

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Insight, Learning and Impact Report: Children and Learning Directorate – Quarter 2/Mid-Year 2025-26	
REPORT OF Executive Director Children and Learning	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 9 December 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report focusses on the performance in Quarter 2 (Q2) 2025-26 for each division across the Children and Learning Directorate. In this report, directors have been asked to provide a narrative covering key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning. This report is divided into three main sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary table which highlights key responses from services for Q2 2025/26 across the Children and Learning Directorate. • A more detailed narrative of the individual service responses • Appendix A contains the data dashboard. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report. Contact Officer: James Coumbe – Insight, Learning and Impact Lead London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG Email: james.coumbe@camden.gov.uk Tel: 020 7974 5965	
RECOMMENDATION The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report, including the most recent data and trends and the emerging challenges identified.	

Signed by: 

Tim Aldridge, Executive Director Children and Learning

Date: 25 November 2025

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Insight, Learning and Impact (ILI) Q2 report covers the period between July 2025 – September 2025.
- 1.2 The ILI report is submitted to all scrutiny committees twice a year (mid-year at Q2 and end of year at Q4). The report will go to all the scrutiny committees but they will no longer receive the full report, instead just the extract from the report relating to the committee's remit.
- 1.3 The ILI report includes both service narratives and the data dashboard. The service narratives (in the body of this report) provide an overview of the key issues identified by officers for each service. The data dashboard (Appendix A) gives Scrutiny Committees the opportunity to view service performance data collected across the year so far and compared to previous years.
- 1.4 To produce the service narrative, all Camden Council Directors were asked to provide a narrative covering key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning, looking back over Q2 2025/26 on the following points:
 - What were the biggest challenges to your service delivery i.e. what challenges are going to require the organisation's attention and focus
 - What are the biggest opportunities i.e. where could you most benefit from support to deliver improvement?
 - What have your services learned and what do you need to learn in the future e.g. from data or evaluation, regional or national research.
- 1.5 The main report begins with a tabled summary of service issues for Q2 2025/26 in responses to the three key questions above. That is followed by a more detailed narrative of those individual service responses.
- 1.6 The Corporate Data Dashboard is at Appendix A which provides the latest performance data and previous years for the key measures from the services, and which accompanies this report.

2 Children & Learning response summary

2.1 Children's Prevention, Safeguarding and Family Help

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
Children's social care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher numbers of global majority children subject to intervention • Child Protection numbers are stable but higher than statistical neighbours. • Sufficiency of local placements for the most complex children in care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery work progressed leading to the development and implementation of the East prototype in the East neighbourhood • Introducing the Lead Child Protection Practitioner in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), providing child protection expertise to families at point of referral • To change culture and practice to support families earlier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that demonstrates a shift in practice and intervention around Family led decision making (FLDM) • Learning obtained from the prototype facilitates the design and roll out of Family help and Multi Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) across the whole of the Children in Need/ Safeguarding service and Early Help
Early Years and Family Hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New strategy from government with stretched targets for the number of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Foundation Stage. • Creating a new service model across the continuum of need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More stable funding position for Family Hubs • Longer term funding will allow for outcomes from early service development to be realised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added value of working together across the age range and sharing resources, skills and knowledge.
Integrated Youth Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in offences involving weapons possession • Increase in the number of arrest for possession with intent to supply drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid work experience placements • Government announced Youth Futures Hubs in July 2025 as part of its cross-departmental strategy to improve outcomes for 10–25-year-olds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and Family Hub join up

2.2 Commissioning and Inclusion

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
Education, Commissioning and School Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant reduction in demand for school places in Camden/London • Increase in the number of schools reporting culminative and in year deficits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a school sufficiency programme to address and mitigate school level issues relevant to falling roles and financial pressures • Cross service work exploring opportunities for strategic development of capital estate and additional SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing increased governance and programme support to deliver programme of work.
Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to consistently meet the statutory 20-week timeframe for Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments given the ongoing sustained increase in both the volume and complexity of requests • Impact of the migration to Impulse on casework management and performance monitoring. • Recruitment and retention of an experienced workforce following the reorganisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to produce initial drafts of the EHC Plan following the EHC needs assessment • Improved and timely communication with children, young people and their families and the school community. • Potential reforms following the publication of the Education White Paper with an expected focus on inclusive mainstream education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations from the young inspector report provides insight into further imbedding a collaborative approach to EHC Plans and Annual Reviews. • Biannual Service development days • The embedding of multi-disciplinary panels has resulted in a consistent and transparent approach to decision making.
Virtual School, Participation and Progression Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Year 11 students through GCSEs while preparing them for post-16 progression • SEND children placed out of borough requires cross borough co-ordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual School joined by the Participation & Progression Service (moved from IYSS (Integrated Youth Support Service)) • Exploring joint opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Maths), • Camden's new Kinship Care Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency of input from familiar practitioners really benefits the children • Camden's Young Inspection of the Virtual School
Adult Community Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuts to Adult Education Grant Funding • Anticipation of further cuts in Autumn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Ofsted framework this academic year • Full Matrix reaccreditation visit in May 2026 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to prioritise re-enrolment rather than new learners

2.3 Relational Practice

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
Children and Learning Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to meet demand for relational practice development work • Participation development continues to be in high demand, with increased requests for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant interest in relational practice development across most parts of the Council • Potential to generate external interests following Camden Centre for Relational Practice launch • Transition towards family-led decision making (FLMD), key driver for change in practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative evaluation of the Children and Learning relational practice framework at design stage • Collaborative co-design work which took place with young people, share with others interested in youth-led codesign or in participation
Systemic Family Therapy (SFT) Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of children and young people with complex presentations of mental health and neurodivergence needs requiring health and social care support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the underrepresentation of Black and Brown families accessing therapeutic services • Family Spaces a brief family therapy model offered to families at the point of referral to MASH • FLDM can underpin practice during all stages of a family's journey within system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation undertaken to review the impact of the SFT service on upskilling staff practitioners in systemic and relational practice • Evaluation also to conduct a review and analysis of referral data, including volume, type and source of referral
Quality Assurance (QA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the Loop • QA Capacity Across Expanding Services • Ensuring QA is Restorative & Strengths-Based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Help Model & Legislative Reform • Embedding Relational, Reflective Practice • Elevating Child & Family Voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on outcomes not just process • Embed a focus on strengths and family-based methods • Adopt mixed methods QA for richer insights
Practice and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and development needs to be streamlined and conducive to the needs of a workforce. • Retention and recruitment, ensuring workforce strategy can attend to this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with learning and development delivery commissioning and resourcing • 'Grow our own' drawing on residents who live in Camden, to reduce the reliance on agency staff for hard recruit roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of skills and experience of workforce, to ensure appropriate training offer.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAWG is a council priority, requires commitment from all directorates • As we move into the national reform, attending to the needs of children and survivors as victims, changing cultural practices, that recognises the need to attend to both. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an opportunity to influence services across the space where VAWG can be socialized as part of core business • Perpetrator programme will be launched for the first time in Camden, an offer to support couples who wish to remain together, and perpetrator is motivated to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on learning having IDSVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) in MASH, and Family Help prototype. • VAWG strategy to focus on areas of need/change identified in VAWG needs assessment
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3. CHILDREN AND LEARNING

3.1 Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding

3.1.1 *Challenges*

Black and brown families are disproportionality represented in all parts of the system including children subject to child protection roles and those in who are looked after. Work to mitigate this includes the Edge of Care service, a programme to keep children and young people on the edge of care, within education and from being unnecessarily placed into care. The division is prototyping the Families First programme in the East Locality and moving to neighbourhood working to think about possibilities of how they connect with families earlier to avoid intervention at the acute end.

The service recruit staff but the challenge is retaining them given that Camden is an inner London Borough, and the cost of housing is mostly unaffordable for young staff starting out with their families. The retention package is being targeted to retain staff in frontline case holding teams that leave between year two and three to improve stability and consistency of experience for children and families.

The delivery of the Family First programme is impacted by the challenges for the Integrated Care Board (ICB's) and Metropolitan Police and therefore their capacity to engage locally. This has limited the level of co-design work that has taken place.

Placement sufficiency for Camden's most complex children to remain in the borough remains a challenge.

The service are seeing increasing complexity in relation to neurodivergent children in the 'child in need' cohort which requires a design approach to how they provide targeted services for this cohort.

3.1.2 *Opportunities*

The division has engaged in deep discovery work to understand the child's journey in the system. This is informing the design and delivery of neighbourhood working through the East Prototype service and the 0-19 targeted support service to inform wider changes in line with the Families First Programme.

Early learning from the East prototype has helped the service to think deeply about their purpose and values and how they might shift practice to empower and enable families to build resilience and support change with creativity and rigor.

3.1.3 *Learning*

The outcome of Outstanding in all areas for the most recent ILACS (inspection of local authority children's services) has given independent feedback on what is working and what the Council can develop and improve further. The Outstanding Youth Justice System inspection shows what works across the division and how they may focus on developing a Victim Strategy with their partners.

3.2 **Integrated Early Years and Family Hubs**

3.2.1 *Challenges*

In July the government published 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' a new strategy setting out the government's plan to ensure that all children have the best possible start and to break the link between background and future success. Aligned to the new strategy each Local Authority has been set a statutory target for the percentage of children that reach a good level of development at the end of the Foundation Stage. Camden has been asked to ensure that 78.8% of children achieve the measure by 2028 representing a 9% increase on the 2024 figure.

Camden has been making significant progress in this measure and, in narrowing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged children and their peers, but the new target is stretching particularly in the context of reducing resource.

Public Sector reform is on-going and will lead to significant changes in the way Camden delivers services. A new service model that spans the continuum of need from prevention to statutory intervention will need to be developed with partner agencies including the Voluntary and Community sector.

3.2.2 *Opportunities*

'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' provides a commitment to continue funding Family Hubs. A new Best Start Family Service will see Family Hubs delivered in every Local Authority and will provide funding for the delivery of prevention and early intervention services through Family Hubs for at least the rest of this parliament. This commitment will allow for longer term planning and for the services established in Camden's Family Hubs such as the enhanced healthy child programme, Camden Kids Talk and a greater focus on providing for children with special educational needs and disabilities, to mature and deliver the ambitious outcomes that are expected.

3.2.3 *Learning*

The division continue to reflect on how they can make the best impact on children's outcomes with the available resource. The recent launch of the Raise Camden Taskforce addressing child poverty and the increasing evidence about the most significant barriers to success will inform future planning.

Bringing staff from Youth and Family Hubs together has been really valued - the enthusiasm, ambition and creativity in the combined workforce. The specific skills of staff working with different age groups are incredibly valuable and cannot be lost but there is much that can be shared and learnt by building closer relationships.

3.3 **Integrated Youth Support Services**

3.3.1 *Challenges*

Weapons carrying in the community: There have been seven permanent exclusions in 2024/25 for possession of an offensive weapon from 4 different schools. This accounted for 35% of permanent exclusions and was an increase on previous year (4 for weapons). From the Youth Justice System (YJS) there were 31 offences involving weapons possession in 2023/24 which accounted for 20% of all offences. This is a slight increase on the previous year (27 weapons offences, accounting for 17% of all offences).

Possession With Intent To Supply Drugs: We have seen a recent increase in the number of children being arrested for Possession with Intent to Supply Drugs (13 children arrested between July- October, with 5 arrests Jan- June). Discovery and mapping work will be taking place to better understand this emerging picture, the support being offered and if any disruption work can be undertaken.

3.3.2 *Opportunities*

Paid work experience placements: Have been part of the YJS offer since 2021. In this time 22 children have accessed this and made significant progress with only 1 child (to date) reoffending within 12 months. An evaluation report is almost complete to help inform how paid work experience placements can continue to benefit children in high priority groups and obtain full time employment. This impact is being considered around the broader work taking place across the Youth Mission where children within the criminal justice system are one of the priority groups.

Youth Futures Hubs: The government announced Youth Futures Hubs in July 2025 as part of its cross-departmental strategy to improve outcomes for 10–25-year-olds. Designed with young people and local partners, the hubs will integrate mental health, skills & employment, and advice & guidance in areas of highest need. This work is led within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Young Futures programme has 3 key clear aims – 1) preventing young people from being drawn into violence 2) improving their mental health and wellbeing 3) providing opportunities. Guidance shared mentions a core offer, which is flexible and integrated and co-designed with young people (who are remunerated for their time).

3.3.3 *Learning*

Youth and Family Hub join up: Staff from Kilburn's Youth hub and Family hub came together to launch a test and learn focused on joint up working. National and local policy supports the idea of integration across age ranges to stimulate a whole family approach to support. Staff were given tours of Kilburn Family Hub and Netherwood youth hub.

3.4 **Education, Commissioning and School Organisation**

3.4.1 *Challenges*

Over the last 8 years there has been a significant reduction in demand for school places within Camden and the wider London area. Forecasts of pupil demand have also been created in times of unprecedented change and challenge for families in Camden. Whilst current forecasts are beginning to stabilise the impacts of this has reduced the anticipated level of demand for school places.

In response to these changing local demographics the Council has taken a proactive approach to school place planning. Since 2018 the Council, in partnership with its family of schools, has removed 10 forms of entry from the reception intake, responding to a 30% reduction in birth rates 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 Camden's family schools remain both sustainable and responsive to the needs of their communities.

The service is now entering a new phase in the school organisation response to changing demography, through the development of the **School Sufficiency Programme**. This programme has been established to work with school leaders to address issues relating to school admissions, school finances and support schools to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

In November 2025 the team presented the latest round of demographic information to the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee, which indicated a continued decrease in demand for school places and therefore a continued importance for Camden's schools in this area of work.

3.4.2 *Opportunities*

The service will be responsive to the changes proposed in the new Schools Bill. This will include a greater role for Council's in managing the capacities of Academies, in addition an increased role for the Authority, outside of the Officer of the Schools Adjudicator in providing directions for admission. Whilst not yet included in guidance, there is anticipation that the admissions code will be amended to include a

coordinating role for Authorities in relation to in-year school admissions. Through the School Sufficiency Programme, officers are working cross-service to develop a SEND & Alternative Provision (AP) commissioning plan, setting out additional provision that will be brought on-stream to ensure that pupils needs are being met locally wherever possible.

3.4.3 *Learning*

The team's annual School Capacity (SCAP) return has provided the opportunity to integrate the work of the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) alongside mainstream demographic forecasting to map future sufficiency statements relating to provision of specialist places and resources. This work will continue by both the School Place Planning Group and the High Needs Block Subgroup.

3.5 **Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Service**

3.5.1 *Challenges*

Over the past year, Camden's SEND & Inclusion Service has embedded the new structure following a service wide re-organisation. The service continues to receive an increasing number of complex Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments which has impacted the ability to consistently meet the statutory 20-week timeframe (completion of EHC needs assessments within 20 weeks). Additionally, work is ongoing to mitigate any impact of migrating services from Nexus to Impulse Nexus to ensure effective case work management and the ability to monitor and track performance and meet statutory requirements such as the national annual 'SEN 2' survey.

Induction processes have been strengthened and there is a focus on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) with regular breakfast meetings and service development days in place.

3.5.2 *Opportunities*

Additional capacity following the SEND & Inclusion reorganisation has allowed the Service to strengthen relational practice. Camden schools are now receiving termly visits from SEN Officers to offer support to SENDCos (Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Coordinator) and maintain an overview of EHC Needs assessment requests, Exceptional Needs Grants (ENGs) and Annual Reviews. As part of the EHC needs assessment process families are consistently being offered moving forward meetings to discuss any concerns they may have and there has been an increased focus on mediation and dispute resolution.

Camden is a part the London Cluster Change Programme alongside Barnet, Islington and Enfield. This has provided a range of opportunities including investment in trialling

an AI programme to produce initial drafts of EHC Plans. The trial will begin in early 2026 and it is hoped that as well as improving compliance with timescale EHC Plans will be of a consistently higher quality.

The Education White Paper is now expected in the Spring Term 2026. It is anticipated that there will be a focus on inclusive mainstream education. With the work in place as part of the Change Programme and the SEND Strategy, Camden remains in a strong position to continue to respond to increasing levels of SEND in the borough.

3.5.3 *Learning*

The Service were fortunate to welcome the Young Inspectors in the Summer of 2025. It is envisaged that their report and recommendations will provide further insight and galvanise the Service's collaborative approach to producing EHC Plans and Annual Reviews.

Alongside a range of parent workshops, the Service continues to invest in regular breakfast meetings and development days. More recently using these to explore the direct experiences of Camden families through case studies, improving the understanding of their experiences and identify changes to systems, processes and the relational approach.

There has been a focus on consistent and transparent decision making and several multi-disciplinary panels have been put in place, including EHC needs assessment, tribunal, resources and admissions. These panels have, and continue to provide learning opportunities, provide a platform to share good practice and inform Service development.

3.6 **Virtual School**

3.6.1 *Challenges*

The Virtual School holds the statutory responsibility for ensuring that children in Camden's care receive the best education possible wherever they are placed. The Virtual School also plays a strategic role in promoting the education of other cohorts of the most vulnerable children (care experienced, children in need, children in kinship care). In September the Participation & Progression Service transferred from the leadership of Integrated Youth Support Services to leadership from the Head of The Virtual School, placing it under the Education, Commissioning and Inclusion Division. The combined service is now known as The Virtual School, Participation & Progression Service. This brings together Camden's high performing Connexions Advisers and enrichment programmes (e.g. Camden Summer University, Honest Grind, Avalon Project) to create an enhanced combined offer to Camden's young people.

A small cohort of Year 11 students were supported through GCSEs and were prepared for post-16 progression, with some heartening stories of effort and resilience, particularly for children with disrupted education histories, some due to Covid-19 pandemic when they would have been in their early secondary school careers and many due to their life circumstances, highlighting the need for sustained input to this vulnerable cohort.

A small cohort of Year 13 learners successfully started their university careers in September supported by funding provided by the Head Start into Higher Education Programme. Students on the programme who began their higher education journeys in September 2024 successfully completed their first year of university.

The Virtual School has been working with some complex issues for children with SEND children placed out of borough, requiring cross borough co-ordination in partnership with our colleagues in SEND and Children's Social Work Services. There continues to be challenges nationally as different regions and local areas operate varying practices in respect of managing Education Health Care Planning processes for children looked after by one local authority but placed in another.

3.6.2 *Opportunities*

The Virtual School, Participation & Progression service are exploring joint opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Maths), Inclusive Economy and Good Work Camden in developing a wider and more targeted menu of opportunities and interventions better targeting specific cohorts of young people. Good work Camden have begun to identify work placements for post 16 young people in care. We hope that a partnership with companies offering independent learning courses means that the Virtual School can better support those students who struggle in main classroom settings to achieve a qualification.

The Virtual School has taken an active role in Camden's new Kinship Care Strategy work, currently looking at how Children Looked After/children in need/children with a social worker can be better prioritised across areas of service provision e.g. 2-year-olds in kinship care being able to access 15 hours of provision even if grandparents are not working.

3.6.3 *Learning*

The Virtual School has analysed data for children in care which shows that consistency of input from familiar practitioners such as our reintegration and inclusion workers really benefits the children. The Virtual School has learnt that for most children, school attendance increases the longer a child is in care. Even at those emotive times of the year such as Christmas when attendance for troubled children often dips, for children

who experience stability in care, attendance increases. We have learnt that school attendance for vulnerable girls drops at Key Stage 3, for boys this happens later at Key Stage 4 requiring differential intervention work as early as possible.

Our learning has further underlined the value of timely, practical, and individualised interventions for Year 11 students, such as mentoring, targeted revision support, and close liaison with colleges. Strong multi-agency coordination around transition points is key, with the most positive outcomes where schools, carers, social workers, and virtual school staff work consistently together.

Finally, the importance of student voice has been a clear learning point; listening to young people's worries, needs, and aspirations ensures that support is more relevant and impactful. The Virtual School has continued its involvement in key pieces of consultation with SEND colleagues following learning from investigations by Camden's Young Inspectors that took place last year in respect of the Virtual School.

3.7 Adult Community Learning

3.7.1 *Challenges*

The Service restructured last year to meet national and regional cuts in the Grant. The restructure also incorporated the already announced cuts to the 2025/26 academic year budget. It is also possible that there might be national cuts to the budget again in the autumn which could impact on service delivery.

3.7.2 *Opportunities*

Next academic year we are looking forward to the new Ofsted framework and a full Matrix reaccreditation visit in May 2026

3.7.3 *Learning*

At the end of the academic year 2024/25 the Service had to put on a lot more activity in Tailored Learning looking for Unique Learner Numbers. What we learned was that we had prioritised re-enrolment in term 2 rather than new learners. Going forward we will add more activities to engage new learners in term 2. We still anticipate either meeting or very close to meeting our in house determined learner numbers for Tailored Learning. The Service met it's external targets for formula Funded Adult Skills Funded (ASF) earlier in the term.

3.8 Centre for Relational Practice and Participation

3.8.1 *Challenges*

Capacity to meet demand for relational practice development work across the system. The team is maximising internal capacity wherever possible, but demand for support now regularly outstrips available resource. The Centre for Relational Practice is ideally

placed to deliver this work but has limited capacity and there are currently no plans to redirect resource into it.

Similarly, participation development continues to be in high demand, with increased requests for support to either deliver participation work or support others with participation projects. There is a risk that corporate ambitions to increase participation capabilities and activity with residents are not fulfilled as resource is not redirected into this area.

Supporting the transition towards family-led practice and family-led decision making (FLDM) as part of the national children's social care reforms. Although already present to an extent in children's social care, family-led practice and family-led decision making represents a significant whole-system shift towards families and their networks empowered to participate fully, as an equal partner, in interventions and support.

3.8.2 *Opportunities*

There is significant interest in relational practice development across most parts of the Council. This represents a significant opportunity to meet Council ambitions in both 'We Make Camden' and 'The Way We Work' (TWWW) if capabilities and capacity to support it can be addressed. The division is collaborating with the People and Inclusion division to build as much internal capacity as possible, through an 'associate' model for the Centre for Relational Practice.

The team's evaluation activity has demonstrated the value and benefit of our work (relational practice design, codesign with residents for example). They rely heavily on small pockets of research skills and experience from within the service to do this evaluation work. In the current financial climate, there is a growing need for research capabilities to help demonstrate impact. Increasing access to research capabilities across the Council would present a significant opportunity to deliver improvement.

The transition towards family-led decision making represents an opportunity as well as a challenge. This is particularly in support of We Make Camden ambitions regarding community empowerment, and to recalibrate the children's system even further towards prevention.

3.8.3 *Learning*

The formative evaluation of the Children and Learning relational practice framework at design stage. This will be particularly relevant to services looking to develop their own practice models. Codesign with young people on rights-based participation, through a collaborative project between the Children's Participation team, Detached Youth Team and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation Fitzrovia Youth

in Action. The learning may be helpful to others either involved in youth-led codesign or in participation through a rights-based lens.

3.9 Systemic Family Therapy (SFT) Service

3.9.1 *Challenges*

The national and local context of the increasing number of children and young people who present with complex presentations of mental health and neurodivergence needs requiring health and social care support. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are struggling to meet the demand, thus placing greater pressure on children's social care. The systemic family therapy service often gets requests from practitioners who are unable to obtain a service from CAMHS for children and young people and or are awaiting assessment for longer than a year, which is exacerbating relational challenges within the family requiring the Council's support. With a team of four family systemic psychotherapists managing increased anymore demand could potentially lead to waiting lists, which would not be conducive to the current model the team operates whereby a swift responsive approach is a key essential benefit of the service.

3.9.2 *Opportunities*

To further support service delivery the team is aiming to demonstrate rigour to ensure that they can demonstrate the service's impact. The ways in which they do this is by utilising MOSAIC, the social care case management system, for all referrals, so that they can quantify the referrals, types of interventions offered, and whether a child's case status remained or changed following systemic consultations and or direct work has been undertaken. Moreover, to develop an understanding of the sociodemographic data of those they are working with to ensure that we are actively tackling the underrepresentation of Black and Brown families accessing therapeutic services in Camden and the disproportionate outcomes they experience throughout their journey of involvement with children's social care. Therefore, they need essential data to be captured to underpin this ongoing process of monitoring and oversight.

The service is currently trialling **Family Spaces**, a brief family therapy model offered to families at the point of referral to MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) The family will be offered up to four sessions with a family therapist alongside the allocated practitioner and a small reflecting team. Sessions will combine support, intervention, and 'Children in Need' assessments. It is an opportunity for practitioners to work alongside a family therapist to support families in reflecting on their strengths, challenges, and resilience, with a reflecting team offering multiple perspectives to deepen understanding and generate new insights.

Family Spaces will help the workforce to take a more purposeful planning approach to assessment, which will focus on viewing an assessment as an intervention bypassing the tendency to look for long stories, instead getting to the exploration of problematic patterns and themes and seeking to support the family to begin or enhance the skills they may already be using to disrupt these patterns.

More cases could close after the assessment period or closing with referrals being made to universal services. If cases do need to remain open, they could continue to be worked on intensively using the same pace of Family Spaces with less risk of drift or escalation occurring.

FLDM is at the heart of the national reform agenda, and the systemic family therapy service occupies a unique position, whereby it works with all hierarchies within the organisational system. Thus, can use its influence to support the workforce directly through consultations, joint working and workshops to model opportunities of how and when it can underpin practice during all stages of a family's journey within the system.

3.9.3 *Learning*

An evaluation of the service is underway by the Strategy team aiming to:

- Review the impact of the Systemic Family Therapy service on **upskilling staff practitioners** in systemic and relational practice.
- To investigate the experiences of staff practitioners receiving intervention and support from the SFT service in improving confidence, skills and practice.
- Capture learning to inform **future service development** and strategic planning.
- Conduct a review and analysis of referral data, including volume, type and source of referral.
- Capture if the early identification and prevention aspect of the SFT service is contributing to changing the trajectory of cases i.e. has a child's status changed or remained the same.

3.10 **Practice and Learning**

3.10.1 *Challenges*

Unifying cross system and services endeavours relating to learning, development, retention and recruitment.

3.10.2 *Opportunities*

Efficiency and efficacy gains through closer collaboration and coherence with learning and development delivery commissioning and resourcing, opportunities to coordinate resources for recruitment and retention activities across the Directorates and the wider council in even more joined up ways.

Opportunities to 'grow our own' to reduce the vulnerability to reliance on the need for agency staff for hard recruit roles now and in the future. Entry Level Applications for Local Government roles are very attractive and attract high calibre, locally based residents who could meet current and future organisational employer needs.

3.10.3 *Learning*

Better data is needed to enable to understand, have oversight and respond to the skills and experience mix within the workforce across the council.

3.11 **Quality Assurance (QA) Service**

3.11.1 Challenges

Closing the Loop: Conversion of Quality Assurance Findings into Action

The current quality assurance framework highlights the principle of "closing the loop" on learning, i.e. taking learning back into practice and making a difference. Many areas of practice are still developing their journey to translate identified learning needs into sustained service improvements. The challenge is to find and activate mechanisms that are accessible in a variety of formats. To this end quality assurance services will need to continue to work closely with the Academy to embed learning mechanisms that reach and embed within the variety of services within the Directorate.

QA Capacity In An Expanding Service Landscape

The Quality Assurance Service in the Children and Learning Directorate has been on a development journey over the last three-year period. Initially, the focus was solely on children's social work, however this has expanded significantly to ensure a cross Directorate and seamless approach to delivering assurance for children and families. The existing quality assurance systems are tasked with development and change to support and compliment those wider remits, taking in to scope youth justice, SEND and early help practice.

The challenge is to maintain capacity to support that change and to uphold inspection standards and consistent impact and outcomes. This needs to be achieved being mindful of budget, capacity, activity prioritisation, tailoring the activities to benefit differing practice standards / inspectorates and whilst ensuring streamlined and consistent approaches. To this end, the team have developed a quarterly meeting of all quality assurance leads from each of those service areas, to share learning, identify common ground and develop systems, tools and contributions to enable a wider picture of quality across the Directorate and embrace a "doing even better" approach for children, young people and their families.

Ensure QA is Restorative & Strengths-Based

Quality Assurance activities can often be interpreted as unhelpful or disconnected by practitioners. Whilst the service have worked hard to narrow the gap between assurance activities and practice understanding, through consistent and reflective approaches, this is always a hearts and minds activity. Quality assurance colleagues should act as coaches, facilitating reflective practice, relationship-building, celebrating good work, and identifying support needs.

There is a continuing challenge in delivering this on the ground, enabling others to see the value of quality assurance activity and achieving lasting impact. The journey will continue by ensuring quality assurance is represented in induction for new starters, the continued embedding of routine auditing and moderation work, seeing quality assurance as “everyone’s business” and developing the in-house skills of practitioners to foster a curiosity and self-evaluation.

3.11.2 Opportunities

Legislative Reforms Driving Family-Led Support

Nationally there are significant shifts in understanding, policy and practice around children’s services practice with the introduction of the Family Help model. This brings with it greater emphasis on family led decision making, kinship care, multi-agency teams, and enhanced support. This aligns well with the Camden model of relational practice and the wider corporate strategic vision.

This provides opportunities to redesign and streamline quality assurance across all of the Directorate and potentially corporately, in terms of quality assurance vision, tools, metrics, and to drive forward excellence in changing practices, whilst monitoring impact and outcomes in real time.

Embedding Relational, Reflective Practice

Quality assurance approaches in children services are increasingly grounded in relational practice, across the Directorate. This provides an opportunity to further enhance real-time feedback, service user voice, and reflections on the impact and outcomes for children and their families. There is opportunity to consider the language, vision, and purpose of quality assurance activity in the coming months, in line with key changes as noted above.

Elevating Voice of Child & Family as a Core Quality Assurance Source

The current Quality Assurance Framework has been highlighted as being “one of the best examples seen” by Ofsted inspectors (March 2025). There is scope to refresh this again considering current changing practices and to further embed direct feedback from children, families, and partners. This will provide insight into the impact of Camden services for children and their families, allowing refinement of

vision, service delivery and understanding, whilst creating and supporting robust qualitative data streams for systemic improvement.

3.11.3 *Learning*

Focus on Outcomes, Not Just Process

There has been extensive quality assurance activity over the last three-year period, building consistency and developing mechanisms that reflect the vision. The service have seen that Quality Assurance approaches must emphasise understanding *why* and *how* improvements are made to secure impact, not simply monitoring tasks.

Embed Strengths and Family-Based Methods

The recent National Reform agenda pushes for relational, strengths-based practice and with family networks at the centre. This demonstrates that quality assurance must evaluate both the quality of engagement processes and the lived experiences of children and families, in order to gain as full a picture as possible.

Adopting Mixed-Method Quality Assurance for Richer Insights

Effective quality assurance requires integrated intelligence that includes quantitative metrics, qualitative insight, learning from things such as serious incidents, and direct feedback from children, young people and their families. Ensuring that this information drives identifiable improvements (“closing the loop” as noted above) is essential. To that end, the service knows that effective quality assurance goes beyond reviews of children’s records - it combines quantitative metrics, direct case observations, customer feedback, direct observations of practice, learning reviews, complaints, multi-agency activity such as section 11 audits, and serious incident analyses to form a comprehensive perspective.

4. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

- 4.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted on this report and has no additional comments.

5. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 5.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

6. Environmental Implications

- 6.1 There are no proposals with environmental implications made in this report.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A: Corporate Performance Data Dashboard - CSF Q2 2025/26

REPORT ENDS