

## **Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

### **Subject: LA Role in Promoting Access to Childcare and Early Education**

Lead officer: Allison Jones Service Manager Early Years

Lead member: Councillor Maxi Martin

Forward Plan reference number:

Contact officer: Allison Jones Service Manager Early Years

**Reason for Urgency:** The Chair has agreed the late circulation of this report.

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#### **Recommendations:**

- A. For Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel to note the items in the report
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#### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the role of the Local Authority, and the progress made by Merton Early Years Service, in relation to the specific delivery of the Childcare Act 2006 statutory duties: promoting access to childcare and early education for families.
- 1.2 The Local Authority has a range of statutory duties underpinned by statutory guidance, which provides the framework for the promotion and access to childcare and early education for families. This is a key strand of work within the early years service. The key duties are:
- provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on provision of childcare in their area
  - to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (up to 18 for disabled children)
  - to secure early years provision free of charge for every child in their area until the child reaches compulsory school age (the beginning for the term following their fifth birthday) for 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds
  - to secure information, advice and training for specific early years providers on the following matters:
    - ✓ meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage;
    - ✓ meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities, vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
    - ✓ effective safeguarding and child protection.

## 2 DETAILS

### **Provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on provision of childcare in their area**

- 2.1 Merton's Family Services Directory (FSD) website ([www.merton.gov.uk/fsd](http://www.merton.gov.uk/fsd)) provides searchable detailed profiles of Merton's Ofsted registered childcare and early education providers. This is supplemented by information about types of provision, questions to ask providers and help with childcare costs.
- 2.2 The website attracts around 10,000 unique visitors (different individual users) each month and the most popular searches are for childcare.
- 2.3 This information is kept up to date with daily updates from Ofsted and providers are able to self-update their entries, which are checked for veracity before being published. Annual surveys help to supplement this updating of information.
- 2.4 For parents of children eligible for free/funded places for 3 and 4-year-olds, an annual Nursery Admissions Brochure is produced explaining the benefits of early education, how to apply for a school nursery class place and including additional information about local Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers. This is distributed through community primary schools and children's centres and is also available online.
- 2.5 For families seeking free/funded early education places in the PVI sector, the Merton Directory of Providers is published on our website. This is a register of all providers delivering the funded entitlement including their offer of delivery ie sessional offer, full day care, flexible
- 2.6 Information about the benefits of free early education for 2-year-olds and how to apply for places is currently distributed via our Childcare Brokerage Service, children's centres and partners, such as the Health Visiting Service. Information in languages other than English is also available and is additionally distributed via local community organisations which support families where English is not the first language. All this information is provided as leaflets and online.
- 2.7 Information, advice and guidance is available via email and telephone. Requests for information via these channels have diminished significantly in the past 3 to 4 years in line with the increasing usage of the FSD. Telephone and email enquiries are now usually of a more complex nature, such as when a parent has additional requirements around finding childcare. Most of these enquiries relate to free/funded early education places and the various subsidies that parents can access if they are using registered childcare.
- 2.8 Families with children with SEN or disabilities are provided with additional information about how childcare providers can support their child's additional needs via the Local Offer, which is published at [www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer](http://www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer).
- 2.9 The borough's children's centre staff are able to provide assistance to families in their search for childcare in their area and parents are encouraged to visit their local centre if they require any support. Families already participating in children's centre services are offered information and advice, including about childcare, during sessions they attend.

- 2.10 The Service holds the Family First Quality Assurance for Family Information Services and each Children's Centre locality is working towards the Children's Centre Family First Award
- 2.11 This year there has been heightened activity regarding the promotion and access to free/funded provision for children eligible for 2 year funding. This has included borough wide campaigns such as publicity on buses, on trams and local bus stops. In addition there has been extensive locality based outreach and targeted dissemination of information to eligible families. Appendix 1

**To secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (up to 18 for disabled children)**

- 2.12 To secure sufficient childcare places, local authorities **should**:  
Take into account what is 'reasonably practicable' when assessing what sufficient childcare means in their area and consider :
- the state of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists;
  - the state of the labour market;
  - the quality and capacity of childcare providers and childminders registered with a childminder agency, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise;
  - encourage schools in their area to offer out-of-hours childcare from 8.00am and 6.00pm;
  - encourage existing providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market.

**Report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents.**

- 2.13 An assessment of the childcare market is carried out which provides an overview of the supply of provision across different types of childcare across the borough. Appendix 2a and 2b showing the distribution of provision across Merton by (registered provision only). The last Childcare Sufficiency Assessment can be found at [http://www.merton.gov.uk/childcare\\_sufficiency\\_report.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/childcare_sufficiency_report.pdf)
- 2.14 For parents who are working, studying or training Merton has a good supply of Ofsted registered childcare. Ofsted registration is important not only as a quality indicator but also as it only this type of provision that parents can use if they want to claim various childcare subsidies including childcare tax credit, care to learn, salary sacrifice and nursery education funded provision.
- 2.15 The supply of childcare is fairly static on a year by year basis, with variations in accordance to type (reduction in number of child minders, increase in day nurseries and preschools). The highest number of places is concentrated within the West of

the borough and this area has seen growth in the number of places available for children aged 0-5.

- 2.16 There is a good supply of breakfast, wrap around, out of school and holiday provision for children of primary school age. From a total of 43 Primary schools, 42 of them provide some form of out of school childcare. The types of provision each school offers is published within the Primary School Admissions Brochure, promoting access and choice at the point of Primary School Application
- 2.17 There is a more mixed picture in terms of provision for children with Special Needs and disabilities, particularly for children with complex needs. There are a range of short breaks and recreational activities available, but securing provision for working parents across the wider childcare sector for children with additional needs is patchier than other types of provision.
- 2.18 The supply of places for older children (secondary age) is predominately delivered via after school clubs, leisure and youth providers, and is often not registered with Ofsted
- 2.19 Assessing sufficiency requires an overview of demand, and this can be a challenge in terms of understanding the borough wide demand for childcare. A range of “intelligence” is used which includes: snapshot of waiting lists, snapshot of vacancies, monitoring parental enquiries, liaison with school admissions to monitor take up of nursery class places and monitoring “hits” on the website. This indicates that there can be some geographical gaps in provision for babies, affordability, children with SEN and disabilities and children in first term of secondary school. However, the market often regulates itself and the LA will become a broker or a facilitator in response to specific issues ie new statutory duty for 2 year olds (1000 places) or working in partnership to secure sufficiency where there is planned population growth ie new housing or school expansion for example:

**To secure early years provision free of charge for every child in their area until the child reaches compulsory school age (the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday) for 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds**

- 2.20 All maintained primary schools in Merton offer funded early education for 3 and 4 year olds, securing a high number of sessional early years places free of charge for children. Approximately 80% of all children take up their place in a school, with the remaining 20% taking up a funded place across the PVI sector, usually forming part of a full day care offer or within the independent school sector
- 2.21 Take up of the universal funded entitlement is high with 99 % of all children taking up a place. This is higher than the national average of 96% and London average of 92% (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-benchmarking-tool>)
- 2.22 The market model in Merton (high number of sessional places supplied by the maintained sector) has provided some challenges for the roll out of 2 year funded places. As such Merton has relatively few sessional providers delivering funded education. Plans to develop and stimulate the market have been on-going and to date there are approximately 650 available places across the market, with approximately 1000 eligible children. In January 2015, 510 children took up a funded 2 year old place, which is approximately 55% of the eligible cohort. Further

work will take place this year continuing to stimulate the market and raise the profile of the offer, promoting access to childcare and early education for families

- 2.23 Activity to securing sufficiency of places for 2 year olds is currently concentrated in areas in the east of the borough. However, there are eligible children across all areas of the borough (see appendix 3). The distribution for eligibility is broader than just the Free School Meals and Looked After Children eligibility as the 2 year old offer includes additional eligibility criteria which includes low income working families and children with SEN/Disability as defined by having an Education Health and Care Plan or claiming Disability Living Allowance.

### **To secure information, advice and training for specific early years providers**

- 2.24 The Early Years' Service works in partnership with the range of PVI providers to secure sufficient provision that is of good (and above) quality. As such providers can be supported from the point of registration through to inspection with Ofsted. Providers can choose to receive support from the service and there are associated charges for accessing some parts of the Continuous Improvement Offer of Support. The LA is expected to secure provision for 3 and 4 year olds that is Requires Improvement and above, for 2 year olds it is expected that the LA will secure provision that is good and above.
- 2.25 Providers must evidence that they can meet the statutory requirements of delivery that includes the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage, safeguarding and supporting children with SEN/Disabilities. The service currently offers a range of group training, on site training, bespoke training, face to face advice and guidance specifically in relation to these particular aspects.
- 2.26 Information, advice and guidance is secured through the following:
- Signposting, web information and email correspondence
  - Continuous Improvement Offer of Support
  - Telephone advice and visits to providers
  - Provision of training and on site improvement support
- 2.27 Merton has a long standing relationship with its local childcare providers, and take up of the service offer is high with 328 registered providers signed up to the Continuous Improvement Offer of Support, 257 settings taking up a training event (1800 practitioners from these settings attended a training event )and almost 400 visits to early years settings. 568 staff from the PVI sector attended a safeguarding training event and 167 children were supported in PVI settings due to having additional needs.

## **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1. There are no alternate options in relation to the Council's responsibilities for the delivery of its statutory duties. However, how Merton delivers its statutory duties is at local discretion and a range of alternative options will be considered as the service transforms and reshapes in order to meet the on-going financial pressures and efficiencies.

#### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1. There has been no specific consultation carried out as part of this report. On a yearly basis, information is collected from the early years providers which provides a detailed overview of the particular characterises of this part of the market. This is published by the Government and is used as an Early Years Benchmarking Tool. There is planned consultation in accordance with the transformation and efficiencies programme.

#### **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The next Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is due for publication in May 2015. The statutory duty to provide places for all eligible children aged 2 is from September 2014. The transformation of the service will take place from now until 2018-2019.

#### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Funding for meeting the statutory duties is via the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (place funding, infrastructure support/securing sufficiency, support for children with additional needs and supporting quality) and Council funding for the Early Years Service including Family Information Service/FSD, and improving quality (training).
- 6.2. The on-going transformation and efficiencies across the service in the next 3 years, will require a review of the current offer/services with a view to reducing the offer, raising income and maximising use of self serve and channel shift so that families and providers can self serve where appropriate. There will be a minimal offer in lien with the statutory duties only.

#### **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The Council has a range of duties that must be delivered in accordance with the statutory duties.

#### **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. Take up and access to high quality childcare and early education is a key determinant of children's outcomes and research shows a lasting impact on children's progress and long term economic outcomes through the attendance of high quality early years services.

#### **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. Take up and access to high quality childcare and early education is a key determinant of children's outcomes and research shows a lasting impact on children's progress and long term economic outcomes through the attendance of high quality early years services.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. None specific to this report, however the LA plays a key role in supporting settings to meet their statutory duties and improve their practice . This includes managing risk (safeguarding) and ensure that the statutory childcare welfare requirements are adhered to (health and safety).

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

- 11.1 Appendix 2a and 2b shows the distribution of provision across Merton by registered provision only.
- 11.2 Appendix 3 shows eligible children across all areas of the borough.

## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1 EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE STATUTORY GUIDANCE 2014

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