

Update of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee - June 2025

1. Purpose of the Cabinet Member update

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

2. Update on SEND Inclusion Board and SEND Strategy

We are continuing to deliver on our commitments outlined in the SEND Strategy most notably over the last few months:

- 2.1 **Empowering families through collaborative support:** As well as work to increase routine engagement with families, we have held two large events this year. Organisations from across the partnership ran our first Bengali Marketplace Event on the 6th May which provided information on SEND services and support from across the partnership. This followed the successful Somali Market Place event that was run last year and is in response to feedback about the need for tailored information.
- 2.2 The partnership ran its annual **Preparing for Adulthood event** for young people in Camden. Around 60 young people from local colleges, mainstream schools, special schools, electively home educated and NEET attended the event, and it was a fantastic opportunity to connect with the community to provide valuable resources for children and young people as they prepare for adulthood. We look forward to hosting more events like this in the future to continue empowering and supporting children and young people with SEND and their parents / carers.
- 2.3 **Strengthening inclusion in settings:** The council have set up a Meeting Predictable Needs Working Group, (including representation from schools, early years, parent carers, SENDIASS and Camden Learning), to coproduce a Meeting Predictable Needs Toolkit. This group have met twice, and a first draft of the toolkit has been developed. This toolkit clearly outlines the expectations for working in an anticipatory way to meet predictable needs, be engaging and accessible, feature best practice examples and shine a light on successes in settings, and support the application of the graduated approach. The toolkit will build on Camden's Ordinarily Available Provision document from 2019, and on evidence and good practice examples gathered through four mainstream inclusion workshops in Camden held in February and March. The toolkit will

outline the support and resources that mainstream schools and educational settings are expected to provide for children and young people with special educational needs (SEND) without requiring additional funding: it will reflect Camden's unique funding model and higher levels of devolved funding. The toolkit will be a continuously reviewed document, and we expect it to evolve after an initial launch in July.

2.4 SEND and Inclusion redesign: Almost all roles in the redesigned SEND and Inclusion Service are now filled. Significant work has gone into ensuring all new members of staff receive full inductions and that the increased capacity makes tangible improvements in outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. The service is now running with increased capacity including in case work, engagement, quality assurance and engagement.

2.5 Camden are also doing work on an **all-age Autism Strategy 2025-2030**. The strategy has been created through a range of co-production work with residents. The strategy is now live for consultation until 6th July and is due to be approved by Camden's Cabinet in September.

3. Update from Camden Safeguarding Children's Partnership

3.1 Camden has submitted six serious incident notifications to the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in the last 12 months. Below are the key themes detailed from incidents of serious harm, death to children or care-experienced people, due to suspected abuse and or neglect.

- i) Profile of cases: infants (sudden unexpected death in infancy and non-accidental injuries) and care experienced young adults (mental health and suicide).
- ii) All children were from black and global majority ethnicities.

3.2 Two Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) were published in 2025 on:

- i) Intrafamilial child sexual abuse of children with special education needs and including one child who was electively home educated.
- ii) A Joint CSPR following a child who died by suicide whilst residing as a residential summer school placement in Camden.

3.3 One LCSPR has recently been commissioned following the rapid review of the death of an infant in December 2024, cared for by Camden care experienced mother.

3.4 Key Safeguarding Practice Themes in 2025 are:

- i) Support care-experienced Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in accessing healthcare, education, mental health support, and making social connections.
- ii) Adopt a trauma-informed approach when working with care-experienced expectant mothers, balancing the needs of the child.

- iii) Utilise support and supervision to reflect on and explore strategies to overcome multiple disadvantages impacting parenting capacity.
- iv) Build trusted relationships with transient vulnerable (care experienced expectant mothers who have been victims of domestic abuse.
- v) Remain vigilant about infant safety, sleeping arrangements, and consistently share safer sleep advice.
- vi) Ask questions and clarify terms used by different agencies (e.g., health, social care, police) to assess risk and understand intervention/support needs.
- vii) Facilitate information sharing across multiple health systems in hospitals and community healthcare.

4. Children's Trust Partnership Board in May on Relational Practice

4.1 Camden's Children's Trust Partnership Board is the guardian of a happy childhood in Camden and brings together partners four times a year, chaired by Cllr Boyland. Following a refresh in 2024, the Children's Trust Partnership Board has themed meetings.

4.2 The May meeting was focused on Relational Practice and included a listening circle with partners and a discussion of what we mean by Relational Practice across the partnership. Key methods for the approach were discussed highlighting the use of participatory, anti-racist and restorative practice as well as values at the heart of the council's Relational Practice framework such as mentalisation and empathy.

4.3 The meeting also included a discussion on upcoming changes to Children's social care with National Reforms and the introduction of the Children's Wellbeing & Schools Bill, due to be law in 2026-27. It is believed changes to Children's social care will be the most radical system redesign for 30 years. Reforms provide an opportunity for real change, using the strengths already present in Camden to make a real difference to children, young people and families. Partners heard about the council's plans to design a new model of Family Help which involves increased multi-agency approaches. Partners had an opportunity to consider what a combined Family Help system could look like and how it can build on what is already delivered in the borough.

4.4 Ahead of each Children's Trust Partnership Board, Cllr Boyland runs a session with parents on the meeting theme to bring their perspective into the room. Questions for parents ahead of this meeting were centred around how families experience help. Feedback provided gave an insight into support from the council and community services. Parents shared positive experiences of help from Camden Family Hubs and organisations such as KIDS and The Winch.

4.5 Parents also talked about challenges they had faced navigating services for children with SEND, housing, as well as during transitions between education providers. They expressed views about what professionals can do to provide 'good help', citing the need for professionals to listen to their concerns and be open to their views as parents.

5. AI Campus

5.1 There are 31 Year 12 students actively engaged in the 'AI Connect' enrichment programme – a innovative tailored programme which integrates the collaboration and expertise from STEAM sector experts. In the Spring term, members of the UCL's Department for Neuroscience led students worked in a robotics project to learn about the origins of modern AI, culminating in a presentation to share learning to parents, mentors and partners. Google support also enabled Matt Brittain, a long-standing Vice-President to share his career pathways and professional insights in a student session. In May, a student group presented and attended the Google and Working Options-led conference together industry leaders, tech pioneers, and young changemakers to explore how emerging opportunities, especially those in AI and technology, are shaping the future.

5.2 In April, an 'AI in Education Leadership Hands-On Series' session to senior school leaders focused on the embedding of AI into everyday practices to cultivate a culture of innovation and effective problem-solving at every level of school life. Teacher professional development continues within 'Experience AI' monthly training sessions led by ParentZone.

6. Opportunity Centres in Camden

6.1 Opportunity Centres are a key commitment in the "Building Back Stronger" Education Strategy, whereby we aim to provide:

- a space open to all children to go after school, on weekends and school holidays.
- access to high technology, digital and AI venues and programmes around the borough.
- a space children can develop their skills, access tutoring in core subjects, and obtain good information, advice and guidance on employment and careers.

6.2 There are two school-based Opportunity Centres operating at Acland Burghley School and La Sainte Union which address part of our ambition. Two new vocational skill-based Opportunity Centres are now in place designed to inform and **inspire young people** about **vocational or non-academic routes into careers**.

6.3 The **Euston Skills Centre** delivered a pilot Opportunity Centre from Feb to March 2025. The pilot was open to Years 9-11 initially from two schools – Maria Fidelis and Regents High School. The Centre offered two learning formats: one off taster sessions and four-week courses. Taster sessions were intended to give students a taste of different businesses and jobs through engaging and interactive activities. 100% of students who attended a taster session said they enjoyed it and that it either motivated them or sparked a new interest. We

developed two 4 week courses on design and construction and another on future business development for budding entrepreneurs. Both courses were highly rated by 23 students. We are now scheduling activities that will start up in the summer holidays and autumn term. And working on an overarching programme branding that all opportunity centres can use.

6.4 The London AI Campus Opportunity Centre provides out-of-school learning and support for secondary and sixth-form students enhancing their access to technology, digital and foundational AI learning through small group tutoring, speaker events and enrichment activities. Pilot activities focused on talks from inspiring speakers, AI skills sessions and informal drop-in sessions. Students regularly attended our engaging skills sessions, and a careers talk led by Zappi, a local global consumer platform company, which guided them to explore various career paths in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data science. Summer term activities centre on a series of talks by leading artists and social media experts exploring the adoption in Art, music and marketing.

7. Use of AI and technology innovation in service delivery

Camden is continuing to be at the forefront of technological innovation and exploring use of AI tools to enhance service delivery. Children's Safeguarding and Family Help service are piloting the software "Magic Notes": a web-based AI dictation tool for use by social workers in meetings.

7.1 Magic Notes can provide summaries of meeting and construct and format these summaries into defined templates. As part of the pilot, we have templates for the Child's Plan, Child and Family Assessment, Supervision and Case Notes. Magic Notes will help to significantly reduce time social workers spend manually typing documentation and/or case notes. The pilot which began in early May is running for 8 weeks and includes training for 20 members of staff in the Children in Need teams and Children and Young People with Disabilities Service. The pilot will officially finish on the 20th of June and reporting tools have been implemented to assess and the monitor usage of the tool

7.2 To date, positive feedback has been received, with officers reporting of the "life changing" amount of desk hours saved. Children's Safeguarding and Family Help services are looking at the possibility of extending the use of Magic Notes for an extended period whilst exploring other AI options.

8. Launch of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pocket PA app

8.1 On the 13th May, colleagues from across the Council came together with young people to launch our Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025 to 2028, alongside our care experienced app, Pocket PA, which is a one-stop shop for information, advice, opportunities, discounts and more for care experienced young people in Camden. Cllr Boyland attended the event and reiterated how Camden's Full Council gave people who have experience of being in care living in the borough 'protected characteristic' status last year, further embedding the Council's important role as a corporate parent to children who experience care. The

refreshed strategy is a truly Council-wide approach that has been coproduced by children and young people demonstrating how the strategy has been shaped by their voices and experience. It set out a clear path forward for meaningful action.

8.2 The event was attended by professionals from a wide range of Council services and care experienced young people. They included former Camden care experienced interns Rose Green and Hassan Mohamed, who have both recently moved to new full-time, paid roles in the Council. The full strategy is available here [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-28](#).

8.3 Attendees were given an introduction to the relaunched **Pocket PA app** by our developers from [focusgov](#). The app is an easy-to-use tool designed to help young people quickly find the support and information they need. Hassan spoke about his work to support the relaunch of the app and create a regular bulletin for care experienced young people. The Pocket PA app project involved colleagues across Strategy, Communications, Participation and Children's Safeguarding and Family Help, as well as the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After.

9. School Place Planning

9.1 The Council has strengthened its capacity to support the development of a detailed School Sufficiency Programme Plan (SSPP). This will enable Camden and our family of schools to sustainably manage the challenges of a reduction in pupil numbers alongside an increasing proportion of children with additional needs.

9.2 We recognise that schools are working within an environment of extended funding constraints. We share the aim of school leaders who have asked the council to come forward, at pace, with a plan that acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of current school provision and provides proposals that ensure that our local education offer reflects the demand patterns of the borough.

9.3 The vision of the SSPP is to ensure schools in Camden in the future continue to deliver Strong, Sustainable and Inclusive Education. Its purpose is to develop a sustainable school system in Camden and deliver creative solutions to respond to system pressures. This in part will be through supporting stronger collaboration between schools. The vision and missions are based on three core pillars of:

- i. Excellent and sufficient SEND Provision
- ii. Efficient pupil places
- iii. Balanced budgets.

9.4 Over the coming months, we will:

- Engage all schools in dialogue about future challenges
- Provide targeted support and intervention to schools that need it most

- Work with school leaders to co-develop strategies for managing surplus school places and financial risk over the coming years.

A formal report will be brought to Cabinet in 2026, outlining progress to date and presenting future options.

9.5 To oversee the programme, new governance structures are being established.

These include:

- A decision-making Programme Board
- A cross-sector Stakeholder Advisory Group
- An Officer-led Steering Group
- Operational workstreams aligned with each of the three pillars

Implementation work will begin this school term, with the Council working closely alongside schools to deliver on the aims of the plan.

9.6 Key to the development of the plan is coordinated integration with our property and assets team. We are currently conducting condition surveys at all Camden owned school properties. These will feed into a detailed capital programme that aligns with our SSPP, ensuring that decisions on capital expenditure are based upon a detailed understanding of the efficient future pattern of school provision.

9.7 We continue to work closely with our schools to respond to immediate issues. For example, our Education and Capital teams have a history of working closely together, including the allocation of over £3m from July 2024 for the delivery of a programme of SEND adaptations to support inclusive practise within schools. Specifically, this has involved funding projects at over 25 individual schools, including some significant changes to Additional Resource Provision including that at Primrose Hill Primary School. In response to changing demand patterns, we have also worked with schools to support temporary and permanent changes in published admission numbers including New End Primary School.

10. Ofsted ILACS Inspection

10.1 In March we received an Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), with the final report published in April 2025 confirming that Camden Children's Services are judged to be Outstanding. This is the second time our services have received this judgment, the highest possible under the current framework. We are delighted that the inspection report reflects the hard work, passion and dedication of our workforce in striving to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people. We are committed to continue improving services and outcomes and are working to go even further in line with feedback from inspectors.