

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11 October 2016

Wards: All

Subject: CYP task group 2016/2017

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Lead member: Councillor Dennis Pearce, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations

The members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny and Overview Panel consider:

- A. The use of the task group method to fulfil its remit during the 2016/2017 municipal year;
 - B. Whether any suitable topics have been identified through the topic selection process for scrutiny review that would best be achieved through a task group approach;
 - C. If a suitable topic has not yet been identified, consider how the Panel will ensure it will continue to consider the use of task groups at its subsequent meetings throughout the 2016/2017 municipal year;
 - D. What format any agreed task group should take and specifically whether this will use the traditional approach or utilise a workshop method as suggested at the topic selection workshop; and
 - E. If appropriate, appoint members and consider co-opting members to any agreed task group.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To ensure the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel is making full use of all the scrutiny methods it has available to conduct its scrutiny role, including task groups.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. What is a task group: overview and scrutiny has a range of methods available to it for carrying out its work. These include task groups:
 - 2.1.1 A small group of members meet outside of the scheduled meetings to gather information on the subject area, visit other local authorities/sites, and speak to service users, expert witnesses and/or officers/partners. The task group can then report back to the Panel with its findings to endorse the submission of its recommendations to Cabinet/Council.
 - 2.1.2 This is the method usually used to carry out policy reviews.

- 2.2. On-going task group activity: the Panel is currently coming towards the end of its review of routes into employment for more vulnerable cohorts. This has been delayed during the year for a range of reasons (a change in scrutiny personnel, the election for the Mayor of London and the EU Referendum, the chair of the task group being appointed to Cabinet etc).
- 2.3. It should be noted that it won't be possible for the scrutiny officer to support an additional task group until this activity is completed (a final report produced and approved by task group members and the Panel in full, prior to it being sent to Cabinet/Full Council for its comment).
- 2.4. The Children, Schools and Families Department has also flagged its inability to support a new task group until the anticipated Ofsted inspection has been completed.
- 2.5. Outcomes of the topic selection workshop: at the scrutiny topic selection workshop held in May 2016, members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed the following:
- 2.5.1 No potential task group subject was identified at the workshop and what format this activity should take was discussed. It was suggested that the Panel might support a task group during the year if a topic arises lending itself to in-depth scrutiny. Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, suggested this might be fulfilled through an in-depth workshop approach with external experts.
- 2.6. There was some initially discussion of topics that had been suggested that would lend themselves to a task group approach:
- 2.6.1 Tackling childhood obesity (in partnership with Public Health);
- 2.6.2 The recruitment and retention of teachers at a time when local schools are reporting an increasing dependence on agency staff;
- 2.6.3 Radicalisation and especially the impact the new duty on teachers to report has on their relationships with pupils; and
- 2.6.4 Safeguarding, specifically Child Sexual Exploitation and Female Genital Mutilation.
- 2.7. It was agreed at the topic selection workshop to incorporate all of these suggestions into the relevant existing reports and Panel meeting items. However, there is scope that should members not consider this sufficient that they may decide to give an item more focus through a task group approach.
- 2.8. Discussions have been held with Public Health regarding tackling childhood obesity. Although both nationally and locally there are some signs that the rise in childhood obesity is levelling off, significant concerns remain:
- Overall 4,500 primary school children in Merton are estimated to be overweight or obese.
 - This amounts to:
 - 1 in 5 children in Merton entering reception class
 - Over 1 in 3 children leaving Merton primary schools in year 6
 - There are marked geographical variations:

- At reception, over 2 in 10 children in schools in Mitcham Town and East Mitcham clusters are overweight or obese compared to 1 in 10 children in West Wimbledon
 - In year 6, over 4 in 10 children in schools in Mitcham Town and East Mitcham school clusters are overweight or obese compared to 3 in 10 children in West Wimbledon
 - There are a number of primary schools in Merton where over 50% of children in year 6 are classed as overweight or obese.
- 2.9. Further background on the strategy for tackling childhood obesity in Merton is provided in Appendix 1. This includes possible areas on which a task group might focus. Public Health has highlighted that a task and finish group and any resulting report on its recommendations and the opportunities this will bring, could feed into the refresh of the childhood obesity action plan. This could be used to ensure the action plan continues to be an effective driver for change and reduces childhood obesity.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Workshop approach: at its meeting in March 2016, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel adopted a different approach to its review of the council's corporate parenting role. This took the form of a workshop, supported by an external corporate parenting expert who supported members to conduct an in-depth review.
- 3.2. This approach was well received by officers and, as noted in the minutes of the meeting, by members. This also gained support in the 2016 member survey ("**Particularly liked the children's scrutiny Panel breaking into group work. It helped Members to focus on a subject, rather than gloss across it**"). It has therefore been suggested a workshop might provide an alternative, effective approach for conducting an in-depth review of a subject identified as suitable for a task group.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. To assist Members to identify priorities for inclusion in the Panel's work programme, the Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for possible scrutiny reviews from a number of sources:
- a. Members of the public have been approached using the following tools: articles in the local press, My Merton and Merton Together, requests for suggestions from all Councillors and co-opted Members, letters to partner organisations and to a range of local voluntary and community organisations, including those involved in the Inter-Faith Forum and members of the Lesbian Gay and Transgender Forum;
 - b. Councillors have put forward suggestions by raising issues in scrutiny meetings, via the Overview and Scrutiny Member Survey 2016, and by contacting the Scrutiny Team direct; and
 - c. Officers have been consulted via discussion at departmental management team meetings.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. If a successful task group is going to be conducted during this municipal year, then it is beneficial to have this agreed and ready to commence as

soon as the existing task group is completed. This allows for the time available to be best utilised. Alternative, a workshop approach will need to be built into the work programme.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the financial, resource and property issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific financial, resource and property implications.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Overview and scrutiny bodies operate within the provisions set out in the Local Government Act 2000, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 7.2. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the legal and statutory issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific legal and statutory implications.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engagement. Any task group review will involve work to consult local residents, community and voluntary sector groups, businesses, hard to reach groups, partner organisations etc and the views gathered will be fed into the review.
- 8.2. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. In line with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police and Justice Act 2006, all Council departments must have regard to the impact of services on crime, including anti-social behaviour and drugs. Scrutiny review reports will therefore highlight any implications arising from the reviews relating to crime and disorder as necessary.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific risk management and health and safety implications.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

11.1. Appendix 1: background information on childhood obesity and what approach a task group on this subject might take.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel draft work programme 2016/17

Appendix 1

Childhood obesity: further background and the approach a task group might take

1. Specific discussions have been held with Public Health regarding tackling childhood obesity. The draft action plan on preventing childhood obesity (2016 – 2019) has been presented to and will be adopted by the Merton Children’s Trust Board to oversee its implementation. This has been developed based on a Partnership assessment of Merton’s work to tackle childhood obesity, (conducted as part of a pan London thematic peer review against a good practice framework and the National Childhood Obesity Plan). The review highlighted a number of areas which could be strengthened which could be of interest to the Panel and a focus for a task group including:
 - 1.1. Engagement and commitment (increase engagement and commitment to tackle childhood obesity amongst partners in all sectors); and
 - 1.2. Knowledge (improve children and families’ understanding of, and feeling of control over, their own health and wellbeing).
2. Given the importance of tackling childhood obesity, the extent of the challenge, its complexity and the degree to which this is subject to geographical variations within the borough, officers in Public Health have indicated their interest in supporting a member task group as another means of bringing oversight and resource to this issue. Approaches might include reviewing the methods being employed by schools in the borough to support children to live healthier lifestyles. Alternatively, a task group might focus on an ethnic group more likely to be affected and examine strategies to ensure the action plan is successful at providing engagement and support for children and young people in this specific group (the task group looking at Type 2 Diabetes in the South Asian community is a good example of this approach).