

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 15th October 2014

Agenda item: 8

Wards:

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

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

Lead members: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cllr Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Head of 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 update report in July 2014.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 In the primary schools admissions round for September 2014, the council received 111 additional on-time first preference applications compared to the previous year. However, additional classes provided at Singlegate and Poplar Primary Schools (permanent arrangement), bulge classes at Garfield, Joseph Hood and West Wimbledon, and the late decision by the DfE to open the Park Community ("Free") School in temporary premises for September 2014 has meant that the council has been able to provide sufficient reception year places with some surplus. Although there are some pupils still officially "unplaced" all have been offered a place and they are not yet of statutory school age.
- 2.2 The council's projections are that there will be about 60 additional children in September 2015 compared to this year, but due to the uncertainty of the exact position, as in previous years, officers will wait until applications are received in January before making any further decisions on extra classes. It has been confirmed that Dundonald Primary School will provide 60 places in September 2015, a rise of 30 compared to last year.
- 2.3 With regard to Dundonald Primary School, on 12 September 2014 all legal challenges against the council were exhausted so the council appointed the contractor for the phase 1 works immediately and site set up for the construction works commenced on 22 September. The phase 1 works relate to the external works in the recreation ground, before the building can be constructed.
- 2.4 Good progress continues to be made on the council's other major primary school expansion schemes. The only project scheduled for completion for September was Cranmer Primary School, which completed on time to be fully

open for the children at the start of term. Work continues as planned at Singlegate, Poplar, Merton Abbey, Pelham, St. Mary's and Hillcross Schools.

- 2.5 Provisional GCSE and A level results for 2014 have been pleasing. Provisional GCSE results saw sixty-six per cent of Merton students achieve 5+ A* - C grades, including English and maths, up four per cent on 2013 and 14% over the last four years. This year also saw 95% of students gain five A* - G grades. In September 2013 the Secretary of State for Education announced that only a pupil's first entry in a particular subject will count towards a school's performance tables and not the student's best results. This rule took effect from this summer and applies to English, maths, science, humanities, and languages results this year and then all subjects in 2015. This has resulted in a significant variation of results across the country and may result in some adjustment from Merton's provisional results when official results are published. Official statistical releases and comparisons will be available at the end of year and reported to CYP scrutiny panel in the annual School Standards report.
- 2.6 Provisional A-Level results saw 72.4% of Merton students achieving A*-C grades against 76.2% in 2013. Results showed 98% of pupils achieving A* to E, up 1% on 2013. Official validated results will also be reported in the annual School Standards report.
- 2.7 Members of the panel will be aware of central government's initiative to provide universal free school meals to KS1 pupils. The council has utilised the £600k DfE grant across community and VA schools to improve about one-third of the kitchens which were identified as priorities to enable the additional meals to be prepared. With one or two exceptions all the works were completed during the summer holidays. One hall extension scheme, at The Sherwood school, is required to provide sufficient dining capacity for the additional meals served. This will be undertaken later this academic year. All primary schools (and special schools with KS1) are now offering the universal free school meals. The uptake has increased rapidly over the first four weeks of term and over half the schools have already met the 85% take up target, with most of the other schools also moving close to it. Officers will be meeting the school meals catering contractor shortly to identify issues where schools are not meeting the target with a view to agreeing an action plan.
- 2.8 The project to increase those pupils registered for free school meals on the basis of parental income and eligible, as a result, for Pupil Premium funding has continued since the last panel report. Schools have engaged well with the project and, to date, 206 pupils have been identified as eligible since specific promotional activities began in July 2014. Thus far, Merton schools will benefit from additional Pupil Premium funding of over £255,000 and promotional work will continue over the autumn term prior to the January 2015 school census used by the DfE to calculate the council's next Designated Schools Grant.
- 2.9 Five further Ofsted school inspection reports have been published since the last panel meeting. Ofsted rated Sacred Heart, Stanford, St Peter and St Paul, Malmesbury and Liberty schools as all requiring improvement. Follow up HMI monitoring visits to three of these schools have already been held, however, with inspectors noting good progress by the schools in addressing deficits and

strong and effective support being provided by the local authority to the schools concerned.

- 2.10 Ofsted's inspection of Acacia Children's Centre took place in July with the centre rated as outstanding against all judgement areas. Inspectors noted the effectiveness of the centre in targeting and engaging families most in need of support; the excellent progress made by children attending the centre; outstanding leadership at all levels and the very able support provided by the local authority.
- 2.11 Brightwell Children's Home was also inspected in July achieving an overall rating of good. Inspectors found outcomes for children and young people to be good; the quality of care to be outstanding; the home good at keeping children and young people safe and good leadership and management.
- 2.12 Merton is putting arrangements in place to implement central government's 'Staying Put' policy to enable looked after young people to remain in foster placements up to their 21st birthdays should they wish to do so. For some young people, this policy will mean a greater level of support will be able to be provided than historically and their transition to independence informed by their own wishes rather than the needs of the service. Professionally, this is to be welcomed wholeheartedly. However, while the council has received a small annual grant to fulfil the new duties, there will be inevitable additional pressures on looked after children placement budgets as a result and a need to increase the recruitment of foster carers at further cost.
- 2.13 Following the recent Jay Report into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, and at the prompting of both the Independent Chair of Merton's LSCB and the council's Chief Executive, agencies in Merton are reviewing the effectiveness of local arrangements to identify children at risk and to intervene robustly with both victims and perpetrators of child sexual abuse. At a national level, Ofsted has recently begun a bespoke programme of sample thematic inspections on this issue with two London boroughs so far included. The inspectorate has announced that future inspections of local children in need, looked after and safeguarding services will all include specific enquiry into the arrangements for responding to child sexual abuse.
- 2.14 Merton's Transforming Families programme continues to perform strongly with, to date, 51% of families worked with having been 'turned around' against set criteria compared to 45% nationally and 42% in London. In total 16 local authorities including Merton are performing above the national average and have been designated 'early starters' for the next phase of the national programme which involves expanding the range of problems/issues which render families eligible to enter the programme and making more flexible the success criteria used by local authorities to claim 'payment by results'.

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.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. No specific implications.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. No specific implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. No specific implications.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No specific implications.

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

- N/A

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None