

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
15TH JUNE 2011

7.15pm – 9.15pm

PRESENT: Cllr Jeff Hanna (Chair), Ravi Kurup, Keran Currie, Anna Juster, Cllr Dennis Pearce, Cllr Karin Forbes, Cllr Iain Dysart, Cllr Agatha Akyigyina, Cllr Richard Chellew, Cllr Margaret Brierly and Cllr Richard Hilton (from 8.10pm).

ALSO PRESENT: Jan Martin, Head of Education, Melissa Caslake, Head of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion, Yvette Stanley, Director Children, Schools and Families, Paul Ballatt, Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, Michael Sutherland, Service Manager, Policy, Planning and Performance, Cllr Maxi Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Cllr Peter Walker, Cabinet Member for Education, Hilary Gullen, Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence were received from: Cllr Holmes

Cllr Scott - temporary resignation from Panel - Cllr Brierly appointed, Colin Powell and Andrew Boxall

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2011 (agenda item 3)

Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2011 were agreed

Cllr Hanna, on behalf of the panel, formally thanked Cllr Pearce for his work as former Chair of the Children and Young People.

2 Matters arising from the minutes (agenda item 4)

There were no matters arising

3 Children and Young People – key challenges for 2011/2012 including appendix – Children and Young People key challenges for 2011-2012 – officer report (agenda item 5)

Cllr Hanna thanked officers and members for circulating papers in advance.

Cllr Maxi Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Cllr Martin acknowledged that longstanding colleagues would appreciate that 2010-2011 had been a significantly challenging year for Children, Schools and Families and for all the services in the department. There had been a significant range of national reviews and new policies impacting and a sharp contraction in specific grant funding, resulting in the department reducing expenditure by circa 20% in one year.

Despite this, Cllr Martin felt there has been much progress and asked colleagues to note the following across the major service blocks within her remit:

Early Years

- Major restructure of the Early Years service to deliver £1m for savings/re-investment in new statutory requirements for 3 and 4 year olds;

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- Re configured 0 -12 supporting families team to ensure service is targeted effectively at families in most need of support – our work is quoted in the Munro Report;
- Continued to manage the children's centres roll out;
- Delivered the free 15 hour entitlement for 3 - 4 year olds with a new single funding formula and admissions process.

Integrated Service for Children with Disabilities/SEN

- Brought together Integrated Service for Children with Disabilities covering health and social care services for disabled children and their families which is managed alongside the Special Educational Needs (SEN) statutory assessment process pre-empting the more joined up approach flagged in the recent SEN Green paper;
- Developed our SEN inclusion bases and delivered additional specialist capacity including the wonderful St Ann's Centre of Excellence and Cricket Green's new 6th Form provision.

Integrated Youth Support Services

- Commenced our training programme for the Young advisors
- Embarked on a partnership approach with the Voluntary and Community Sector and Registered social landlords to re-commissioning youth services for 2012;
- Had a very positive visit from Ofsted who praised our Young People's involvement in Youth Service Commissioning;
- Commended by the Municipal Journal Awards for our work on Restorative justice

Children's Social Care

- Have made good progress on areas for improvement identified in our May 2010 inspection and seen this validated in the more recent Ofsted visit.
- Have significantly improved our use of agency staff;
- Have worked with our Merton Safeguarding Children Board partners to ensure that children's safeguarding is prioritised by all agencies.
- Have met our adoption targets and significantly improved our processes for assessing foster carers;
- Are transforming front door of Children's Social care through employment of graduate screeners to triage contacts enabling social workers to focus on assessment and intervention and in the longer term to support growing our own social workers.

Commissioning Strategy and Performance

- Worked with our Children's Trust partners to refresh our Children and Young people's Plan to ensure we have cleared shared priorities particularly in the face of the contraction of resources;
- Are in the process of developing an Access to Resources (ART) Service across CSF to deliver even stronger gate-keeping and smarter placement commissioning and procurement;
- Development and delivery of Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy, re-commissioning preventative services from the voluntary sector in partnership with the sector.

Priorities for 2011-12

- **Children's Social care.** Responding to new requirements linked to Munro Report and delivering a local service managing the careful balance between quality and risk;
- **Youth Justice.** Respond to new inspection regime and delivering Youth offending Services in the possible context of payment by results;
- **Youth Services.** Develop and implement a new model of partnership delivered youth services with local partners;
- **Access to Resources.** Implementing and embedding to further improve the procurement of complex placements across CSF;
- **Early Years.** Deliver our new 2 Year Old pilot with Sutton and explore new partnerships for delivery and preparing for possible national drive for payment by results;
- **CWD/SEN.** Responding to SEN Green Paper;
- **Early Intervention & Prevention.** Consolidating our Merton approach to delivering preventative services through our Child and Young Person Well Being Model ensuring both commissioned services and in house functions are preventing higher cost interventions and making the most difference for children and young people.
- **Cross-cutting.** Ensuring all our services are good and improving and offering the best value for money for residents and service users.

Cllr Martin emphasised how the department put the child at the centre of any decision and thanked officers for their hard work where challenging decisions had to be made. It had been difficult for staff to get everything in place to start this year at a good point. Cllr Martin was very proud of integrated services, especially noting good publicity in the national press. Cllr Martin suggested that panel members meet integrated services colleagues to learn more about their work.

Cllr Walker, Cabinet Member for Children's Education

Cllr Walker spoke about the National Agenda for Education, the significant loss of grants and the local pressure on primary places having occupied a lot of time and focus over the last year, and that 13 outstanding or good schools had undertaken to admit more pupils this September.

The National agenda for Education, significant loss of grants and the local pressure on primary places have not surprisingly occupied a lot of time and focus over the last year.

It has been a year of challenges but also of achievements – some of the highlights are as follows:

Education Achievements 2010-11

Education

- Primary expansion programme – major programme developed and being implemented shaped by Member priorities of *standards, sustainability and value for money*;
- 5 new 6th forms opened in 2010 – delivering improved local offer including for young people with complex needs;
- Developed SEN resource bases and expanded Cricket Green and St Ann's schools enabling more young people with complex needs to be educated in borough;
- Development of School on School support – given loss of nearly £2m of Education Standards Fund we have further developed new ways of securing school improvement including:
 - William Morris and Singlegate federation
 - Extension of the Local Leaders of Education programme with Merton heads giving support to other local schools
 - School clusters and school triads working together focussed on raising standards and narrowing the gap
- Transforming our School Standards and Quality Service
 - Developing shared services with Sutton; for continuing professional development, governors support; 16-19 support;
- Developed shared Admissions Service with Sutton;
- Reached agreement with schools to establish a central Schools Procurement hub to deliver back office savings for schools;
- Started the commissioning of “cashless” pay system for primary schools.

Priorities 2011-12

We will need to consolidate all the work undertaken in 2010-11 and in addition focus

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on the following:

- Developing our **Merton Education Partnership** – taking forward emerging model of further developing local collaboration across education providers in the borough;
- Delivering sufficient school places in the most economic way.
- Responding to changes in School Governance and Local authority and school funding
- Implementing new national policies and guidance on school admissions and other areas of the department's work.

Cllr Walker would appreciate the panel's help with finding solutions to the on-going problems of reduced funding, both capital and revenue.

Cllr Walker has instigated a borough wide conference on 24th June to share ideas for greater partnership working. Headteachers are aware that cuts to staffing will be coming, and in order to maintain/improve standards they will need to be open to new ways of working.

Yvette Stanley explained to members that the Children, Schools and Families department came into being following the Children's Act 2004. All partners in the Children's Trust were working together to improve outcomes for all children. Yvette outlined each head of service remit within the department. The growing and changing population is expected to lead to more children being in care. Significant changes had been made as a result of necessary savings.

The key service challenges are the major demographic growth in the borough and consequent rising demand for universal, targeted and specialist services for children and families; significant reduction in funding for children's services and the need for 'transformation' in the way the services are organised and delivered and legislative and public policy changes introduced by the present government.

Recommissioning of services is critical to our way of working, closer working with schools in purchasing (supply and services) and working in partnership with families to prevent potential, more complex, intervention later on. Resilience and sustainability will need to be built while funds are reduced.

Changes to Special Educational Needs procedures with the Munro Report were expected.

Children, Schools and Families services are, to a large extent, prescribed by legislation, but there is some scope to shape in some areas. Paul Ballatt will bring information about this to scrutiny at the appropriate time to help form policy and develop strategy going forward.

Questions were raised regarding; the 'bulge' of increased numbers of pupils when they transfer to the next tier; the success of the sixth forms; how stakeholders and the voluntary sector could be involved; transition for SEN pupils at age 16; whether the children's centre could be maintained long term with the funds available; whether

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scrutiny panel members were able to attend the conference instigated by Cllr Walker.

Cllr Walker confirmed that involvement in the conference by scrutiny panel members would be welcomed and that other invitees include representatives from libraries, sports partnerships, Wimbledon High School, Kings College School, Merton Technical College and Greenwich Leisure. The innovation in partnership working would take time to bed down. Jan Martin has been working with headteachers of primaries to promote working in triad format (groups of three schools) to share best practice. Peter Walker wants to involve academy schools and the private sector where possible.

Paul Ballatt has an appraisal target to bring forward proposals to manage the bulge population for the next tier. This could benefit from pre-decision scrutiny later in the year.

Jan Martin described how they were coming to the end of the first year of the new sixth forms, but exam results were not yet available. These will be reported when ready. The sixth forms had been monitored closely, and the feedback from students was very positive. The sixth forms had got off to a really good start. St Ann's is a centre of excellence and there was now more room for expansion in numbers all the way through the school. Children's Centres are rolled out, all open and operating. Funding however, is uncertain. The early intervention grant is not ring fenced and this will need to be watched carefully. We need to make sure we can continue to deliver universal services and a more targeted service for vulnerable children. Some families are proving difficult to engage with and this is an area for improvement. Looking at some of the savings from out-sourcing, children's centres are a possibility for later in the year. There is more money coming in for services for two year olds and Jan will come back and explain this in due course.

Yvette Stanley said the voluntary sector is a key partner in the Children's Trust as part of the setting of strategic priorities. This year the voluntary sector will co-decide priorities for allocating the reduced pot. The board is looking at the future, and it is likely less will be provided in-house. Paul Ballatt said we have had to de-commission services from the voluntary and community sector, which has been done as painlessly as possible. However, there will be some losses in the third sector in terms of provision of services, but also some opportunities. Work is being done with the voluntary sector on the provision of escort SEN transport - a good quality service to deliver a good quality service that can be expanded. There were also opportunities in the youth offending service for mentor and befriending services, and for looked after children, with contact arrangements.

Jan Martin explained how the Green Paper for SEN might involve supporting SEN children and adults up to 25 years of age. Any transition point for children is a point of vulnerability and work is done with the transition team to minimise this.

Cllr Hanna pointed out the sixth forms could be looked at as part of the suggested task group.

The reports on Key Challenges were noted and thanks given to all concerned.

4 Performance Monitoring – overview of Children, Schools and Families department (agenda item 7 – supplementary)

Paul Ballatt explained that the key factors for consideration in the performance of the department and key partnerships is to understand the service and make informed decisions, and which items need to be on the draft work programme. Children, Schools and Families is the most regulated, monitored and inspected council service. Paul urged a degree of caution, some performance indicators are 'mature', detailed and comprehensive but others 'less than helpful' in showing the true story. Most are national indicators, which are prescribed, the local indicators are 'sharper'. Overall the indicators show an improving trajectory, with some being the fastest improving in the country.

CSF in summary has been good or satisfactory, the last grading received being satisfactory even though some services were showing a marked improvement within this.

Cllr Pearce asked whether very local deprivation is measured (to two or three streets). Paul Ballatt explained that they were looking at data in a very intelligent manner both detailed and in universal analysis. Michael Sutherland explained that they could look at single postcodes (ie approx 6 houses), which highlights affluence as well as deprivation. There is a fantastic wealth of data available.

Cllr Attawar asked for more explanation of placement stability (relating to sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 of the report). Melissa Caslake said that placement stability in terms of length improved year on year, more needs to be done, but that we are currently in line with most authorities in this. The figures include children moving back home, so in some cases the indicator does not reflect this good outcome. More focussed scrutiny of placement tracking was required. Finding permanent placements in a timely fashion and support to keep children in these placements was taking place and being tracked. There were 11 children in permanent placements last year, an increase on previous years. The satisfaction rate was higher than the London average and the previous survey, however, care is needed in interpreting this as some respondents would not have experienced children's services and be likely to be influenced by national media.

Ravi Kurup complimented the department on doing a good job.

Cllr Dysart enquired about young people's participation in council decision-making and KS1 writing skills, highlighting how important writing is in enabling self expression.

Michael Sutherland explained the survey is available online, that results for participation were above the London average and a bigger issue was how the engagement takes place.

Jan Martin explained that Key Stage 1 is the weakest area, the reasons for which are being explored. There is a raft of opportunities in place to encourage children to become better writers, earlier. Jan hoped that the standards report next year would show an improvement from these initiatives. Jan undertook to keep members informed of progress.

Cllr Akyigyina enquired about dental health and what is being done to encourage uptake up the service.

Yvette Stanley detailed how early years participated in work on healthy lifestyles that included dental health. Schools also cover oral hygiene in their healthy lifestyles work. Current changes in the agenda for health will alter commissioning and affect how services will go forward. The council expected to have more influence. School nurses go into schools and cover broad health issues.

There was work being done on helping families who are not able to speak English to access all kinds of healthcare. Some of these families use Accident and Emergency departments of hospitals as a first port of call due to lack of information about how to access healthcare, including dentistry.

Melissa Caslake explained that the indicator for dental health was well above average.

Anna Juster enquired about how emotional health was measured.

Michael Sutherland explained this was from the 'Tellus' Survey data which involved 2000 young people in the borough from year 6 upwards. They were asked a batch of questions such as 'do you have friends', 'are you able to speak to your parents/adults'.

Yvette Stanley said that the Children's Trust had a key health area around child and adolescent mental health services. They were aware of the stresses and strains on young people, and self esteem issues.

Cllr Akyigyina said she felt very proud of Merton at the recent fostering reception and complimented the team on doing a really good job.

Cllr Attawar asked about shared services and which services can be shared.

Paul Ballatt said the admissions service was joint management of two teams (Merton and Sutton) but joint management was how things were working at present, rather than full integration into a single team.

Jan Martin described the shared governor services with Sutton. There was one programme with Sutton for continuing professional development in schools. This was working very well and Sutton were moving their staff into the Chaucer Centre. The Merton school improvement team were working in Sutton sharing expertise, but not as a shared service. Sutton are restructuring their early years service and will therefore not be ready to examine any potential benefits until the Autumn. It would be re-visited to see whether there would be any benefit in joining up. Conversation is starting about the possibility of a group of authorities sharing services across all council provision.

Cllr Walker explained that a year ago they had hoped more headway would have been made in shared services and progress was too slow to make economies as a borough, and was not yielding the benefits wanted.

Panel noted the report.

5 Performance Monitoring – regular update (agenda item 8 – supplementary)

Michael Sutherland explained the 'traffic light' system and went into detail explaining the performance indicators that were lower than target. In addition to the explanation given in his report, referring to line 10, Michael added that of reviews held for children in care ended the year on 98%, as last year, but still 7% above the national average.

Melissa Caslake gave reasons for three reviews not meeting the target: one had administrative problems and processes were being checked to ensure this doesn't happen again, one had a key member off sick and in one instance the interpreter didn't arrive.

Michael will send an explanation of the definition of Youth Re-offending rates to panel by e-mail, although this is not a very helpful measure as the figures can be skewed by one child committing multiple offences.

Line 16: Youth participation had increased, commissioned services were also now gathering information.

Line 23 Road Safety, there had only been 4 minor accidents between November and January.

Cllr Forbes queried why the target had not been raised for youth participation, now that more data is being taken into account. Paul Ballatt agreed to re-consider this with the youth partnership.

Jan Martin explained that the Green Paper could bring in a whole new system and everything could change with new indicators.

Cllr Akyigyina raised concern that there were too many red traffic lights with the performance indicators and that 'belts needed to be tightened'.

Melissa Caslake appreciated the councillor's comments and explained that officers do everything they can to make sure everything goes well, but the cumulative effect of previous staff sickness was still being worked through. However, the direction of travel is right. It is more important to have the right quality of assessment, rather than meeting the timescales, which are in themselves not an indicator of quality.

Cllr Hilton commented that we set a higher threshold than other boroughs in bringing children into care. Some of the indicators do not reflect the true picture, for example, a family of five children going into care will skew the figures. Cllr Hilton felt a month on month indicator would be helpful - an arrow showing whether the performance had improved or decreased.

Cllr Akyigyina emphasised how one family was still important. Paul Ballatt acknowledged this and commented on how everyone present had different areas of particular interest.

Panel noted the report.

6 Work Programme 2011/2012

Cllr Hanna thanked those that had attended the Scrutiny Topic Selection Evening and explained the definition of brief reports, reports, follow ups, updates and informatives.

Discussion ensued about the provision of primary places, and the panel agreed to have a brief update in September, with a more detailed agenda item in November if issues were highlighted.

The Chair proposed the following amendments to the work programme in the light of previous discussions:

- the September item on foster carers should include information about permanency of placements and progress to achieve this,
- the budget item in November should give some information about how to establish shared services with other local authorities, whether these can be of benefit to Merton or not (including financial benefit) and that a recurring update on progress with this issue would be helpful,
- an update on the areas of development identified by the December Ofsted visit and the November peer review, as set out in the bullet points on pages 43 and 44 of the supplementary agenda be provided,
- the April meeting should include information about dental registration rates, MMR vaccination rates and how to improve these.

These suggestions were agreed and the amended work programme agreed by panel.

Panel appointed Cllr Holmes as performance lead (in his absence and subject to his agreement)

Panel appointed Cllr Hilton as budget lead

Panel endorsed the non-statutory co-optees for the year as Julia Waters (secondary headteacher representative) and Keran Currie (primary headteacher representative).

Panel members to consider visits to integrated services, Hollymount School, Children's Centres and Youth Support Services. These can be carried out by small groups rather than the whole panel. It was also suggested Panel members might like to meet young people who have recently left care. Paul Ballatt to come back to panel in September with detailed proposals for visits.

Panel agreed the task group review; 'Post 16 Career Pathways' and appointed Cllr Akyigyina (Chair), Cllr Pearce, Cllr Forbes, Cllr Dysart, Cllr Holmes and Ravi Kurup to the task group.

Cllr Dysart enquired about youth representation on the panel, which Paul Ballatt agreed to look into and report back.

Panel would like to attend corporate parenting training, and agreed with Cllr Martin's recommendation that panel members would benefit from this training on a yearly basis.

Paul Ballatt would work with the new performance lead on performance indicators.

The Chair closed the meeting at 9.15pm.