**Fairness for Families:**

Tackling child poverty in Islington

Response to public consultation

**Fairness for Families**

Islington’s Child Poverty Strategy 2013-16

Response to Public Consultation

Between 11 October 2013 and 22 November 2013 Islington Council consulted on its draft Child Poverty Strategy, in accordance with the Child Poverty Act 2010. We asked Council staff, partner organisations and residents for their views on how we propose to tackle child poverty in the borough during the next 2 years.

The consultation consisted of the following:

* **A survey questionnaire** publicised through:
* Council Website (Current consultations page)
* Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (through VAI)
* Targeted emails to key organisations - both statutory and voluntary sector
* Posters and leaflets in Children’s Centres and Libraries
* Dissemination by Children’s Services through their network of groups and partners
* Council’s weekly staff bulletin

*40 responses: 13 from residents, 8 from council staff / teams, 7 from VCS organisations and 12 unspecified*

* **Discussions at key VCS sessions:**
* VCS Dialogue session – round table event on tackling child poverty *(17 organisations)*
* Children & Young People’s Voluntary Sector Forum – network bringing together organisations working with children and families *(15 organisations)*
* **Focus groups with parents at:**
* Centre 404 – parents with disabled children
* The 3 Adult Learning Centres – parent learners, most of whom are seeking work

*Around 50 parents in total*

* **Ideas sessions for council staff**
* Part of the Council’s series of Innovation events to explore new ideas to ongoing issues and challenges

*15 council staff*

**Introduction**

The consultation raised numerous issues which we have acknowledged. Some of the issues have been incorporated into the final Child Poverty Strategy which will be published in March 2014 subject to approval.

Many other issues were raised than there was space to accommodate in the strategy; however, we have shared these issues with the relevant teams in the council so that your comments and ideas have reached the right people. Where possible we have provided responses to many of the issues raised in the consultation in this document.

We are very grateful to all those who took part in the consultation, for your honest feedback and for your patience as we have sought to address each issue that you raised. We hope that any questions you might have asked in the consultation will have their answers here. If you would like any further information please contact Gordon Taylor.

 **Email:** Gordon.Taylor@islington.gov.uk

 **Tel**: 0207 527 3453

 **Post:** Room G12, Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD

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**Islington Council Teams**

There were several teams in the council who were referred to during the consultation. These teams work to help tackle challenges residents on low incomes may face.

Family Information Service (FIS) - Islington Family Information Service (FIS) gives free, impartial information, advice and guidance about services for children, young people and families in Islington.

* **Tel** 020 7527 5959
* **Email** fis@islington.gov.uk

Families First - Families First supports families with school-aged children up to 19 years old. The team supports families with a single trained family worker who will help a family access all the different services the council offers, ensuring that a family gets the support they need on an individual basis.

* **Tel 020 7527 4343**
* **Email** **familiesfirst@islington.gov.uk**

Business Employment and Support Team (BEST) - The Business Employment Support Team works with businesses to help them improve their links with the community and recruit locally, to benefit businesses and improve the employment prospects of local residents.

* **Tel** 0207 527 3465
* **Email** BEST@islington.gov.uk

Housing Aid Team - If you have a housing problem or consider yourself homeless or about to be, you can contact the Housing Aid Team for advice and an assessment of your circumstances. Please note: the Housing Aid Team has now moved from Northway House to the Islington Customer Centre at 222 Upper Street.

* **Tel** 020 7527 2000
* **Email** advice.housing@islington.gov.uk
* **Visit** The Islington Customer Centre, 222 Upper Street, Islington, London N1 1XR

Islington Working for Parents (IWP) - The Islington Working for Parents team provides a personal service that is tailored to your individual needs. In addition to helping you to find a job, we also have excellent referral links with other agencies to help with things such as checking your benefit entitlements, maximising your income and accessing childcare so that you can make sure that work pays.

* **Tel** 020 7527 4486
* **Email** iwfp@islington.gov.uk
* **Visit** your [local Islington children's centre](http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/children-families/familyinformationservice/childrenscentres/centres_islington/Pages/default.aspx?extra=7) or [Islington Jobcentre Plus](http://www.islington.gov.uk/about/jobs-careers/Pages/employment_training.aspx).

Adult and Community Learning (ACL) - Every year Islington Council offers many free adult and community learning courses in our welcoming community venues to help unemployed and low waged residents develop their skills and confidence. Whether you are looking to develop your skills for work or further education, learn English, build your confidence and skills to help your children with their homework, or even get ready for the benefit changes, there will be something for you.

* **Arsenal Red Zone Learning Centre**, Emirates Stadium (Museum Entrance), Ashburton Triangle N5 1GD **Tel** 020 7704 4500
* **Hargrave Park Learning Centre**, Hargrave Park Primary School, Bredgar Road, N19 5BS **Tel** 020 7272 0546
* **First Steps Learning Centre**, Central Library, 2 Fieldway Crescent (Holloway Road entrance) N5 1PF **Tel** 020 7527 7002
* **3Corners Learning Centre**, Northampton Road EC1R 0HU **Tel** 020 7527 5083

Seasonal Health and Intervention Network (SHINE) - helping people with health, energy efficiency, general housing quality, income, social isolation and much more.

* **Tel 020 7527 8203**
* **Email** ine@islington.gov.uk

Domestic Violence Helplines – If you are a victim of domestic violence or know someone who is please ring **The National Domestic Violence Helpline** – **0800 2000 247**

Or visit our webpage – <http://www.islington.gov.uk/domesticviolence>

Income Maximisation Team (IMAX) - Friendly and confidential advice for residents who are in or out of work.  Also offer benefit checks and help to complete benefits forms.

* **Tel 020 7527 4343**
* **Email** **familiesfirst@islington.gov.uk**

Welfare Response Team - Pulling together experts from different areas of the council and Jobcentre Plus, the Welfare Response Team makes home visits and develops action plans with residents affected by benefit changes.

* **Tel 020 7527 2706**
* **Email** welfareresponseteam@islington.gov.uk

Contact Islington - For all other enquiries please contact our customer centre.

**Visit Islington Customer Centre**
222 Upper Street
London, N1 1XR

Monday – Friday 9am - 5pm
(excluding Bank and public holidays)

**Tel** 020 7527 2000

Monday        8am - 6pm
Tuesday       8am - 6pm
Wednesday  8:30am - 6pm
Thursday      8am - 6pm
Friday          8am - 6pm

**Survey Results**

*Feedback on the Draft Strategy*

Respondents were asked to provide feedback for the priorities, principles and goals set out in the draft Child Poverty Strategy.

**Q1: Priorities:**

The vast majority ofrespondents **agreed** with the four key priorities or strands;

* Supporting residents into employment
* Supporting families to be financially resilient
* Tackling the immediate impacts of poverty
* Improving life chances for children

**Q2: Principles:**

Similarly, **broad support** for each of the five underpinning principles:

* Child poverty should be eveyone’s business
* Parents need to be part of the solution
* For most people employment will be the best route out of poverty
* Tailored and targeted interventions
* Think Family approach

However less consensus (though still majority vote) on employment being the best route out of poverty

**Q3-6: Goals (we wills) for each of the four priorities**

People were asked to say rate the importance of each of the goals sitting beneath the overarching priorities

There was **strong support** for each of the goals, with almost all respondents ranking them as very important or important.

*Suggested changes to the strategy*

* A number of respondents suggested the following changes to the strategy:
* Recognition of carers and the support they require, including grandparents and siblings.
* Recognition of domestic violence as a cause of child poverty that urgently needs addressing.
* Recognition that children in households affected by domestic violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage require identifying and protecting.

These suggestions have been acknowledged and the strategy changed to include them.

**Responses to key issues raised in Consultation**

Many issues were raised by participants in the consultation which we wanted to respond to. We contacted colleagues in relevant teams to find out:

* Is the council addressing the issue
* If the council has plans to address the issue
* Why the council is not addressing the issue

In this section we have compiled the responses we received from these different teams so that if you asked a question during the consultation, there should be an up to date answer here.

We also received a lot of feedback asking for more specific, tangible examples of how we will tackle child poverty. The information in this section will demonstrate that the council is already running a wide range of projects and programmes too numerous to include in one strategy. The final Child Poverty Strategy will set out our overall approach to tackling child poverty but there is a huge amount of work going on in children’s centres, adult learning centres and across the borough that is helping families struggling on low incomes every day. Further information can be found in the Relevant Strategies and Plans section at the end of this document.

There was a large number of issues raised so we have categorised our responses:

* + Issues requiring further research
	+ Communication of messages
	+ Employment and skills
	+ Schools and young people
	+ Childcare
	+ Financial issues and support
	+ Housing
	+ Children and families – support and activities
	+ Health and wellbeing

**Issues requiring further research**

Several participants suggested that certain issues required further research to be more clearly understood.

* How do mental health and trauma affect people’s chances of finding employment?
* What impact do different cultural attitudes towards gender have on people’s chances of finding employment?

Islington Council recently established an Employment Commission to address the challenge of unemployment and identify how to make the most of Islington’s resources.

The Commission will undertake a range of activities to find out about the experience of Islington residents in relation to employment, including holding a public meeting where residents will be invited to speak. To submit evidence to the Commission please

e-mail employment.commission@islington.gov.uk.

Although the commission has not yet decided its focus areas it is very likely that the Commissioners will address the points above. Further research being done by our Public Health team as part of the Commission’s work should also give us greater insight into how mental health and cultural attitudes affect residents’ attempts to find employment.

*More information about the* ***Employment Commission*** *can be found online:*

*http://www.islington.gov.uk/advice/employment/Pages/employment\_commission.aspx*

**Communication of messages**

It became clear to us that residents and VCS organisations were unaware of many council services. We have therefore informed relevant teams and our communications team that our messages are not always reaching you.

There were specific communications issues participants raised:

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| * Families need to be informed of additional ways they can save money on their energy bills and the help the council is giving.
 | * In January 2014 the council started the “Helping Hand” campaign which aims to help residents with living costs. Part of this is offering advice to residents about saving money on their energy bills through the Energy Advice Team.

**Tel** 0800 953 1221 **Email** www. islington.gov.uk/energy |
| * More use should be made of social media, particularly to host online forums where parents can support one another.
 | * Our communications team are currently reviewing the council’s publication – Islington Life and are considering publishing future issues online.
* A social media strategy is being produced to look at how the council uses social media to communicate with residents.
 |

* *Follow the council on* [*twitter*](http://www.twitter.com/IslingtonBC) *@IslingtonBC*

**Employment and skills**

The Business Employment and Support Team (BEST) is the council’s business facing team who are in regular contact with many of the businesses who operate in Islington. Their work ranges from encouraging businesses to offer apprenticeships to helping parents into work and much more. Many participants expressed interest in the work of this team and wanted to find out more about how exactly the council is tackling unemployment.

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| * Some courses at the Adult Community Learning (ACL) Centres do not coincide with school hours – parents have to leave courses early to pick up their children.
 | * The Islington Learning and Working team are looking at matching up learning centre and school hours as they plan their curriculum for the coming year. The majority of the learning centre courses currently start at 9.30am and finish at 3.30pm.
 |
| * Parent learners at ACL centres welcomed crèche facilities at centres but commented that not all sessions had these.
 | * Learning centres are not set up to have crèche facilities – but we do offer crèches in some venues and in Children’s Centres.
 |
| * Libraries have a role to play in supporting families with literacy, access to info and the digital divide including offering ICT training to those who are less able to use computers.
 | * There is an array of provision in our libraries - however we are going to review our offer to ensure that we have a good spread and curriculum offer.
 |
| * English language skills are a particular barrier - employers had cited candidates’ poor accents as a reason for failure to secure a job.
 | * The council provides English for Speakers of Other Languages classes which help learners improve their accent.
 |
| * Many parents reported struggling with application forms and interviews.
 | * The Islington Working for Parents (IWP) team provides support with application forms and interview preparation and all employment support sessions tackle these issues.
 |
| * Employability support for parents should take place before children reach 5 because after this point the benefits system imposes work with greater pressure.
 | * The IWP and BEST teams already support parents with employability training before their children reach 5 years.
 |
| * Parent learners are keen to develop themselves and work but struggled to pass interviews and get a first chance. Many learners at the ACL centres suggested that the Council should work with employers to provide alternatives to interviews such as work trials or probation periods.
 | * The BEST team already work with employers to organise work trials and are keen to do more of this in the future. They are also exploring how the council can support parents with work experience opportunities.
 |
| * Need to work with employers to identify opportunities, particularly more local jobs - greater awareness is needed of the breadth of work opportunities available.
 | * Although the BEST team focus on helping clients get into entry level jobs, these jobs come from a wide range of sectors and employers.
 |
| * Some employers are reluctant to recognise qualifications and work experience gained in other countries – one parent had worked before but was told she was not selected because she had not worked in the UK.
 | * The BEST team have links with a number of community groups who help job seekers who have overseas employment. They are now exploring how they could turn this into a permanent referral system, linking up those in need of advice with the right experts.
 |
| * Employers should be encouraged to recognise the skills parents have to offer.
 | * The IWP team already work to help parents identify their strengths and communicate them as skills which employers are looking for.
 |
| * Council should work with employers to bring in flexible working patterns to help with childcare issues:
* Many parents expressed preference for employment within school hours (and some unwillingness to consider work outside of these hours).
* Some parents found employers reluctant to take on mothers due to childcare responsibilities.
* Employers expected flexibility from parents but were not flexible themselves – e.g. asking parents to work late hours at short notice.
 | * Islington Council is a partner of the Timewise Foundation, an organisation which seeks to help employers understand the benefits of flexible working and enable them to offer their staff greater opportunities to work flexibly. The council itself has many flexible working policies and seeks to lead other employers to adopt similar ways of working. Our leadership and campaigning over the London Living Wage has seen 35 employers in the borough become accredited by the Living Wage Foundation for paying their staff a Living Wage.
 |
| * A large number of participants in the consultation gave us feedback about Jobcentre Plus.
 | * The Employment Services Board was set up in July last year to bring together all the different groups in the borough who work to help residents find work. Alongside the council and Jobcentre Plus (JCP), other groups which make up the board include City and Islington College, Work Programme Providers and leading local businesses. Feedback from the consultation relating to JCP will be given through the Employment Services Board.
 |

***Islington Working for Parents*** *worked with 524 parents between April and December last year.*

*228 parents found jobs and 38 parents found volunteering or work placements.*

**Schools and young people**

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| * Parents with a lack of aspiration are likely to pass this on to their children - the council needs to support parents to avoid this.
 | * The council strongly encourages positive parental engagement in children’s education, health and well-being. This is from the earliest engagement through children’s centres and then through schools. One of the key areas of engagement is around learning and ensuring high expectations. Children’s centres and schools will not only encourage parents to take advantage of adult learning opportunities but advise on how best to support children’s learning at home.
 |
| * Financial education for all pupils in secondary schools from Year 7 – suggestion of creating a computer programme designed to teach pupils how to manage a budget.

Family planning and cooking for less should also be taught. | * Support for financial education is provided as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE): financial capability is one of the seven areas of PSHE that we recommend Islington secondary schools include in their PSHE programmes. Some central training on teaching economic wellbeing and financial capability for PSHE teachers and subject leaders has also been provided.
 |
| * Careers advice should be given to pupils earlier in their education, as early as Year 7. Careers advisors should encourage pupils to be more ambitious, advising on a wide range of career paths.
 | * Negotiations are currently taking place with individual schools on bespoke Careers Adviser support for their students, which can be targeted from Year 8
 |
| * Apprentices were seen as positive though comments on lack of places and low wages.
 | * Islington Council pays its apprentices the London Living Wage and is working with other employers to encourage them to do the same.
 |
| * Concern from parents that a young person taking up an apprenticeship could leave a household worse off (benefit support could be withdrawn from a household as a result of the slight increase in income from the apprenticeship).
 | * It is unlikely that a young person taking up an apprenticeship could leave their household worse off as the non-dependent deductions taper is based on income and so any deduction would be very small at the beginning.
 |

*Islington is one of only 9 Local Authorities nationally, where all the schools are rated as either ’good’ or ‘outstanding’ by* ***Ofsted****.*

[*http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/schools-learning*](http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/schools-learning)

**Childcare**

A strong message we received from our focus groups was that finding affordable childcare is a real challenge for parents on low incomes and a major obstacle to finding employment.

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| * There was some reluctance amongst participants to consider using certain types of childcare – particularly childminders.
 | * Childminders are regulated by Ofsted and access training and professional support, largely via the local authority: we continue to see an increase in overall quality each year. We have recently updated our website to include a direct link to childminder’s Ofsted reports.
* We have organised a range of activities to promote childminders as a positive option. These include speed minding, support through children's centres and help with access to qualifications including providing a level 3 award on Saturdays.
* Children’s centres have recently been organising information and activity events for parents to promote access to free early learning and have invited childminders and other local childcare providers to attend. Parents have taken up childcare with childminders they have met at these events.
* We would be interested to know more about the reluctance of parents to use certain types of childcare. Please contact the Family Information Service for more information.
 |
| * Difficulty in accessing childcare at short notice – some parents said they had been unable to take up job offers through a failure to secure childcare.
 | * The Family Information Service does what it can to help parents do this, generally through childminders who tend to be more flexible.
* The Childcare Coalition is aiming to evaluate informal childcare and community networks that might be able to support parents around flexibility and affordability of childcare.
 |
| * Lack of childcare provision for primary school children – can use family or friends for young children but this is more difficult as children get older.
 | * There is a good offer of wrap-around (term-time) childcare in Islington, with
* around 41 breakfast clubs and 32 after school clubs in Islington
* 12 adventure playgrounds offering open-access (not childcare)
* all 45 primary schools offer enrichment activities after the school day up to 4.30pm. Those schools that do not then offer childcare up to 6pm usually have a walking bus to nearby provision in a school or voluntary sector provision.
* Where there may be a gap is in holiday provision. There are ten holiday play schemes funded by the council, as well as the adventure playgrounds. They tend to be very busy and we are looking at ways of encouraging schools to engage more with the agenda of setting up holiday provision.
 |
| * Lack of consistency in school offer – some schools had breakfast and after school clubs, others had nothing. Charges varied across schools.
 | * A few schools have commented that they do not feel there is sufficient demand from working families to justify the cost of setting up and staffing after school childcare – parents would not be prepared or able to pay the childcare charges, even though they may be subsidised by the council (and tax credits). We are keeping an eye on this situation, as the profile of families and the proportion of parents working may change in the short to medium term, thereby increasing demand. In the meantime, those schools without their own out of school childcare generally have an arrangement with a nearby school or voluntary provider to offer childcare to their pupils.
 |
| * Mainstream childcare provision is not always suitable for disabled children - tailored childcare for children with disabilities is needed, including details on childminders who specialise in caring for disabled children.
 | * The Council commissions some targeted and specialist services for children and young people with more severe and complex needs funded by short break services and social care. Eligible families have flexibility in how they use this support and often use it to help meet their needs for childcare.
* Due to the needs of the disabled children, the cost of providing these services is far higher than other childcare. As a result families are often unable to use their own resources to buy the childcare they need. There is a need to consider if a childcare subsidy can be made available and how this would be administered and paid for.
 |
| * Lack of awareness of the overall childcare offer.
 | * We are improving the information on the council website so that childcare information is easier to find, simpler to understand and more concise.
* We are also raising awareness of local childcare services, and the support that parents can access – such as the FIS telephone service – through our communications channels, including the quarterly magazine *IslingtonLife*, Twitter, posters and leaflets in community locations and the monthly residents’ e-bulletin.

Sign up for the e- bulletin here: <http://www.islington.gov.uk/islington/news-events/Pages/ebulletin.aspx?extra=24>* In particular we are promoting free early learning for 2 year olds.
 |

*Contact the* ***Family Information Service*** *for childcare advice*

[*http://www.islington.gov.uk/fis*](http://www.islington.gov.uk/fis)

t: 020 7527 5959

**Financial issues and support**

There were significant concerns about the impact of welfare reforms. Whilst this is something that Islington Council has little control over, we are following developments from central government closely and seeking to help residents who are adversely affected by the reforms.

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| * Residents are not convinced that they will be better off in work: childcare costs (particularly for larger families), reduced benefits, increases to housing and living costs, low wages and zero hour contracts were all cited as discouragements.
 | * It is the case that people are better off in work, however, under the current system this is not as good as it should be. Under Universal Credit this will improve and those in work will be better off than they are at the moment.

The Income Maximisation team are available to advise residents on benefits. |
| * Participants agreed with the need to help families to access benefits and financial support, particularly in extraordinary circumstances. However, this should not increase pressure on staff.
 | * The new customer centre at the council’s offices at 222 Upper Street will mean that frontline staff from a wide range of services will all be in the same place. This will help staff understand resident’s needs more quickly and direct them to the right person for advice more efficiently.
 |
| * The council should prioritise reducing travel and heating costs.
 | * The “Helping Hand” campaign (see p. 8) is working to help residents reduce their energy bills.
* The Seasonal Health and Intervention Network helps assess residents for around 30 possible interventions helping people with health, energy efficiency, general housing quality, income, social isolation and much more.
* The council is doing lots to promote cycling as a cheaper travel option (see p. 25).
 |
| * Apprehension about the move to monthly payments under Universal Credit - difficulties of budgeting on a monthly (as opposed to weekly) basis.
 | * The government are introducing the Local Support Services Framework – this will be a system which ensures that residents affected by welfare reforms will receive the help they need with a range of issues, including money management and budgeting.

It is likely that Universal Credit will not be implemented until after 2016, giving us adequate time to make preparations to help those who will need it. |
| * Concern over proposals for Universal Credit payment to be made to one recipient – particular risk for families facing issues around domestic violence, gambling, substance abuse. Benefit sanctions against one member of the household will affect the whole household negatively.
 | * The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are the government body responsible for Universal Credit. They have highlighted victims of domestic violence as a particular claimant category who will have specific needs that will need addressing, however, at the moment it is unclear how they intend to address these needs. More information should be made available closer to the time when monthly payments are implemented.
 |
| * The Resident Support Scheme (RSS) is inadequate to cover the various funding streams it has replaced.
 | * The Resident Support Scheme was a combination of different funding streams, primarily made up of money from central government. This funding from central government was recently cut. The council has protested against this and is considering how crisis support might be provided in the future.
 |
| * Signposting of emergency help such as the RSS and local food bank should be clearer. The council should also provide free phone calls to some of its services from mobile phones (not 0800 numbers).
 | * The communications team is producing “The Really, Really Useful Guide” which will be distributed to 105,000 residents from 5–6 March and will include information on the “Helping hand” campaign (see p. 8).
* There is also an on-going internal communications plan to reach frontline staff with signposting information so they can help residents find the right support.
 |

**Housing**

*“The Really, Really Useful Guide” will be sent out to residents on 5-6 March.*

|  |  |
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| * Inconsistent messages– participants made several comments above the variety of advice they had received relating to housing issues.

Recent changes to housing benefits, such as exemptions to the spare room subsidy for disabled children, have caused difficulty. Participants complained that council advice was not always up to date. | * There have been numerous changes in what is on offer and there has been a gap in training which keeps staff up to date with most recent developments. We have reminded front line staff to direct residents to the correct advice service and additional training to address this is scheduled before the end of March.
 |
| * There was a strong message from clients of Centre 404 about the importance of a safe and secure home for those with a disabled child – this seemed to matter more than anything else.
 | * Islington Learning Disabilities Partnership and Housing Needs have worked together over the last two years to improve access to accommodation for people with a learning disability and their families.
* The council prioritises families for ground floor accommodation where a family member has a particular need. This decision is made after taking advice from relevant health and social care professionals.
 |
| * Challenged the expectation that older children in council housing should be obliged to move out – this would leave parents without valuable support or someone to talk to
 | * There is no expectation from housing that older children should be obliged to move out. The council only has a small number of larger properties which become available to let each year. We give households who are overcrowded a choice of options as an alternative to waiting for a suitable property to become available - such as looking for a swap or mutual exchange partner – however many households are happy for older, independent members of the family to move into their own accommodation.
 |
| * Families with a disabled child should be given property large enough to allow a separate bedroom for their disabled child or other children (sharing room with disabled child can impact on sleep).
 | * Under the allocation scheme the council can decide to allow a separate bedroom for a disabled child where this is deemed necessary, however the council must also consider the high levels of severe overcrowding in the borough. Advice is taken from relevant health and social care professionals in deciding whether or not an additional bedroom can be allowed.
 |
| * Parents of disabled children found it difficult to meet the requirement to clean their council home within time (or face a charge of £250) prior to moving due to caring commitments. There was a request for a longer notice period or more support for parents carers when moving home.
 | * This is only charged as a last resort and there is a discretionary element which can be waived in exceptional circumstances. So we urge families who are moving in the near future, particularly those facing challenging circumstances, to contact their Housing Office well in advance to get advice on the support available.
 |
| * Overcrowding is a significant issue for a small number of families who have lots of children. There can be a lack of space for children to do homework.
 | * The council has done much to reduce the number of severely overcrowded households in the borough. We actively promote mutual exchanges between overcrowded and under occupying households. Under occupiers are incentivised to move into smaller accommodation – freeing up larger units – through payments of grants per bedroom they are releasing.

The Mobility Team can also help to relieve the effects of overcrowding by purchasing space saving furniture – such as bunk beds - for overcrowded families. The team also refer families to libraries and other facilities where children can do homework. Contact the Housing Aid Team for more information. |
| * The value of libraries as a place to study and do homework was recognised, particularly by parents in overcrowded households.

Libraries also have a role to play in helping residents improve ICT skills and access services. | * All 10 libraries have a free Homework Club once a week, with a tutor available to assist children. Libraries are also open after school and at weekends with library staff able to help children find the resources they need and with space for children to do homework. We publicise this on our webpages and in leaflets /posters in libraries, but there is scope to promote this more widely through schools, Children’s Centre’s and Community groups.
* We also have free PC access for adults and children in all our libraries. All Libraries now have free public

Wi-fi. |
| * The council should focus on bringing empty properties back into use.
 | * In terms of empty properties in the private housing sector, the council has an effective empty property strategy in place and is committed to bringing empty properties back into use through a range of methods. Since 2010, 509 former empty properties have been brought back into use as homes for people in housing need.
 |

*On Monday 17 February 2014 the Housing Aid Team will be moving to 222 Upper Street.*

*t: 020 7527 2000*

**Children and families – support and activities**

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| * Outreach advice was praised - parents of disabled children highlighted how difficult it was for them to access advice and support services. Outreach sessions in Centre 404 were very helpful and their clients would like more. They also expressed a preference for independent advice through voluntary and community groups, rather than the council.
 | * Centre 404 have been commissioned to deliver the Parent Carer support service by the council and, as a charity, they are independent of the council*.*
* Parents can also access advice and support through special educational needs co-ordinators in local schools. The 3 special schools in Islington, Samuel Rhodes, Richard Cloudesley and The Bridge have been commissioned to deliver outreach services by working with mainstream schools. This will increase their capacity and help them meet a wider range of needs.
 |
| * Some victims of domestic violence are deterred from coming forward for support because they fear their children will be taken into care, particularly parents with ambiguous immigration statuses.
 | * There are lots of ways we can support victims of domestic violence to keep themselves and their children safe. The majority of victims of domestic violence are able to protect their children and victims will receive lots of support to keep their children with them and safe from harm.
* There are some particular forms of support available to victims whose immigration status is ambiguous. For example the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession enables those who entered the country on spousal visas and who are experiencing DV to gain access to public funds and temporary immigration status while they apply for leave to remain. We have a number of specialist services that can support victims in this situation so we urge people to come forward to access this kind of support.
 |
| * More education opportunities for pre-school children are needed.
 | * There are a large number of education opportunities for pre-school children available through the Family Information Service (FIS). The FIS is a helpful source of information and works with other services and partners, such as children’s centres, Islington Working for Parents, health visitors and the Business Employment Support Team to help parents access the support they need.
* We are always looking at ways to improve how we communicate with parents. We may be helped in that respect by a national report on how parents access information due out in spring 2014.
 |
| * Extra-curricular activities outside of school such as swimming and homework clubs were too expensive for many parents who requested more low cost or free activities including free swimming for children.
 | * Free homework clubs are available at all Islington libraries (see p. 23).
* Schools may charge for the provision of some after school clubs but there should be no charge for any clubs that support children with their homework.
* Rosebowl and Lift are two youth clubs which offer after school activities which are either free or very low cost.
* Access to sporting activities is subsidised through the Aquaterra Izz Card and Access to Sport.
 |
| * Parents of disabled children requested more sessions and activities which involve the whole family, including siblings of disabled children. This avoids childcare cover and allows siblings of disabled children to meet others in a similar position.
 | * We are currently looking into how we provide whole family activities and will be working with Islington Giving, the Cripplegate Foundation and social landlords to investigate providing more family activities in the future.
 |
| * Lack of provision for children with lower-level disabilities.
 | * There is an expectation that the majority of disabled children with lower level disabilities will be able to access mainstream services.In February 2014, the council is planning to conduct a telephone survey of parents of disabled children to establish how easily they can access childcare and positive activities. The findings will help us to plan how to address the barriers that prevent them accessing such services*.*
 |
| * Parents with disabled children requested more clubs and activities open to both able bodied and disabled children.
 | * Most mainstream clubs and activities are already open to disabled children, but may not specifically advertise this.
* Children assessed as having more severe and complex needs can use their short breaks or social care funding to pay for additional support to help them access these services. However, the majority choose to go to activities that are not inclusive.
 |

*Centre 404 is the council’s provider of Carer Support Services*

[*http://www.centre404.org.uk/*](http://www.centre404.org.uk/)

*t: 020 7607 8762*

**Health and Wellbeing**

Several participants commented that health and wellbeing is an important aspect of poverty which needs addressing alongside economic. The council’s Public Health department within the council recognises how significantly health issues affect the local community and are working with the NHS, council teams and other partners to combat the effects of ill-health.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Promote cycling – this will benefit both adults and children to be more alert at work or school, save money on travel, tackle obesity (particularly amongst secondary school children) and contribute increased attendance. The council should help with the initial costs of cycling, offering loan schemes and recycling unclaimed bikes in police possession
 | * The council is doing a lot to promote cycling in the borough. Free Bikeability training is available in all primary schools, 50% of secondary schools and to all adults who live, work or study in the borough. This will continue until 2017.

Book online: http://islington.bookcycletraining.com* The borough-wide 20mph scheme is a cycling promotion as fears over the danger of cycling is the most significant barrier to more people starting to cycle.
 |
| * Behavioural health interventions should be appropriate to their context, it may not be viable to promote healthy eating to a family who are struggling financially
 | * Islington Food strategy takes on a wide definition of food poverty covering access, affordability, appropriateness and awareness. There is a great deal of work already underway in the borough to address food poverty.
* The Healthy Start campaign gives parents on low income financial support to provide healthy food for children under four years old. Visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)
* The Islington Healthy Start Vitamins Pilot scheme in Islington has been effective at increasing the awareness of vitamins among families across the borough. The uptake of free vitamins for children under four years old increased by around 20%.
* The Food Strategy group are currently looking at ways to promote and maximise the use of Healthy Start vouchers.
* A mapping exercise that plots food outlets against deprivation was recently completed in the borough. The findings of this exercise are being used to identify “food deserts” and to support communities to develop sustainable solutions to improve access to healthy food.
 |
| * Too big an emphasis on employment and finance in the strategy and not enough is being done to improve wellbeing. Access to, and the promotion of, green spaces will increase the wellbeing of residents which in turn will instil a greater sense of drive and motivation to help themselves out of poverty. Residents should be consulted on their preferred wellbeing activities. Projects that involve regular exercise, less dependency on anti-depressant drugs and more frequent visits to parks, gardens, woodlands and forests would play a key role in improving the mental wellbeing of Islington’s resident.
 | * “Improving mental health and wellbeing” is one of Islington’s three health and wellbeing priorities. There are particular concerns about the impact that austerity, financial stress and unemployment are having on residents’ long term mental health. Child poverty is significantly linked to worklessness in Islington, which in turn is linked to an increased level of mental health needs.
* Islington Council was one of the first councils in the country to join the ‘Time to Change’ campaign, which aims to increase awareness and understanding of mental health needs and to tackle the stigma and discrimination that can be associated with mental health problems. This encourages
* earlier identification of mental health problems
* help-seeking behaviour

Our community-based projects are now helping residents understand and identify mental health problems in themselves and those around them, improving awareness of how to find the right support.* Islington has been awarded funding to build or refurbish thirteen Active Spaces across the borough to help support local school children, their families and the wider Islington community to increase their physical activity. The Active Spaces are being placed in areas where there are high levels of child obesity and deprivation.
* Islington has recently completed an extensive children and young people’s physical activity needs assessment. This looked at barriers to participation in physical activity as well as factors which would support children and young people to increase their participation in physical activity. ProActive Islington are now exploring how the findings/recommendations can be implemented.
 |
| * More details on what the council is doing to reduce teenage pregnancy
 | * Islington Council commissions or provides a range of activities and support to help reduce teenage pregnancy or improve outcomes for teenage parents and their children. Specific interventions include sex and relationships education, targeted work with vulnerable groups, young people’s sexual health services and health and social care interventions for teenage parents, such as the Family Nurse Partnership.
* Actions to address the impacts of poverty and worklessness and to raise educational and employment aspirations are important in improving long term teenage pregnancy rates. The rate of teenage pregnancy in Islington has fallen significantly in recent years. Further details can be found at the Islington Evidence Hub: [http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Information/Factsheets/2013-2014/(2013-05-20)-Teenage-pregnancy-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.islington.gov.uk/publicrecords/library/Public-health/Information/Factsheets/2013-2014/%282013-05-20%29-Teenage-pregnancy-fact-sheet.pdf)
 |

*More information on health and wellbeing can be found here:*

[*http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/social-care-health/health-in-islington*](http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/social-care-health/health-in-islington)

**Relevant Strategies and Plans**

The Council does a lot more to tackle child poverty than has been listed in the responses above. More information about the work we do to address issues relating to child poverty can be found in the strategies, assessments and reports listed below. These can all be found online through our website <http://www.islington.gov.uk> – simply type the title into the search bar.

Key strategies and reports include:

* Islington Fairness Commission Final Report (June 2011)
* Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 - 2020
* Child Poverty Needs Assessment (August 2013)
* Islington’s Core Strategy (February 2011)
* Islington Housing Strategy 2014-19
* Prevention of Homelessness Strategy 2012-14
* Corporate Plan 2011-15
* Local Economic Assessment (2010)
* Islington Food Strategy (2010)
* London Assembly Report ‘Making London a Zero Hunger City’ (March 2013)
* Seasonable Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy (November 2010)
* Health Inequalities Strategy 2010-2030