

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE O&S PANEL
21ST SEPTEMBER 2011

7.15pm – 9.30pm

PRESENT: Cllr Jeff Hanna, Cllr Simon Withey, Cllr Linda Scott, Cllr Debbie Shears, Cllr Karin Forbes, Cllr Agatha Akyigyina, Cllr Laxmi Attawar, Cllr Dennis Pearce, Cllr Iain Dysart, Cllr James Holmes, Andrew Boxall, Colin Powell, Anna Juster

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cllr Peter Walker, Yvette Stanley, Paul Ballatt, Jan Martin, Melissa Caslake, Michael Sutherland, Tim Wells, Keith Shipman, Hilary Gullen

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Richard Hilton

Cllr Jeff Hanna welcomed Andrew Boxall back to the panel.

1 Declarations of interest

None received

2 Minutes from the CYP Panel meeting 15th June 2011

Cllr Withey had sent apologies and was substituted at this meeting by Cllr Chellew. The minutes were agreed with this amendment.

3 Minutes from the Special CYP Panel meeting 15th September 2011

Agreed

4 Matters arising from the minutes

None for either 15th June or 15th September meetings

5 Strategic Objective Update

Paul Ballatt summarised this report, which had been requested by the Chair. The report submitted was taken to September Council and summarises the Children, Schools and Families functions and the Children's Trust, noting their priorities that were confirmed earlier in the year when drafting the Children and Young People's Plan. It describes the key challenges and how successful the partnership approach is in Merton. One of the key challenges for councils and for CSF is the financial context we are all operating in. All public services are being urged to make a greater impact by making the best use of money available. The report notes one of the

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Merton Education Partnership initiatives with schools, who will also be coping with greater financial restraints, and how this will become increasingly important. The Munro Report will lead to significant reform in social work practice. The report notes that CSF is undertaking transformation work to continue to improve services in the current financial context.

The report does not note that CSF are actively anticipating and preparing for an announced inspection on safeguarding and the looked after children's service, this is in addition to many other regulatory inspections. The announced inspection is particularly significant in influencing the department's annual rating.

The budget is being prepared for the next financial year, and for the council's medium term financial strategy. Savings proposals are being made which will be presented to scrutiny panel for the first time in November.

The Panel expressed congratulations to the staff and students who had worked so well to gain excellent GCSE results this year.

In response to a panel member's question about processes within the department, Yvette Stanley said the budget process had been a fundamental challenge for every service, having to make sure 'every penny' counts. The money has to be used in the right place in terms of statutory functions, and where it will make the maximum difference.

CSF is looking at further partnership possibilities to help schools become self-sustaining, and how procurement can be made 'smarter'. The department is using LEAN tools to examine the efficiency of processes and procedures. The results are expected to be radical in some cases, but to have a smaller, 'slicing' effect in others.

Heads of Service go through a process of examining service provision for proposed savings, then DMT look at the impact of these. Each division in CSF department comes up with a range of proposals for year one, and future years, to establish a direction of travel. This might involve changes in prioritisation between and across services.

There is scope in establishing a wide variety of shared services. For example, there is currently a shared arrangement with Sutton around school admissions, where the LBM manager manages both admissions services. This might lead to a single admissions team in the future. Also being examined are the Access to Resources possibilities, procuring placements for children with SEN as well as Looked After Children. It is hoped this will achieve greater value for money, and Sutton are potentially interested in joining in with this initiative.

Merton is part of a consortium of South West London boroughs for pilot proposals for 'assessed year-in practice' for social workers – working a probationary year with conditions attached. This has the potential to be expanded across other boroughs, and to include other learning and development projects.

Michael Sutherland explained the SEN indicators, which measure the difference between pupils without SEN and those with any level of SEN, are part of the national 'narrowing the gap' indicators. The thresholds of KS2 and GCSE are quite high, and

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a gap is expected, although all concerned work to minimise this where possible.

A panel member asked about the exact number of statements issued, which Michael Sutherland offered to circulate after the meeting.

In response to a question from a panel member, Keith Shipman explained the new government proposals are for a three year pilot looking at schools becoming more responsible for the child that is excluded. This means an excluded child stays on the school role, and remains their funding responsibility for their education. The school becomes commissioners and procurers for services for that child.

Panel noted the report.

6 Primary School Places

Paul Ballatt responded to the panel's request for information on admission data for this September. There will be an opportunity for a broader report to panel later in the year.

Merton is in the middle of one of the greatest challenges ever for providing primary places, and many other boroughs in the country are experiencing the same effect. For September 2011, 7 new forms of entry were expected, but this expanded to 9, and has now grown to 10, due in part to an unprecedented level of late applications.

The updated figures show 49 resident children unplaced for current year, of which 32 have received and rejected a local school place within 2 miles. Of the remaining 17 who have not received an offer, 9 applied by the closing date but about half of these have not responded to Merton, suggesting they will not want a place. This is against 25 current vacancies. Merton has either offered, or has a place, for everyone who has applied, but the location of some of the unplaced children means the available offer is further than 2 miles from their home. The outcome is that a decision has been made for another bulge class for this year. Consultations are underway with a specific school, and an announcement will be made on Friday, 23rd September.

In response to a question, Jan Martin responded that if a school is expecting 50 pupils, they will be appropriately staffed to reach the appropriate ratio of children, ie 6-8 children to each key worker, and these, appropriately trained and qualified, staff will be responsible to make sure the children settle in quickly.

Explanation about the procedure for placing of the bulge class was given as follows: A number of schools were considered following examination of the area of demand and a specific school with sufficient space was approached. A temporary classroom will be provided, and officers have already been to discuss this with the school. It was pointed out that a number of children on the unplaced list do not necessarily need a place until January, although there is an ethos of wanting to get them in and settled as quickly as possible. The aim is, with the governing body's agreement, to get the temporary classroom available for use following the Autumn half term. The team have experience in getting temporary accommodation in and are confident of achieving this to the timescale given.

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Paul Ballatt agreed to provide figures on the number of late applications this year, compared to previous years, after the meeting. Paul also explained how multiple offers work in that parents have six options, and Merton try to make them an offer higher up their list. It is routine for a child to be offered a place in one school and is on a waiting list for another, preferred, school. This means there are multiple 'live' offers.

In response to a member's questions on birth rate monitoring and how the bulge year will be provided for at secondary level, Paul Ballatt responded that there was a position that Merton and a number of London boroughs faced at the time due to fundamental inadequacies in the model used to estimate the need for pupil places. Merton buys in to the GLA projection model, which is predominantly birth rate based. It is not a perfect way of estimating need. Merton has developed its own addition to that model, so use it as a starting off point and then look at 'survival' rates (ie stay in borough rates) to apply for a primary place. This is not an exact science. There are migration and development issues that have to be worked on and make a 'best estimate' position. If Merton had taken the GLA figures, only three forms of extra entry would have been planned for this September rather than the ten actually required. The GLA model costs £6000 pa, but it is the industry standard model. The population is expected to fluctuate, and there will eventually be a reduction in pupils. It is hoped to be able to predict these variances more efficiently in time. By Christmas the DMT will look at an initial set of proposals for providing additional places for the future bulge in admission to secondary schools.

Yvette Stanley added that Merton has an impressive retention rate due to the high quality of our primary schools.

Members were reassured that there will be more than enough pupils in the initial intake to make the bulge class a viable option, leaving some surplus for additional children later in the year.

Yvette Stanley also explained that there is pressure across the whole borough, but Merton is trying to make sure there are enough vacancies across four quadrants in the borough. There might be a need for more surplus capacity, although some people do move out during the year. Geographically there should be enough surplus for 'wriggle' room.

The school with the bulge class will not be penalised for lower pupil numbers in this class - a rate has been agreed with the school.

In response to a question about whether Merton will be disadvantaged by sharing services, Paul Ballatt said that there is a need to make savings for Merton and Sutton, and that there are pan London admission arrangements to be implemented at primary level. They have provided a clear steer that a broad approach is recommended. This would be more co-ordinated, and where previously parents might have made application for admission to several boroughs the effect would be mitigated. Merton will not be disadvantaged.

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Panel noted the briefing report and expressed appreciation to officers for their work in finding places for pupils in challenging circumstances.

7 New Strategy for the Youth Services

Keith Shipman introduced this report, detailing the significant reduction in grant funding for the youth service. There will also be a shift in policy and new policy from the government regarding youth. There has been significant increase in participation, although this remains slightly below the national average. The Merton Youth Partnership is very successful and is always looking to improving practice. There is a strong commissioning model, recognised by Ofsted this year, as an example of good practice nationally. A transformation board has been set up, which is an expanded version of the Merton Youth Partnership executive. The board considers all aspects of youth work, what sort of services are required, where they are required, how they are provided and how they should be commissioned or procured. This is in the context of how to deliver them most effectively given a restrictive budget. The 'needs analysis' looks at the borough by ward and compares issues, the numbers of adolescents and comes up with a rating figure. This helps to target finances. Appendix 1 shows the design principles, the youth work to be delivered, how to make it happen and this has been agreed by the board. An area based model is used, looking at commissioning or providing youth work in new areas. This gives greater linkage between those organisations and the local community. The board need to look at how to provide money for services, ie whether it can come from the primary sector or from philanthropy, which is a big challenge in Merton. They also examine the balance of the work force – volunteers and paid staff. These are currently roughly equal numbers, which is a good balance as volunteers are crucial to running the service. Life expectancy figures given were explained as 4 being bad, 1 good and this being relative within Merton by ward, 1 demonstrating high life expectancy.

Opportunities for social enterprise were discussed, where a service was 'spun out', protected from competition and keeping the same staff. This was deemed to need highly motivated staff, and it would be a major challenge to get this type of project off the ground while the department was looking into contracting out services. However, all options were open to consideration and other boroughs were being contacted to find best practice.

Keith Shipman explained that within the transformation group, they had received briefings about social enterprise initiatives.

Yvette Stanley said that the team were working with key partners, ie residential social landlords, who are part funding our Family Intervention Project this year, and could commission youth work. There is a diverse voluntary sector in Merton with resources, and they are also looking into getting the best value for money for the 'combined pound' and combined commissioning expertise.

Further explanation of the KICKz project was requested, and Keith Shipman informed panel members that there were originally two projects running, but there was now

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only enough funding from the police to keep the Liberty project going under the KICKz banner. This project had been cited as the best in London by the Mayor of London. The project at Harris Academy was still running, but as funding now came from Fulham Football Club, it was not officially a KICKz project.

There will be a Youth Partnership meeting consultation event in a couple of week's time to discuss progress to date with partners.

Panel congratulated officers on setting the 'gold standard' for some of the youth work carried out and for their exciting and innovative approach.

Panel noted and endorsed the report, thanked staff for their work and look forward to hearing back about best practice in other boroughs.

8 Brightwell and Short Breaks Strategy

This report is an update on the Brightwell reorganisation, and how this links directly into the short breaks service and the statutory duty of council to offer these breaks. There is a draft statement which panel may comment on.

The planned refurbishment work has not yet started. It will not be carried out in one go. Some work is needed in rooms that won't be accessible while work is done. The work schedule is close to being finalised, and will be made available when it is ready. Panel were reassured that no additional closures were expected to enable the refurbishment to be completed, as the centre is currently not open every day, and the days when it is not open can be used for the work to be carried out.

Report noted and thanks given to officers for their work.

9 Scrutiny review on provision for vulnerable young people excluded or not participating in school.

Cllr Holmes introduced the review and thanked members and officers for support, particularly Stella Akintan.

This was an entirely non-party political group, and it is hoped that the report makes a real contribution. The recommendations include further training for teachers and co-ordination with partner agencies. Cllr Holmes felt that last few recommendations are the key ones, making schools more responsible for individuals. The task group found that it costs £15000 pa to keep a student in alternative education, compared to £4500 to keep them in mainstream school. The task group felt it was extremely important for the mainstream school to keep links to individuals when they enter alternative education. This could be done by inviting the pupil back for special days (sports days, celebration of achievement etc). This is an area for encouraging the pupil to remain integrated with the first school, and save money. There is more work to be done on the provision of alternative education – should this be commissioning by Merton - could schools commission this.

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Cllr Holmes spoke of every young person having something they are really good at, and how we need to make more use of apprenticeships/work placements to enhance this.

Cllr Walker invited Cllr Holmes to his Friday meeting with officers to discuss the recommendations, particularly in view of the cost difference between mainstream and alternative education.

Panel endorsed the report and agreed to forward it to cabinet for approval and provision of action plan after the Friday meeting.

10 Terms of Reference for Post 16 Career Pathways Task Group

Cllr Agatha Akyigyina informed panel of the aim of the task group; to encourage the best career outcomes for young people in the borough. The task group had had two meetings already to 'set the scene'. Cllr Holmes explained that the job market is going to get harder and that the next steps for the sixth forms, which had already proved successful, needed to be looked at. Of particular interest to the task group would be how the sixth forms link to career pathways to increase job prospects for young people.

Cllr Peter Walker informed panel of job fairs with local employers instigated by Siobhain McDonagh MP. Cllr Akyigyina will be attending one of these and will report back.

Panel agreed the terms of reference.

11 Briefing note on recruitment of foster carers

Tim Wells introduced this report. Tim has responsibility for the fostering service and was pleased to come to panel to inform them of this work.

The council have a statutory duty to provide foster care. Children come to care for a wide variety of reasons, and the responsibilities incumbent on foster carers are wide ranging and challenging, as is the recruitment process. Looking after someone else's child is a very serious business indeed. Merton is challenged, along with other boroughs, by the shortage of carers. Merton is part of the South West London consortium for carer sharing arrangements, to increase our capacity. The team have targeted recruitment strategies, including recruitment for minority groups, and are seeking to increase applications from these groups. Merton has relatively low numbers of looked after children compared to neighbouring boroughs. There are additional numbers of assessments for carers in progress, and are on a trajectory to increase capacity in the coming year.

Cllr Agatha Akyigyina, a member of the council's fostering panel, commented on the rigorous assessment for potential carers and how the borough have excellent procedures for making sure they have the right people.

It was commented on that this is one of the hardest service areas in the council. A panel member asked about the greatest challenges and areas of vulnerability.

Tim responded that there is a need to maintain the quality of placements and the

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resilience of carers. Caring for someone else's child is extremely challenging, due to complex behaviour problems and an unsettled history for the child. More long and short term support for carers, for example, with more respite care – along with other services. There is a strategy to find how to most effectively use collective services to support carers.

Melissa Caslake explained that many of children are teenagers with extremely challenging behaviour, which makes it hard for them to be looked after, and this can be unrewarding for foster carers. The team have to think whether some of these children can live in a family environment. However, family support is preferred to children's homes where possible. It can be difficult to make decisions about placement when you have children on cusp of these behaviours - whether they pose a risk to family members. Children need to be placed locally wherever possible as this helps maintain links with school and family.

Tim Wells emphasised how the best outcomes for children result when they are able to become attached to a significant adult. This most effectively happens in a family environment.

Melissa Caslake pointed out that 11 care leavers are starting university this year, and reminded panel about the rewarding aspects of foster caring.

Panel discussed the drop out rate for carers in the induction period, which is not unusual as personal circumstances can change through separation, bereavement etc. The process of stringent checks also put some people off.

The application timescale had shortened from 9 to 7 months. Panel also discussed the need to refresh the advertising campaign material.

It was noted that applicants to foster caring had commented on the friendliness of the officers answering telephone enquiries in Merton, particularly in comparison with other agencies. This had lead more potential carers to come into the Merton scheme.

Panel noted the report and thanked officers involved for their work.

12 Briefing note on teenage pregnancy

Keith Shipman introduced this report. Officers look at how Merton can co-ordinate work with partners to improve the teenage pregnancy rate, and work with young parents. Merton has the highest reduction in teenage pregnancy in outer London. This has not been accompanied by the usual increase in abortion rate, and so is a particularly good outcome.

Successful work had been carried out in schools with sex and relationship education, policy development, 'Check it Out' with the PCT, and with condom provision services.

It was highlighted that public health money covers these preventative functions for young people and early years.

Panel noted the report.

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13 Performance Monitoring

Michael Sutherland addressed this report, highlighting areas mentioned in the report that were below target, with explanations for panel. Commentary has been included in some definitions, where requested. Exclusions were expected to come in above target for the year, but this is a volatile target where one incident can lead to multiple exclusions. Low rates of road accidents in Merton were noted. A panel member noted items 2 & 3 being still below target. Melissa Caslake explained that there had been significant improvement recently, and that they are working hard to improve figures. The timing of the data collection does not match well with working patterns, and completing more work in a month than started shows a downward indication. The backlog is being dealt with and this will be demonstrated in future indicators. The Munro Report will recommend timescales and will possibly merge some performance indicators. There are new guidelines coming out in December, which will be monitored closely. Panel members were reminded that quality has to be taken into account, not just timeliness.

There had been no primary exclusions for several years.

The indicators are being reviewed for the quality of the indicator; whether the indicator reflects the range of responsibilities in the department in a balanced way; the relevance of comparisons of data against targets, against national averages and against equivalent 'statistical neighbour' authorities; and which bodies hold which data, and how we are held to account by them. The proposed new basket of indicators will come back to panel for approval in due course.

Panel noted the report and the need to continue to monitor indicators 2 & 3.

14 Draft Work Programme

Remains unchanged, therefore noted by panel

15 Youth Offending Service Post- Inspection Scrutiny Briefing

Keith Shipman explained this was a case-work inspection, and is very technical in nature, covering whether national standards are being met. The report contains specific recommendations relating to recording information. The team had identified in December that improvements were required and an audit was carried out and changes put in place. The report reflected the borough was improving due to these changes. Challenging improvements are required about making the assessment, and how this process is followed through within timescales.

Once the young person is given a sentence, the borough has to perform a number of assessments, signed off by the manager, all to different timescales. Any further re-offending resets all the timescales and requirements. Since the inspection, a draft action plan has been drawn up, and this will show how the inspectorate monitors the borough. Staff will have improved training, and there will also be comparison with best practice examples in different boroughs. There is a LEAN review to improve the processes.

Keith Shipman explained that there is what appears to be a 'London phenomenon'

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with these reports, where London boroughs come out 20% below national average. This could be a result of offending patterns, and hyper-mobility of offenders (meaning a broad range of partners become involved in one young person) in London not being fully recognised.

The process left little time to liaise with relevant partners. Feedback is considered by board, along with audit results, which result in improvement plan.

An update can be given to panel as a performance monitoring report in a future meeting.

Panel noted the report.

16 Date of next meeting

The Children, Schools and Families department will confirm the date of the next meeting on Friday, 23rd September.

The next panel meeting date was later confirmed to be 15th November 2011