

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: November 15th 2011

Agenda item:

Wards:

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department (updated)

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley

Lead member: Cllr Maxi Martin; Cllr Peter Walker

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel note the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members with information on key developments affecting Children and Young People since the Panel's last meeting in September 2011.
- 1.2. This report replaces the version circulated with the main agenda and includes additional information in paragraph 2.12.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Primary School Places: Members will be aware of the major challenge for the council in providing sufficient and suitable primary school places for the rising population of school age children. Nine additional reception classes were provided for September 2011 entry at All Saints, Gorrington Park, Liberty, St Mary's Singlegate, William Morris, Wimbledon Park, Dundonald, Hillcross and The Priory schools. As indicated at the last Panel, a further additional class is required and this has now been confirmed at Merton Abbey School.
- 2.2. All Merton children requiring places have now received offers. 15-20 offers have been rejected – some of these children will not be of statutory school age until January 2012 and others will have made alternative arrangements. The Admissions Team routinely follow these cases up in order to clarify the residual demand for Merton school places. There are currently 20+ vacancies, the majority at William Morris School. The additional class at Merton Abbey School, to be provided via a temporary building from the end of November 2011, currently has only 2 vacancies.
- 2.3. Following the pre decision scrutiny conducted by this Panel on the proposal to permanently expand Dundonald School, Cabinet took the decision on 19th September 2011 to proceed to the next stage of the proposal.

- 2.4. Officers are currently planning consultation processes for five other permanent expansions at All Saints, Gorringer Park, Liberty, Singlegate and Wimbledon Park schools which will be undertaken during November and December 2011.
- 2.5. Inspections: Recent inspections of schools have included a monitoring visit to William Morris School which found good progress has been made in improvements needed for it to be removed from an Ofsted category. Garden and Wimbledon Park schools were also inspected in September and October but reports have not yet been published.
- 2.6. Work is being progressed in anticipation of the Ofsted announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services of which we expect to be notified in the near future. The first element of the inspection will examine comprehensively how effectively the Council and other services in the borough are working together to safeguard children through case file study, observation of practice, examination of policies, procedures and data, interviews with service users, staff, managers, elected members and focus groups. The second element will employ broadly similar methods in respect of our work with children looked after.
- 2.7. Information was provided to Panel at its last meeting on the recent inspection of key elements of Merton's Youth Offending Service. A number of substantial areas for improvement were identified and an action plan has now been drawn up to address these issues. Some additional capacity via a specialist consultant is being sought to support this work.
- 2.8. Financial Management of Schools: As a result of media interest in school financial management and human resources issues, the Chair of the Panel has sought information regarding the support provided to schools in relation to these matters.
- 2.9. In terms of finance support, schools are supplied with a copy of a guidance manual produced and updated by our internal audit service which supports appropriate financial management systems and processes. Schools are expected to comply with appropriate financial procedures by adopting the Council's own financial regulations or formally establishing their own. These should cover all procurement activity. There is an annual programme of school audits undertaken by the Council. This is reducing as a result of lower capacity in the service and schools are selected for audit on a risk based approach. The corporate finance service supports budget monitoring – again a risk based selection of schools. The service is also open to requests from schools for support – including advice and training – which is routinely provided subject to capacity. Governors specifically are offered training centrally as part of the overall programme of governor training. Additionally some finance/premises sub committees of school governing bodies have requested and received finance training.
- 2.10. Schools are fully accountable for managing their budgets appropriately. Most, but not all, schools buy into finance support from the Council via an annual Service Level Agreement (SLA). In the case of all schools, however, the Council is empowered to issue 'a notice of financial concern' to schools if deficits in financial management are found. Council services will, in these

circumstances, work closely with schools including governing bodies to ensure required improvements are promptly made.

2.11 Human Resources: The Council's HR service provides advice, guidance and assistance on all HR matters to schools via an SLA. Most (but a reducing number) buy into this SLA. Schools are required to have in place comprehensive HR procedures for dealing with competency, grievance, disciplinary, sickness issues etc – they are offered the opportunity to use Council procedures but they are not bound to do so. Schools receive advice and support from the Council's schools HR staff as and when necessary. School staff have access to the Council's Employee Assistance Programme which provides general advice and counselling amongst other services.

2.12 Serious incidents. Members of the committee will be aware of two very serious incidents involving knife crime in the borough, one in Wimbledon and one in the Pollards Hill area. The Police investigations on both are on going.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. N/A.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. No specific implications.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. No specific implications.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. No specific implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. No specific implications.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No specific implications.

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

N/A

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None