schools face in closing the learning gap presented by school non-attendance, falling pupil rolls and budgets. However, outcomes for disadvantaged learners in Camden remain better than those nationally.

Primary School Attainment Provisional 2024 good level of development'		Secondary School Attainment (provisional final data sets will be released in January 2024)	
<i>Early Years (end of Reception year)</i>	70% achieved a 'good level of development', an increase year on year since 2022 and above the 2023 national and London averages.	<i>Key Stage 4</i>	68% achieved a standard pass in both English and Maths GCSEs 51% achieved a strong pass, higher than national comparators.

<i>Key stage 2 (end of Year 6)</i>	72% of pupils reached expectations, above the London results of 67%.	<i>Key Stage 5 – Average Point Score (A-Levels)</i>	90% achieved two or more A-levels (A*-E)
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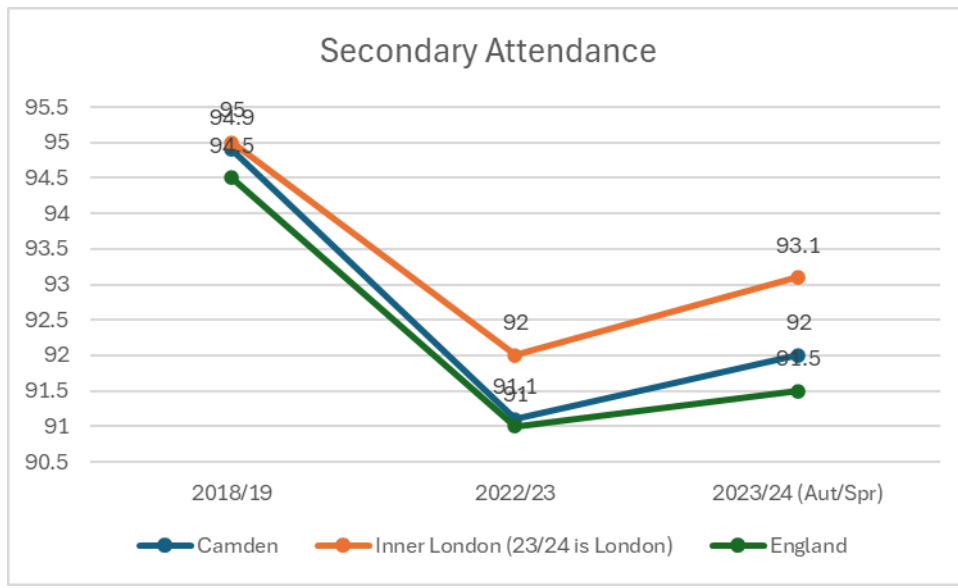
School Attendance

3.9. Attendance in Camden’s primary schools was higher in the 2023/24 academic year than in 2022/23 (94.4% compared to 93.3%), based on Autumn/Spring data, but remains lower than the 2018/19 pre-pandemic overall attendance rate for Camden primary schools of 95.8%. This is also lower than comparable Autumn/Spring rates for London and England, which were 94.7% and 95.6% respectively.



3.10. Persistent absence from school is defined as attendance below 90% of school sessions. Autumn/Spring data for 2023/24 indicates that 1,505 primary school children in Camden were classified as being persistently absent. This represents 17.7% of Camden primary school children compared to the London rate of 14.6% and national rate of 14.7%.

3.11. As with primary schools, secondary school attendance in 2023/24 was higher than 2022/23 (92% compared to 91.1%), based on Autumn/Spring data. This is lower than the comparable rate for London’s secondary schools but higher than the national rate, which were 93.1% and 91.5% respectively. Secondary overall attendance also remains below the 2018/19 pre-pandemic rate of 94.9%.



3.12. In 2023/24, Autumn/Spring data indicates that there were 1,894 persistently absent secondary school pupils in Camden. This represents 24% of Camden secondary schools pupils and is higher than the comparable London rate of 19.6% and national rate of 23.9%.

3.13. In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) issued revised non-statutory attendance guidance. Whilst recognising that there remains a place for legal interventions in respect of school attendance, such as fixed penalty notices and prosecutions, it advocates for schools adopting a 'support first' approach when responding to pupil absence.

3.14. This guidance was updated and became statutory in August 2024. This coincided with new government regulations covering changes to how schools keep attendance registers and fixed penalty notices. These changes introduced revised registration codes for schools to use and a national framework for fixed penalty notice fines.

3.15. In 2023/24, Camden issued 546 fixed penalty notices; a reduction on the 646 issued in 2022/23. 464 of the fixed penalty notices issued in 2023/24 were for unauthorised leave in term time and 83 were for persistent absence.

Initiatives to Support School Attendance

3.16. School attendance has been a strategic priority for Camden since the pandemic and a focus of work for schools. Schools have been promoting the benefits of regular attendance and working with children and families to overcome barriers to attendance. They have been supported in this endeavour with several initiatives.

3.17. A Camden 'back to school' campaign was run in September 2023, which involved placing posters in bus shelters around the borough, bookbag leaflets for primary

schools to send to parents and posters that schools could display in their setting. The bus shelter posters were redisplayed in January 2024 and September 2024.

- 3.18. Fitzrovia Youth in Action (FYA) were jointly commissioned by Camden Council and Camden Learning to work with secondary-age children to produce a school attendance video and carry out a series of pupil-led workshops in secondary schools. As part of workshops with young people over the summer holidays and in schools during the autumn term, which initiative has received positive feedback from the Department for Education.
- 3.19. Using school census and other data sources, we recently conducted a multivariate analysis to examine the different factors influencing school attendance. Through this exercise four main priority cohorts of children and young people (CYP) that currently have high rates of persistent absence from school have been identified.
- 3.20. Following this, two tests and learn pilots are being developed relating to targeted text message in parents/carers and the development of a Team Around the School model relating to locality based family support.

Suspensions and exclusions

- 3.21. Suspensions from Camden primary and secondary schools are lower than the comparable rates for Inner London and England. The most recent available data from 2022/23, showed 33 (0.3%) Camden primary school children received one or more suspensions. This is lower than 0.5% of Inner London primary school pupils and 0.8% of primary school pupils nationally.
- 3.22. Provisional data for 2023/24 indicates that the number of primary pupils who received a suspension is 0.5%, however it is anticipated that this will remain below comparable Inner London and national rates, which will be published in July 2025. This rate is also lower than the pre-pandemic rate in 2018/19 pre-pandemic rate of 0.6%. The average length of a suspension from Camden primary schools in 2022/23 was 2.05 days.
- 3.23. In 2022/23, 522 Camden secondary school children received one or more suspensions. This equates to 4.8% of Camden secondary school pupils, which compared to 6.2% of Inner London secondary school pupils and 7.1% of secondary school pupils nationally. Provisional data for 2023/24 suggests that the percentage of secondary school pupils who received at least one suspension has increased to 6% (higher than the 2018/19 pre-pandemic rate of 5.2%). The average length of a suspension in from a Camden secondary school in 2022/23 was 2.6 days.
- 3.24. In 2022/23, there was one permanent exclusion from a Camden primary school and 16 permanent exclusions from Camden secondary schools. Provisional data

for 2023/24 shows that there has been an increase in the number of secondary permanent exclusions.

Safeguarding in schools

3.25. All Camden schools have received effective safeguarding results at their last Ofsted inspection. Schools are supported in this endeavour by Camden Learning, who during 23/24 carried out sixteen safeguarding reviews, which made a range of recommendations to practice that have enhanced safeguarding. In addition, there were further focused pieces of safeguarding work in several schools.

3.26. As part of Camden's wider commitment to tackling violence against women and girls, supporting schools to address child-on-child sexual harassment continues to be a priority. This year we have commissioned Tender Education & Arts to deliver a two-day healthy relationships workshop in every secondary school.

3.27. With Education becoming the fourth safeguarding partner, Camden primary and secondary schools are represented on the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership, ensuring the voice of schools is heard in that forum. Camden Learning chairs the termly Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Forum, which is well attended by safeguarding leads from state funded and independent schools to help ensure safeguarding leads are kept up to date with developments in the sector.

School Report Cards

3.28. Camden schools have been supported to explore models of school accountability which capture the voices of children, parents and employees experience in schools. Over the last year a Developer Group of 15 school leaders attended 7 workshops to develop a model 'school report card'. The group agreed the report card's key components and then discussed the model with groups of parents across schools to reach a format for a prototype which gives each school a unique profile and parents the means to look beneath the data and explore the richness of offer in the Camden schools system. The prototype 'school report card' was trialled by a wider cross section of schools in the spring term 2024, before a full roll-out is planned for 2024-25.

Opportunity centres

3.29. Camden's Education Strategy, Building Back Stronger, set out a priority to develop Opportunity Centres to facilitate learning beyond the school day. We have further developed the ambition for a network of high technology learning venues across the borough operating at evenings, weekends and holidays to start to address the inequalities for those who live in overcrowded spaces, without the broadband or kit to manage home schooling.

3.30. Opportunity centres are currently being trialled at two Camden secondary schools – La Sainte Union and Acland Burghley, offering out-of-hours

interventions, 1:1 tuition and targeted support. These school-based opportunity centres are also delivering programmes in music, physical activity, creative arts, and food and nutrition, making use of the schools' cookery and technology workshop facilities. These offer access for secondary age students to learning, targeted at those who most need it, but with wide access alongside to technology designed for students' individualised and personalised use.

- 3.31. Proposals are also being developed to the open two new Opportunity Centres in Spring 2025, one as part of the development of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Campus through the Science, Technology Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEAM) programme, and the other based at Euston Skills Centre.

Diversifying Governors

- 3.32. Camden Learning have also monitored the diversity of school governors through surveys, to provide baseline information and to inform initiatives to increase diversity. This led to work with the outreach activity at the Moving On event, the Windrush event and both Melas. The Global Majority Governors Network, jointly with Islington Council, continued to operate through the year – this is group is building the capacity of existing governors as well as getting involved in recruitment. In 2024 Camden Learning also launched the Young Governors' Programme, coordinated by Governors for Schools, which has prepared young people 18-30 for a year-long placement as an Associate Member of a Camden Governor, with all 13 participants placed on a Board.

Camden Arts Biennale

- 3.33. The first Camden Arts Biennale took place from 11-17 July 2024, where 35 schools attended the initial launch event. This was the first event of its kind and featured fine arts from Camden students of all ages which was preceded by a range of activities to support the development of fine art in schools delivered by professional artists. Hosted by the prestigious Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, for a week the Lethaby Gallery opened its doors to the public and displayed artwork representing every school and stage of learning from our member schools. The Biennale was met with huge enthusiasm from the local community, with over 6000 visitors throughout the week, a record number seen at the Lethaby for any exhibition there.

Camden Music

- 3.34. Camden Music continues to be dedicated to giving every child the opportunity to experience, enjoy and learn music. In 2023/24, Camden Music collaborated with 53 schools, providing instrumental tuition to 1744 pupils through Whole Class Ensemble Teaching and leading 39 out-of-school musical groups attended by 522 children. They organised numerous concerts at prestigious venues like the British Library and London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) St Luke's, with highlights including the Brass Bands at the Bandstand event on Hampstead Heath. Their Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) project, Voyagers, successfully completed its pilot phase and will continue thanks to funding from the Camden

Music Trust. Additionally, the Primary Choir Festival saw participation from over 900 pupils, and the Summer Choral Concert featured over 100 singers.

- 3.35. In July, Camden Music supported Camden Spark with the STEAM work experience week, where 25 young people explored various career pathways, including a day at Universal Music Group. They also celebrated the premiere of a commissioned piece by the Camden Youth Orchestras at LSO St Luke's.
- 3.36. The Camden Music Trust has also strengthened our relationships with organisations like the Universal Music Group and the Koko Foundation, which plans to fund further bursaries for disadvantaged children.
- 3.37. On Wednesday 30 April 2025 the bi annual Camden Schools' Music Festival will be taking place at the Royal Albert Hall. Over 2000 young performers will be taking part, with every Camden School represented. The programme will show case our musical talent across Camden from the very best of our orchestras, to our bands and group singing.

Supporting Technology in Education: Digital Learning Hubs

- 3.38. We continue to commit to remaining at the front edge of technological development in our schools. The Enthuse Partnership, combined of 8 Camden Schools, is designed to increase girls' participation and success in computing by focusing on several key areas. Collaborations with organisations like Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Learning and DeepMind allow the partnership to expand STEM activities.
- 3.39. Camden STEAM has worked with our key partner, Google, to develop a London AI Campus which will launch in November 2024. Established as a collaboration between Google, Camden Learning and Camden Council, Camden sixth form students across all ten secondary schools will be accessing the campus, which will provide an exceptional enrichment experience for local students interested in pursuing a career or degree in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related fields.
- 3.40. Camden students will be the first in the UK to benefit from the expertise of specialist teachers, tech employees, sector leaders and academic organisations. Every year, 30 Year 12 students will be selected to enter the two-year 'AI Connect' enrichment programme. Camden students will work towards an event in 2026 where students will present to Google and local AI experts on how they have applied their learning to identify and solve a problem in their local community, through the practical application of AI. The Campus will also host an 'Opportunity Centre' from February 2025 for all Camden sixth-form students in after-school and holiday periods.

Camden STEAM Programme

- 3.41. The Camden STEAM programme brings together Camden schools (primary, secondary and Further Education) with leading employers – such as AstraZeneca, Google, Digital Catapult, Universal Music, ITV and the Roundhouse, universities and institutions in the science, tech and creative sectors to equip Camden's young people with the skills and opportunities to embark on a STEAM career. There are over 60 STEAM employers committed to supporting young people in Camden, and over 200 STEAM Ambassadors (employee volunteers) supporting Camden students.
- 3.42. The Camden STEAM programme reached over 6,900 students during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Camden STEAM Work Experience programme continues to grow, offering placements to 391 Year 12 students from across Camden's secondary schools and the college, with a focus on young people from underrepresented backgrounds. This is an increase from 253 students in 2023, and 154 students in 2022. 59% of students taking part were eligible for free School Meals (an increase from 49% in 2023). 58% of students were from a Global Majority background.
- 3.43. The STEAM programme offers high-quality placements and 83% of students reported gaining skills they wouldn't have learned at school, such as collaboration, public speaking, and leadership. One student's experience at Google highlighted the programme's focus on inclusion, *"Honestly, I didn't think I belonged in a place like this, and then you meet so many people who are just so different and they just work so well together."*
- 3.44. Camden STEAM has worked with local employers to develop a number of bespoke projects to meet the needs of Camden schools and students, such as Year 5 visits to the Google office in Pancras Square hosting 180 pupils, and a bespoke Google Apprenticeships event for Camden students attended by 80 students. This has also supported schools to secure industry placements with a range of employers including the Roundhouse, Labtech, ITV, Havas, and the Francis Crick Institute.

Digital Learning Strategy

- 3.45. The Digital Learning Plan, commissioned by Camden Learning, takes account of the needs, opportunities, resources, expertise and challenges in Camden schools. As part of Camden's Education Strategy to 2030, Building Back Stronger: harnessing technology to improve learning, schools and our local system. In the first year the digital foundations pillar was a focus seeking to Improve infrastructure standards, technical support and hardware, Improve data and network security and data analytics. In the coming year a focus will be on the classroom use of digital with innovation and best practice in Camden schools being exemplified and disseminated. The Enthuse Partnership, combined of 8 Camden Schools, led by Torriano Primary and Parliament Hill schools, is designed to increase girls' participation and success in computing by focusing on

several key areas. At the end-of-year conference, 'AI in Education & Computing: Transition between KS2 & KS3,' educators from primary and secondary schools collaborated to bridge the digital skills gap in Camden. Looking ahead, Camden Learning plans to expand its professional expertise to ensure rapid response and bespoke support for school staff and to develop digital delivery methods to further support SEND pupils, underscoring our commitment to inclusive education while recognising the need for ongoing improvement to meet the significant challenge that our schools face in supporting pupils with additional needs. Haverstock School will also add a Digital T Level to its existing offer next year.

Careers and Connexions

3.46. Camden's Careers & Connexions services continues to deliver high quality IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) in Camden maintained schools and within the community. The schools team are currently commissioned into nine Camden Secondary Schools to deliver on Gatsby Benchmark 8. The community team are linked into youth hubs and community settings across the borough as well as having dedicated staff for core groups such as our SEND and care experienced young people. Examples of work delivered include complete options meetings- discussing each subject and how that may relate to future career prospects, support for applying for apprenticeships and employment, attending annual reviews, carrying out careers interviews with action plans, targeted work with risk of Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) students and additional work with students with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans.

3.47. Community work continues with staff basing themselves within the community and supporting young people who may be NEET or at risk of NEET, accessing education out of borough, with long term health conditions or requiring specialist service. The figures below give an indication of the reach of the team within the community. These numbers will also include the team's presence within the drop-in services at Crowndale every Friday (additionally on Thursdays in summer during exam results).

3.48. 2269 interventions through non-intervention settings took place over 2023/24 across 8 non-education settings.

Camden Summer University

3.49. Camden Summer University (CSU) also works to build relationships with professionals and organisations to support young people aged 13-19 to develop existing skills and interests and introduce them to new and exciting ones. To ensure the most vulnerable students receive priority, the programme is published internally to staff across Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS), Social Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Key workers can refer young people they are working with to specific courses before the programme is published on-line. These enrolments are made before taking

requests from other students. For Summer 2024, there were 69 courses available. 68 out of 69 courses came with accreditation awards with 553 Accreditations awarded to young people in total. Course themes for 2024 included:

- Creative Arts
- Music, Dance, and Performing Arts
- Fashion and Beauty
- Health, Fitness, and Sports
- Work, study, and life skills
- Film, media, and ICT
- Cookery

3.50. The British Museum continues to generously host the annual film screening, providing a prestigious venue for showcasing the creative talents of our young film makers. This year's featured a selection of short films created by 6 groups over the summer. This event helps to celebrate the students' creative achievements and share them with family and friends. Work is ongoing to complete the 3rd annual calendar for Black History month.

- 693 Young People registered to take part
- 417 Young people made a booking
- 1459 recorded outcomes in 5 weeks
- 553 Accreditation awards to young people
- 91 Young People registered with a disability
- 39% registered as receiving free school meals
- 5% registered who are Looked After Children

4. Improving the Health of Children and Families

Food and nutrition in schools

4.1. Good food and nutrition provides a foundation for learning, wellbeing and health. Alongside this, we need to ensure that children's learning is not affected by being hungry. A report by the Food Foundation in June flagged two very concerning challenges – the continued increases in conditions like obesity and type 2 diabetes among young people driven by calorie dense diets, as well as the less talked about impact of poor quality diets and under nutrition, which affects children's growth. These issues can be addressed by a range of actions across society and is a focus for collective action in Camden. This section will focus on the significant ongoing actions taken in our schools this year.

4.2. Camden schools are committed to supporting children across the school day, taking a whole school approach. A key sign of this commitment is engaging with the Healthy Schools award, and currently 71% of primary and secondary schools have either achieved or are working towards this standard (29 primary, 5 secondary, 5 special schools). For food and nutrition, the schools progress their plan to meet the cooking and nutrition curriculum requirements, along with the

culture and environment of the school around food and promoting healthy choices at break and lunch time. Schools must show how they are working to increase the percentage of pupils taking up their free school meals offer as well.

Breakfasts – providing support at the start of the school day

- 4.3. Over the past year, Camden's school breakfast programme has expanded and has supported the roll out of Magic Breakfast at 21 of our most deprived schools. This Council funded initiative implemented by our schools enables 3340 children to have a free breakfast every day - up from 587 in 2022, and up 12% in the last year - with more than 635,000 breakfasts provided per year. 37 out of our 38 primaries. We also cover 10 out of 10 of our secondary schools, 3 out of 3 of our special schools and 2 of our pupil referral units.
- 4.4. The programme is highly valued by teachers and parents. Three further schools are joining in the Autumn term.
- 4.5. Alongside this, the breakfast programme has continued providing support, resources, and advice to schools that access the National Schools Breakfast Programme (NSBP), the national subsidised school breakfast scheme, and to those schools that have chosen to continue arranging their own breakfast service.

Universal free school meals in primaries

- 4.6. The Mayor of London's commitment to extend free school meals (FSM) to all Primary age pupils started in September 2023, extending the national free school meals offer to pupils in Key Stage Two (aged between 7 and 11) as well. As a result, more than 3,000 pupils who would otherwise have had to pay became eligible for free lunches. In the first year, over £1.6m has been paid out to Camden Schools, including an additional amount for those schools where more than 90% of those eligible are having school lunches. This extended benefit now includes pupils from low-income families just above FSM criteria who can access a free school meal. Through the Council's school contract over 1.4m meals have been provided in schools throughout the 23/24 financial year.
- 4.7. There were initial concerns among some Camden Heads that providing this universal benefit may impact on school level pupil premium, as being signed up for free school meals is the driver for this funding (£1,455 per pupil signed up). But following concerted communications with parents by schools supported by the Council, the total proportional receipt of pupil premium increased for Camden in this first year. The universal free school meals programme continues in primaries for a second year, and the pupil premium position will continue to be monitored, alongside supporting eligible families to continue to benefit when they move to secondary school.

Addressing hunger in secondary schools

- 4.8. FSMs in secondary schools are only available to families on the lowest income, following national criteria. Our focus is on supporting as many eligible families as possible to benefit, as well as enable access to the range of cost-of-living support schemes and advice available.
- 4.9. FSMs uptake is measured twice a year on the day of the School Census survey, which provides a snapshot of the data on one day. As of Spring 2024, nearing two thirds (61.5%) of secondary school pupils in Camden registered for FSMs actually ate their FSM on the day of the School Census, in line with the spring 2023 uptake figure of 62.3%. The uptake varies across the 10 secondary schools, with a range of 47.6% to 84.3%.
- 4.10. In response to low uptake of FSMs in some secondary schools, the FSM Test and Learn project to tackle hunger in Camden Secondary schools was started to increase uptake of FSMs. This project identified several insights by engaging with pupils, parents, and school staff around hunger and FSMs. Some key insights include the need for a formal way to regularly collect pupil feedback in schools, and the need for additional support for families to make FSM applications, especially at the secondary school stage, where parents/guardians have less contact with schools. These insights have led to increased support for families applying for FSM, a free fruit offer at breaktime in 6 secondary schools, and 2 special schools (following pupil feedback), and changes to the new school meals specification (live from April 2025). This includes ongoing and deeper pupil engagement in the school meal offer and menu. An application has also been made to the Department for Work and Pensions to enable their data to be used so that all Camden residents who are eligible for free school meals can be automatically enrolled without needing a parent/guardian to complete an application.

Camden Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF)

- 4.11. HAF is a DfE funded programme that supports children and young people aged 5-16yrs who are eligible for benefits-related FSM during Spring, Summer, and Winter school holidays. It provides free access to physical and enriching activities, nutritional education, and a healthy hot meal during the day. The Council works in partnership with the Young Camden Foundation to deliver the programme.
- 4.12. There are 8,073 children eligible for FSM in Camden, and the central government funding only enables us to offer a small proportion of FSM eligible children and young people access to the programme. In recognition of this challenge, and the marked increased demand for places, the Council identified an additional £88,000 from Council and Public Health reserves to expand access to the HAF programme. This funding enabled an extra 116 SEND places.

- 4.13. In Summer 2024, Camden's HAF programme successfully reached more than 3000 children across 48 venues, serving over 13,400 meals. With the involvement of 32 dedicated providers, the programme supported children eligible for FSM and children with SEND. In total, 1,851 primary-aged and 744 secondary-aged children attended, including 277 FSM-eligible children with SEND in universal settings and 91 in SEND specialist provisions.
- 4.14. The Young Camden Foundation's (YCF) 'Share a story' appeal received 2,258 new and lightly used books and magazines, from literacy charities, YCF corporate partners and publishers, at an estimated total value of £5,800. These were distributed to HAF providers, to encourage a love of reading over the holidays and to lessen the reading gap experienced by low-income families. Further conversations about future funding are ongoing with DfE in the new government.

Childhood Immunisations

- 4.15. Improving the uptake of childhood immunisations remains a strategic priority for the Camden Health & Well-being Board and Camden Borough Partnership, as well as the main population health priority for North Central London (NCL) Integrated Care System (ICS). Over a period of 5 years, we have seen a steady increase in the number of children aged 1 who have received all the vaccines that they are due. This increase is slightly less for children aged 2 and less progressive for children aged 5. Work is underway with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and General Practice (GP) to identify data issues and improve immunisation take up rates and giving access to school nursing team and health visitors to key patient level immunisation record information to enable them to promote immunisations.
- 4.16. National increases have been reported in two vaccine preventable diseases this year (Whooping cough and measles). Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination has been promoted through a variety of channels, including resident bulletins, social media platforms, electronic billboards and bus advertising. We have also produced leaflets which were translated for local populations, and distributed via GPs, libraries and children's centres and at community events.
- 4.17. We have used our parent champions, health improvement staff and school nursing teams to promote MMR vaccination. We have promoted messages around the increase in measles cases and the importance of vaccination using staff from Family Hubs and have attended baby bonding sessions to promote childhood vaccinations and answer questions raised by parents. We have attended headteacher meetings to provide briefings on the increase in measles and the importance of improving MMR vaccination uptake rates.
- 4.18. We have worked with our colleagues in NCL ICB, University College London Hospital (UCLH) / Vaccine bus and family hubs to deliver outreach MMR clinics

and information sessions throughout the borough. We have also been working with our asylum seeker and refugee populations in contingency hotels and displaced populations to promote the importance of childhood vaccinations and to ensure that this population are registered with GPs. Training has been delivered to staff working in initial and dispersed accommodation in relation to the importance of MMR vaccination and preparedness for measles cases.

4.19. Information sessions and a vaccine session has also been held at the New Horizons, a pan-London centre for young people living with homelessness.

Mental Health Services

4.20. Nationally, data shows steep decline in mental health of Children and Young People (CYP) and unprecedented demand for support with mental health disorders rising from 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 5 in 2023. In Camden it is estimated that 1 in 5 CYP aged 11-16 have a mental health condition, and 23% of 17–19-year-olds. Prevalence estimates for mental health disorders in Camden are around 33% higher than the national average, with social risk factors playing a significant role. Children living in social housing are twice as likely to have a mental disorder and social housing is home for 52% of Camden's children and young people. 1 in 3 Children live in Poverty in Camden, and young people from low-income families are likely to have worse mental health as well.

4.21. 1 in 3 young carers are estimated to have a mental health issue, with an estimated to be 1,370 young carers (aged 5–24) in Camden. The jointly commissioned Islington and Camden Young Carers Service was reprocured with a new provider (The Children's Society) who have started their work with the development of a new Camden Young Carers Strategy.

4.22. Waiting times for the Tavistock's CAMHS services continued to be low in comparison with other NCL boroughs, with 82% of children seen within 4 weeks in Quarter 4 23/24. The pilot of an Integrated Front Door model of multiagency triage for additional support for children and young people was launched for primary care referrals. Referrals come into a single point and are reviewed by early help, social care and mental health practitioners to ensure the right offer of support is in place. The pilot has had positive feedback from GPs. Further evaluation is planned with a view to a potential to roll out the approach to schools.

4.23. Following a successful pilot, Camden Council commissioned a social prescribing service for CYP aged 12-24 for a period of two years, with Fitzrovia Youth in Action, the Brandon Centre and the Hive. The service involves two link workers engaging 1:1 with young people through schools, GPs, Youth Early Help, Family Hubs and other networks. The workers develop trusting relationships with young people to identify and co-produce a personalised plan of activities based on the young person's needs, preferences, and motivation. Workers have access to a

budget to fund individual activities as well as facilitating access for the young person to activities which are already available in the borough. The service also supports group-based activities aimed at improving inclusion, building resilience and tackling isolation.

- 4.24. Over the last 12 months, the Hive have been delivering a pilot aimed at engaging young men from disadvantaged backgrounds into their service. Young men have been traditionally under-represented in mental health services, and they experience specific challenges around social isolation, agoraphobia and gaming addiction. To address this gap, the Hive have employed a male practitioner who uses creative and flexible approaches to engage young men through sports, drama, art or music. The project includes activities, discussion-based workshops and one-to-one mentoring. The project has been very successful and resulted in an increase of 300% in men accessing the Hive. The pilot has also had an effect in increasing access particularly for young black men, where there has been a 325% increase.
- 4.25. As part of improving the offer of mental health support for care experienced young people in Camden, the CAMHS Looked After Children and Refugee team has been expanded and recruited two new psychologist positions. This will enable the team to see young people up to the age of 24 (previously the service stopped at age 18). In addition, a Psychologist post has been created, based in the Young People's Team at Camden & Islington NHS Foundation Trust and the Hive, which will provide support to care experience young people and refugees.

Mental Health in Schools

- 4.26. Support for mental health in schools continues to be delivered by a combination of NHS funded Mental Health support teams and VCS organisations as well as through the Early Years Schools and Families team. In 2023/24 all Camden state-maintained primary and secondary schools were offered partnership with Mental Health Support Teams (MHST's), which included 0.5 day per week for Primary Schools and at least 1.0 days per week for Secondary Schools.
- 4.27. The Early Years, Schools and Families team have a dedicated post that provides advice, support and training for schools on promoting positive mental health. This includes parent and pupil workshops on topics such as 'managing behaviour through a trauma lens', 'supporting parent or pupils own mental health' and 'building resilience'; and training pupils to be Wellbeing Champions to advocate and support positive mental health and wellbeing in their school.
- 4.28. In 2024, there were 4 parent workshops delivered, attended by 63 parents/carers, topics focused on managing stress and anxiety and building wellbeing and resilience. 7 staff training sessions were delivered to support staff wellbeing and resilience and refresh trauma informed practice learning and manage behaviour. 12 pupils across 2 schools were trained to be Wellbeing

Champions. 5 schools received Trauma Informed Practice training delivered by the Educational Psychologists. Pre and post evaluation showed positive impact in knowledge, confidence and staff skills to support and respond to a trauma-led approach and follow up support was provided for the year following the training.

4.29. Over the coming year we will be working to address continued high levels of absence and emotional based school avoidance through a multi-agency approach: mapping need, joining up the various parts of the system, and learning from the Rebuilding Bridges Year 2 evaluation.

5. Adult Community Learning and Virtual School

5.1. Camden Adult Community Learning (ACL) is an adult community learning Service that targets deprivation in Camden. Its mission is to “Encourage and support adults to make their first steps back into learning and so become more active economically, in their families and communities, and maintain better health.” It is funded primarily via the Greater London Authority (GLA) with a range of other financial sources of income. The Service continues to be free at the point of access.

- 2,259 adults were taught by the Service: 95.5% were retained on their courses of study and 99.6% passed their course
- Average attendance was 88.5%.
- Most learners were women of economically active age and non-white British. The cohort of learners also contained 637 learners of 65-plus, (16 learners of 95-plus). 24% of learners self-declared as having a disability/learning disability in 2022/2023.
- Courses are predominantly at the lower entry levels, but some vocational programming was at level 2 and level 3. Provision continues to be predominantly delivered in the most deprived areas of the borough and face to face.
- Students successfully completed learning across Camden in courses in: Family Learning; Digital Inclusion; Health and Wellbeing; English as a second language (ESOL); Vocational training (Supervisory Training in Construction, Childcare and Barista training); as well as a Youth Employment Programme (Targeted at those in danger of violent crime or being the victim of violent crime)
- Furthermore, the ESOL Advice Service supported refugees into courses of study, and in hotels specifically, as well as Camden’s settled communities. More than 1000 people were Serviced by the ESOL Advice Service (EAS).
- Camden ACL ran a very successful SEND Parents and Carers Well Being event at Swiss Cottage Library connecting families to the wide range of opportunities for adults in the local area.

6. Children's services and safeguarding

Camden safeguarding children partnership

- 6.1. The role of the Camden safeguarding children partnership (CSCP) is to ensure good governance and strategic oversight of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children in Camden. The CSCP's shared vision is that all children and young people in Camden are *safe, thriving and heard*.
- 6.2. In light of Working Together 2023, a review of the Camden safeguarding arrangements will take place to reflect the joint commitment to safeguarding children across our statutory and community partners. The updated version will be published by the end of this year. The CSCP also produces an annual report to reflect on the years achievements and improve safeguarding practices, test working arrangements, and measure the impact on local families.
- 6.3. Our statutory safeguarding partners: The CSCP's Health Subgroup ensures safeguarding assurance across our local health sector and creates a communication network for key safeguarding professionals in Camden's health services to share expertise on safeguarding children. All Camden Health Trusts are rated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as 'Good'.
- 6.4. Camden Council – Children's Services: Camden Council's children's services was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, in April 2022. The Ofsted Focused Visit in late 2023, found that; *most children continuing to benefit from experienced leadership of services, good corporate and political support, a committed, well-trained workforce and resources which helps children to progress*. Ofsted praised commitment from multi-agency safeguarding partners, and the strength of strategic leadership and work on areas such as neglect, anti-racist safeguarding practice, and the training and support offer available for the frontline workforce.
- 6.5. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS): The MPS has faced scrutiny in its approach to child protection, as highlighted by the Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The CSCP has sought assurance on several key finding; the local MPS response to criminal and sexual exploitation, the identification and support for vulnerable children, and the effectiveness of interventions to improve the response to child exploitation. The MPS has recently published the Children's Strategy which introduces a Child First policy.
- 6.6. Serious incident notifications: In the 2023-24 financial year we have seen six serious safeguarding incident notifications. The Camden Statutory Partners have worked together to reach a decision on identifying the learning through Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR) or alternative methodologies of learning for each serious safeguarding incident. All our reviews involve engagement with children or their families, so that their experiences are reflected by the Independent Author. Safeguarding themes from recent reviews include

domestic abuse in the family home, serious youth violence, safeguarding standards in educational residential placements, mental health of Care Experienced adolescents, transitional safeguarding, non-accidental injuries to an infants and safer recruitment. Many themes highlight the challenges faced by vulnerable households and suggest the need for a more aligned strategic approach across local governance systems to ensure the best lifelong outcomes for Camden children and families. Priorities for 2024-26 reflect areas of development in local multi-agency safeguarding systems and practice such as:

- Re-engaging vulnerable children in education (including SEND)
- Mental Health in the family
- Children Looked After and those that are Care Experienced.

Early Help Family Support

- 6.7. The number of families requesting and receiving Early help Family Support from Camden services is now at its highest level since before the Covid pandemic. The proportion of contacts passed from the Child and Family Contact Service to Early Help has remained consistent over the last 4 years at an average of 53%.
- 6.8. The number of Early Help assessments conducted each year have continued to increase post-pandemic (690 in 23/24), in line with national trends. Complexity of needs, and the cumulative effect of multiple needs, continues to rise in early help assessments. The volume of contacts passed to early help continue to increase, up from an average of 3300 contacts to 3700. These factors continue to require intensive collaborative working with colleagues in other children's services departments and across the council (SEND, CAMHS, housing, welfare rights). The colocation of multi-disciplinary teams in Family hubs will support efforts to reach families experiencing difficulties at an even earlier stage.
- 6.9. Housing, families in acute stress, mental health, parenting issues and SEND are in the top 5 presenting issues for Early help assessments. A considerable increase in SEND has meant that SEND needs have replaced financial problems as one of the top 5 presenting issues at assessment.
- 6.10. Over the last 5 years, approximately 28% of contacts passed to Early Help have closed with the provision of Information, advice and guidance (IAG). Under the family hubs strategic development and in support of the 'Team around the school' objective in the education strategy Building Back Stronger. Early Help are continuing to increase proactive outreach to take family information, advice and guidance (IAG) closer to the community. In 23/24 First Stop Early Help (who provide information services at the children's front door) trialled information surgeries for parents in school, targeting wards with high needs based on Early Help and cost of living data. The test phase reached 29 parents over 26 sessions in 2 schools with positive feedback from parents and school staff. The team are working to scale up from 2 to 6 targeted primary schools (identified by needs) and Food banks.

Support for Refugees and Displaced Children and Families

- 6.11. As a Borough of Sanctuary, Camden continues to welcome and support vast numbers of displaced and refugee families. Following the closure of the Afghan Bridging hotels in February 2022, 25 families have successfully resettled into long term accommodation in the borough this year, alongside 43 households since 2022.
- 6.12. A further 27 households are due to be resettled in coming months. Early Help have continued to support children and families to integrate and settle in their local neighbourhoods alongside partner schools, health, mental health, housing, the GLA and community services.
- 6.13. As the war continues in Ukraine, hosting has continued in Camden, although numbers of new arrivals have decreased. 96 hosted households remain in Camden. Early Help have supported 133 hosted families and 13 unaccompanied minors since 2022 and are further supporting families that have left the scheme and resettled in the borough.
- 6.14. Over the last 18 months the Displaced and Refugee families team have established targeted outreach support to families accommodated by the Home Office in procured hotels and dispersed accommodation. 3 mixed occupancy hotels remain in Camden and the team have supported 113 families to access education, health and local services, with all 66 children accessing education or provision. 64 of these families (with 137 children) have left Camden hotels to date. Early Help will continue to support destitute families in hotels, working closely with the Home Office to address safeguarding concerns. The team also work closely with housing colleagues to support families leaving Home Office accommodation and accessing housing options in the borough as a favoured community to live in as some families have been in the borough for over 2 years.

Children's Social Work

Children in Need and Child Protection

- 6.15. We are continuing to see a year-on-year increase in the number of contacts to our integrated 'front door' which provides access to our early help and social work services. There has been a 20% increase in total contacts in the last year and as a result in 2023/24 we saw our highest number of referrals to social work in the last 5 years at 2241, a 49% increase since 2019/20.
- 6.16. We have a strong multiagency safeguarding hub in place with co-located police and health colleagues, as well as an embedded education lead to strengthen our safeguarding work with schools. We work closely with colleagues from a broad

range of services including substance misuse, probation and domestic violence to make sure we have a good understanding of the range of risks children may be facing.

- 6.17. Despite the increase in overall numbers, we are seeing relatively stable proportions of children who require additional support as children in need or through child protection plans with the rate of children subject to a child protection plan sitting at 46 (per 10,000 of the under 18 population) in 2023/24, down marginally from 48 in 2022/23. The reasons children require our support and intervention remain consistent with domestic violence, mental health and neglect being the most prominent.
- 6.18. When we feel it may not be safe for children to remain at home, we work closely with families to help formulate safe plans and offer various services to help families achieve safe arrangements as part of 'pre-proceedings' work. We concluded 33 pre-proceedings cases in 2023/24 and have increased our proportion of families who are diverted away from court. Where cases have proceeded to court in 2023/24, 74% of children remained with family as the final outcome with 34% of these children being made subject of Special Guardianship Orders.
- 6.19. We are in the process of establishing an Edge of Care team as part of our sufficiency and transformation work to support children who are at highest risk of entry to care receive the help they need to remain in their family.

Camden's Children and Learning Academy

- 6.20. Camden's Children and Learning Academy is a joint enterprise being developed between the Relational Practice directorate and Camden's Learning and Development Service. We have been working in partnership to deliver Camden's vision of a learning environment and culture where workers are valued, and their professional development is prioritised to ensure our practice is of the highest standard. We have been building on the Social Work Academy in 23-24 to ensure we are focused across the whole children's workforce not just social workers. We will be launching in January 2025.
- 6.21. We are aiming to cultivate a stable, flexible and sustainable workforce that is skilled and knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of children and families in Camden, whilst embedding Relational Practice into our work with children and families across all children's services.
- 6.22. The Academy has been resourced this year with new Practice Development Officers, a dedicated Head of Practice and Learning and a new Academy Team manager. This has enabled a greater focus on embedding learning across the practice system and supporting the workforce with their learning and development. The Academy has been focused this year on the recruitment and retention of social work staff as a priority with a task and finish group initiated in

January 2024 to meet fortnightly to review the recruitment strategy and track recruitment activity with key Managers, HR, Communications and Principal Social Worker oversight. We are starting to see a positive impact with recruitment and retention improving across most of the services. We have also embarked on recruitment of students through the step-up programme and have 3 new social work apprentices appointed this year.

6.23. We have seen a small reduction in our agency staff numbers since the new recruitment drive started in January 2024. Importantly we also have a more stable agency workforce to ensure our families feel don't experience unnecessary change while we are recruiting permanent staff. From our recent recruitment event on the 18th October we have shortlisted a number of very experienced social workers.

The Camden Centre for Relational Practice

6.24. This year, the Children and Learning Directorate has innovated to create The Camden Centre for Relational Practice. The Centre is a new research and practice centre focused on relational cultures in public services: its mission is to make relational cultures in public services a common practice for the common good. The new Director of Relational Practice, Nana Bonsu, joined Camden in June 2024 and is leading the development of the Centre which will also incorporate a new unifying practice framework for all staff in Children and Learning. The framework brings together the best of our existing practice models, grounded in a systemic approach and coupled with four core methods of participation, mentalisation, anti-racism and restorative. It will also centre Council values of community empowerment. Practice framework training will commence early 2025.

6.25. The Centre is already driving developmental work in the field of children's participation. A staff-led group is working with the Centre to assess the utility of the Lundy Model of Participation (a children's rights-based approach to participation) to provide coherence to all participation work in the Directorate. The intent is to underpin all participation activity with a defence of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (a child's rights to express a view and have that view taken seriously) and to create feedback mechanisms for children to identify for themselves whether this was the case.

7. Support for Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS)

7.1. Nationally and locally, we are seeing increases in the number and complexity of the population of children with SEND. Camden is proud of the services we provide for children and young people with SEND, while also recognising the challenging context nationally and the areas for improvement locally. Over the

last year, considerable progress has been made around improving the local offer of SEND services, and this improvement journey will continue in future years.

- 7.2. Camden Council currently maintain 1,562 EHC Plans (as of July 2024) for children and young people who reside within the borough. From January - July 2024, 76.3% of new EHC Plans have been issued within 20 weeks which, whilst above the national average of 54%, is lower than previous years in Camden where 90-97% of new plans have been issued within 20 weeks.
- 7.3. Camden has had a long tradition of proactive planning and collaborative work with schools and settings to promote inclusion. The Exceptional Needs Grant (ENG) pathway was developed with settings as an alternative to the EHC plan pathway, allowing for funding to be received by settings more quickly, by ensuring 'the right provision at the right time' for our children in mainstream settings and reducing reliance on statutory services.
- 7.4. ENG requests are submitted, considered and moderated through five clusters across the borough. The clusters comprise of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCOs) and meet half termly, with half of the meeting looking at requests for ENG funding and the other half spent on CPD. This forum has been very useful in spreading best practice between schools to enable more effective interventions to meet needs. Camden's improvement work is guided by the five-year Local Area SEND Strategy 2022-27, a local area strategy, that involves key partners across Camden SEND. It was a journey of co-design between parents, carers, young people and professionals from across the partnership that identifies three priorities:
 1. Make life easier for families of children or young people with SEND
 2. Support children and young people with SEND to thrive in learning, health and wellbeing
 3. Enable young adults with SEND to build a good life locally
- 7.5. Sitting beneath the Local Area SEND Strategy is the SEND Strategy Implementation Plan which sets out the specific work we are undertaking to deliver on our strategy priorities. The Implementation Plan is an active document refreshed annually in response to changes in the system and a range of data and information sources.
- 7.6. The SEND Inclusion Board oversees delivery of the strategy and hears reports on progress at every bimonthly meeting. Each priority has a sponsor and workstream lead to work with the partnership to develop and deliver an implementation plan. Annual progress reports and implementation plans are published on our website to increase transparency of our strategy delivery.

Children and Young People with Disabilities Service

- 7.7. Best start in life is the foundation to Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS) work, it is about what is best for disabled children and young people, and in the last year the service continued to develop pathways that are able to provide a more personalised, inclusive and relational approach to our delivery.
- 7.8. During 2024/25, CYPDS continued to develop pathways that provide a more personalised, inclusive and relational approach to our delivery. CYPDS works with disabled children and young people whose functioning due to their disability is more severe and profound and/ or have complex needs.
- 7.9. CYPDS currently supports 550 disabled children and young people across ages 0-25. All disabled children and young people in CYPDS will have a Preparing for Adulthood assessment from the age of 14, and this is to identify the on-going care and support need of each child. CYPDS works in partnership with other Camden social care services and community partners, to ensure that disabled children whose functioning is not severe or profound, have access to social care support through the universal and targeted offer in Camden.
- 7.10. Parent carers are seen as equal partners, and they help us shape and understand the demand and expectations, in the same time contribute to service developments:
- Feedback received from Special Parents forum indicated that while the specialist short breaks offer is well known and published, this is not always the case with the universal and targeted offer of support for disabled children.
- 7.11. In May 2024, CYPDS jointly with SEND organised a Local Offer Market event for disabled young people and families during which the universal and targeted short breaks providers across Camden were in attendance.
- A Preparing for Adulthood event was held in May 2024, and about 100 parents and disabled young people attended. During the event participants could access workshops on topics like Autism, Sexual health and relationships, health action planning and Decision Making/ Mental Capacity.
 - The revised Preparing for Adulthood booklet for parent carers was launched during May 2024 event, document which was coproduced with parents carers supported by CYPDS.
 - Feedback was received from Special Parents forum and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information (SENDIASS) in relation to all disabled children right to a social care assessment, especially when children do not require a specialist offer of support. In 2024, Children and Young People Disability Service (CYPDS) Head of Service in partnership with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Help developed guidance for social care professionals about the right to an assessment for

disabled children, and their parent carers. This guidance is now available on the Local Offer since July 2024.

- The Short Breaks Statement for 2024/25 was launched in September 2024, and this is now available on Local Offer for all parents carers, young people and professionals.
- 7.12. CYPDS in partnership with Commissioning and voluntary sector have continued to support the implementation of the Rebuilding Bridges project in Camden which is funded by Department of Education through the Short Breaks Innovation fund during 2024/25. This provides 1:1 mentoring and group support to children or young people with SEN and disability who are out of education, or at risk of school placement breakdown. The project developed a community-based model of care that is multi agency, focuses on individual strength and family support in the community with the aim to return children into education and build parental confidence.
- 7.13. CYPDS have been involved with the development of the Independent Living Hub at Greenwood Community Centre. The Independent Living Hub, run by the charity Wac Arts, supports preparation for independent living as young people move into adulthood. Fourteen to 25-year-olds are introduced to services for young people in the community as they leave education and prepare for adult life. The Greenwood Centre in Kentish Town, it is a purpose-built space packed full of facilities designed by and for people with mild to moderate disabilities who can travel independently but still need assistance in gaining greater confidence and even more independence as well as essential life skills. Drop-in sessions will use drama, music, art and design, alongside practical learning to explore personal and social challenges such as love, friendships, and conflict, as well as technology, travel, cooking and healthy living.
- 7.14. In 2024, CYPDS introduced the Short Breaks Practitioners model for disabled children receiving enhanced specialist short breaks support. Having a named worker contributes to children achieving better outcomes through long term trusting relationships that help children and their families to live with the dignity and independence we all strive for. The feedback from families supported by CYPDS has been positive.
- 7.15. The CYPDS service works closely with Camden's Special Educational Needs Service (SEN) and the local specialist educational providers, and almost 70% of the young people with EHC plans who are over the age of 18 supported by CYPDS are in education, and accessing supported internships (10 young people each year).
- 7.16. 80% of young people over the age of 18 who are supported by CYPDS live with 1 or more carer in the family home. There has been an increase in carers conversations in the last year, with each review taking place carers are offered a carers conversation, should they wish to have one. The social care support

for young people living at home is provided through Personal Budgets, in the form of a Direct Payment, which gives the families flexibility and choice about whom they want to employ and how support should look like.

- 7.17. Supported living that is local to Camden is available when necessary for 30% of young people over the age of 18 who are supported by CYPDS. This is for young people to develop skills independently with support whilst remaining connected to the community they are familiar with and their families. Mental Health admissions remain low: there are 2 young people in CYPDS who require inpatient mental health support.
- 7.18. Personalised educational provision is available for 6-7 young people with complex needs and SEND in Camden each year, delivered as part of Alexandra Centre provision. This enabled young people to remain in Camden, instead of having to access out of borough far away from home educational provision.

Camden SEND Investment

- 7.19. Delivery of the strategy has picked up pace through year 2 with a permanent Head of SEND and Inclusion in role. There have already been a number of meaningful changes to the way that local services are functioning as part of this improvement journey, underpinned by a redesign of the SEND and Inclusion service run by the council. This restructure invests an additional £1.3 million into the service to enable them to better meet rising levels of need in the borough. It also prioritises moving officers closer to the community and families. The team have also introduced a SEN Duty line and regular SEND & Inclusion Surgeries to make it easier for families to get updates or information about their cases. This will be underpinned by service standards setting out exactly what families can expect from the SEN Service. This marks a culture shift towards a responsive, community-based service.
- 7.20. Schools are facing significant pressures to meet increasing numbers of children with SEND and greater complexity of needs, and Camden are attentively working to support them to meet these needs. Officers have set up a High Need Sub-Group to Schools Forum, with school leaders, to steer the spend of the High Needs Block to best meet needs. In the summer term 2024, Camden ran a capital grants funding round, awarding c.£2.5 million in grants to 28 schools to enable them to improve accessibility and inclusion spaces.
- 7.21. In the coming months, there will be a second phase of the service redesign which will look at advisory and support services. It will be guided by the newly published SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which provides strong evidence on local needs so that we can make sure that services match these needs.

- 7.22. In October, the refreshed Local Offer website was published, making it easier to families and professionals to find information about local services and support. The SEND system can be complex and hard to navigate and so a high quality Local Offer is integral to enable families to be able to access the information they need as easily as possible.
- 7.23. We invest £11,000 in our children in mainstream settings, with SEN support needs, or High Needs Funding, which is an additional £5,000 on top of the national £6,000 notional funding. This devolved funding enables mainstream schools and settings to provide the right support at the right time. The two high needs funding bands are for our children and young people with exceptional needs and can be paid without the need for an EHC plan.
- 7.24. SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) plays a key role in supporting families to navigate the complex SEND system and enact their rights. It is for that reason that Camden increased investment in the service in 2023 so that the team could grow and increase the amount of outreach they do within the community. This includes recruiting a Somali Outreach Worker who has worked with the Somali community. It has also enabled them to offer training to a wide range of professionals so that they can better understand the SEND system to support the families they are working with. This has helped to make sure that families are able to get basic information and advice from a wider range of professionals. The SENDIASS Manager sits on the SEND Inclusion Board and provides a report to every bimonthly meeting.
- 7.25. Being part of the Change Programme Partnership, a Department for Education funded programme, test's the reforms proposed in the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. The Change Programme Partnership is testing elements of the SEND and AP reform agenda set out in SEND and AP Green Paper. Camden, Islington and Enfield are part of the London Change Programme Partnership, led by the London Borough of Barnet. Camden were keen to be part of the Change Programme so that we could act as early leaders in the upcoming changes and help to shape national policy.
- 7.26. Through the Change Programme, Camden have tested a new EHC plan template, developed a Local Area Inclusion Plan, strengthened our mediation and dispute resolution offer and set up multi-agency panels. The change in Government means that we are now awaiting a ministerial steer on which reforms we should push ahead with testing. While awaiting this, officers have continued to work on our Ordinarily Available Provision and Alternative Provision offer, in line with Department for Education advice.

Rebuilding Bridges

- 7.27. Rebuilding Bridges is delivered by the London Borough of Camden and funded by the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund. In Year 2

(April 2023 – March 2024), Rebuilding Bridges supported 120 children and young people aged 6-25 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, autism and learning difficulties to achieve the following aims:

- Improvement in children/young people's outcomes related to their personalised goals.
- Improved emotional well-being for children/young people supported by the project.
- Parents / family members' increased resilience/ability to cope as carers.
- Improved school/college attendance for children/young people supported by the project.
- Reduction in behaviours of concern across settings / home environment.
- Prevention of escalation of child protection thresholds for children/young people.
- Young peoples' increased independence and improved preparedness for adulthood.

7.28. Rebuilding Bridges has three strands. The first provides intensive support package through Pace, CAMHS and educational psychologists, including one-to-one mentoring and small group support, plus therapeutic interventions from project psychologists. Support was provided to parents and carers as well. The second strand is called 'Count Me In' and provides additional personalised support to access youth provision. The third strand is the Independent Living Hub, provide by Wac Arts, delivering after school and weekend activities to support preparation for independent living and development of friendships and community participation.

7.29. The programme has shown positive impacts, including half of participants improving school attendance and 41% stepping down a category in their Child Protection thresholds. 83% of young people supported by the Independent Living Hub demonstrated improved independence in their personalised goal-based measure and so reduced risk of requiring residential care in adulthood. The funding for this programme ends in March 2025 and so the key focus now is the embed learning from this approach into our service delivery.

8. Corporate Parenting and Voices of Families and Children

Children Looked After

8.1. As of the end of October 2024, we are corporate parents to 218 children, of whom 61 have been in the care of the Council for more than two years. Sixty-eight children in our care are subject to section 20 (voluntarily in care), of whom 38 are unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Seventy-eight children are aged 16 and 17, and 140 are aged 0-16. We have 74 children subject to Care Orders (the court has permanently granted London Borough of Camden parental responsibility) and 66 children still in care proceedings and subject to Interim Care Orders. We have three children in custody. One was in the care of Camden at the point of remand. All children continue to be visited regularly and

have their wishes and feelings included in the children's looked-after reviews and plans developed for their care.

- 8.2. The Virtual School has developed a dedicated educator navigator role to start working with children in secondary school who are displaying the potential to study at university. The team continue to support social workers in completing Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for all children and nineteen-year-olds in full-time education. A Virtual School Education Achievement Celebration was held at the Arsenal Stadium in late October 2024 to celebrate children's achievements.

Care-Experienced Young People

8.3. There are 354 Care Experienced Young people (previously children looked after (CLA) receiving a service from Camden. Of this cohort, 37 young people were in our care for less than 13 weeks, qualifying them for support when they have identified goals. Their cases are closed by mutual agreement, and they return for support when needed. The other 317 are former relevant young people who are provided with a service until their 25th birthday for as long as they want a service. We do not close qualifying or former relevant young people's cases if we have safeguarding concerns for them.

8.4. The service supports 398 young people, including those aged 16 and 17, as they prepare to transition into adulthood. We have 187 former UASCs, of whom 17 are qualifying young people. These young people have shown remarkable resilience and determination; their achievements are a source of pride and inspiration for us all. A celebration achievement event will be held in early 2025 for them.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

8.5. Camden made care-experienced a protected characteristic in January 2024. At Full Council, following a themed debate on care-experienced which heard directly from care leavers, personal advisors, and public speakers, including those with a national profile Terry Galloway and Lemn Sissay, on what it means to grow up in care and be care experienced. Directly following this debate, the motion to make care experience a locally protected characteristic was voted unanimously by all councillors. Following this work, we are developing a cross-council corporate parenting strategy which will be shared with our Corporate Parenting Strategy in January. Being appointed as co-chair for Corporate Parenting Board, entrenches our commitment to thinking about how we ensure we have the best offer for our care-experienced children and young people as their corporate parents.

8.6. Following the motion, Camden's Corporate Management Team have sponsored the work, with Executive Directors across Camden coming together and making commitments from their services. We have undertaken a cross-council work programme to improve our council-wide offer for caring for experienced people and collectively renew our corporate parenting strategy. This work, divided into

five workstreams, is set to bring about significant positive changes, and we are optimistic about the future.

- Connection and Belonging: We are improving our co-production and participation with children in care and care-experienced young people, supporting lifelong connections for care-experienced children and young people, and creating a physical hub where care-experienced people can meet and access services.
- A Place to Call Home: We are improving our placements for children in care and care-experienced young people and refreshing our placement sufficiency strategy. We want to ensure children are supported to remain in their families. When children come into care, we provide stable, loving homes where they can recover from trauma and achieve their potential.
- Making a positive contribution: Improving our education, employment, and training offer for children in care and care for experienced young people. We aim to be ambitious and support them in learning. To help them be ready to engage in employment activities to support their well-being and lifelong outcomes and help them become productive citizens.
- Culture change: Create a care-conscious workforce and implement Council policies to support those with care experience to thrive in employment and staff with caring responsibilities for non-birth children.
- Well-being: Improving our transitions to adulthood, promoting the physical, mental health and well-being offers in partnership with Leisure and Community Services with the Integrated Care Board and health partners

8.7. A survey will be conducted in partnership with children in care Council in November 2024 and workshops with young people have been running since September 2024 to ensure their views are actively represented in the strategy. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028 and supporting documents will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in January 2025, Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny in February 2025 and the Full Council in April 2025.

9. Early Years & Family Hubs

Co-creating our Work with Families

9.1. Co-design or “deciding together” is local authorities, partners and parents and carers coming together to create and improve services. Co-design with families is undertaken in a variety of ways including experience of service questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, the parent and carer panel and other parent meetings created to design specific services. In Camden there are a number of services working to engage children and families meaningfully in service design and development including:

- Early Years Parent Champions
- Family Hubs Parent Carer Panel
- Transformation Group
- Best Start for Baby Parent & Carer Forum

- Parent Advisory Board – reports to Health and Wellbeing Service
- Special Parents Forum
- Autism Partnership Board
- Maternity & Neonatal Voices Partnership
- Participation and Engagement Group
- Camden Children in Care Council (CiCC)
- Annual Young Inspectors programme
- Young People’s Pathway Advisory Board
- Peer Advocates Young Advisors
- Family Changemakers
- Camden Domestic Abuse Survivors Group
- Family Advisory Board
- Family Group Conferences

Early Years and Family Hub Service

9.2. The Early Years and Family Hub service values families’ contribution to designing services, and their feedback about their experience of services. Working with families to design services together helps us to ensure that services meet different needs and are offered in a way that makes sense to families.

9.3. Families often tell us finding out about services can be difficult and information about services is not always easy to understand. However, children’s centres and family hubs are perceived by many as a lifeline. Families have told us many of them prefer services to be delivered and where they would like more support and shared the impact of the support offered and how this has made a positive difference for them and their child.

Start for Life Parent & Carer Panel

9.4. The panel’s valuable feedback, and insights contribute to service design and improvement. The panel consists of expectant and new parents with children under 2 years. The panel membership is refreshed every 12 months to ensure that the opportunity to participate is offered to parents who are using or have recently used start for life and early years services and that discussions are relevant to the current service offer. There is a 4-6 weekly in person meeting and on-line meeting. To ensure we go beyond listening to our parents, and evidence the action we take in response to their feedback we routinely share our “you said, we did” action list with the panel members (appendix 2).

Best Start for Baby (BSfB) Programme

9.5. Best Start for Baby is Camden’s enhanced healthy child programme offering increased support from pregnancy to age 2 years. The programme has been offered to all Camden parents since April 2024. In the first year, families are offered appointments every 3 months in the first year during the transition to parenthood, a unique period of rapid growth, when babies’ brains, their sense of self, and their understanding of the world, are shaped by their experiences and environments. The programme not only supports child development but also

brings an increased focus to parental well-being and supporting parent-infant relationships. This approach recognises how important it is that parents and carers have their own needs met, so that they can meet the needs of their baby.

- 9.6. The overall response from our parents' at their well-being check in appointments was that they felt validated and that they had a relaxed and safe space to be heard to reflect on relationships. 98% said they found the session 'extremely helpful'. Participants expressed *"I valued the opportunity to talk about my relationship - you don't get the chance to talk about it as a first or second time parent. You are often asked about your own wellbeing, but not about your relationship"* and *"Please extend this service and please advertise it more"*.

Those who found it 'extremely helpful' to discuss the following topics:

- Own health and wellbeing: 96%
- Becoming a parent: 87%
- Relationship with baby: 91%
- Relationship with partner: 92%
- Other relationships: 86%
- 100% said they would recommend the service to friends or family

The Children's Trust Partnership Board

- 9.7. The first Children's Trust Partnership Board of the year took place on 19th February 2024. The session was hosted at Edith Neville school, as part of a new approach to conduct meetings in the community. Members were invited to engage in a workshop session with an aim to refresh the structure of the board. As well as gaining feedback from partners, a focus group of parents were asked for their views about what works well at the board, and what could be done to improve meetings moving forward. Parents shared that previous board meetings had taken place during the school run - as a result of this feedback, the timing of the board meetings was adjusted to take place earlier in the day.

- 9.8. Views captured during the first meeting of the year were played back to partners during the next board which took place 19th April 2024 in an online discussion. The updated board will move away from information sharing to shaping strategic direction, as 'Guardians of a happy childhood in Camden.'

- 9.9. Camden's third Children's Trust Partnership Board meeting took place on Tuesday 7th May 2024, focusing on mental health. As well as being presented with data that showed the trend of mental health needs in the borough, members were encouraged to think about the strengths/assets in Camden on this topic, with a focus on how we can address the mental health and wellbeing needs of families holistically.

- 9.10. The most recent board meeting in July focused on Family Hubs and Whole Family working, linking to the resilient families themes 'Belong' and 'Contribute'. Members heard from an organisation co-located within Camden's Family Hubs and reflected on another example of multi-agency working, through Best Start for

Baby, Camden's enhanced healthy child programme. The meeting ended with a deep dive into comms plans for the Family Hubs offer in Camden, and a workshop session asking members to describe a Family Hubs offer from the viewpoint of a fast-food chain like McDonalds or Deliveroo.

10. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

The Executive Director of Corporate Services has been consulted and has no additional comments to add.

11. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

Legal Services have been consulted and their comments are incorporated in this report.

12. Environmental Implications

This report should contain no significant environmental implications for Camden.

13. Appendices

- Appendix 1: Best Start for Children and Families Single Member Decisions
- Appendix 2: You Said We Did Document from our Start for Life Parent
- Appendix 3: Governor Diversity Data Annual Report