

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
22 MARCH 2011

(7.15pm – 9.40pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Dennis Pearce (in the chair).
Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Karin Forbes,
Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Peter McCabe, Krystal Miller,
Judy Saunders and Miles Windsor (substitute for Councillor
Simon Withey).

Andrew Boxall, Anna Juster and Ravi Karup.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet member for Children's
Services) and Peter Walker (Cabinet member for Education).

Council Officers

Melissa Caslake (Head of Children's Social Care & Youth
Inclusion), Lynne Doyle (Deputy Research & Information
Manager), Janet Martin (Head of Education),
Kate Saksena (School Standards & Quality Manager); and
Michael Sutherland (Service Manager - Policy, Planning &
Performance); and
Hilary Gullen (Scrutiny Officer), and M.J.Udall (Democratic
Services Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Iain Dysart and Simon
Withey; and co-opted member Colin Powell; and also from officers - Paul Ballatt
(Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance) and Yvette Stanley (Director of
Children, Schools and Families).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No declarations were made.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2011 be
agreed as a correct record.

3 MINUTES – MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising but the Chair reported on the following.

Primary Places and Future Strategy - Report to Cabinet – The Chair advised that the
Cabinet the previous night had agreed all the recommendations in the report on this
issue on its agenda; and suggested that the Panel might wish to consider later
whether or not this should be a possible item for the Panel's future Work Programme.

4 SAFEGUARDING IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE (Agenda Item 5)

Melissa Caslake gave a detailed and extensive overview of the report including
highlighting (a) Merton's policy of early intervention and support so as to decrease
the likelihood of a crisis approach and greater intervention being needed
subsequently; (b) the rising demand for services at the front line whilst the number of

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subsequent assessments has remained relatively stable; and (c) the number of children being placed in the care system in Merton (per 1000 population) being well below the national and particularly London averages. During the overview, Melissa Caslake responded to queries including on the matters outlined below.

- (1) The variety of ways children came to Merton's attention including via the police, school, health visitor, neighbours or extended family, or multi-agency group.
- (2) Table 1 (on page 9) showed that of the predicted 5000 initial contacts, no further action would be taken in 3,200 cases, demonstrating that although the numbers contacting Merton are increasing, very few end up with a protection plan or in care.
- (3) All Boroughs were experiencing a similar increase in numbers of children coming to their attention, but there was need to investigate the reasons for the number being referred to Merton's attention.
- (4) The methods used in the recruitment drive for more foster carers.
- (5) The increase in the number re-referrals was due to the overall increase in the number of referrals and the smaller (percentage) number who were subsequently assessed as needing further support. Melissa Caslake advised that there was not a fixed number of assessments each year and considered that serious problems were not being missed, but in some cases a child's needs/problems may change in the intervening period between being seen initially and being subsequently seen as a re-referral.
- (6) The issue of those families who are subject to a child protection investigation but do not end up a child protection plan or other support services, finding it an anxiety provoking experience and less likely to engage with support services in the future (end of para. 2.6, page 11, refers).
- (7) In response to queries raised regarding the effect of the changing demography of Merton's population, different languages and cultural perceptions, Melissa Caslake confirmed that data on ethnicity was collected and undertook to look further at the issue of early intervention in some communities not being as successful as in others.
- (8) The issues of staff supervision and management oversight of casework raised in Ofsted's letter under "Areas for Development" (see page 31). Melissa Caslake advised that Ofsted had indicated that Merton was addressing the issues raised in Ofsted's earlier letter following their May 2010 inspection, but agreed that there was still progress to be made and outlined various steps being taken including a management away-day and the introduction of a Quality Assessment Framework.
- (9) Councillor Krystal Millar suggested the "Munro Review" whose publication was expected in the summer (and was referred to in the report) be a possible item for the Panel's work programme.
- (10) The possible of use of volunteers to support social workers (para. 4.3, page 20).
- (11) The use of Guardianship which was like an adoption order but not so far-reaching and enabled other family members (or a non-family person) to be involved in a child's upbringing whilst still involving the parents and was perceived as a more

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permanent arrangement than fostering.

Discussions concluded with both Cabinet member, Councillor Maxi Martin and the Chair thanking officers for their report and their work.

Report otherwise received.

5 CELEBRATING SUCCESS, STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN MERTON SCHOOLS 2009/10 (Agenda Item 6)

Prior to consideration of the report, Janet Martin pointed out that these results had been achieved with a full School Improvement Team, and due to certain grants now ceasing in accordance with national policy (which had been known about for several years), there had been reductions in staff and the Team was now half its previous size.

Kate Saksena then introduced the report key stage by key stage, including displaying a one page power-point display for each stage highlighting some of the main performance results for that stage. *(NB. Following the meeting, the power-point presentation was put on the Council's web-site with the rest of the meeting agenda.)*

Kate Saksena (and other officers) responded to queries at each stage and the main issues discussed are listed below.

Early Years Foundation Stage

Kate Saksena highlighted various issues, including the early emphasis on language development and that in closing the gap between the average group and the lowest achieving 20% group, Merton's performance was 12th best in the country. No issues were raised by Panel members.

Key Stage 1

Kate Saksena highlighted various issues, including that performance had remained similar to the previous year; writing was below the national average and continued to be an issue for Merton; and that emphasis on language development should help improve performance at Key Stage 2 next year or in future years. No issues were raised by Panel members.

Key Stage 2

Kate Saksena highlighted various issues, including that there now had been continuous improvement at Key Stage 2 over the previous 3 years; and explaining the new measure "Contextual Value Added" (CVA) which meant that all pupils irrespective of their starting points should make appropriate progress; and that black pupils were underperforming in comparison with their peers, particularly in maths. Issues raised by Panel Members included the following.

(a) Black pupils underperforming in comparison with their peers – Officers outlined the action taken in Merton when any group of pupils was identified as underperforming, including 1:1 support if appropriate; and indicated that in Merton a number of black pupils came from francophone countries and so English wasn't their first language, or maybe even their second language; but that black pupils didn't

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underperform at all Merton schools.

(b) Assessment at Key Stage 1 – In response to a query about the possible under assessment at Key Stage 1 (as against apparent considerable improvements at Key Stage 2), officers indicated that this issue had been raised with all schools and assessments would be challenged if appropriate.

(c) Actions at Key Stages 1 & 2 – Officers confirmed that, although not detailed in the report, specific actions were taken at Key Stages 1 & 2 following the receipt of each year's results, including at looking initially at overall results and at then individual results; and meetings being held with schools to discuss the results, including any groups of pupils identified as underperforming. Officers emphasised the importance of analysing results as a small number of pupils could skew particular results in some cases.

(d) Terminology – Reference was made to different ways of describing underperforming groups in different sections of the report; and Janet Martin undertook to look at possibly changing this, before the report was published further.

(e) Progress in English - Officers indicated that, having seen preliminary results for the current year, they were confident this improvement could be maintained and wasn't just due to a particularly good cohort of pupils.

(f) Communities – The importance or otherwise of local communities, poverty and pupil/parent relationships on individual pupils progress.

(g) Boycott of SATS – Officers highlighted the gaps on page 80 indicating where schools had boycotted the SATS examinations in 2009/10; indicated that the Government used 2009 results in such cases; and that officers considered that the results overall hadn't been skewed by the boycott.

Secondary Stage - Key Stage 4

Kate Saksena highlighted various issues, including that whilst Merton's GCSE results had improved, they had not improved as quickly as the national average; the introduction of the "English Baccalaureate" measures leading to all schools to review their GCSE options; and the importance of leadership from subject leaders in each school.

(i) Black pupils underperforming in English/Maths – Officers acknowledged this to be an issue, but pointed out that there were some areas where black pupils had improved (page 62 refers) and that black pupils' CVA was quite good.

(ii) Links to business – In response to queries about steps taken to meet local employers expectations for their workforce, officers outlined ongoing discussions about career pathways (and different routes to degrees) with South Thames College (Merton Campus) which had good links with a number of local employers; the need for schools to work with the College in this regard; and outlined other steps being taken to develop the apprenticeship route and links with local employers.

(iii) Pupils with English as a second language – Officers highlighted that the table on page 62 indicated that these pupils were outperforming those pupils with English as

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their first language.

(iv) St Marks C of E Academy - Officers indicated that, following the appointment of a new head-teacher in September 2010 and having seen the preliminary results the school had already “banked” for the current year, they were confident the school’s results would improve.

(v) SATS 2010/11 – Officers advised that all schools were expected to hold SATS this year.

(vi) New Schools – Officers advised that they were aware of only one school considering applying to be an academy and currently were unaware of any proposal for free schools in Merton.

(vii) Officers explained that Harris Academy achieved an average of 14.7 qualification points per pupil as many did B.Tec courses which were each equivalent to 2 or 4 GCSE’s.

Secondary Stage – Post 16

Kate Saksena highlighted the continuing upward trend in A levels etc which greater than the national average.

(a) Sports Partnership – Officers indicated that following on from discussions by schools about the Merton Sports Partnership, officers were confident that a version of the Partnership would roll forward.

(b) Merton Music Foundation – Officers advised that whilst Merton had participated in the concert at the Royal Albert Hall in March 2011, places were offered to schools by the Foundation on a rota basis and it was for each school to decide whether to participate; and that officers had no information that the Foundation wouldn’t be running the Royal Albert Hall event again.

Other Issues

Councillor James Holmes suggested that School Standards be a possible item for the Panel’s work programme.

Discussions concluded with Cabinet Member, Councillor Peter Walker highlighting various points in the report including the changes in the ethnicity of Merton’s population.

Report otherwise received.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 7)

A3 size colour hard copies of the performance monitoring table (on agenda page 92) were circulated at the meeting.

Michael Sutherland introduced the report, particularly focussing on those indicators where performance was not reaching targets set, or where there had been exceptionally good performance, and then responded to queries regarding the above table.

(a) Line 18 (Number of BME Pupil Exclusions Permanent) - In response to queries

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from Councillor Krystal Millar, Janet Martin confirmed that, although this line had no traffic light colour shown, this indicator was closely monitored and advised that she understood the increase in January 2011 of 3 exclusions in one month was not related to one single incident.

(b) Line 19 (Outcome of School Inspections) – Councillor Karin Forbes suggested that “Excellent” should read “Outstanding” as this was what was measured. Michael Sutherland undertook to amend the table.

(c) Line 23 (CYP Road Accidents) - Michael Sutherland indicated that he hoped to provide more background information (from Environment & Regeneration Dept.) on this issue to the next meeting.

Report otherwise received.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair suggested that as this was the last meeting of the Panel in the current municipal year, that any Members who had suggestions for the 2011/12 Work Programme should contact the Scrutiny Team. It was noted that there was due to be a topic selection meeting (for all scrutiny work programmes) on 17 May 2011 prior to the next Panel meeting in June and any suggestions should be submitted prior to that May date.

Councillor James Holmes suggested the following possible topics -

- (a) 6th Forms – Links to business (including apprenticeships, preparing the workforce for the 21st century, and vocational courses); and
- (b) School Standards – Supporting Weaker Subjects (including leadership and developing head-teachers/teachers abilities to tackle such challenging areas).

(NB. Other possible topic identified during the meeting was -

The “Munro Review” whose publication was expected in the summer.)

Councillor Dennis Pearce then thanked all of the Panel members for their work and support over the year.
