

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
4 NOVEMBER 2014

(19.55 - 20.55)

**PRESENT** Councillors Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the Chair),  
Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico,  
Councillor David Chung, Councillor Edward Foley,  
Councillor Fidelis Gadzama, Councillor Joan Henry,  
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Katy Neep,  
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Peter Connellan and Denis Popovs

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services),  
Councillor Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor  
Mark Allison (Cabinet Member for Finance)  
Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance),  
Yvette Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Paul  
Angeli (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care), Caroline Holland  
(Director of Corporate Services), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Bennett.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2014 (Agenda Item 3)

**RESOLVED:** The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

Panel agreed to re-order the agenda to the following:

Item 8 – Budget and Business Plan 2015-2019

Item 5 – Looked after children – Annual Corporate Parenting Report

Item 6 – Progress on safeguarding services

- Item 7 – Local authority role on reducing particular vulnerabilities faced by girls
- Item 9 – Performance Report
- Item 10 – Work Programme
- Item 11 – Glossary

Councillor Jeff Hanna informed the Panel that the report on the recruitment and retention of female and BME teachers would be circulated to the Panel at the end of November (reference page 4 of the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2014).

## 5 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - ANNUAL CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Maxi Martin introduced the report explaining the background to the Corporate Parenting Committee. Paul Angeli added that there has been an increase in regulatory burden on the council which has resulted in the need for the service to raise the bar on what it currently provides. The Corporate Parenting Committee oversees this work.

Councillor Linda Taylor noted the good work undertaken by the council in increasing the number of young people adopted over the past year but expressed her concerns about the increase in the number of 16/17 year olds entering care, asking what sort of help they need. Councillor Linda Taylor also commented on the new handbooks produced for staff and young people but expressed concerns that there was not enough information on getting into employment or on claiming benefits.

Paul Angeli explained that there had been a lot of work undertaken with young people not in employment, education or training. The data in the report appears as though performance is declining in this area, however, this is the result of the way data was gathered on a national level which has shifted. Paul Angeli added that the council are now expected to track 19-21 year old care leavers and demonstrate this activity to central government which means an increased role for the local authority to play in the lives of young people who were in care beyond 19 years of age. A task force has therefore been set up to look at bringing together key agencies to track young people leaving care in this extended age range. The DWP also have new duties to ensure access to education, employment and training as well as what has been done locally. Paul Angeli added that he would ensure that further revisions to the handbook included information on accessing work.

Councillor Marsie Skeet enquired as to why only 62% of visits were completed within timescales and what the corporate parenting board were doing about this. Paul Angeli explained that this was a data quality issue and required further exploration – our case records show a higher level of visiting but the performance reports are not extracting this data. This issue has been raised at the corporate parenting board.. Paul Angeli reassured the Panel that there is a lot of scrutiny in this area to tackle underperformance.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked if the onus was placed on young people to get in touch with the council about their whereabouts after leaving care and what contact the council made with care leavers. Paul Angeli explained that there are a range of circumstances and often some young people are no longer living in the borough. The council actively track all care leavers however; many young people do not wish to remain in contact with the council. A return of 21% of care leavers tracked has been returned to central government. This may not be reflective of those who are not in suitable accommodation.. However, where young people have opted out of further contact with the council, this is not reflected in the return and does not impact performance.

Councillor Katy Neep asked why the largest increase in young people entering care was in the 14 years and above age group, and if there are concerns about any earlier preventative initiatives not having the required effect as young people still end up in care. Councillor Katy Neep asked what support was provided to ensure that emotional wellbeing and mental health issues were addressed amongst young people that have been identified as having a substance misuse problem.

Paul Angeli informed the Panel that the number of 16/17 year olds in care is above the London average which skews performance but that it is right that these children should be assessed as children in care. This is due to the governments instruction that care leavers are not simply placed with Housing Associations without the proper assessment by the local authority and the looked after children team. In Merton, more than for other local authorities, there have been a number of care leavers that would do reasonably well in supported accommodation but this is not the recommended approach. The Looked After Children Team is working with the housing department to deliver our agreed protocol for managing where 16 or 17 year old care leavers are placed and there is joint commissioning of provision between CSF and the housing departments.

Paul Angeli explained that a number of cases in the 14/15 year olds were not previously resident in Merton but have been identified as requiring care and present very complex needs. Provision therefore is required to meet this demand, including ensuring services are provided to support the emotional and mental well being of young people. Yvette Stanley explained that the

lower age range of those placed in care are often placed with the extended family, with permanent foster carers or adopted. Of the 140 cases noted, one third are asylum seekers who have arrived in the country unaccompanied as teenagers. A rota is in place with other London authorities to share out support for these young people.

Paul Ballatt added that the department instil and encourage a certain set of values in staff that work with young people as the relationship between staff and young people is key to ensuring good outcomes. There is also every effort made to match social workers and children so that this relationship can be sustained long term.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked if the numbers of young people coming to the borough balanced with those leaving Merton and if not whether there was a reason for this. Paul Angeli explained that there is no increase in the number of families leaving the borough but that there is an increase in the numbers coming in. A number of these are complex cases.

Yvette Stanley added that the council also work with the families to place young people out of the borough where it is of benefit, for example, to distance them from gang activity or crime.

Peter Connellan asked if the council kept in touch with employers of care leavers and noted the emotional strain placed on family support staff and those that support care leavers. Paul Angeli explained that the council do not stay in touch with every employer but that they have established relationships to track young people with educational or training organisations. In addition, Paul Angeli recognised the significant pressure placed on staff and explained that additional support had been provided through Tavistock.

**RESOLVED:**

Panel noted the report and wished to record their thanks to Paul Angeli and his team.

Panel asked that the Corporate Parenting Board be requested to monitor that six weekly visits were being achieved to raise performance from the current 62% rate.

**6 PROGRESS ON SAFEGUARDING SERVICES (Agenda Item 6)**

Councillor Maxi Martin introduced the report.

Councillor Marsie Skeet asked about the statement regarding 400 children going missing from their homes and care each year, what duration these children were missing for and what measures were in place to tackle this. Paul Angeli explained that the 400 figure related to episodes of children going missing, not 400 separate cases. Government have recently changed guidelines and Merton has rewritten their protocol in response working with the police and the missing person's team. Paul Angeli added that a high proportion of children going missing in Merton are being cared for by other local authorities but are placed in the borough. The council look into the case of a missing child from another borough as part of this revised protocol. Jigsaw4u has also been commissioned to engage with parents and young people to reduce episodes of children going missing.

Paul Angeli informed the Panel that in addition to the statutory duties placed on councils, the department are working with the police and engage with the child and parents to attempt to reduce the number of episodes of a child going missing. Strategy meetings are also held to ensure that young people stay in placements and that the departments work is co-ordinated with the police in this area. Within this cohort, many of the girls and young women that go missing are at risk of sexual exploitation and the council are working on this. Councillor Jeff Hanna asked if any child that had gone missing had not been found. Paul Angeli confirmed that although rare this was occasionally the case and that those children who had not been found may have potentially been trafficked. The council are in on-going dialogue with the police on these cases. Merton has one such case at present.

Councillor Katy Neep asked if 500 child protection investigations of children at risk was a high figure we should have concerns about. Paul Angeli explained that this figure was slightly higher than other authorities and meant that Merton was actively assessing risk of harm. However, the conversion rates from investigation to child protection plans being set up are not particularly high. Councillor Jeff Hanna asked about the information that had been received in relation to data shared with the UK by the Canadian Police Force on potential offenders. Yvette Stanley confirmed that she had written to the Borough Commander to determine if any notifications had been received about activity in Merton. Yvette Stanley highlighted that Members of the Panel would be aware of national initiatives to tackle paedophilia and identify those accessing child pornography. There are large volumes of these cases found by Police which are now being addressed at national level.

Yvette Stanley explained that the police command is split into the work undertaken by the Borough Commander, child protection teams and other Police teams outside of the borough.. This can make it difficult to get an overview of perpetrators when cases are being overseen by a number of

police forces or commands. In addition, Child Abuse Teams have recently been restructured and whilst there is greater capacity within teams to support cases, this area remains a real challenge for the Metropolitan Police. The London Safeguarding Board has been raising this need proactively with the Commissioner.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked Yvette Stanley to contact the Borough Commander to seek clarification from the Met as to whether they had received any information from the Canadian Police regarding potential offenders which had yet to be passed on to Merton Police.

Councillor Linda Taylor proposed that the Borough Commander be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to discuss these issues. Councillor Jeff Hanna added that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meet with the Borough Commander twice a year and any questions the Panel has could be raised through this process.

Councillor Maxi Martin added that she meets with the Borough Commander regularly to ensure joined up thinking and that the Leader is fully briefed on these cases.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the report and recorded their appreciation for officer's work in this area.

## 7 LOCAL AUTHORITY ROLE ON REDUCING PARTICULAR VULNERABILITIES FACED BY GIRLS (Agenda Item 7)

Yvette Stanley introduced the report noting that there are a range of issues that fall under the category of vulnerabilities faced by girls and that responding to such issues is not managed or led solely by the Children, Schools and Families department. This work was also undertaken previously by Safer Merton and by our safeguarding board partner agencies. A recent DV Strategic Needs Assessment recommended strengthening governance arrangements around delivery of these services and a broader brief for the council is to now bring together partners to look at the issues as outlined in this report.

Councillor Marsie Skeete asked if all schools have procedures in place to report concerns when girls from certain cultures are taken on holiday to certain places by families where the child is potentially at risk. Yvette Stanley confirmed that all schools do have a procedure and report this to the council. Further to this a designated teachers group meets every six weeks to discuss issues. The council also works in line with pan London protocols and

undertake the relevant assessments to determine any risks to the child. There is however still a lot of work to do in the health economy as referrals made previously were not coming through to the council. This has provided the local authority with some challenges. Furthermore, there is a need to develop an understanding amongst families of these issues.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked what counselling services were offered to young girls and women that had experienced FGM. Paul Angeli explained that there isn't a significant provision nationally or locally in this area at present but that a number of specialist teams operate out of hospitals which provide support. The Afuka charity also offer support to young people and adults.

Councillor Katy Neep asked what provision or funding was in place to support those with mental health problems resulting from these experiences, as provision was found to be quite poor nationally, what emotional well being support the council offered to young girls and what preventative work was undertaken in schools.

Paul Ballatt explained that mental health service provision is split between three tiers ranging from universal (tiers 1 and 2) to specialist provision (tier 3). At tiers 1 and 2, many schools have commissioned targeted mental health provision to ensure there is a counselling service available within the school. Access to this service can be through self referral or through teaching staff recognising when students have problems or may benefit from counselling. At Tier 3, more specialist services are akin to the traditional CAMHS model. This includes training for non specialist staff to equip them with the skills to provide an initial level of intervention and support to students. Practitioners follow national standards and national service frameworks in this area, yet there is a degree of specialism practitioners possess which means that services provided can often be less connected to strategic need identified and more to their interests and area of expertise.

Paul Ballatt added that the council can refer cases to CAMHS for assessment or intervention. The council is also responsible for influencing NHS commissioning of CAMHS services and can use council funding to commission the relevant services.

Peter Connellan asked if this provision was only made available to the secondary sector. Paul Ballatt confirmed that services are available to both primary and secondary schools.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked what training teachers and social workers receive to ensure they are aware of the issues girls and young women face and are able to identify them. Yvette Stanley explained that support is made



available to teachers however; the PGCE they undertake does not equip them to deal with such issues. The work to be undertaken to raise awareness amongst teachers can be coordinated through the safeguarding board and through the designated teacher's networks to ensure this is on their radar.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked if specialists have face to face contact with teachers to brief them on these issues. Paul Ballatt explained that tier 3 CAMHS specialists are commissioned to train teachers so that they are able to recognise and respond to issues. Paul Ballatt added that awareness raising with schools was also likely to result in an increase in referrals.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked if a progress report could be brought to a future meeting of the Panel giving more detail on what Merton are doing in this area and on performance. Yvette Stanley confirmed that this could be included in the Panels regular Update Report.

Yvette Stanley wished to commend young people for their work on FGM which was providing peer support to young people.

Councillor Joan Henry thanked officers for their support and work in this area.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the report and thanked officers for their work.

## 8 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2015-2019 (Agenda Item 8)

Caroline Holland introduced the report which was considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 20 October 2014 and set out the updated medium term financial strategy (MTFS), reflecting revisions to the budget and identified savings in line with confirmation of the government grant funding to be received. Departments were asked to review the current MTFS and present alternative savings which were outlined in the report. Furthermore, the updated capital programme also accounted for the school expansion programme. Caroline Holland explained the changes within the schools expansion programme would impact on revenue and the budget overall. Paul Ballatt added that the Panel received a report detailing the financial information on the capital programme and expansions programme at the last Panel meeting. Paul Ballatt also outlined the substantive changes in this years bidding round which included reducing permanent primary expansions by 2 forms of entry, and secondary expansion by 6 forms of entry and providing additional funding for enhanced special school provision which were not in earlier projections.

Caroline Holland informed the Panel that there was a council wide budget gap of £32 million which needed to be addressed and future savings proposals to



achieve this would be brought to the next round of scrutiny in January 2015, along with revised service plans.

Councillor Jeff Hanna noted that the report was difficult to read in part due to the font size of the service plans. Councillor Jeff Hanna informed the Panel that he had contacted the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Councillor Peter Southgate, to raise this as a concern and to ask for the next round of budget and business plan proposals to be circulated with the agenda on A3 to make them easier for the Panel to read.

Paul Ballatt outlined that some of the savings previously agreed had been replaced as outlined and should be considered in conjunction with the equalities impact assessment.

Councillor James Holmes asked for information on the SEN Transport budget. Paul Ballatt explained that SEN transport is a replacement saving as the budget is under significant pressure. The ability to deliver this saving was questioned and this saving has therefore been removed and needs replacing. Paul Ballatt added that the Panel had received reports on this budget and the issues faced at previous meetings.

Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that a working group was established just under 3 years ago which led to minor changes in policy on the provision of SEN Transport. The department have looked at other forms of SEN transport beyond institutionalised forms which have been built into this transport policy and will ensure greater choice as well as value for money. There is now better liaison with the Environment and Regeneration department and the transport hub, with a post recently recruited which ensures liaison with parents regarding provision and choice. This has resulted in the achievement of some savings however; demographic growth has brought additional budget pressures and has impacted on the projections and savings that can be made at this stage.

Paul Ballatt added that the Children and Families Act also affects assessment and planning for pupils with SEN. As part of this Act, councils are required to offer personal budgets in some circumstances. There may be some scope for families to commission their own transport at a lower cost using personal budgets. Modelling undertaken by the department has demonstrated that significant savings could be made in the medium term with this approach. Councillor Jeff Hanna asked if the council had to wait for legislation to be enacted to take this proposal forward. Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that this was not the case and that there is a duty on the local authority to consider the service it provides and to offer personal budgets. The department are looking

at personal budgets for transport, short breaks and other preventative services.

Caroline Holland added that the council needed to reduce the present overspend within the SEN budget first and once the spend is under control then the department could look to make these savings from the introduction of personal budgets.

Councillor James Holmes asked how personal budgets could reduce cost and if it was surely not cheaper to commission services as a council. Paul Ballatt explained that whilst you would expect commissioning services for delivery by the council would be cheaper than individuals going out to do so; this was not the case regarding SEN transport.

The Panel agreed to make the recommendation that officers expedite such savings as can be achieved from the SEN budget without detriment to users. Councillor Linda Taylor asked about the proposed savings to the training provided for facilitators of parenting programmes. Paul Ballatt explained that this saving would be achieved through a reduced spend on the parenting training budget as the number of trained facilitators in place is sufficient for this programme and therefore the council do not need to train more practitioners. Also, a saving would be made from de-commissioning a service which according to current monitoring, is underperforming. Councillor Linda Taylor asked if there was any scope in existing contracts to generate more value for money or any savings. Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that the department had some years ago moved to a commissioning model that was outcome focused and compliance was monitored regularly to ensure value for money.

Councillor Katy Neep asked if the potential impact identified within the equalities impact assessment of the proposed decommissioning of one project for children with disabilities, that has had limited take up, was a cause for concern. Also if families would be supported through other services to mitigate the negative impact and ensure they are aware of other options. Paul Ballatt confirmed that there were a range of services for children with disabilities and users would be redirected when that service ended.

Councillor James Holmes asked about the proposed savings in the school standards and quality team and what progress had been made in getting schools to buy in school improvement support from the council and if third parties had been approached on a commercial basis.

Yvette Stanley explained that the council do charge schools and have been in discussion with third parties to look at where there are opportunities to generate additional income with organisations buying in these services. The

core budget for this team is c£500,000 and a service level agreement with schools in the borough is in place. Most of the income generated maintains this service and is primarily from schools buying in services. The South West London partnership of borough's also provide reciprocal services to enable the council to access the relevant expertise, although this does not provide capacity to generate significant income. Capacity is also supplied through the Teaching Schools Initiative by the DfE for schools' professional development. Yvette Stanley added that the school improvement market is particularly competitive and that Merton aim to be the main provider to schools within the borough. If the council could expand the service to make it more commercial then it would do so but this is not an option at present given the councils financial position and the level of risk that this investment may involve. Councillor James Holmes asked if there were a significant number of schools that had bought back services. Yvette Stanley confirmed this was the case and that the services bought back were wide-ranging including: school improvement; behaviour support, HR; Finance IT and research and information amongst others. Schools valued services such as data to support target setting at pupil and cohort level. Whilst the council has expertise in certain areas, very few of these services are profit making. Councillor James Holmes proposed that the council look at the model established by Richmond and their buy back service for any good practice that could be adopted. Councillor Katy Neep asked what measures had been put into place to ensure changes to accommodation for looked after children, 16 years of age and above, were not negatively impacted by the proposed saving. In addition, would the council send children out of the borough to make this saving. Paul Ballatt explained that the Access to Resources service within CSF procures all places for looked after children 16 and above. This model also improves negotiation with providers. This team are tasked with reducing spend and increasing the quality of individual placement contracts with individual providers. Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that needs assessments are undertaken on a case by case basis which impacts on the rates that are paid to providers. The service therefore can generate savings without impacting on quality. Paul Ballatt reassured the Panel that the department are committed to the best outcomes and wouldn't just adopt the cheapest model. Yvette Stanley added that, as Director for CSF, she is responsible for signing off all out of borough placements which are often the more complex cases, are generally more expensive and can involve sexual exploitation or mental health issues. Yvette Stanley explained that it is often the case that placements need to be made out of borough because they meet the young person's specific needs. The council's track record of placements close to home is good, however, people often move in to the borough to access cheaper homes or due to the benefits cap in Merton and this can result in an increase in the number of complex cases. Such demographic changes impact on the

council's ability to make cashable savings in those budgets. However, the council aims to procure smart without impacting on quality.

Yvette Stanley explained that the next round of savings would require £4.8 million of savings to be found and that given current budget [pressures it would not be possible to make savings from SEN transport and placements budgets which probably amounted to 30% of CSFs budget. At present these services are overspending. This means we are again having to look at reductions in youth services, early years, and commissioned services below the statutory threshold for intervention.

Councillor James Holmes asked about the proposed savings to the post 16 Looked After Children/Care Leavers accommodation budget and if these savings were realistic and achievable. Yvette Stanley informed the Panel that the council has new responsibilities for complex needs cases, of which there are up to 25 for children with disabilities and up to 21 for Looked after children.

There is an overspend in the service of £2.6 million a high proportion of which related to new statutory duties and demographic pressures and the council are working with the DCLG and other departments to quantify these new requirements ( new burdens) on councils. These additional responsibilities also put particular pressure on Merton which is one of the lowest funded local authority in London for children's social care services.

Councillor Maxi Martin highlighted the role of elected members and staff as corporate parents and talked about the work the department had undertaken to try and deliver savings without any detrimental impact on young people.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the report and agreed to forward their recommendations and comments to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for consideration, at their meeting on 25 November 2014, which are as follows:

**SEN Transport (CSF2012-05):** The Panel recommends officers expedite such savings as can be achieved from the SEN budget without detriment to users.

**All savings:** That Panel reluctantly agree the proposed savings and have noted those savings to be replaced.

## 9 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Jeff Hanna informed the Panel that a meeting had been arranged to review the current set of performance indicators that the Panel receives and

that there would be a report back in January to the Panel on the outcome of that meeting.

Paul Ballatt expressed his thanks to the Panel for attending the performance monitoring training session delivered on 20<sup>th</sup> October. Panel returned their thanks to Naheed Chaudhry and Paul Ballatt for delivering the session.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the report.

#### 10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

Yvette Stanley informed the Panel that Jan Martin, Head of Education, was due to retire shortly.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the work programme and wished to record their thanks to Jan Martin for her hard work to date and to wish her well in her retirement.

#### 11 GLOSSARY (Agenda Item 11)

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the glossary and thanked Paul Ballatt for producing the document.