

# Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

## Subject: Merton's Children's Trust – Progress on Local Implementation

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Forward Plan reference number: n/a

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### Recommendations:

- A. Panel notes local Children's Trust arrangements in Merton, the progress made in meeting the aims and objectives set by the previous government, and the direction of travel for ongoing partnership in the delivery of children's services in the borough.
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## 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides background information on a core element of the previous government's approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. It describes progress made locally on implementing Children's Trust arrangements in the borough and goes on to consider the future of local partnership arrangements for children's services in Merton.

## 2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Local Children's Trust arrangements were a central element in the previous government's overall strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.2. As a public policy response to failings of agencies to work in partnership to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children (cf Laming Report) and to meet government's clearly defined ambitions (through the Every Child Matters agenda) for children and young people, statutory guidance and regulation on the establishment of Children's Trusts was issued designed to strengthen partnerships, integrated service delivery and accountability across agencies at a local level.
- 2.3. Specifically, all local areas were expected to establish robust governance of children's services via the forming and operation of a Children's Trust Board. Duties to co-operate in the delivery of children's services were imposed on a wide range of agencies and it was, further, required that a regular Children and Young People Plan would be produced which would identify the actions to be taken to improve outcomes for children and young people at a local level.

- 2.4. These arrangements were subject to rigorous inspection and performance assessment via a comprehensive range of regulatory mechanisms including the Joint Area Reviews and Annual Performance Assessment.
- 2.5. Statutory guidance issued by the then Department for Education and Skills identified a number of key characteristics of effective Children's Trust arrangements:
- Inter-Agency Governance
  - Integrated Strategy
  - Integrated Processes
  - Integrated Front-Line Delivery

In evaluating progress of Merton's implementation of Children's Trust arrangements it is sensible, therefore, to make use of these characteristics.

#### Inter-Agency Governance

Merton's Children's Trust Board is well established, with clear membership and terms of reference. Current representation at a senior level includes the local authority, health sector, police, Connexions, local third sector and schools. The Board routinely sets strategic priorities for children's services in the borough and receives regular performance reports on service delivery. A number of 'sub – partnerships' feeding into and from the Board are also well established – eg Children with Disabilities; CAMHS; youth.

The Children's Trust Board also acts as the 'Thematic Group' of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Children and Young People.

Although strategic engagement of most relevant children's services is in place and attendance at Board meetings is relatively good, further work is needed to better engage other agencies/services with the potential to add value including housing and regeneration. Although Merton College was very committed to Children's Trust arrangements its successor, South Thames College, has been less engaged.

Although it is widely held across agencies that partnership at a strategic level is essential to drive forward the integrated service agenda upon which improved outcomes for children and young people clearly depends, a major challenge for the future will be the sustaining of the current levels of engagement in the face of public spending cuts and refocusing of public services. The present government has, for example, already signalled its intention to reduce expectation on schools to engage with local Children's Trust arrangements. As regional and sub-regional agendas are progressed for other public services - eg LAs; NHS Trusts and Police – the retention of a sharp local focus on strategic planning may also be threatened.

#### Integrated Strategy

Children's services in Merton have been producing and implementing Children and Young People Plans (CYPP) since 2006. Participation across agencies in the planning process and multi-agency ownership of the plan has been good.

A new CYPP is to be produced from April 2011 – the decision taken despite the new government's signal that it intends to withdraw the requirement. Merton's Children's Trust Board will set priorities at its meeting in January 2011 and an inclusive process of specific action planning will then be undertaken.

While it is generally held that the CYPP has been a useful tool to identify priorities and set expectations, it is recognised that performance monitoring of all elements of the plan has been less than comprehensive. Consequently our intention is that the new plan will be more sharply targeted and more specifically measurable.

In addition to the CYPP, a number of integrated strategies exist involving a broad range of partner agencies. These include the joint commissioning strategy for early intervention and prevention services, the CAMHs commissioning strategy, the Parenting Strategy and our children's centres and extended services strategies.

### Integrated Processes

This characteristic relates to procedures which direct or lead workers in a broad range of services and settings to work together in an integrated manner. Merton has well established and robust policies and procedures in place relating to the integrated delivery of child protection/safeguarding services. Additionally, some years ago partner agencies worked together to establish a local 'Child Wellbeing Model' which, in practice, supports the early identification of children with additional needs and the timely delivery of preventive services through use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Joint funding arrangements are also in place across the LA and NHS in respect of care packages and placements for children with complex social care, education and health needs. Merton also has a well established multi-agency training approach including joint induction, safeguarding and common core skills training.

Particular challenges for the future include further implementation of a 'Lead Professional' model across agencies and further work on achieving a common understanding across practitioners in different agencies of thresholds.

### Integrated Front-line Delivery

In addition to the joint work noted above in relation to child protection and common assessment of children with additional needs, there are many further examples of effective integrated front-line delivery of children's services in the borough. For example, our services for children looked after are delivered jointly by social care, education and health professionals. Our Youth Offending Service includes youth justice workers, the police, Connexions personal advisors and health specialists. A Health Visitor is attached to our social care access and assessment team. Health practitioners operate routinely from Merton's children's centres. More recently, an integrated service for children with disabilities has been established with local authority and health service staff co-located.

Professional motivation as well as drivers for financial economy and efficiency are likely to lead to further integration of front-line services over the coming years.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1. With an expected significant reduction in regulation of children's services, it is possible, although as noted above not advisable, for agencies to choose not to engage as strongly in partnership arrangements and integrated delivery of services.

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

- 4.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

### **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

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

- 6.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

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

- 7.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

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

- 8.1. Children's services have a key role in promoting children's rights, equality of opportunity for children and young people and community cohesion. These are core values of children's services which inform specific service objectives.

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

- 9.1. There is a range of specialist services (eg YOS; ASB etc) which specifically exist to minimise offending by young people. Through their core focus on achieving positive outcomes for children and young people, other children's services contribute to reducing offending and anti-social behaviour of young people.

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

- 10.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

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

None

### **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. A wide range of background documents and materials is available on DfE website ([www.dfe.gov.uk/publications](http://www.dfe.gov.uk/publications))