The purpose of this report is to set out the responses to a consultation, carried in March 2017, in relation to out of school childcare and the response of the council to this consultation.

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Funding (£817,000) that was subsidising after school and holiday childcare in primary schools and voluntary sector settings for working parents/carers ended in March 2017 due to Government cuts. The council carried out a consultation in March 2017 about the actions it was taking to reduce the impact of these cuts on parents/carers and the settings.

1.2. The actions consulted on were:
   - transition funding April to August 2017 to minimise disruption
   - promoting information to parents about help with the costs of childcare
   - giving information about low-cost, no-cost options (adventure play)
   - working with current providers of out of school childcare to support them with their plans to reshape their businesses in the light of the cuts
   - encouraging as much fundraising as possible.

1.3. There were 187 responses. The key themes emerging from these were:
   - the impact on the ability of parents to work if childcare charges increase – the biggest concern
   - use of adventure playgrounds – a mixed response with some negative comments around safety and quality
   - concern about the impact of the cuts, including on the sustainability and quality of childcare settings.

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1 Publication was delayed in the run up to the General Election on 8 June – the purdah period.
1.4. The main response from the council to the consultation is that, in the light of significant concerns expressed about the risk of increased charges impacting on parents being able to work, the council has managed to find further funding to subsidise after school and holiday childcare for Islington working parents from September 2017 to March 2018.

1.5. This will give the council and settings more time to:
   - review provision, including costs and charges
   - understand the impacts of other support with the costs of childcare such as the new Tax-free Childcare
   - gain a better understanding of which Islington families may need particular support to be able to work.

1.6. See Section 6 below for the detailed response from the council.

2. Introduction

2.1. Funding that Islington Council had used to subsidise after school and holiday childcare ended in March 2017 due to reductions in central Government funding. An on-line survey took place in March 2017 to find out what parents/carers and childcare providers thought about the actions the council is taking to reduce the impact of these cuts.

2.2. There were 187 responses to the survey which was available on the council website from 1 to 30 March 2017. It was advertised via schools and voluntary sector childcare providers who were provided with publicity flyers. It was discussed at a meeting of Over Fives Childcare Providers on 14 March 2017. Information about the consultation was also circulated to children’s centres and nurseries.

2.3. The actions that were consulted on were:
   - providing transition funding between April and August 2017 to minimise disruption to families and providers
   - promoting information to parents about help with the costs of childcare (bursary, childcare vouchers, tax-free childcare, tax credits).
   - giving information about low-cost, no-cost options (adventure play).
   - working with current providers of out of school childcare to support them with their plans to reshape their businesses in the light of the cuts. This will include meetings for providers to look at the local childcare market and childcare business modelling and to encourage possible partnerships between providers.
   - encouraging voluntary sector providers to fundraise as much as possible and to link in to local support with business planning.
3. **Background**

3.1. The local authority has a duty under the Childcare Act to secure sufficient childcare for children aged 0 to 14 or up to 18 with disabilities, as far as is reasonably practicable, to help parents to work. Local authorities (LAs) are meant to pay particular attention to families in receipt of tax credits (low-income working) and to children with disabilities.

3.2. The council has been subsidising around 900 after school and 300 holiday childcare places to help parents to work. These are provided by 28 schools, four working in partnership with the voluntary sector, and by six voluntary sector providers.

3.3. These places have been funded as follows:
- £308,000 per year through Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding – Early Years part
- £390,000 per year through New Homes Bonus (funding the council earned through exceeding its home building targets)
- £119,000 core funding

3.4. Eighty five percent of the funding that ended in March 2017 was outside the control of the council:
- The Government’s consultation on the early years national funding formula in August 2016 clarified that LAs could not use DSG for over fives childcare
- The remaining balance of £119K was part of a package of savings from April 2017 given the overall cuts situation.

3.5. The council was nevertheless planning to provide interim funding to maintain out of school childcare at broadly the same levels between April and August 2017 to minimise disruption to parents and providers.
4. Summary of responses

4.1. Nearly 90% of parent/carer respondents were using after school childcare, while 67% were using holiday childcare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Are you a parent or carer using after school childcare in Islington?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Responses</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Are you a parent or carer using holiday childcare in Islington?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. 88% said they were using the childcare to help them to work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Do you use this childcare to help you work?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. 16 respondents said they had a child with special educational needs or disabilities, while nearly a quarter had a gross household income below £25,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Does your child or do your children using the childcare have special educational needs or disabilities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Responses</strong></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Is your gross household income below £25,000?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Quite a high number of respondents (24) identified themselves as both parents/carers using childcare and after school and holiday providers – it is not possible to verify if the level of overlap is accurate.

6. Are you an after school or holiday childcare provider in Islington?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>185 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Responses</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5. The level of awareness of adventure playground services was quite high (64%) and of Government’s support to parents with the costs of childcare was high (82%).

7. Do you know about provision at adventure playgrounds?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>162 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Responses</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Are you aware of the Government’s support for parents with the costs of childcare incl Tax-free Childcare?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>163 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Responses</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6. Just over a third of respondents agreed with the actions that the council is taking to reduce the impact of the cuts.

9. Do you agree with actions that the council is taking to reduce the impact of the cut?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>143 (out of 187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Responses</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have categorised responses to questions 10 and 11 in terms of key themes – see below. These are explored in more depth in the following section.
4.7. Responses to Question 10 – asking for comments on the council’s actions and/or suggestions for other support to parents/carers and childcare providers.

4.8. Responses to Question 11 – Do you have any other comments?
5. Analysis of responses in relation to key themes

5.1. This section goes into more detail about the responses to the questions:
- Do you agree with the actions that the council is taking to reduce the impact of the cuts?
- Any other questions?

5.2. We have analysed the comments here by themes across both questions. The consultation was asking for views about the actions the council is taking to reduce the impact of the cuts, rather than about the cuts themselves. However, a number of responses expressed concern about the cuts, and some seemed to indicate that the respondents thought the council was cutting services, rather than not being able to continue to subsidise services. The last question asking for any other comments resulted in a number of comments in opposition to service reductions and to the Government’s policy of austerity.

5.3. In analysing responses by theme of issue raised, we have included some full responses, but it is not possible to include every single response verbatim. For a full record of all individual responses please contact Jane Wright (see end of report).

5.4. Theme One – Impact on Parents’ Ability to Work

This concern was voiced more than any other – 34 respondents felt the reductions in funding would impact on the ability of themselves as parents or parents in general to work or work full-time. Seven comments referred specifically to the impact on single or lone parents, and three to the disproportionate effect on mothers.

Examples of comments:

‘As a single working parent, I rely on this support. This is likely to affect my ability to continue to work. So what money is saved by the council, may be totally outweighed by what families like mine will potentially need from the government, if this reduces or eradicates the possibility to work.’

‘The cuts will probably mean that the after school club at my school will no longer be viable to run. This means I will not be able to work in my current job. This is completely contrary to the Council's priority of getting people into work and the fairness agenda. It will also have a disproportionate effect on working mothers.’

‘Withdrawal of holiday childcare will mean that many parents will be unable to work.’

‘Changes in the prices will (again) impact on the poorest working parents; increasing the fees for after school schemes and holiday will make it difficult for working parents to make working worthwhile in a city where rents and transports are already overpriced for minimum wage workers and anyone without stable employment.’
'We need to have good childcare provision in place in order to keep children safe have fun and helping parents being able to work and have peace of mind at reasonable prices to help parents be in work and carry on working. If these prices go too high we will be unable to work as wages are low and the cost of living in London is so high and it won’t help the economy as parents will find it a struggle to pay for childcare as it might go out of their price range.'

'This will have a severe effect on working parents especially single parents, with two or more children it will prevent parents from being independent, and therefore unable to continue working. It’s very hard now, these cuts will affect us all.’

5.5. Theme Two – Use of adventure playgrounds to support parents to work

One mitigating action is ensuring that parents are aware of the after school and holiday services, usually free, that are available in Islington’s 12 adventure playgrounds. There was a link in the survey to information about the playgrounds, including addressing common concerns about how safe they are.

22 respondents raised issues about the use of adventure playgrounds. The issues raised included:

- Need for transport from schools to the adventure playgrounds, especially for younger children.
- That the playgrounds do not take children aged under 6.
- Opening hours of adventure playgrounds insufficient to meet needs of working parents (eg not opening early enough)
- Two responses suggested introducing charges for adventure play, perhaps for under 11s, if it is going to be ‘the only affordable option available to working parents’ (11s plus could still come and go and not be charged).
- Concern about how safe the adventure playgrounds are, with children being able to leave when they want and with them not being on school premises.

Examples of comments:

- ‘Unfortunately for full time working parents Adventure playgrounds are not an option as it doesn’t cover the full/extended day.’
- ‘The actions are positive but of course may not resolve the issue. I do know about adventure playgrounds but do not feel that my child would be safe and many don’t offer the holiday care required. Some offer open play and this again is not an environment I feel is safe leaving my children in.’
- ‘There is no way that adventure play is comparable to a holiday care scheme. It is effectively telling a child to look after themselves for the day, but hang around a park that may be nowhere near where they live.’
- ‘Adventure Playgrounds are for children 6 years + so what are parents of 4 and 5 year old children to do? Furthermore, how is a young child meant to arrive safely at their nearest adventure playground, when they are too young to walk alone? These provisions are not
adequate replacements for after school care on site or nearby local schools, where care workers pick up children and bring them to the care site.’

- ‘Ad hoc provisions such as the adventure playgrounds do nothing to help people to be able to work.’

5.6. **Theme Three – Suggested actions for the council to take, including need to know impact of cuts on charges.**

It was very helpful that some respondents made suggestions of actions the council could take/the council could encourage providers to take.

- Council should take leadership role in supporting smaller provisions to work together (possible mergers) and to provide support with walking buses to transport children safely
- A few parents said they wanted more information about the likely impact of the cuts on charges for after school and holiday so they can plan/understand the situation better.
- Suggested the council creates ‘networks of parents that could help each other such as enabling webpages / mum networks … so we could split childcare between families…’
- Suggestions that the council should look again at the cuts decision
  - ‘The council has not explained what they can do to cut their own cost without affecting working families.
  - Suggestion that other services could be cut first, eg libraries and refuse collections
  - The provision of free school meals – while applauding this, a respondent wrote, ‘feel that some significant saving could be made by the council if this were means tested or a voluntary contribution made … I would be very happy to pay for my children’s school lunch.’
- Query about whether Islington looked into additional or transition funding steps – better communication needed about this.
- Suggestion that the council provides examples of what lower income families do in other boroughs and what non-subsidised childcare will look like.’
- Comment that parents working full-time should have access to free childcare during the holidays, ‘…although I have a good wage I end up paying most of it on childcare during holidays leaving me struggling as I do not quality for tax credits…’
- Suggestion that Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) could have a role to play.

5.7. **Theme Four – Willingness/ability to pay more**

- One respondent suggested that providers could charge for extra hours of care or for food/drinks. ‘Parents that can afford additional services can subsidise towards those in lower income households’.
- One respondent suggested charging more to make after school childcare viable.
• One respondent was concerned about disruption if parents had to move their child to another setting after school and said, ‘If there is an option to means test, I think this would be better than closing these down.’ Two more respondents also suggested means testing.

• One respondent said that as the fees are very low anyway, they ‘can be increased without too much concern especially where both parents work. After school care especially in Islington is excellent and should be protected at the current standard and enhanced whether there is the opportunity.’

• One respondent asked, ‘Why couldn’t parents have been given a choice to pay more for afterschool care provision to prevent closure?’

• One respondent indicated they are ‘quite happy to pay a bit more for the childcare as long as it is not taken away.’

• One respondent commented, ‘We will still use the after school club even if there is no subsidy, but I know that the lack of subsidy will make it very difficult for many working parents.’

• Two respondents suggested introducing charges at adventure playgrounds.

5.8. Theme Five – Comments from settings (childcare providers)

Three comments expressed concern about the reliance on the voluntary sector and fundraising.

One school indicated that the loss of LBI funding may mean that the after school provision may need to close – the funding is needed to underwrite the cost of staffing, given that ‘families … find it very hard to say when they will need the afterschool care but do sometimes use it in an ad hoc way (for example, where a parent has a zero hours contract so does not know when they might be offered work, or in a crisis situation).’

One setting commented, ‘There are not many funding opportunities and it will be difficult to secure multi-annual grants in order to be able to budget for and offer affordable childcare provisions. As voluntary organisations, we also rely on external funding for other services we provide, which will be affected, directly and indirectly, as we will need to spend more of our resources on raising additional support for childcare services. As a provider, we will introduce a concessionary rate for families on low income for our after school care. However, this will need to be subsidised through the fees other (the majority of) parents/carers will pay.’

This setting also commented,

‘Although we fully appreciate that Islington has been supporting after school and holiday childcare provision longer than any other local government, we are concerned about the impact this is going to have on the quality of the childcare provision and on families on low income. Without financial support, we will need to be very careful with spending and staff time which define the quality of our provision. For example, high staff-child ratio, planning and evaluation time and training which are costly. It will be particularly difficult with EYFS and under 8 places and we may need to limit the number of places available even more due to costs.’
5.9. Theme Six – Opposition to the cuts/expressions of discontent

Some respondents suggested the council review the cuts decision – see Theme Three above.

13 respondents explicitly stated their opposition to the cuts, and a further three did not feel the proposed actions would mitigate the cuts. Issues raised included:

- cuts squeezing the middle classes
- particular providers being under threat
- parents not being able to find any more money to pay for childcare
- the need for lobbying the Government against funding cuts
- the need for parents to work to be good role models to their children.

5.10. Theme Seven – Children with special educational needs (SEN)

16 respondents indicated they had a child with SEN.

One made the following comment:

‘I am a full time working class lone parent with a child of special education needs. I have to use the after school facilities as I work full time. I have no family to support me as they live abroad and my son feels very safe in his surroundings in his school-Rotherfield. My son can’t cope with change if this was lost. So please think about this as it is still part of education.’

A respondent made this comment:

‘My child has special medical needs and requires a childcare provider that can administer medication at all times and that all staff are fully trained.

5.11. Theme Eight – Miscellaneous

The other comments were largely about Government policy towards childcare. There was some acknowledgement of what Islington Council has done so far to support over fives childcare.

There was one comment in relation to breakfast clubs, but these are not currently funded by the council and so are outside the remit of the consultation.
6. Response from the council

6.1. The council is very grateful to all the people who took the time to respond to the on-line survey. It appreciates that the cuts were not welcomed and it is clear there could be an impact on supply, with some smaller settings, particularly potentially in the voluntary sector, at risk. There could also be an impact on parents’ ability to pay if the charges are increased, with a greater impact on lower income families and lone parents, including some mothers. This could lead to some parents not being able to continue to work, thereby undermining the council’s Child Poverty strategy. This could then result in some families being subject to benefit capping due to not being in work. There could also be impacts on quality of provision if settings reduce their costs to try to make their budgets balance.

6.2. Continuation of funding up to March 2018

In the light of significant concerns expressed about the risk of increased charges impacting on parents being able to work, the council has managed to find further funding to subsidise after school and holiday childcare from September 2017 to March 2018.

The extra funding gives providers more time to:

- Consult and work with their parents
- Review their staffing structure and offer
- Review their charging policy and plan for gradual increases over the next nine months
- Fundraise.

This gives the council, with providers, more time to:

- Gather data about low-income working families
- Understand the impacts of other support with the costs of childcare such as the new Tax-free Childcare and childcare element of Universal Credit.
- Develop a robust but manageable system whereby providers can identify Islington working families that could not manage unsubsidised charges and are not able to access other support with the costs of childcare, and therefore would need continued subsidy to be able to start to work or continue in work, if any future subsidy is identified by the council.

6.3. Impact of loss of subsidy on charges

Without the subsidy, we have estimated that charge increases should be manageable for some working families using after school childcare, in that the average charge of subsidised provision before April 2017 was about £7.50 per night (full charge), whereas the estimated cost of delivery is about £9.50/£10. Providers have begun to look at adjusting charges over the next three to six months so that the increase is not so pronounced in one go. We are also asking providers to try to minimise increases up to March 2018 in relation to discounted places.
There is definitely more of an issue for holiday childcare. The average charge for extended day (8am to 6pm) was around £17 per day in subsidised provision in 2016/17, but the charge to recover the costs of delivering that childcare would be around double that – about £33 to £35 per day.

The extra funding up to March 2018 will mean that subsidised rates are maintained for two further half terms – in October 2017 and February 2018. However, we have asked providers to begin to look at adjusting charges over the next three to six months.

It is worth reiterating that new Government support with the costs of childcare via Tax-free Childcare has started to be implemented for the youngest children and children with SEND. It will gradually be available later in the year for children aged up to 12. It could bring the cost of after school childcare down to about £8 per night, or £6 for children with SEND. It could also bring the cost of holiday childcare down to about £27 per day for extended day, or £20 for children with SEND.

We also expect that lower income working families should be helped through tax credits.

There was a link in the survey to a Family Information Service leaflet called Paying for Childcare which sets out the various strands of support to working and studying families with the costs of childcare, including Tax-free Childcare: www.islington.gov.uk/payingforchildcare.

We are now also attaching a link to the very helpful Government Childcare Choices website for parents to look at all the options for help with the costs of childcare: https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/. This helps parents to work out which is the best option for them, given they have to choose between various options – eg a parent cannot be accessing tax credits and tax-free childcare or childcare vouchers.

We noted that a few parents expressed a willingness to pay more rather than lose the services and three suggested introducing means testing. The latter is to be explored, but we acknowledge that this has cost implications in terms of administration costs. We will also look at providers charging more for some extras, and we will work with providers to ensure greater efficiency in managing arrears.

6.4. Use of adventure playgrounds to support parents to work

Although there will now be additional funding up to March 2018, we still want to work with the Play and Youth Service to explore promotion of adventure play as part of a package offer to children and young people of working, as well as non-working, families.

Concerns about safety – there was a link in the survey to a new leaflet about adventure playgrounds which explains how this provision is safe and of good quality.

www.islington.gov.uk/playgrounds
This explains that:

- Children sign in when they arrive so that staff members know who is on the playground at all times.
- Senior workers at each playground hold a Level 3 qualification or higher.
- All staff members are police checked, receive regular safeguarding training and follow Health and Safety guideline requirements.
- There are fully trained first aiders on site whenever the adventure playground is open.
- All staff or volunteers working with food have a valid Food Hygiene Certificate.
- Some children may not be ready to come along to the adventure playground or walk home without an adult. Each child’s circumstances are discussed between parents and the staff members at the time of registration so there is an agreement and understanding about your child’s stage of development and independence.

The playgrounds are embedded in their communities, working closely with families and with community policing to address the issues that may be taking place outside the adventure playground in local neighbourhoods to keep children and young people safe.

In addition, it is worth noting that the council directly commissions all 12 adventure playgrounds and the provision is regularly contract monitored and quality assured. It is not ‘ad-hoc’ provision, but is carefully planned, monitored and developed.

The council will look at other issues raised, including opening hours to fit working parents’ needs, and whether any of this provision could be registered with Ofsted to take children aged 5 and 6, or even younger children. But these changes would have significant resource implications, as well as impacting on the council’s current contracts with the two providers (Islington Play Association and Awesome CIC).

**Charging for adventure play provision** – the Adventure Play Review in 2011/12 explored a range of options for the future of adventure playgrounds, including potential costs for children, young people and families to access them. Through a year-long process of consultation, strategic meetings and reporting to the Children and Families Board, it was agreed that adventure playgrounds should remain free at the point of access. This is also in line with the Playwork Principles, the set of values that underpin the profession of playworkers and with what the 12 adventure playgrounds have been commissioned to provide from 2016 to 2019 in their current contracts.

If any funds become available, the council will consider a small pilot of walking buses from schools to adventure playgrounds – if this happens and there is good take up, it is likely that parents would be asked to cover the cost of this service after the pilot ends.
6.5.  **Children with special educational needs**

While we did not receive many comments in relation to SEN, we note the importance of consistency of care for such children. We are offering SEN training to over fives childcare providers in summer and autumn term 2017. Parents of children with disabilities will be entitled to double the support with their childcare costs through Tax-free Childcare (up to £4,000 per year for children aged under 17).

6.6.  **Suggested actions for the council to take**

We have set out briefly above the difference between current average charges and unsubsidised charges (section 6.3.) – we shared more information about this with providers in March 2017.

In relation to the suggestion that the council could create networks of parents that could help each other (see page 7), the council view is that there are already sufficient networking websites and social media opportunities for parents to link up that the council, with its reducing resources, could not hope to better.

We have researched the situation in other boroughs – we will endeavour to find out more, including how lower income families manage there.

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