

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
8 FEBRUARY 2011

7.15 TO 9.15 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Dennis Pearce (in the chair). Councillors Simon Withey, Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Peter McCabe, Krystal Miller.

Andrew Boxall, Anna Juster.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mark Allison, Maxi Martin, Peter Walker.
Yvette Stanley (Director, CSF), Paul Ballatt (Head of Education), Melissa Caslake (Head of Children's Social Care), Janet Martin (Head of Education), Zoë Church (Chief Financial Manager), Hilary Gullen (Scrutiny Officer), Susanne Wicks (Democratic Services Officer).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Judy Saunders.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes are agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5 ORDER OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

RESOLVED: To take item 7 (budget) before item 6 (business planning).

6 SCHOOLS FUNDING REGIME – PRESENTATION

Zoë Church delivered a presentation on funding for the Children, Schools and Families department. The presentation covered the current funding regime, anticipated grant reduction in 2011/12, other savings identified by the department and details of the dedicated schools grant 2011/12.

In response to questions from Panel members, Paul Ballatt advised that the Centre of Excellence premises should be ready to handover in early March, with children occupying the school in the Spring Term. Yvette Stanley explained that whilst it is hoped that accommodating children in the Centre of Excellence will lead to savings

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
8 FEBRUARY 2011

as the authority will not have to fund out-borough placements, there are no plans to move children from settled placements into the Centre of Excellence.

7 BUDGET UPDATE 2011/12

The Panel went through the savings detailed for the service areas within their remit and discussed them in detail. Officers gave more detail where required and responded to questions raised. The main issues raised are detailed below:

CSF5: Carers grant/children's fund

Paul Ballatt gave further details of this saving. The Panel suggested that Overview and Scrutiny Commission be given more explanation of the narrative for this saving, as the information given in the table suggests service reduction.

CSF6: CAMHS

Melissa Caslake explained that the team has been reconfigured to meet the needs of the service whilst deleting the vacant post.

CSF7: Child death reviews

Melissa Caslake explained that discussion has taken place with other agencies involved in the Child Death Overview Panel and it is intended that participants will take turns to provide administrative support to the Panel.

CSF11: Teenage pregnancy

Councillor Simon Withey suggested that, given the relatively low levels of teenage pregnancy in Merton, this saving could be increased. Zoe Church confirmed that a further saving has been made, but Yvette Stanley cautioned against further reducing funds from this preventative service, particularly as the data for teenage pregnancy is always two years out of date.

CSF24: Primary/secondary strategy – central co-ordination

The Panel noted their concern that the raising of standards achieved in schools over recent years may be put at risk by this saving. Jan Martin acknowledged the risk of a drop in standards, but advised that a lot of work has been done with schools to prepare for this change. Schools have been encouraged to work together and support each other. Furthermore they can also buy in support from an ever-increasing marketplace.

CSF25: Special educational needs

The Panel requested that more information on how this saving will impact on schools be supplied to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. Particular concern was expressed regarding whether there would be a disproportionate impact on schools that are particularly successful with SEN children as these schools tend to attract

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
8 FEBRUARY 2011

more pupils in this category which puts an extra financial burden on them.

CSF26: SEN transport

Paul Ballatt explained that a group, including parent representatives, has been established in order to look at the existing SEN transport policy in order to identify savings, and to explore different ways of providing the service.

CSF28: Integrated services efficiencies (Brightwell)

Members of the Panel expressed concern that this saving could negatively impact on some of the most vulnerable people in Merton. Jan Martin confirmed that the review report of Brightwell has been completed, and proposals have been drafted with regard to the restructure of the service. Whilst acknowledging the sensitivities around disclosing information prior to commencing staff consultation on the restructure of this service, the Panel requested that more information on this saving be supplied to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

CSF38: Merton Music Foundation

Members of the Panel expressed concern about the impact of this saving upon Merton Music Foundation's long-term future. Yvette Stanley advised that officers have met with the Foundation to discuss ways in which they can maximise their income.

The Panel discussed whether or not they wished to forward comments to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for consideration at their meeting on 9 February 2011. It was unanimously:

RESOLVED: To forward the Panel's comments on CSF5, 24, 25 and 28 to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

8 BUSINESS PLANNING 2011/12

Paul Ballatt introduced this item.

With regard to the format and content of the plan, the Panel, whilst appreciating that the service plan is very much a 'work in progress', noted their concerns about the new format. Examples given were; difficulty of populating such small cells with meaningful text, in some places text had been missed off (anticipated demand for Children's Social Care) and there was over-use of abbreviations.

It was felt that training specifically in Performance Management for the new reporting framework would be helpful.

Report received.