

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: April 18th 2012

Agenda item: 5

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

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, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last update report in February 2012.

2 DETAILS

Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services

2.1. The Ofsted announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services took place in January 2012. The inspection examined comprehensively the effectiveness of Merton's services in safeguarding children and in improving outcomes for looked after children. At the time of the Panel's last meeting in February 2012, draft feedback had been received but the final report and ratings have now been published and can be seen in full at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/merton>

2.2. The overall judgements and ratings provided in the report confirmed the headline feedback received at the end of the inspection that Merton's children's services are working effectively together and are improving outcomes for these priority groups. The inspection examined 22 judgement areas, all of which were rated as 'good' (grade 2) representing services which exceed minimum requirements.

2.3. As of December 2011 only 40% of local authorities received good or better ratings which places Merton's services well both nationally and in London and provides a sound foundation for the further improvement we are ambitious to achieve. Inspectors made a number of recommendations for improvement and officers are currently developing action plans to address these recommendations. These plans will be monitored by both the Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Children's Boards and it is

proposed that a report on progress is provided to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel in the new municipal year.

School Inspections

- 2.4. Four further inspection reports on Merton's primary schools have been published since the report to CYP Panel in January 2012. Of particular note William Morris School, previously subject to Ofsted's 'special measures', is now rated as 'good' marking the effectiveness of the council's decision in 2011 to federate the school with Singlegate school, rated by Ofsted as 'outstanding'. Provision at Beecholme, St Thomas of Canterbury and St Theresa schools has also been confirmed as 'good' resulting in over 80% of the borough's primary schools now rated as 'good' or better.
- 2.5. However, within the secondary sector, despite some improvement in pupil achievement over the last few years, and following the recent inspection in January 2012, Bishopsford Arts College has been judged as inadequate and has been placed in 'special measures' by Ofsted. In line with current national government policy, there is now a presumption that the school converts to academy status. A special Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 4th April..... agreed with recommendations of officers that the Secretary of State is requested to make an Academy Order and that the Harris Federation is named as the council's preferred academy sponsor for the school. At the time of writing this report, the council is also consulting on requesting consent to replace the school's current governing body by an Interim Executive Board to ensure the smoothest possible transition to academy status.

Miscellaneous issues

- 2.6. As reported to the CYP Panel in February 2012, preparation work is being undertaken in Merton in connection with national government's 'troubled families' initiative. Officers and partners have been engaged in identifying families with multiple problems and considering models of intervention to be employed. While some 'up front' funding will be made available, outcomes specified by government which local interventions must address and improve in order to lever full funding include increasing school attendance and reducing offending and worklessness. It is expected that Merton will negotiate a three year programme with DCLG by the end of April 2012.
- 2.7. National government is also seeking to further promote local cross agency information/intelligence sharing and integrated interventions in respect of children at risk. Sponsored by the Department for Education and the Home Office, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) involving the co-location of staff and data systems are being promoted to councils and partner agencies as a means of achieving the more 'joined up' approach called for, most recently, in the Munro Review of child protection. This initiative will necessitate a local review of current structures including the social care access and assessment service and the Police public protection desk as well as consideration of what other disciplines could usefully be included in a local MASH – eg NHS staff; probation service; education staff and those working with vulnerable adults. Referral and assessment processes will also need review. Officers are currently engaging local partner agencies in considering the application of a MASH in Merton.

- 2.8 As detailed in “An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay” scorecards on performance on key indicators relating to adoption are to be published shortly for each local authority. The scorecards will highlight how swiftly councils place children in need of adoption and how swiftly they assess and approve prospective adopters. They will allow councils to monitor their own performance and compare it with that of others. At the time of writing this report, officers are checking data accuracy contained in Merton’s pre-publication scorecard. We are already aware that our three year performance in two of the three key measures falls below thresholds set and are developing improvement plans accordingly.
- 2.9 Officers are currently preparing for primary school reception class ‘offer day’ on 18th April. At the time of writing this report, there are in the region of 200 children yet to be offered a place and 200 vacancies. Approximately 20 of the ‘on time’ applications cannot be made a ‘reasonable’ offer (within two miles or 45 minutes travel time) at this stage although officers are confident that between the first and second round of offers in mid May school places considered reasonable will become available. Beecholme, Poplar, Pelham and Garfield schools are providing ‘bulge’ classes in September 2012 to meet the additional demand for places being experienced this year.
- 2.10 As one of ten councils selected nationally to deliver a pilot programme to improve the early years offer to vulnerable two year old children, Merton has recently hosted an event for other councils and the DfE at which our shared project with LB Sutton to increase the skills of childminders in working with vulnerable young children was presented and well received. Merton’s Supporting Families service framework, hosted within our Early Years service area, was also recently a finalist in the annual Local Government Chronicle awards.
- 2.11 An event was also held in March for parents who had undertaken accredited parenting programmes provided by Merton in 2011-12. Some 60 parents of children who had offending or school attendance issues graduated from the ‘Strengthening Families: Strengthening Communities and ‘Escape’ programmes and were invited to receive certificates from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services.

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