

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
18 JANUARY 2012

7.15pm – 10.15pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair). Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Dennis Pearce, Linda Scott, Simon Withey.

Andrew Boxall, Alison Jerrard, Amanda Stuart-Fisher

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin, Peter Walker, Mark Allison
Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services) , Yvette Stanley (Director Children, Schools and Families), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Melissa Caslake (Head of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Michael Sutherland (Service Manager, Policy, Planning and Performance), Keith Shipman (Education and Youth Inclusion Manager), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Hilary Gullen (Scrutiny Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Colin Powell and Anna Juster

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2011

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

4. MATTERS ARISING

A panel member was given confirmation that the updated adoption figures will be available for the April CYP panel meeting.

The Panel agreed to take item 10 next.

10. BUSINESS PLAN - 2012/16 - UPDATE

The Director, Caroline Holland introduced this report.

Panel discussed the service review savings options on which it had previously expressed concerns to be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission, and in the light of additional information provided by officers on proposed savings which it had previously agreed, the Panel also discussed these a second time. A summary of this discussion and the Panel recommendations are set out below. These are set out for the Commission so they can then be formally forwarded to Cabinet.

- **Options pack page 38; School Improvement – School Standards**

and Quality (Level 1 Saving):

Jan Martin described how this post had been providing support for teachers supporting curriculum developments in information technology. There is now enough expertise in schools to provide this themselves or they can purchase the service. Schools are also collaborating with some offering expert advice via leading teachers. The training of Merton Leaders of Education is continuing with a second cohort being trained.

Panel agreed this option

- **Options pack page 44, CSF Contracts, Procurement and School Organisation – reduction in 1 fte Admissions Post (Level 1 Saving):**

A panel member expressed concern regarding how regeneration plans could impact on future school admissions. Paul Ballatt confirmed this had been considered and reiterated that there were potential economies of scale by shared services with Sutton.

A panel member commented that electronic admissions systems will experience intermittent problems.

Paul Ballatt reassured panel that consideration of deliverability will be a priority.

Panel asked that this proposal be avoided if possible and refer back to Cabinet to reconsider.

- **Options pack page 47, Reduction in funding – Duke of Edinburgh Award (Level 1 Saving)**

Yvette Stanley explained to panel that schools, rather than individuals, will be charged for this scheme. Schools could then pass the cost on to those who could afford to pay, while supporting those who needed it. Parent Teacher groups might be able to fund raise to support the scheme in schools.

Panel members had met with Youth Parliament members who had expressed concern over this proposal.

Panel members felt the scheme was of great benefit to young people and should be considered for expansion rather than contraction, particularly in view of the current economic climate and the need for positive engagement activities.

Discussion also ensued over the funding of hospital tuition and how an underspend had been created which was being used to offset costs.

Panel asked that the Cabinet note their continuing concern regarding this proposal and to reconsider.

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- **Options pack page 58, Implement new transport policy from April 2012. Introduce new modes of fulfilling the council's statutory responsibilities for the provision of SEN transport (Level 1 Saving)**

Paul Ballatt gave the latest out-turn current projection as £170,000 overspend for the year end, but asking panel to note this was not yet a fully reconciled figure (Panel had previously noted an under-spend in SEN transport for 2010-2011 and felt it was not necessary to list it as a saving).

Panel noted the information given and agreed the proposed saving.

- **Options pack page 49, (1,2 and 4) Commissioning budget for youth project, The Youth Opportunities Fund for young people to administer themselves and bid for small amounts to undertake discrete projects, and Positive Activities for Young People Targeted Youth - youth support that provides targeted youth work, and information, advice and guidance work across the borough. (Level 2 Saving)**

Yvette Stanley explained the principles of the process in concentrating on statutory services, while preventing children moving up the hierarchy of need. The current three-year contracts would cease at the end of March and the remaining budget would be used to procure fewer services or more targeted services. Panel members expressed how important it was to support vulnerable young people and give them a structure, particularly with high youth unemployment and the risk of greater numbers coming into care with the associated costs if their were insufficient resources for prevention.

Panel agreed to refer this proposal back to Cabinet to reconsider.

- **Options pack page 31, Fostering and Adoption Expenses (Level 1 Saving)**

A panel member felt it was counter-productive to allow this proposal while there was a national campaign to encourage adoption.

Panel agreed to not forwarding this back to Cabinet (vote 6 - 4)

- **Options pack page 32, Reducing the social work support available to families in the borough who have adopted children (Level 2 Saving)**

Panel felt this proposal posed a greater risk than had originally been thought and agreed with the revised Level 3 rating. Concerns were raised re possible adoption breakdowns and the impact on families and other council budgets.

Panel agreed to refer this proposal back to Cabinet for

reconsideration

- **Options pack page 35, Reducing the budget available to support care leavers entering independent accommodation or forms of education, employment or training (Level 3 Saving):**

Concern was raised about young people coming out of care with no family support network being at a disadvantage compared to their peers and the need for funding for individuals in finding accommodation and setting up independent living on leaving care.

Panel agreed to refer this proposal back to Cabinet for reconsideration (vote 6 – 4).

- **Options pack page 51, 1. Closure of youth provision currently providing youth clubs in the evening mainly in the most deprived areas of the borough and 2. Service reduction in education welfare service. This is likely to reflect the loss of one post.**

The Chair confirmed that this had originally been referred to the Commission with concern. Panel remain concerned about this saving proposal, in the context of the summer disturbances and how lack of youth provision might increase unrest.

Panel agreed to refer this proposal back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

- **Options pack page 54, Decommissioning of early intervention and prevention services (Level 3 saving)**

The potential impact of this saving proposal on vulnerable young people remains a concern for Panel.

Panel agreed to refer this proposal back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

RESOLVED: To forward the Panel's comments and recommendations on the above savings proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

5. SAFEGUARDING

Melissa Caslake introduced the report on Safeguarding.

In response to questions from panel members, Melissa explained that Merton has low numbers of children in care compared to other London boroughs, which is partly due to the Merton Model.

Newly qualified social workers in Merton have specialised training in the bespoke 'academy' programme, and take on less cases to make time for the additional training. All social workers have a level of supervision, appropriate to their experience. The 'time taken for assessment' measure was being replaced by putting more emphasis on the time taken from the point of referral to the point of providing help to the child.

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Melissa also expanded on 2.4 (second bullet point) regarding developing and embedding performance reporting and monitoring with a description of the Quality Assurance sub group, which is made up with representatives from a number of different agencies, who look at policy development. The sub group are working well together.

Melissa explained that three multi-agency audits are carried out each year, and include assessment of the quality of work done. The information is fed back into the Board and continually fed back into the business planning process.

There is a range of social care data provided by the multi-agency framework, providing a new breadth of data. This includes information from the Police on participants in the MAPPA.

Yvette Stanley explained the council's statutory duty to lead a local partnership, and that Merton's is currently under inspection by Ofsted with regard to these partnership arrangements.

In response to a panel member's question, Melissa Caslake explained social workers' training and how the transition from 'text book to reality' was managed. Social workers need to be equipped with skills to enable them to make finely balanced judgements. It was also important to have a balance of experienced and newly qualified social workers in the team.

Melissa agreed to provide panel with an update on private fostering in the borough, and also copies of the report from the conference attended by the Youth Advisors.

Jan Martin described the very comprehensive safeguarding audit tool used by all schools, and Paul Ballatt added that schools not only take part in child protection but can describe concerns and participate in the plan to meet needs at the lowest point possible.

Alison Jerrard reassured Panel that the secondary head representative on the Board reports back to the secondary headteachers' group. Alison also alerted members to the exceptional amount of work being done at the Year 6 – Year 7 transition stage.

Yvette Stanley described how there will be a remodelling of early intervention services, and the panel should ask for regular reassurance that the resources are appropriately targeted.

Michael Sutherland gave the Panel information about the BME demographic, in that school population data shows the direction of travel and that the ethnic mix is broadly proportional to the population. Melissa Caslake explained that BME children tend to be over-represented CPP and child poverty where a range of factors come together. Children may be receiving help from support services that prevent them from entering the system.

On Panel's request, Melissa agreed to circulate a copy of the Safe

Parenting Handbook (referred to on P49).

In response to a question about confidentiality of data Michael Sutherland responded that this was a pilot multi-agency framework, agencies had agreed to supply this information to the MSCB. At this point the data is not for wider distribution as some of the dataset relates to small cohorts of vulnerable children and sensitive issues. Advice has been sought from the information governance manager in regard to this matter due to concerns about individuals being identifiable from it.

On training (p57), the Chair asked whether the Board monitored which persons should be trained, and how far all those concerned undertook training. Melissa informed Panel that they looked at who needs to be trained and at which level, and that gaps were identified – for example there were not enough police attending courses. The suggestion that future reports might include data on those who should be trained and how far this had been achieved, so that any gaps were evident.

Panel asked for a record of their discussion to go to the Board for information. Panel formally expressed thanks for all the work the Board undertakes and thanked Melissa for the report.

6. DISCOURAGING THE CARRYING AND USE OF KNIVES AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

Keith Shipman introduced this report. It was clarified to Panel by the Chair that this was a report on how the carrying and use of knives could be discouraged, and there would be no discussion of any specific incident.

In response to comments from the Panel, Keith explained that young people carrying knives was partly due to the fear factor, and that they didn't usually consider that the knife could be used against them. There was a smaller group that carried knives because they were very scared, or being bullied. Keith described the projects that were being rolled out to address both issues.

Alison Jerrard said that most secondary schools in the borough have safer schools officers who work with the young people and also liaise with them to and from school. These officers are well integrated into the school community, and linked to transport officers. This initiative has helped improve safety on buses and at bus stops.

Panel agreed to endorse the development of a multi agency Knife Crime Plan.

7. UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

This item was introduced by Paul Ballatt.

Paul gave updated figures for paragraph 2.2 that there are currently 8 reception class vacancies and 6 new applications. All children were offered

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places but 4 children remain unplaced.

On paragraph 2.11 – Ofsted are currently inspecting the safeguarding and looked after children services.

In addition to the report, there was a recent Youth Parliament session on the savings proposals which was well attended by young people, officers and members. The comments made by the young people will be fed into the savings proposals process.

Panel agreed they would like to receive a secondary school provision report as referred to in paragraph 2.5.

The Chair raised a concern regarding paragraph 2.14 – ‘additional fiscal pressures on families may well result in greater demands on council services’ and asked how this could be measured.

Michael Sutherland explained it was difficult to be precise due to the wide range of factors but there were 30,000 families with children in Merton and as there was expected to be a 3% increase those entering poverty over the next three years it might involve 900 families (affecting probably more than 1600 children).

Yvette Stanley informed Panel that the Merton website included recently added anti poverty information.

The Panel agreed that further information on increasing numbers of children in poverty, and the impact on demand for services for the Department, would be welcome.

Alison Jerrard thanked the department for support during Ofsted and felt it was a privilege to be able to talk about the support schools received in managing safeguarding in her interview with inspectors. Alison also commented that good work was also being done to encourage families to take up free school meals.

Paragraph 2.17 – A panel member asked whether the Council might monitor and advise so as to aim for all schools to have governors that are trained in managing finance, rather than the council just offering training. Jan Martin pointed out that some school governors will be employed in finance/accounting roles and would have expertise to offer, but Jan would consider how to carry out an audit of these skills in schools and whether there is any possibility of schools sharing expertise, **and would report back.**

Discussion also took place regarding how schools with problematic budgets are tracked and supported by the council.

Panel congratulated the team on having an increasing number of care leavers beginning higher education.

8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Michael Sutherland introduced this report.

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Concern was expressed about the 3 serious road accidents being linked to a lack attention when crossing roads away from crossing points. Yvette Stanley will discuss the issues raised with E&R and headteachers.

Concern was also expressed that we were still failing to meet targets in relation to initial and core assessments.

The new basket of indicators (page 130) was discussed, where number 1 and numbers 11 – 15 were additional indicators to address issues relating to looked after children. Statistics on Ofsted reports would be detailed in the update report, not the performance index, the school standards report providing more detail on school performance. The indicators should include information against both national averages and statistical neighbours (where available) to establish how well Merton is doing.

Panel accepted the new indicators and requested the addition of BME exclusions, retention of the road accidents figure, a figure to indicate how many statements had been applied for and issued, and some detail on primary exclusions (if any) and managed moves.

9. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

No change from last meeting, but Panel asked to amend the date of the February Panel meeting to 22nd February.

Panel wished Melissa Caslake well with her maternity leave and thanked her for her work.