

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL 15 OCTOBER 2014

7.15PM – 9:00PM

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors Linda Taylor, Dennis Pearce (substitute for Fidelis Gadzama), James Holmes, Joan Henry, Charlie Chirico, Sally Kenny (substitute for Katy Neep), Marsie Skeete, David Chung, Edward Foley

Co-opted members –Peter Connellan, Colin Powell, Denis Popovs, Simon Bennett

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

Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Yvette Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Tom Procter (Service Manager, contracts and school organisation), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neep and Gadzama.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 JULY 2014

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting subject to including a reference to Councillor Dennis Pearce being appointed the budget lead for the Panel.

4 MATTERS ARISING

None.

5 SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES STRATEGY – UPDATE

Councillor Martin Whelton introduced the report and explained that Chapel Street and The Harris Federation had put forward Free School applications. ('Pre-opening' DfE approval has already been given to Chapel Street but no decision has yet been made on the Harris application). Cllr Martin Whelton expressed his reservations about the Chapel Street application stating that he supported Harris on the basis of their proven track record in the borough and elsewhere and existing strong relationships with Merton. The Strategy was focused on filling surplus places in the first instance, and expanding existing schools as well as having new provision. The location of demand for secondary schools shows the need to be primarily in the west of the borough. The panel is aware of the limited site options available to the council. No new proposals for church schools were being brought forward at this time; however, the council recognises the popularity and success of these schools and will keep the position under review as regular pupil projections are undertaken.

Councillor Martin Whelton also stated that value for money was of paramount concern in

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considering ways of meeting the increasing demand for secondary school places over the coming years. The report also shows the need for expanding places in special schools.

Councillor Martin Whelton referenced the capital programme and the outline costs and stated that there were no additional proposals for further permanent primary school expansion at present.

Councillor James Holmes asked about the Cabinet Member's preference from the Free School applications made. Councillor Martin Whelton stated that the track record of the providers needed to be considered. Councillor James Holmes stated that it might be difficult to make a judgement about track record given that Chapel Street is still a relatively new Free School provider. Councillor Martin Whelton responded that there is also a concern regarding the model of secondary provision proposed in the Chapel Street application – a school operating over three sites as this model is unproven.

Councillor Linda Taylor stated that she supported the extension of provision in the west of the borough. If residential developments are going ahead on Plough Lane and Gap Road then we need to factor in provision of school places there and also take account of other proposals coming through. The correct infrastructure needs to be in place.

Paul Ballatt added that the more Free Schools and academies the borough has, the harder it makes pupil planning for the Local Authority as those schools are their own admissions authorities. There are two current secondary Free School applications and, if approved, they would significantly impact on the balance of provision in the borough and, therefore, on choice for pupils and parents.

Colin Powell stated that there should be consideration of further church school provision as these schools are a positive choice. The Church of England Diocese is disappointed to not have been more involved in development of the strategy despite its close working relationship with the council. He added that the Diocese would still like to work with LBM to support extension of provision.

In respect of the Chapel Street application, Colin Powell expressed the opinion that a school split over three sites would be too complex to manage. Colin Powell added that parental choice should also be an influencing factor when thinking about expanding provision. Councillor Martin Whelton explained that he was due to meet with the Diocese shortly. Councillor Dennis Pearce stated that he felt there was a duty placed on Harris first and foremost to find the site and quality premises before making an application.

Councillor Sally Kenny asked what priority there was for building/expansion in the East of borough and why only 36% of the last 30 places at faith schools were given to children from the borough. Councillor Martin Whelton informed the Panel that this was partly due to borough boundaries with Wandsworth. Tom Procter added that although catholic schools do not only have practising catholic students their admissions policies give priority to practising Catholics, in tightly defined terms.

Councillor Marsie Skeete asked about site availability for the proposed Free Schools (Chapel St Trust and Harris Federation). Councillor Martin Whelton explained that Chapel Street could decide to be based in another borough. Councillor David Chung expressed

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his concerns about agreeing Free School applications without having identified available sites first.

Councillor James Holmes stated that we should be proactively supporting both the Chapel Street and Harris applications to ensure that we can meet demand. He added that if there are reservations regarding Chapel Street then the council should be engaging with them to ensure they provide the standard of school that we would want.

Yvette Stanley explained that the decision on Free School applications was outside the hands of the council. The DfE makes these decisions supported by new schools commissioners.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked if there was a way for the council to actively support the Harris bid. Yvette Stanley explained that the council had shared information with the Secretary of State and the schools commissioner for the region but that there was no formal influence the council could exert.

Colin Powell stated that there needed to be transparency in terms of residents knowing what was happening and also the admissions policies of these schools. Councillor Jeff Hanna asked what communication was planned or being undertaken with parents. Paul Ballatt explained that, as part of the primary school expansion strategy, the council undertook a major consultation programme involving a number of public meetings, supported by written materials. The intention is to undertake similar communication and engagement with the public in respect of additional secondary provision but the timing of these remains uncertain.

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked if sites were not identified, how far existing provision could reasonably be expanded. Paul Ballatt stated that the council recognised that some schools do not wish to expand beyond 8-10 FE. This position has been reflected in planning the strategy.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and wished to record their thanks to Tom Procter and his team for their work.

6 MARKETING MERTON'S SCHOOLS

Jan Martin introduced the report and informed the Panel that a decision had been taken in 2007 to market Merton's schools and that the marketing budget was fully funded by schools, with the agreement of the schools forum.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked about the core budget and if there were additional funds put forward by the council. Jan Martin explained that all funding comes from schools, and that the council does not provide additional funding. The marketing budget is £50,000 and, in addition, individual schools fund their own marketing.

Councillor Joan Henry asked about the marketing strategy for sixth forms. Jan Martin clarified that exact plans for sixth form had not been drawn up as yet. Each school will identify a particular aspect of marketing that they will then lead on behalf of all schools in the borough. Councillor Marsie Skeete stated that My Merton might be used for marketing schools. Jan Martin explained that the marketing company used by schools engages with

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the corporate communications team and those schools would like more representation in My Merton and other corporate publications.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and asked that consideration be given to encouraging the use of My Merton to market Merton's schools.

7 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN – SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING TASK GROUP

Councillor James Holmes thanked officers for the plan and stated that some of the work in the action plan appeared to have been underway whilst the task group review was on-going. It would be useful for future reviews to make clear what is already planned and underway so that the task group is not making recommendations that duplicate existing work streams.

Councillor James Holmes asked what was provided through governors' training. Jan Martin explained that governor training is available through the service level agreement (SLA) and that the council also offer bespoke training on request by governing bodies. Most governors would not want to attend this training until they were due to recruit a head.

Yvette Stanley added that senior officers attend the interview panels for head teachers' appointments and can use this as a training opportunity.

Councillor Sally Kenny asked how opportunities for progression were being communicated to existing teachers. Jan Martin explained that there were recommendations resulting from the review which would look to widen the publicity of opportunities for career progression to existing teachers and also to encourage the progression of those from a BME background. Data was being collected on BME recruitment, retention and progression and a report compiled that could be shared with the Panel in due course.

Peter Connellan asked what the role of governors was in recruitment. Jan Martin explained that governors have responsibility for ensuring that the correct recruitment procedures are followed.

Councillor James Holmes noted that the scope for the review should have been more focused and that this is a lesson to be learned for future reviews.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked for an update on progress with implementation of the action plan at the Panels February meeting.

Colin Powell stated that the Future Leaders programme should be localised as local knowledge was important in identifying the right people. This is also being looked at as part of the work of SWELSET.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the action plan and requested that:

- A copy of the report on female and BME recruitment and retention be circulated to the Panel (with a copy being provided to Councillor Akyigyina);
- A progress update be presented at the Panels February 2015 meeting

8 CSF UPDATE REPORT

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Councillor Marsie Skeete asked about the schools requiring improvement and what process is followed to ensure this (paragraph 2.8). Jan Martin explained that schools are assessed on an individual basis. Within 6 weeks of the inspection result, the school receives a visit from the HMI and then action to be taken is agreed and monitored. All schools have had subsequent HMI visits and have been judged as taking effective action. A further Ofsted inspection will then judge the school as good or still requiring improvement. Standards that schools have to meet for OFSTED keep going up every year.

Councillor Henry wished to record her congratulations to Dundonald Primary School.

Councillor Sally Kenny asked about schools requiring improvement, if the schools or council expected these to be the judgements prior to the inspection visits, and if any support is offered to schools who are expecting to receive this inspection result or any monitoring of their progress.

Jan Martin explained that there is a robust risk assessment process and for at risk schools support is offered. The HMI comment on the support provided as part of this process and has been positive about the role of the Local Authority.

Yvette Stanley added that there was an increasing trend in schools receiving 'requiring improvement' results. This is mirrored across London. There will be a refresh of the OFSTED Framework and standards are likely to be raised further. Councillor Charlie Chirico asked if new teachers not performing as well would impact and what support was being provided. Jan Martin explained that the quality of teaching was an absolute trigger and it was particularly challenging for schools inspected early in the year when they have a lot of new teachers, including newly qualified teachers. The retention of good teachers is central to ensuring schools do well and this is being looked at with the Merton Education Partnership. If any teachers were failing they would be supported in improving or taken through the necessary HR processes.

Councillor Linda Taylor wished to note her congratulations on the success of the Transforming Families Programme.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked about safeguarding children, particularly trafficking. Yvette Stanley confirmed that a report would be brought to the next panel meeting on this. Councillor Maxi Martin added that meetings had taken place and the council were considering national data and interventions. There are a small number in Merton the council are working with.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Councillor James Holmes asked that the department highlight areas of underperformance for further scrutiny by the Panel.

Paul Ballatt stated that the basket of indicators could be revised if the Panel wished but that all performance against the agreed indicators was shown, not just underperformance, as the department needed to be able to demonstrate that issues and improvements have been scrutinised.

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Councillor Dennis Pearce congratulated the department on the improvements made.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked about young offenders and if there was anything that could be done to support the Youth Offending Team. Yvette Stanley explained that the team had their lowest caseload to date and that the Youth Crime Executive Board Monitor the service. This reduced cohort means that the team are supporting a small number that are likely to offend again.

RESOLVED: That consideration is given to revision of the current set of performance indicators as routinely reviewed by the Panel following the performance monitoring training session being delivered on 20 October 2014.