

Committee:	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	07/02/2022
Subject: Education and Safeguarding Report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1. People are safe and feel safe 2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

In October 2020, the Safeguarding Sub-Committee was updated on the work that the Education and Early Years (EEY) Service was undertaking to improve the safety and welfare of City-resident children being educated in the City of London and other boroughs, as well as non-resident children attending schools within the City of London during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, during the autumn term 2020, all schools reopened for all pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), children known to social care and key workers, with attendance becoming compulsory and schools managing cases of COVID-19 by closing 'bubbles' or year groups. During the spring term 2021, following another national lockdown, schools closed once more, and were only open to specific groups of children. Since the beginning of March 2021, and for the rest of the academic year, as well as the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year, all schools have remained open, managing COVID-19 cases and outbreaks in line with government guidelines.

In September 2021, families from Afghanistan arrived in the City, having been evacuated as part of a national effort in August 2021. The families were allocated accommodation in two bridging hotels. The EEY Service immediately responded to the needs of families by establishing a playroom for the children as well as exploring a range of options to ensure access to education.

This report is an update on the EEY Service's work over the last year to:

- support our most vulnerable school-age population
- successfully implement and distribute the COVID Winter Grant and COVID Local Support Grant over the 2020/21 academic year

- support our Afghan families to gain access to education.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London has a unique educational landscape in that it has only one maintained primary school and no maintained secondary schools. There are four independent schools and one independent college (David Game College); most children attending these schools are non-City residents. Most of the City of London's primary-age children and all secondary-age children in the maintained sector are educated either in the independent sector or outside the City of London altogether. Consequently, this puts them outside the standard reporting and/or legal framework that governs the City of London's statutory responsibilities.

Current Position

Vulnerable Children's List

2. From 23 March 2020 to 1 June 2020, and then from 1 January 2021 to 8 March 2021, all schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts were made to identify the most vulnerable children and this resulted in a number of children being provided with the necessary IT equipment to ensure successful engagement in remote learning.
3. Revised government guidance in May 2020 resulted in schools opening to a select few year groups within the primary age group and some face-to-face sessions for those in Year 10. Therefore, for many secondary-aged pupils, a full-time return to school did not take place until September 2020. Further government guidance issued during the summer break confirmed that all children would be required to return to school in the autumn term 2020.
4. Following another national lockdown announced at the end of the 2020 calendar year, schools closed from 1 January 2021 to 8 March 2021 with only vulnerable or key worker children remaining in school.
5. During this time, a small group formed to oversee a Vulnerable Children List, which involved monitoring a select number of children on a regular basis – a collaborative piece of work between the EEY Service and the Social Care and Early Help Service. Following both lockdown periods, efforts have been made to ensure that children and young people attend school following the reintroduction of compulsory attendance.

6. The Vulnerable Children List continues to be reviewed and monitored on a monthly basis by the small group, which includes the Lead Advisor for Universal Education Services, Children's Social Care Team Manager, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Case worker, Early Help Co-ordinator and Education Advisor for the Extended Virtual School. The list holds the details of all known vulnerable children aged 0–18, including (but not exclusive to) children with EHCPs, our looked-after children (LAC) and care leavers who attend a school or college and are in Year 13. Following the arrival of our Afghan families in September 2021, this list has now been extended to accommodate children within those families who have been identified with a need.
7. To make reviewing and monitoring the list manageable, it has been categorised into:
 - a) children who are permanent residents in the City of London (aged 0–18)
 - b) Afghan children who are currently residing in the two bridging hotels
 - c) care leavers up to the age of 18 years old who are in Year 13 at school or college
 - d) LAC.
8. As of 17 January 2022, there are 99 children on the list, which is made up of:
 - a) 51 City of London permanent residents
 - b) 21 Afghan children
 - c) under-15 care leavers
 - d) under-20 LAC.
9. These children can also be grouped into the following:
 - a) 86 are known to the Children Social Care, Early Help and Short Breaks Service – either on Child Protection (CP) Plan, Children in Need (CIN) Plan, Early Help, LAC, care leaver, receiving short breaks or going through a Child and Family Assessment (C&FA)
 - b) 19 have EHCPs
 - c) fewer than five are being electively home educated
 - d) fewer than 15 are known to the EEY Service as being at risk of being classified as children missing education (CME).

COVID Winter Grant Scheme/COVID Local Support Grant / Household Support Fund

10. Building on the significant support given to the most vulnerable during the pandemic, from December 2020 the government introduced a new scheme to offer financial support to vulnerable households. Along with other local authorities, this grant has allowed the City of London to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays. Initially, this funding formed the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, which then became the COVID Local Support Grant and is now called the Household Support Fund.
11. Over the course of the 2020/21 academic year, and in line with the campaign to reach as many families as possible, the EEY Service worked collaboratively

with the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service to identify all those families eligible for support. Both these services were successful in offering either a cash payment or voucher over the school holidays to those families in need.

12. Eligibility criteria included children in receipt of free school meals and those known to the children's Social Care team. This was a particularly challenging task for the EEY Service, given the tight timescale and the practicalities in identifying children and young people eligible for free school meals – children apply directly to the school they attend for free school meals and not the local authority they reside in. A co-ordinated list was produced and, with support from the Benefits team, we were able to identify families who were economically vulnerable.
13. During the 2021/22 academic year, the local authority continues to target the families who need the most support. However the EEY Service has reduced its involvement and is only providing vouchers to children attending the Aldgate School who are eligible for free school meals.

Supporting the Afghan Families

14. In early September 2021, the City of London welcomed more than 600 Afghan individuals (including 300 children and young people) into two hotels, acting as bridging hotels on behalf of the Home Office. Staff within the EEY Service were immediately mobilised and efforts began to provide a playroom in one of the hotels for the children to keep them occupied and offer some access to play equipment. Co-ordinated by the Lead Advisor for Early Years, volunteers within the City of London Corporation were recruited to oversee the running of the playroom and provide basic 'stay and play' activities.
15. During this time, the EEY Service and Virtual School team began working collaboratively to identify the children of statutory school age. In parallel, the virtual school established the City Learning Centre in Bonhill Street to accommodate all the children from years 1 to 6 and to provide access to education, including basic Maths and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. The centre ran from 27 September for one month until the start of the October half term.
16. It was acknowledged early on that the learning centre wasn't a long-term and sustainable solution, given that the best place for children to receive an education is in a school setting. Therefore both teams began discussions with a number of bordering local authorities and the City of London Academies Trust to provide school places for more than 200 children of statutory school age. Reaching out for support resulted in all children of statutory school age being offered a school place from the school census date of 7 October 2021.
17. Following the half-term break, during the week of 1 November 2021, all the children started at their new schools. The children currently attend four secondary schools and 12 primary schools in the City of London and neighbouring boroughs.

18. In line with the Afghan Citizen's Resettlement Programme, co-ordinated by the Home Office, our team continues to ensure the safeguarding of these children at a local level by following up with the CME teams within the other local authorities once permanent accommodation has been agreed with the families. This has involved establishing information-sharing processes, in line with the CME Regulations 2016 to ensure that schools are able to follow up with families following their relocation and substantiate that children are actively attending schools in their new residential area.

Education Welfare Work

19. Since the beginning of the 2020 academic year, the Education Welfare Consultant (EWC) has held either virtual or face-to-face meetings with all City schools to assist with any concerns that the schools may have had with individual cases, and to give general advice following the beginning of term.

20. In October 2021 the EWC retired after many years of service and a new member of staff has taken on the role of Senior Education Welfare Officer. The new officer will continue to develop excellence within the service by building strong high-quality relationships with the schools and partner agencies to deliver a focused approach to the welfare of children in school.

COVID-19 Case Reporting

21. Since the beginning of the autumn term 2020, City schools have established processes to cope with the prospect of COVID-19 cases in schools. Guidance has been developed by Public Health England and the Department for Education (DfE). Local Standard Operating Procedures have been established so that schools are clear about what to do and who to contact if cases are identified. This guidance is regularly reviewed by the DfE and updates are sent to the schools directly from our team to ensure that there is clarity following any change in guidance.

22. To ensure consistent local reporting, all confirmed cases are notified to the City of London Corporation and the London Borough of Hackney Public Health Service directly, and a weekly summary of cases is circulated to key individuals within the City of London and Hackney local authority.

Future Priorities

23. Our main priorities during 2022 will be to:

- a) continue to regularly maintain our vulnerable children and young people list, and to ensure collaborative working between the EEY Service and the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service
- b) support our schools in the best way that we can, and for the Senior Education Welfare Officer to continue to act in a 'support and challenge' role and as the lead professional for any difficult cases relating to non-attendance

- c) regularly monitor attendance of vulnerable children at school and respond to any concerns raised
- d) continue to monitor the number of COVID-19 cases in City schools and to promote the COVID-19 vaccine to all eligible groups
- e) continue monitoring the attendance of the Afghan pupils and manage the DfE funding for the Afghanistan Resettlement Education Grant 2021–22.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

24. This work supports priorities 1 and 2 in the Children and Young People's Plan 2018–21:

- Our children and young people are safe and feel safe
- Our children and young people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and are well prepared to achieve in adulthood.

25. Financial implications – N/A

26. Resource implications – N/A

27. Legal implications – N/A

28. Risk implications – N/A

29. Equalities implications – N/A

30. Climate implications – N/A

31. Security implications – N/A

Conclusion

32. Over the last year, since this report last came to Committee, our key priorities within the EEY Service remain the safeguarding and wellbeing of City-resident children accessing education, and to offer educational welfare support to our City schools. More recently this has included supporting our Afghan families who moved into the City in early September 2021. We are committed to providing an excellent service to all our families who require support, and we continue to anticipate what challenges families may have in transitioning back to school following the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendices

- None

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