

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11th October 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

Lead members: Cllr Katy Neep, Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel note the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last meeting in June 2016.

2 DETAILS

2.1 Merton can celebrate another excellent year for A-Level results. Although figures are not yet validated, some 86% of students in Merton maintained secondary schools achieved at least three A-Level passes, above last year's national average of 78.7% and Merton's own performance last year of 71.2%. The percentage of students passing at grades A* - C increased this year to 83.4% against a national average of 77.6%. More Merton students achieved top grades than in previous years, increasing their opportunities to access good quality higher education.

2.2 Our GCSE results have also been very pleasing, bucking national trends with Merton pupils achieving improved A*-C grades in English and maths from last year against a significant fall nationally. 81% of pupils achieved A* - C in English, 21% above the national average (60%) and 77% of pupils achieved A* -C in maths, 16% above the national average (61%). The old key performance indicator "Percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs (A* to C) including English and Maths" is no longer calculated nationally and has instead been replaced by a new accountability system at the end of Key Stage 4, namely Attainment 8 and Progress 8 - these KPIs will be published by the DfE in December/January.

2.3 Three schools have been inspected by Ofsted and ratings published since the last panel meeting. SS Peter and Paul Primary School improved its rating from 'requires improvement' to 'good'. Sacred Heart Primary School remains rated as

'requires improvement', although leadership and personal development domains were rated 'good'. Stanford Primary School also remains rated as 'requires improvement' with its early years provision considered 'good'. 92% of Merton schools, including both maintained and academies, are now rated as good or better for overall effectiveness, above both national and London benchmarks.

- 2.4 We are continuing to implement strategies to ensure the borough provides sufficient suitable school places. We are coming to the end of our major primary school expansion programme with projects completed or nearing completion at Singlegate and Dundonald schools. Having increased capacity in recent years by over 20 new forms of entry, officers will now monitor the situation going forward in respect of the provision of primary places.
- 2.5 Officers continue to work with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Harris Federation in respect of the provision of the borough's new secondary school. The council's administration has been committed to supporting the EFA to provide this new school and officers are in the final stages of assembling a site in the south Wimbledon area on which the EFA will build the school. Ongoing commercial confidentiality means that the council is not making any detailed announcement in respect of the site at this stage although we are hoping to be able to do so in the near future. A verbal update can be provided at the panel meeting if requested. Colleagues will no doubt have been made aware through unauthorised comment of the location and implications for other council services and officers are currently planning a comprehensive communications strategy addressing the issues of all key stakeholders.
- 2.6 In addition to the new school which will provide 6 additional forms of entry, officers are also implementing plans to expand Harris Merton secondary school by 2 forms of entry.
- 2.7 Merton's increasing child population also means that in addition to schemes across the primary and secondary phases, officers need to ensure the sufficiency of local SEN places. Some 100 additional special school places will be required over the next few years and officers are currently working on plans to deliver these places which I will share with colleagues in due course.
- 2.8 In its last Ofsted inspection published in February 2016, Beecholme primary school was rated as inadequate. In line with national policy, this rating made the school subject to compulsory academisation. Officers have subsequently worked closely with the DfE to identify a preferred provider. Chipstead Valley, a small Multi-Academy Trust based in Croydon with existing links to the South West London School Effectiveness partnership of which Merton is a key member, has been identified and approved by the Secretary of State to take over the school from September 2016. Officers will retain close contact with the school and the new provider until the new arrangements are fully established. The school will continue to be part of our Merton Education Partnership.

- 2.9 Colleagues may have already been aware of central government's intention to establish a new national funding formula for schools to promote what is seen as a fairer distribution of funding than has been achieved through the existing schools funding mechanism. Local authorities were consulted in spring 2016 on proposed changes to be made from 2017. In the context of a relatively positive response nationally, many authorities had anxieties about prospective turbulence in funding received by individual schools and government has recently announced a delay in implementation of the national formula to enable a longer 'lead in' period. In that context, in 2017 -2018 no local authority will see a reduction from their 2016-17 schools block and high needs block funding and the current minimum funding guarantee for schools will be retained. Officers will continue to monitor the position and government announcements on the new approach to funding schools and will advise elected members accordingly.
- 2.10 National policy continues to drive changes in the Early Years Service, with a current consultation outlining government proposals for changes in the way funding for free 2, 3 and 4 year old education places is allocated through a new national funding formula. In addition new statutory duties will apply for securing sufficient free childcare for eligible families for an additional 30 hours in September 2017. Early indications suggest that the impact of these proposed changes for Merton's early years education and child care providers is a broadly positive one, with additional funding across the whole sector including private, voluntary, independent and maintained early years settings. Once the consultation closes, and government have finalised the new statutory guidance there will be improved clarity about the overall impact
- 2.11 During the summer term a borough wide Children's Centre consultation was carried out. The feedback from this first phase will be used to inform a second phase of consultation regarding the proposed reshaping of the Children's Centre services. As part of our transformation work the Children's Centres are now providing office accommodation for staff employed by the new community health provider, Central London Community Health. This co-location is designed to facilitate greater integrated working between council and NHS staff.
- 2.12 Youth Participation has been restructured and a new post of Youth Participation and Engagement Manager has been established alongside a support worker post for young people. The Youth Parliament has continued to meet over the summer and members have visited groups in other boroughs. A new elected structure is being implemented with a new constitution which aims to create a greater mandate for the parliament with a stronger 'feedback loop' to the groups that have elected members. The parliament sits alongside other young people's universal participation fora including the children's parliament for primary schools, new young people's area forums, our young advisors and young inspectors. In addition there are targeted groups including the children in care council, youth justice group and 'Your Shout' group for young people with disabilities

- 2.13 Central government has announced increased investment in apprenticeships through the establishment of the apprenticeship levy on larger employers, including those in the public sector. This initiative applies to apprenticeships for all ages, although a more recent announcement has committed extra support from government as an incentive on employers to take on young apprentices including care leavers. This is to be welcomed.
- 2.14 We continue to prepare for the major 'Single Inspection' of services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers. Work has been undertaken over the summer period to update our self-evaluation and engage again with our partners in respect of the inspection process and potential demands on those agencies. This inspection is now significantly 'overdue' with Ofsted having been struggling to complete the national cycle of inspections in the original three year period.
- 2.15 There are a number of regional developments in social care delivery in which panel members may be interested. Merton has been engaged with London Councils and colleague local authorities in planning for the regionalisation of adoption functions. Successive governments have sought to increase the volume and pace of adoption as a preferred means of achieving permanency for vulnerable children and have considered the separate local arrangements in each local authority to be barriers to achieving these ambitions. The current government is seeking to establish regional arrangements across the country by 2020. ALDCS, in London, has submitted a proposition for the capital that regionalises some adoption functions eg recruitment and matching but which also retains strong local links. This has been agreed by DfE and London Boroughs including Merton are now engaged in establishing a more detailed model for possible implementation in 2017-18. Cabinet recently approved Merton's engagement in this ongoing work.
- 2.16 Merton is also involved in the further rollout of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) model which has been piloted and operated in other parts of London and the country. Parental substance misuse has been seen for many years as a key factor in care proceedings for children. The FDAC model involves courts adopting a 'problem-solving' approach with parents during care proceedings which aims to achieve sustained behaviour change and a reduction therefore in the number of children having to be compulsorily removed from their families. Key features of the approach include the timely availability to the court of a specialist multi-disciplinary team whose workers intervene with parents to address the substance misuse issues and regular court reviews of progress without lawyers in attendance enabling judges to engage directly with parents. The model is seen to be 'fairer' by both parents and judges and more impactful in helping more children of substance misusing parents to remain or return to their families with benefits both to the families concerned and the public purse. Merton is currently taking a lead role working with six other

boroughs to establish a new FDAC which is due to begin operation in April 2017.

- 2.17 In the context of a challenging recruitment landscape, the department has been increasingly successful in recruiting permanent social work staff. The current proportion of agency social workers, 25%, is at its lowest level for some considerable time and reflects well on our effective recruitment and retention strategy. We are also working to ensure a 'pipeline' of qualified and skillful social workers with 4 new 'Frontline' student practitioners and a further 6 students on placement in the department with a new cohort of newly qualified social workers (NQSWS) due to join the department in October.
- 2.18 At a national level, central government is currently consulting authorities and major voluntary organisations on the potential requirement for social workers who undertake statutory work with families to be formally accredited. Panel members may already be aware of the need for social workers to be registered and that, as part of their registration, they are required to undertake routine learning and development. The potential accreditation requirement would be designed to further increase the quality of social work practice and public confidence in, as well as the status of, the profession through a regular process which would include an element of 'testing'. Whilst DfE have been implementing small scale pilots it is unclear if all children's social workers would have to undergo testing or whether it would be restricted to those in frontline child protection work. Indeed, it remains unclear if the accreditation proposal will become mandatory. While there are certainly pros and cons in principle with an accreditation model, detail is currently lacking and senior officers will monitor developments following the consultation noted above.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 None for the purposes of this report.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 None for the purposes of this report.

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1 N/A

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No specific implications from this report.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No specific implications from this report..

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1 No specific implications from this report.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No specific implications from this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No specific implications from this report..

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

11.1 N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None