

<b>Item No.</b> 17.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 19 October 2021	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Response to Cabinet Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Education: Children's Experience and Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education	

## **FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION**

COVID-19 has had a massive impact on all of our lives not least the lives of children and young people who've been hit hard by successive disruption to their education.

I would like to thank Councillor Babudu and his team for their scrutiny and helpful recommendations on this critical issue.

I will also take this opportunity to offer heartfelt thanks to children's services, our frontline and education team, Southwark schools and their staff for operating under such uncertainty and being there for our children and young people when it mattered most.

Thanks are most certainly also due to our children and young people, their parents and guardians who continue to inspire us all with their strength and resilience under difficult circumstances.

The attached report documents our response to the five broad areas of Scrutiny recommendations: mental health, public space, catch up, narrowing the attainment gap and the digital strategy.

Mental health is a huge issue with the pandemic putting psychological strain on many, including our children, young people and vulnerable families. Because this was a council priority prior to the pandemic, we were ready and able to open up our novel free mental health drop-in service in April 2020, coinciding with the start of the first lockdown.

The commission's recommendations to improve our work in this area are welcome. We address them partly through the launch of the Youth New Deal, the extension of drop-in services to secondary and primary schools and more. That said, we ask Scrutiny to recognise that the NHS has clear duties and

responsibilities for meeting the health needs of our residents.

Welcome too are the recommendations on curricular activities and access to public space to which we respond below. We are proud of our cross-council/cross-partner initiative, the *Southwark Summer of Play*. By working with local organisations right across the borough, the council is working to *get children out and about* over the holidays to boost their physical and mental wellbeing and help them reconnect with each other.

The fact that our children and young people suffered so much disruption to their education with so many missing over a year of face-to-face schooling is a key concern for the council. Below is an outline of what is being done.

The education team is working closely with schools on methods employed to narrow the attainment gap brought about by the attainment gap. The recent A Level and GCSE results showed that young people did well in Southwark with record numbers getting grades needed for some of the top universities including the Oxbridge colleges. We also know that the resignation of the education recovery commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins, following the Government's rejection of the proposed £15bn recovery plan, could have drastic consequences for many children who are in danger of being labelled 'Generation Covid'. We are working with schools and partners on best possible solutions and, while we know that we have fantastic schools with capacity, at the time of writing finance remains a concern.

The report also covers our response on digital strategy including the widely publicised Laptops for Learning. A successful collaboration between the Council and the London South Teaching Alliance saw a crowdfunding raise £250,000, which when matched by the council raised half a million pounds. This meant that that we could get laptops to 2,600 children and young people so that they could learn during lockdown.

The global pandemic has been a massive challenge but as this report and indeed the original scrutiny commission report show, we had little option but to move fast. In the time it has taken to put the report together and respond we have moved many of the pertinent issues on. The fact that we have great frontline staff and excellent schools and amazing children and young people helps.

However the issue of education attainment in the recovery phase remains an issue that will require more thought and more resource.

The Government let us down on school meals in the holidays and on devices for children and young people from low income homes. So the council stepped in. As the schools open their doors again in September, the council and schools will need a focus on working together to narrow the attainment gap over the new academic year.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Cabinet note the response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education to the 15 June cabinet report from Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Education: Children's Experience and Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Cabinet agreed the recommendations as set out in the Cabinet report dated 15 June 2021, which under the Overview and Scrutiny procedure rule 15.3 required the Cabinet to consider and provide a written response to the report within two months.
3. The Commission investigated the impact of COVID-19 on children in respect of education and mental wellbeing. The Commission heard from three headteachers, young people and the Cabinet Member responsible for children, and officers from within the education directorate and community engagement teams.
4. The Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission agreed its report for referral to Cabinet at its meeting held on 20 April 2021 (subject to minor amendments).

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

**Recommendation 1:** The Commission supports the Council's efforts to better support the mental health of children and young people as outlined in submissions to the Commission and the announcements in February's Council Assembly. **The Commission recommends that the Council looks at additional steps to address the expected mental health crisis amongst children and young people**, in particular whether the Council can **support:**

- **the rollout of outreach support from the Nest to primary schools** as well as secondary schools
- **Additional support for peer-led mental health approaches** (e.g. peer counselling and mental health first aid training) in schools

**Teachers who seek mental health support**, and aid efforts to ensure that teachers do not have any mental health support sought via the school or otherwise flagged on their records.

## Response to Recommendation 1

5. We should in the first instance press the health sector to provide more timely and effective support for mental health needs of our children and young people. Historically this has been severely insufficient. The council recognises this need and its exponential growth and has committed considerable resource to investing in supporting good mental health for children and young people. This need was identified and actioned well before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. The rollout of outreach support from the Nest is already underway in Secondary schools and this will soon be extended to primary schools.
7. Through our Improving Mental Health and Resilience in Schools programme there is a well-developed and ongoing suite of support and training for children and staff and range of collaborative initiatives across Southwark schools.
8. 38 Mental Health First Aiders across Southwark schools have been equipped with the skills and confidence to spot the early signs of mental health issues in a young person and guide them towards the support they need. Projects include:
  - i. Wellbeing gardens to create space for mindfulness and reflection;
  - ii. Student leadership programmes;
  - iii. Expert-led training for parents and carers whose young people need more targeted support;
  - iv. 6-week Forest School Project for year 7 students and a summer residential trip to Jamie's Farm for Forest School Alumni; and
  - v. Staff CPD and training including sessions on "trauma-informed schools" and mental health awareness.
9. Most secondary schools have attended project, subject network and Improving Mental Health & Resilience in Schools (IMHARS) Champions meetings, prioritising mental health and wellbeing as part of the "Relationships and Health Education" curriculum and the launch of new Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum framework and resource bank.
10. We continue to work with external and internal partners and providers, such as the Anna Freud Centre and with children's social care on securing funding for the social workers in schools programme.
11. What is noted in teacher records are a matter for individual school governing bodies to consult upon and agree. The Council encourages and promotes schools to recognise and support the mental health needs of

any staff in schools.

**Recommendation 2:** The Commission recommends that the Council supports efforts to:

- Ensure young people get early and sufficient access to public spaces as they reopen, particularly libraries
- Agree access to green space in public schools for Southwark's children and more generally ensure young people have sufficient access to green space and outdoor activities
- Provide additional opportunities for extra-curricular activities for children who have missed out on these over the various lockdowns.

### **Response to Recommendation 2**

12. Extra-curricular activities are enormously beneficial for all children and young people in helping to develop social, emotional, physical and academic development. During term time schools have been and will continue to provide breakfast and after school clubs as far as possible.
13. The Council has fully restored its youth clubs offer with full opening hours and at full capacity, with a full programme of activities from the 6 youth clubs it has in operation. Libraries reopened in April and are currently operating six days a week with a view to restoring pre-pandemic opening hours from September (subject to any further COVID-19 requirements). Libraries offer dedicated spaces for study as well as a significant stock of books in each library that are targeted to appeal to young people. A core objective of the service is to make libraries welcoming to young people.
14. Similarly the Council has, as soon as it was able to within the parameters of the Government's pandemic guidelines, reopened its leisure centres and reintroduced programmes such as the Free Swim and Gym scheme. Adventure play facilities have also reopened and the summer programme is being delivered. Officers have been working with sports clubs and organisations to assist them in returning to delivering opportunities for young people to participate in physical activity. The Council will pursue any opportunities to develop activities and initiatives through securing access to green spaces owned by private schools.
15. The Council is delivering a 'Summer of Play' programme for young people during the summer holidays. A working group has been set up with key 'Summer of Play' leads who are meeting regularly to develop the offer. The working group includes staff from the youth service, play service, libraries, culture, sports & physical activity, public health and the communications team. The Programme includes a wide range of activities across the borough and for a wide age group.

16. The Department for Education funded Holiday Activity and Food programme is providing funding for Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. The focus of the programme is on children between the ages of 4-16 years, who receive benefits-related free school meals (FSM). Eligible children will receive free places in holiday clubs providing healthy meals and enriching activities. Southwark Council received. £1,540,030 to cover the three holiday periods.
17. During summer 2021, Southwark Council are funding the delivery of a large food and cultural holiday programme across the borough.

**Recommendation 3:** The Commission recommends that the Council advocates for schools to take an evidence-informed approach to any catch-up activity and ensures young people's voices are heard in approaches taken.

The Commission recommends the Council seeks to understand children's concerns that intense catch-up activity over the summer could put further strain on students and should not be done at the expense of providing children with opportunities to take part in additional extracurricular activity. This is particularly important given that children that such social experiences have been missed as a result of the pandemic and would otherwise play an important role in supporting children's mental health and wellbeing.

### **Response to Recommendation 3**

18. We would support this recommendation. It may be helpful for the Commission to engage the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to carry out a research project for all Southwark schools to gain robust evidence base around catch up that compares Southwark to the National picture.
19. School advisors in the Education Directorate are working with schools to understand gaps for children in their learning and the strategies and activities schools are employing to support recovery.
20. Going forward we should employ methods of hearing directly from young people through the Youth Parliament, New Youth Deal, and working with colleagues in community engagement.
21. Youth Parliament could conduct a survey of young people to gather their impressions of how summer activities either supported the needs of young people or created additional burden by over emphasising lost learning.
22. Year 6 pupils joining Secondary schools in Year 7 for 2021/2 would have missed most of school year as a result of COVID and many did not have their planned transition day, so the commission should explore the impact of COVID-19 on this year group in particular.

23. The Commission should evaluate the work of the Council's mental health offer and its impact on schools and young people and to determine what now needs to happen to support all children and young people in Southwark's schools; recognising that mental health provision is a cross council activity and draws on input from different departments and services.

**Recommendation 4:** The Commission recommends that the Council provide more transparent structures and outputs from its task and finish group focused on narrowing the attainment gap and sharing what works in this area.

#### **Response to Recommendation 4**

24. The Council has maintained transparency in each of its commitments and priorities as reference in the Council's now Borough Plan. There is robust governance in place by offices and members.
25. Learning gaps have been identified in a variety of ways and the information used to inform provision, including targeted interventions to address essential learning.
26. Some schools report that learning gaps are less than expected, others report a significant impact on the youngest pupils in terms of language and social skills development. Some headteachers report lower achieving and disadvantaged pupils have seen greater impact of lost learning.
27. Pupils with the biggest learning gaps are largely those who did not engage well with home learning. This could have been for a variety of reasons, including digital poverty, lack of appropriate space or adult support.
28. Pupils have been offered experience in the full range of curriculum subjects, but there has been particular emphasis on mental health and wellbeing and securing the foundational aspects of reading and phonics, writing and maths, since the start of term, as part of the 'recovery' curriculum.
29. Southwark's secondary schools have taken steps to ensure that they have identified any gaps in learning and provided appropriate interventions to address them. Testing and teacher assessment was used to identify both topic areas for revisiting and then individuals for bespoke support.

30. Schools have adapted their curricula to address any learning gaps as necessary and to introduce new knowledge at an appropriate pace. Strategies employed to secure improvement include targeted work, using online learning systems, invited non-vulnerable students onsite to better support their learning, mentoring, parent contracts, and remote learner of the week awards. Pastoral support featured significantly to help students overcome their barriers to learning. Much emphasis was placed on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students through both in-school and inter-agency support – including providing laptops, home visits, mentoring and Chaplaincy care.

**Recommendation 5:** The Commission recommends that the Council updates its Digital Strategy and relevant priorities to ensure that households with school-age children have access to high-speed fixed-line or mobile connectivity (and where still relevant, sufficient devices) to enable them to make the most of digital learning approaches. The Commission acknowledges the fantastic efforts of schools and the Council to address immediate access and device needs of students across the borough. However, the pandemic has highlighted an important new front for the Council’s evolving approach to digital inclusion which will need sustained long term focus.

#### **Response to Recommendation 5**

31. We are very proud of the work undertaken during the national lockdowns to ensure that all children and young people had access to laptops and access to connections in Southwark.
32. A joint crowdfunding exercise between schools and the Council last year was very successful in providing hardware. This supplemented the diligence of officers across education and social care in maximising government initiatives and in some cases personally delivering equipment to vulnerable pupils.
33. Significant inroads were made into connectivity for home learners during the lockdowns. However, this work must continue to ensure gaps in connectivity are remedied and all children continue to have access to hardware from home.

#### **Technology and Digital Strategy**

34. The Council is committed to finalising its’ Technology and Digital Strategy and this is currently scheduled to be put forward for agreement at Cabinet in December 2021.



35. There are six pillars focusing on digital inclusion in the Technology and Digital Strategy, these are:
- i. Affordable Broadband
  - ii. Devices
  - iii. Jobs and Training
  - iv. Digital Skills (Residents)
  - v. Digital Resilience (Businesses)
  - vi. Digital Education (For All)
36. Home schooling had become essential for the majority of families in Southwark. The need for laptops and connectivity had become apparent in the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council's digital team worked on the 'Laptop for Learning' campaign to deliver free broadband connections to 47 digitally excluded families and devices were given to schoolchildren.
37. As part of the digital inclusion work-stream further support to families across the borough is being identified within the six pillars of Technology and Digital Strategy inclusion.

### **Policy implications**

38. Southwark's Borough Plan 2020 - 2022, evolved from the Council's refreshed Council Plan 2018 – 2022. Southwark's Borough Plan provides the Council's response to COVID-19 and presents commitments towards the following areas of focus.
- i. Keeping Southwark safe during COVID-19
  - ii. Tackling health inequalities
  - iii. Southwark Together
  - iv. A great start in life
  - v. Tackling the Climate emergency
  - vi. Thriving neighbourhoods
  - vii. A green and inclusive economy
  - viii. Homes for all
39. The work of the Education Directorate works hand-in-hand with all the said commitments. From keeping education settings safe, environmentally sustainable to being advocates in tackling inequalities to achieve a great start in life.

## **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

### **Community impact statement**

40. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The council's [Approach to Equality](#) commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
41. The Council's Education Directorate involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010.
42. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.
43. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

44. It is widely acknowledged that the pandemic has had a disproportionate (unequal) impact on the health and education of children and families who have a lower socio-economic status. As described in our response to the Committee's recommendations, we are seeking specific evidence to identify where this impact is with a view to targeting our resources most effectively.
45. Resources have been directly targeted towards children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who were at risk of missing out on food, play or education because of the pandemic. Schools were kept open throughout for vulnerable children, food and play provided during school holidays and laptops provided for those most in need. In addition, the work being undertaken by the Southwark Stands Together work stream with our schools seeks to address racial inequality in education settings in terms of curriculum, staff development, employment opportunities and preparation and inclusion. Our commitment to addressing any attainment gap is reported on within the performance

challenge and we are held to account against that metric quarterly.

### **Health impact statement**

46. Our schools work closely with the local authority and Public Health teams to roll out initiatives and campaigns that address physical and mental health in our children and young people across the borough. Several of these initiatives have been documented throughout this report, such as The Nest, Mental Health First Aiders and IMHARS, focused on supporting the mental health of our children, young people and education staff.
47. In addition, we support staff in maintained schools to access mental health support through Mindapples and other services. The Daily Mile campaign to increase physical activity in Southwark's children is reported on via performance challenge and we are active in promoting other local initiatives to our schools to tackle obesity and to support children and young people's mental and emotional wellbeing through a programme of Personal, Social and Health Education CPD.

### **Climate Change implications**

48. All schools have a travel plan with many, putting in place actions aimed at reducing congestion and vehicle access in their communities including, Zones around schools, banning cars, idling and encouraging children to walk, cycle wherever possible. A number of schools work closely with TfL to support sustainable travel initiatives. Funding opportunities for schools to make their environments greener are regularly circulated and adopted by school communities.

### **Resource implications**

49. The Council has committed over £3million to supporting the mental health needs of children and young people. There will be resource implications for undertaking work into the view of children and young people and potentially significant resourcing implications for narrowing attainment gaps.

### **Legal implications**

50. Not applicable.

### **Financial implications**

51. Not applicable.

### **Consultation**

52. Not applicable.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

### Head of Procurement

53. Not applicable.

### Director of Law and Governance

54. Not applicable.

### Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

55. Not applicable.

### Other officers

56. Not applicable.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission 19 July 2021	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&amp;MId=7008&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=550&amp;MId=7008&amp;Ver=4</a>		
Cabinet Agenda 15 June 2021	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&amp;MId=7013&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&amp;MId=7013&amp;Ver=4</a>		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission 20 April 2021	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=550">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=550</a>		
Council Assembly 24 February 2021	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=132">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=132</a>		
Southwark's Borough Plan 2020-22	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/fairer-future/council-plan?">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/fairer-future/council-plan?</a>		
Introduction to IMHARS (short video)	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://schools.southwark.gov.uk/pshe-healthy-schools/imhars">https://schools.southwark.gov.uk/pshe-healthy-schools/imhars</a>		
Equalities Act 2010	Education Directorate 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Nina Dohel 020 7525 3252
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1</a>		
Modernise Strategy: Southwark's Fairer Future IT Strategy	Housing and Modernise Directorate, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Hub 4, Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Dionne Lowndes 07523 919 592

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/modernise-strategy">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/modernise-strategy</a>		

## APPENDICES

None	
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## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's Adults' Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Nina Dohel, Director of Education	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	7 October 2021	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
List other officers here	N/a	N/a
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		7 October 2021