

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
24 MARCH 2015

(19.15 - 20.40)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the Chair),
Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico,
Councillor David Chung, Councillor Edward Foley,
Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor James Holmes,
Councillor Katy Neep, Councillor Marsie Skeete and
Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's
Services); Councillor Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for
Education)

Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and
Performance, CSF) and Yvette Stanley (Director, Children,
Schools & Families Department) Heather Tomlinson (Interim
Assistant Director of Education) Julia Groom (Public Health
Consultant) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fidelis Gadzama and co-opted members: Simon Bennett, Peter Connellan and Denis Popovs, Councillor Sally Kenny attended as a substitute

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2015 (Agenda Item 3)

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

4 MATTERS ARISING (Agenda Item 4)

Councillor Linda Taylor enquired about whether promoting apprenticeship opportunities in the council's contracting activity had been discussed at the Procurement Board. Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that it was due to be raised at the last meeting. However he was unable to attend therefore it would be raised at the next meeting.

5 UPDATE ON PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (Agenda Item 7)

Julia Groom gave an update of the public health programmes within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, highlighting that the Strategy is currently being refreshed and there would be a strong focus on tackling health inequalities.

Councillor Chung said inequality is a complex subject and there has been a lot of work to try and tackle the problems but the issues remain unresolved. How can we ensure we are not addressing the same inequality issues in a year's time.

Julia Groom responded that some good work is taking place including running a healthy schools programme in the east of the Borough. This included undertaking an audit of schools in Mitcham to identify gaps and funding a range of programmes. As a result cooking clubs, exercise programmes and parenting support are being run for pupils and families. School Profiles are also being developed by the School Nursing Service to ensure that in addition to universal services, support is also being targeted to those schools with the highest needs.

Paul Ballat said Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are currently being re-commissioned with a specific focus on looked after children and young offenders as this is where the support is needed. It is crucial to consider "Bridging the Gap" activity as part of the commissioning process.

Councillor Skeete thanked officers for their report and asked who will be monitoring the public health outcomes. Julia Groom said that key outcomes are monitored by the Children's Trust and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Outcomes that are showing success include low birth rates, teenage pregnancy and children who are overweight or obese at reception age, which are all on a downward trend. Paul Ballatt noted that the providers undertaking work on these issues will be subject to robust performance management.

Following a suggestion from the Chair, the Panel agreed that monitoring public health targets should be included as a topic suggestion for 2015/16.

Councillor Holmes asked how the Council will determine if we have the right skills set if services are being taken over by other providers. Julia Groom said commissioning is undertaken jointly by the public health team and the Children Schools and Families Department and the commissioning staff, who are able to maintain oversight of specifications and quality assurance.

RESOLVED

The Panel thanked the public health team for the work that is going on and Julia Groom for attending the meeting to provide a briefing.

6 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACT 2014 (Agenda Item 5)

Heather Tomlinson gave an overview of the six main pillars in the report and stated that in implementing the Act there is one strength and three challenges.

The strength is that the Department of Education monitoring visit has highlighted that Merton is particularly strong on involving parents in developing the local offer and the new Education Health and Care Planning Framework.

The first challenge is that the new process is more demanding than before because of the integrated nature of education, health and care planning. Trying to arrange for all the agencies to get together in one room can be difficult. Furthermore all professionals have different statutory processes and methodologies. Councils across the country are finding the demanding process a problem. In Merton eighteen plans have been accepted, four have been completed with only two of these within the timescale. Again other local authorities are having similar problems. The department must transfer the current one thousand statements into the new model. Twenty four have been completed and according to the timescales we should be completing two hundred and fifty per year. All this is putting additional strain on services.

The second challenge is the need to secure real and meaningful integration with health partners. The new structure has made provision for a dedicated health team and there is also a need for a Dedicated Medical Officer. This post has still not been filled in Merton and health partners are not sufficiently round the table as yet. The third challenge is the move to personal budgets and transfer of funds to eligible parents for travel and short break provision. We need to identify unit costs.

Councillor Holmes asked for further details about feedback from professionals on page six of the agenda. Heather Tomlinson said the national pilot is reporting the same issues that are being found in Merton including limited resources and the need to clarify roles and responsibilities. We need to do more training on multi-agency working. We need to identify and share good practice. Professionals need to develop smart outcome focussed plans, we need a new mindset and to be able to think ahead. Yvette Stanley added we are asking professionals to think in all three domains, therefore we are asking teachers and health workers to make judgements about the care of a child. Historically we used to collate this information, now all professionals need to be in the room with the parent and child. This is a longitudinal

programme we are also experiencing financial retraction and maximum outcomes are required with limited support.

Councillor Hanna asked if the implementation of the Act is achievable within current resources. Yvette Stanley said London local authorities recently met with the Department of Education and it was identified that there would be some economies of scale due to the likelihood of fewer disputes with parents. Councils received a £150,000 grant of which a third will go towards employing two extra staff members so there would be no capacity for additional services. It is still early in the process but more difficult than we thought, especially if an inspection regime is created around it.

Councillor Henry said that mediation is important and cost effective. Therefore in a time of budget constraints why is the department looking at outside providers for mediation services when we could do it in-house. Paul Ballatt said given that we only have a small volume of cases we tend to spot purchase these services. It is early days and we still need to decide if we need to commission this service. Heather Tomlinson said we have to provide this independent of the local authority but we can purchase services from other councils, private or voluntary sector.

Councillor Kenny asked if all the one thousand cases to be transferred are from within Merton and if all the relevant groups will be fully integrated at the transition meeting. Heather Tomlinson said some children will be out of borough. We have to go through a streamlined process working with the child and family and translate this into an Education Health Care plan. We have prioritised year groups; this year will be year eleven school leavers, sub groups include those in residential care. It is challenging preparing a plan that prepares the young person for adulthood especially if there are no links with social care. Yvette Stanley added eleven children are out of borough and over one hundred live at a distance, there is a wide range across the spectrum of need.

RESOLVED

The Panel has concerns about the challenges associated with implementing the Act and thanked the Children Schools and Families for working to tackle them.

7 THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ROLE IN PROMOTING ACCESS TO CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES (Agenda Item 6)

Heather Tomlinson gave an overview of the report stating that there are two main challenges that the department is working to address:

Creating appropriate childcare for children with complex needs: this is a challenge faced by councils across London.

Increasing the take up of free nursery places for eligible two year olds: The current take up rate is 55% which is 9th of all London Boroughs and 6th among our statistical neighbours. This means that the council is doing comparatively well but improvements can still be made.

Councillor Kenny asked if the take up rate differs between the east and west of the borough. Yvette Stanley said the bulk of the outreach is in the east, where there are more seldom heard groups with a complexity of needs.

The Panel asked for detailed aspects of the childcare sufficiency report to be included in the topic suggestions for 2015/16.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the report and thanked officers for their work

8 UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Chirico expressed concern about the possibility of longer travel times if pupils did not receive their choice of school and had to receive a central offer. Paul Ballatt said officers were mindful of this when making central offers. Yvette Stanley added there were school places within all the localities in Merton so this should not be an issue.

Councillor Chirico congratulated the teachers, staff, councillor officers and Councillor Whelton for the good Ofsted rating at Bond Primary School. The panel endorsed this comment.

Councillor Holmes asked for further detail about work to prevent the radicalisation of young people in the borough. Yvette Stanley said the Department of Education is concerned about active targeting of young people. All secondary schools are required to have Prevent training. An information leaflet for parents will be sent out soon, as this is a sensitive issue this has been developed in conjunction with the Interfaith Forum. Yvette Stanley added that she has recently met with the Chair and Vice Chair of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education to discuss additional work that could be done in the community. Five cases have been raised through a channel programme of which only two were investigated, highlighting that this issue is not a significant problem in Merton.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the report and thanked officers for their work

9 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Hanna asked for clarification about the absence of education data. Paul Ballatt said that many of the education indicators were annual and were last reported to the Panel in February's meeting in the Standards Report item. The Department will try and identify other indicators which could be reported more regularly.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the report and thanked officers for their work

10 TOPIC SUGGESTIONS 2015/16 (Agenda Item 10)

The Chair invited panel members to suggest agenda items for the next municipal year, adding that there would also be an opportunity to make suggestions during the topic suggestion workshop in May.

Councillor Taylor suggested post 16 pathways

Councillor Holmes suggested that a head teacher or other service leader could be invited so the Panel can understand the issues and challenges from their perspective.

Yvette Stanley suggested the Panel may wish to meet officers from the Troubled Families programme.

Paul Ballatt suggested the Panel may wish to invite health partners and the police to consider how they support the Children Schools and Families agenda.

RESOLVED

That the Panel consider the following items as part of their work programme for 2015/16:

Post 16 pathways

Childcare Sufficiency Report

Public Health targets in relation to the children schools and families' agenda

Officers from the Troubled Families programme

Health Partners and the Police in relation to their work on children schools and families.

