1 Summary

1.1 The attached report is the latest version of the Children & Young People’s Thematic Paper.
Background and introduction
This paper addresses the central role our schools and colleges have to play in creating and supporting prosperous and sustainable communities: ‘place-shaping’.

There is a growing acceptance by the government, planners and members of the council that, in urban areas, communities are not ‘truly’ sustainable unless they are mixed – and include a large proportion of residents with good jobs and reasonable incomes. Achieving this means developing a system of schools and colleges which successfully equip local young people with the education and skills they need to gain and hold good quality jobs – what could be called ‘employability’.

The quality of schools and colleges in an area has a symbiotic relationship with its communities. On the one hand, communities thrive, and remain, or become more, sustainable if the education in the area is good, and of consistent quality; on the other, the existence in the community of a critical number of ‘stable’ families, with parents who are in work, and earn at least two-thirds of the median wage, will tend to create conditions in which education institutions will be ‘better’ – attracting good quality heads, teachers and support staff, who want to stay in the area.

The rest of this paper expands on the importance of employability, the contribution of schools and colleges, and our strategic approach to improvement.

Issues
Living close to the centre of London gives people in Waltham Forest great opportunities, but also great challenges. For example:

- there are millions of jobs within reasonable distance of people who live in the borough, and a rapidly expanding jobs market in Stratford and Canary Wharf between now and 2020;
- at the same time, there is, and will continue to be, significant competition for jobs – especially those with decent pay, and prospects for progression – from people from not only London, but the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond;
- London’s dynamic and hard-pressed housing market means substantial growth in the local housing stock, partly due to migration from elsewhere; and
- many people in substantial areas of the borough live in poor housing and are deprived in a range of different ways.

The challenge for the council and its partners is to create a prosperous, cohesive and sustainable local community, in quite challenging circumstances, which means:

- equipping our residents with the skills to compete successfully for a range of jobs in London;
- addressing deprivation, but not through gentrification and displacement; and
- creating stable communities and managing both population growth and transience.

We are developing a range of strategies to seek to achieve this, brought together under the umbrella of a sustainable communities strategy, which covers community cohesion, regeneration, planning and housing. But it is self-evident that our approach to children, schools and families is centrally important.

There is one clear, general issue that is crucial to all individuals, families and communities: that is the extent to which, at all of these levels, there is ‘economic wellbeing’. There are many views about what this is, but in fact there a well-established and researched
measure that a family is likely to have ‘economic wellbeing’ if it has 60% or more than the average ‘family’ income. The problem faced by too many families in the borough is that their incomes are below this threshold, usually due to unemployment, or employment in low wage, low prospect jobs. There is a link here with education, even though it is uneven and imperfect, since many people get good jobs that generate average remuneration and better, having attained poorly at school. This is the ‘employability’ standard, expressed through the measure of five or more ‘good’ (grade C or better) GCSEs, or the equivalent in NVQs. The measure changes in 2008 to include English and mathematics as two of the five subjects.

The issue for the borough presently is that even with the large improvement in attainment at key stage 4 this year, 45% of 15 year-olds failed to attain the ‘employability standard’; this rises to nearly 58% against the ‘new’ measure. Moreover, by 18, only about two-thirds achieve 5 ‘good’ GCSEs or equivalent.

The issue here is not only our failure in relation to young people who live here now, especially in some areas. It is also the way in which that failure influences the decision about whether to live here by people who have a choice of location. It is these people who will help develop our area – and especially the poorer parts of it – into attractive mixed communities, with all the attractions of the most successful areas in London – a night-time economy, neat, well-kept streets, and a safe environment.

Our schools will not develop merely through the injection of capital funding, even at the significant level available here. Schools require committed governors, heads, teachers and support staff; but this is still not enough. They require top quality support to develop the best learning opportunities. This is why we are seeking to bring in the best available ideas from outside the borough, through our outsourcing of school improvement and through our innovative and exciting trust proposals for Leyton and Leytonstone, which we are developing now.

**Choices and opportunities**

We are fortunate in having a once in a century opportunity to renew or refurbish completely all our secondary schools, and a significant number of our primary schools. We are presently developing our *strategy for change* document, which we must present to the government before we are able to progress the second wave of our building schools for the future (BSF) programme. Even if we wanted to, we would not have the ‘choice’ to merely refurbish or rebuild these schools, as the government requires proposals that will transform schools through such means as ‘external challenge’, new governance arrangements and a different curriculum offer.

Our wave 5 BSF programme, which covers the south of the borough and Chingford, aims to transform learning for young people, especially between the ages of 14 and 18 (years 10, 11, 12 and 13), focusing on the offer of a much broader curriculum, including the offer of all 14 new diploma lines by 2013, and flexibility for pupils, who will be able to learn and achieve at a pace suitable to them.

For example, pupils within our proposed ‘connected’ learning community in the south will be able to study at other schools or colleges for part or all of their time. They will be able to stay on at school beyond 16 to study either specialised subjects, or achieve ‘level 2’ by 17 or 18, while also studying appropriate diploma or other subjects.

The intention is that all the developments in school and college learning environments will be centres of activity not just for children and young people, but communities too. The BSF and primary school capital developments programmes will be integrated with, and not separate from, the development plans for the area and the borough.
For example, we are considering the possibility of developing a trust arrangement comprising two current secondary schools (George Mitchell and Norlington), a primary school and a special school on the Leyton cricket ground and current George Mitchell site. This has the potential to provide:

- a 5-19 school – especially beneficial to vulnerable children, for whom ‘transition’ between schools is often difficult;
- inclusive education for pupils with special educational needs;
- new facilities, designed and available for community learning and youth activity seven days a week, including the possibility of leisure centre provision, if this fits in with development plans for leisure in the area;
- ‘renewal’ for the area, including synergistic development with the police site on the Hainault triangle, Leyton High Road, the line of factory premises along Norlington Road, and the Norlington school site, which would be available for development.

It is worth being more specific about the proposals for community engagement. Each school receiving investment will be required to set out its individual vision and strategy, including how it will contribute to the council’s overarching vision and plans for extended schools. We will work with all our schools to determine the extended facilities and services they will provide, which will be in the context of the plans for the area, and not just development plans relating to education.

Moreover, all our schools know that the council has established successful area partnership arrangements as a delivery mechanism for extended services, which have been in place since 2005. Within each area, robust clusters of schools, cross phase, have worked collaboratively to deliver extended services, meeting local community needs and respond to community cohesion issues. These modus operandi are being incorporated into our secondary and primary building and school development programmes so that extended services are developed that genuinely contribute to sustainable communities.

The three local further education colleges currently provide most of the borough’s post 16 provision. They are not part of the council’s education estate, although recent national proposals are to transfer all funding for 16 – 19 year olds to local authorities.

Waltham Forest College already offers substantial provision for 14 – 16 year olds and both Leyton SFC and Sir George Monoux college work with schools on more limited programmes for this age group.

Leyton SFC governors have agreed in principle that the college should be part of the network learning community in Leytonstone; its extensive capital programme will be developed alongside the council’s BSF capital programme.

**Outcomes**

There must be specific and general outcomes of capital investment in schools and colleges. Specifically, changes in educational provision must transform learning opportunities and result in significantly improved ‘outputs’ and outcomes for all the young people of the borough. This means better key stage results and other qualifications and skills leading to better progression to higher and further education and, ultimately, to employment in good jobs – the aspiration for all young people.

Generally, schools and colleges must be central to communities, offering attractive buildings with facilities valued and used by a wide range of local people. They should contribute significantly to the development of an area and its attractiveness to potential incomers and existing residents, with and without children.

The future prosperity of the area depends, in part, on our success in the above. The creation of stable communities depends on growing confidence in local schools and colleges on the
part of those parents who would otherwise move on with their children, especially when under 5 or prior to primary-secondary transfer when they are aged 11.

We need to be specific about the expectations of ‘transformed’ outputs from our renewed education / community facilities. For example, we need to:

• agree ambitious targets for attainment up to level 2 – for example, a target of 85% of students achieving this standard by the end of year 13 (age 18) in 2013, compared with the current 55% at age 16 and 67% at age 18;

• meet the needs of the 8-10% of young people who are not likely to achieve the ‘employability’ standard, and ensure that they have an appropriate, usually vocational, pathway from age 14 (year 10);

• meet the requirements of the most able by offering accelerated learning programmes that move away from age-related education programmes and opportunities; and

• consider ‘guaranteed’ learning outcomes for pupils in our schools.

Potential ‘blocks’ to our proposals and gaps in evidence

As with any complex proposals for large-scale ‘systems change’ involving independent organisations, there is a range of potential blocks. For example:

• land issues – in the case of many of our schools, rebuilding rather than refurbishment would be the preferred option: however, neither the land nor the budget are available to enable this, and where land is potentially available, there are planning and other problems (for example, at the Leyton cricket ground, and at Douglas Eyre playing field, at Low Hall next to Lammas);

• our proposed development requires schools to organise very differently – some might become ‘all through’ schools, there needs to be joint timetabling and co-ordinated curriculum offers, and the colleges might incorporate more 14-16s (years 10 and 11) than is the case presently – which can be controversial;

• the government, through its arm’s length agency, Partnerships for Schools (PfS), must approve the proposals, which means that we must look carefully at other forms of governance, including independent ‘trusts’ as well as a radically different curriculum offer;

• the offer of good community facilities on some constrained sites is a challenge, as is the development of other community facilities – for example, health and leisure centres and libraries – on our school sites.

Gaps in evidence

There is evidence that good schools attract and retain families, including those who could choose to relocate. However, the relationship between educational provision and the housing choice of young, childless professionals is less clear:

Other issues include:

• the likely impact of forthcoming BSF programmes in neighbouring boroughs (none is beyond the earliest stages of planning) is unknown. This makes it difficult to assess the potential impact of our proposed programme on sustainability;

• the need for further work to establish the profile of those who leave the borough.

• uncertainty about the future London labour market for local young people.

• the council’s commitment to providing diversity and choice in its educational provision - currently, a significant proportion of young people, right across London, choose to cross borough boundaries to study, presenting both challenges and opportunities for policy makers and providers.