

Cabinet Member Update

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Briefing of: Councillor Tim Barnes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

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1 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

- 1.1 Data on attendance is obtained by the Council from the DfE online portal. Below are the figures for average attendance up until half term, this is based on all primary and secondary schools who submitted their attendance figures on the DfE portal. For the first half of Autumn Term 2020, from 1st of September until the 23rd of October, average attendance for Primary Schools in WCC was 86% and for Secondary Schools in WCC was 85%. Attendance figures have generally been positive and above national averages. We continue to provide support and guidance to schools in Westminster on attendance.
- 1.2 Through the Digital Futures project, the Council and the Young Westminster Foundation are working in partnership to support disadvantaged children attending our schools to have better access to digital devices and stronger broadband connectivity. Schools which have been forced to close classes due to Covid-19 cases are being prioritised through the project. 750 devices have been ordered for allocation via Westminster schools to support students who do not have a device with their education and development. The first delivery of these devices is due to arrive in early December.
- 1.3 A dedicated officer is working alongside Public Health to provide support with outbreak management in early years and educational settings. When a school has a positive case, they are asked to complete a local form. The dedicated officer will then pick this up with the school directly. Support is provided to the school to identify close contacts and to clarify any questions the school may have about the Government guidance.

For the last half term (period of 1st September to 23rd October 2020), positive Covid-19 cases were as follows in WCC:

Type of setting	Number of cases in pupils	Number of cases in staff
College	2	0
Early Years/Nursery	2	2
Independent	24	15
Primary	10	8
Secondary	36	25
Special	0	1
Grand Total	74	51

2 COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME

- 2.1 In November 2020, the Government announced that the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) will provide funding to relieve food poverty during the school holidays as part of the new £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme.
- 2.2 WCC have been allocated £766,382 to cover the period from the start of December 2020 to the end of March 2021. The aim of the fund is to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months during the pandemic. It will helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter.
- 2.3 In line with the DWP guidance, at least 80% of the total fund must be spent on support to families with children and up to 20% on other types of households including households with vulnerable adults. Of the total grant, at least 80% of the fund must be spent on food, energy and water bills with a maximum of 20% available for other items such as clothes, blankets or sanitary products.
- 2.4 The guidance has not been prescriptive in terms of who is eligible, which has been left to local areas to agree, and recipients do not necessarily need to be existing welfare benefit claimants.

3 YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND YOUTH HUBS

- 3.1 WCC have recently announced further funding of £500k for youth services. Of this total, £300k will go to our five Youth Hubs - St Andrew's, Avenues, Churchill Gardens, Amberley and Fourth Feathers- and £200k will be administered in partnership with the Young Westminster Foundation to deliver two small grant funds. The Youth Hubs will continue working in partnership with local providers and our local Family Hubs to deliver youth services for all Westminster residents. The two small grant funds will support an even wider range of youth providers to deliver quality youth services to our residents. The funding will contribute to some of the locally agreed Early Help Partnership Strategy outcomes, including keeping children safe from harm; enabling more children to live with their families; preventing crime and serious youth violence and developing young people's life and employability skills.
- 3.2 We will continue to develop our sports and activity offer across youth hubs and providers. We will also continue to focus on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health outcomes and on employability support as we recover from the pandemic. Fifteen youth workers will be receiving training from Early Help on adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach.
- 3.3 The Youth Hubs were able to mobilise extremely quickly to support WCC in delivering a food offer during October half-term, in conjunction with the Family Hubs. This saw 1436 children and young people either fed or given a food package by their local Youth or Family Hub. In addition, there was a comprehensive activity offer available from all of the Hubs and covering a range of outdoor and indoor activities delivered in a Covid-safe environment.
- 3.4 The Youth Offer is advertised across a number of websites. Young Westminster Foundation, in conjunction with Young K&C, have developed Our City as a young-person focused website to cover all activity across the city. WCC have also created Westminster Youth Connected as a parent and professional-focused website to cover all activities on offer. A key priority for the Young Westminster Foundation and the Council for the year ahead will be continuing the integration of the communication offer for residents and partners.

4 MENTORING AND PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

- 4.1 During the autumn term schools have conducted diagnostic assessments with students to determine gaps in knowledge and plan catch-up work. Schools are raising concerns about reduced levels of attendance, the likelihood of lower attainment, reduced progression options and increased risk of becoming NEET. School Standards are discussing an approach with Early Help and schools to identify and monitor Year 11 pupils who are at increased risk of becoming NEET. This project will sit alongside the existing work of the Vulnerable Children's Collaborative.

- 4.2 The Virtual NEET Group was established to facilitate online collaboration across a range of teams with shared responsibility to support young people (Early Help, Youth Offending Service, Pupil Referral Unit, Westminster Employment Service, and Bi-Borough Education Team, Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit, SEND and Prospects) and to manage referrals of young people who have been identified as NEET. From March Westminster Employment Service (WES) has been working with Early Help through the Virtual NEET group, to accept referrals of 16- and 17-year-olds. This extends the normal referral age of 18 to 25-year olds. Following the pandemic, the average caseload of five employment coaches (working across the gangs, leaving care and YOT teams) has doubled (from 15 to 32 clients). WES are working on a bid to the “*Youth Futures Foundation*” due to be submitted in spring. The bid outlines plans to use funding to sustain and develop work with young people in the context of rising young unemployment in a challenging labour market.
- 4.3 Virtual Westminster Enterprise Week (16-22 November) included 22 online events and engaged 522 students across local schools/colleges. Young people met entrepreneurs creating sustainable businesses and learned from world-leading green energy companies. They had the opportunity to explore degree apprenticeships and gain a better idea of future careers and pathways into: property, construction & the built environment, technology, major infrastructure projects, marketing, visual effects, animation and fintech.
- 4.4 Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) has bid for funding to deliver up to 100 traineeships – part of the additional £111 million of government funding to provide 30,000 new traineeships to respond to impact of Covid-19. New flexibilities extend the training period to a maximum 12 months and young people with an existing Level 3 qualification are now eligible.
- 4.5 Kickstart provides 6-month paid employment (national minimum wage) and 16- to 24-year olds claiming Universal Credit are eligible. Candidates will be referred to Kickstart jobs by the Job Centre. An initial 30 Kickstart placements will be available within the Council. Although opportunities cannot be ringfenced for local residents, WAES is considering a short (1-week) programme that will prepare unemployed residents to take advantage of the council opportunities and opportunities with other local employers.

5 PRE-BIRTH TO FIVE PATHWAY

- 5.1 The pre-birth to five pathway redesign looks holistically at the full range of services supporting women and families in the pre-birth to five period. It considers how these services can work together to achieve our children and young people plan objectives. The aim of the redesign is to develop a graduated local offer of support in the early years, enabling investment in communities and families with the highest level of need.

- 5.2 Following an extensive co-design process facilitated by the Early Intervention Foundation and the Design Council, we identified a number of opportunities for change across the pre-birth to five pathway. Together, these changes will improve integration and targeting as well as offering opportunities to deliver savings. We plan to redesign the Early Help and Health Visiting Service, alongside the offer from Midwifery and wider partners. This will improve the delivery of the mandated Healthy Child Programme for families with low needs as well as delivering contract savings from April 2021. We will then focus on redesigning and strengthening our targeted work with parents in greater need through our collective workforce, an evidence-based delivery model and a designated team for targeted families.
- 5.3 We have written to our health visiting provider (CLCH) and are working closely with them to support them to make the changes to their delivery model from April 2021. Changes to the delivery model include using online triage tools to offer appropriate appointments based on need. A service user advice and support line will also be established and promoted as part of a mixed model of using enhanced digital support for activities such as: baby weighing, breastfeeding and mental health. This will happen alongside a reduced face-to-face clinic offer.
- 5.4 Working closely with CLCH continues to be critical both in terms of designing the new model but also for implementing new ways of working. Staff and managers have engaged positively with the transformation journey thus far. Earlier this year we proceeded with a direct award to CLCH for a period of two years to deliver the health visiting service until 31 March 2022. This provides us with the time to embed the system wide transformation we are aiming to achieve via the 0-5 redesign. The direct award also ensures stability in the partnership during this critical period.
- 5.5 A decision will be needed at the start of next year on the commissioning strategy for delivering the redesigned pathway.

6 FAMILY HUB DEVELOPMENTS

- 6.1 Our Family Hub model continues to develop and expand. Capital works - to the cost of circa £2.9million - are being undertaken at Portman Early Childhood Centre, which will be the Church Street Family Hub. Works started in May 2020 and are due to be completed in mid-2021. In Queen's Park, a business case has been made to convert 17-23 Third Avenue to a Family Hub when the current occupier, the St Marylebone Bridge Special School, moves to a new building in summer 2022. A provisional cost of £1M has been estimated and the works would take 6-9 months to complete. The proposal is subject to consultation with user groups and service providers.
- 6.2 The local library manager is now a member of the Integrated Leadership Team (ILT) that co-ordinates the work of each family Hub. The hubs are seeing the

benefit of being a part of the ILT, they report that they are developing closer links with parents and carers.

- 6.3 The role of the Family Navigator is proving invaluable in supporting families back to school where the parent has concerns about Covid. Family Navigators are also supporting a number of refugee families at hotels in Victoria and Bayswater.

7 SOCIAL CARE DEMAND

- 7.1 In terms of referrals into social care at the front door, unsurprisingly both contacts and referrals went up significantly in September (following the return to school). Despite some fluctuation week on week, referrals are at approximately the levels they were at this time last year (before the pandemic). The second lockdown does not seem to have had the significant impact on numbers that we experienced during the first lockdown period which is not a surprise given that children remain at school.
- 7.2 Admissions to Care and Child Protection Investigations are also both at similar levels to the previous year. Since September, the main trend is that we are seeing an increase in mental health as a presenting factor in the referrals compared to last year. These are not large numbers but it is a noticeable trend and includes both parental mental health and adolescent mental health.
- 7.3 The MASH contacts continue to be higher than last year – this is police notifications (including lower level ones that don't necessarily translate to referrals). This has been the case throughout the pandemic.
- 7.4 Our staff continue to support many children to attend school. They also continue to support families during these difficult times. In terms of our staffing capacity, staff continue to be very healthy overall and to-date we have had no Covid-19 cases. Some staff are experiencing fatigue and lower moral, particularly in those teams that continue to do most of their work remotely (which is mainly the MASH Team). Overall staff are able to continue to work hard and conduct visits to families and we are ensuring that they feel supported in their work.

8 LIBRARIES: RESPONSE TO THE SECOND WAVE

- 8.1 Following the announcement of the second national lockdown, government guidelines have allowed libraries to remain open to provide a number of clearly defined essential services. From the start of the current lockdown period, all WCC Libraries have remained open with a service offer in line with current government guidelines which ensures that social distancing can be maintained, and our residents continue to have the opportunity to read, learn and connect.
- 8.2 Our current offer reflects the government's defined essential services for this lockdown period:

- PC access: we continue to provide residents who may otherwise be digitally excluded with access to PCs and laptops in our libraries. This allows them to engage with the virtual library and Council services and connect with the wider digital world.
- Select and Collect: this service was introduced as a direct response to the second national lockdown to provide residents with continued access to books, DVDs and more. Items can be reserved online or via a dedicated phonenumber for those who may otherwise be digitally excluded. Residents can select an item or call in for recommendations and collect their selected items from the library of their choice. Barriers to membership and blocked accounts have been removed to ensure that the most vulnerable residents can access the service.
- Home Library Service: as during the first lockdown, the HLS has been extended to children and families with reduced barriers to membership for those unable to leave their homes. The HLS will also be launching a pilot tablet scheme to 30 residents who experience digital exclusion.
- Virtual Library: we are working in partnership with IT and Customer Experience & Digital colleagues on plans to enhance the website to align with a long-term vision of ensuring the service can connect to communities and engage new audiences. We are continuing to deliver virtual library events, providing 13 sessions to 583 attendees during the first two weeks of the current lockdown period.