

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 18th April 2012

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

Subject: Merton's Children's Trust

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Forward Plan reference number: n/a

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt

Recommendations:

- A. Panel notes the progress of Merton's Children's Trust and the agenda for 2012-13.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides members of the panel with an update on Children's Trust arrangements in Merton and identifies key issues for the trust in 2012-13.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 Merton's Children's Trust continues to be the focus for partnership engagement in planning and delivering services for children and families in the borough. partners remain committed to the value of local children's trust arrangements and of the 'joined up' and integrated working across disciplines and agencies which the trust champions and drives as one of the key levers for improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.2 Led by the council, the Trust Board has membership from key statutory agencies and the local community and voluntary sector. It sets priorities for action, leads strategic planning and promotes joint commissioning and delivery of services which aim to improve the health, safeguarding, education and enjoyment, positive contribution and economic wellbeing of children and young people in Merton.
- 2.3 In 2010-11 our Children's Trust arrangements were positively evaluated during the national Commissioning Support programme. The recent Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in January 2012 provided a further opportunity for external challenge and feedback on the effectiveness and impact of partnership practice in the borough. Key findings included:
- The Children's Trust is well supported by key agencies and by the voluntary and community sector, all of whom describe a shared passion for improving outcomes. Priorities are identified and developed, based on a clear analysis of need. Performance indicators are closely monitored and reviewed as

improvements to outcomes are being secured. Well-established relationships between Trust members facilitate effective communication and decision-making, as well as appropriate challenge.

- The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is good. The council and its partners and elected members have identified and secured demonstrable improvements to services which are contributing to improving outcomes for children and young people.
- The council and its partners and elected members have high ambitions for looked after children and care leavers and all outcomes are good and improving.
- Partnerships are well established and have been maintained through the significant changes within the health economy. Partnerships with the voluntary and community sector are outstanding.
- The local authority and its partners have a consistent record of improvement. The clear vision for improving outcomes, supported by effective plans, is shared across the partnership.
- Partners have a very good knowledge of the needs of children and young people in the borough and resources are used effectively to improve the quality of services. Robust analysis of data is used well to monitor and evaluate provision and outcomes.
- Partner agencies and voluntary and community organisations across the partnership benefit from good training opportunities and the commitment to learning is impressive, demonstrated by the use of peer review, self evaluation and the increasing use of audits.

2.4 Inspectors made no recommendations relating to strategic leadership and management of children's services in Merton, although areas for improvement relating specifically to partnership practice identified through the inspection include:

- Improving monitoring arrangements for S47 investigations
- Improving transition arrangements for children with disabilities
- Improving the systematic review of health and development needs in pre-school children
- Further develop specialist safeguarding training and supervision for staff in local NHS trusts
- Review the arrangements for initial health assessments of looked after children
- Routinely provide care leavers with a comprehensive summary of their health history
- Develop audit and review of practice in respect of health assessments for looked after children.

Officers and partners are developing plans to address these areas for improvement as part of our overall continuous improvement action planning.

Next Steps

2.5 The judgements of CSP consultants and Ofsted inspectors clearly support the direction of travel taken within Merton's children's services and demonstrate a solid foundation on which further development and improvement of local partnership arrangements can build. Officers and

partners have identified a number of key strategic leadership and management challenges to address in order to achieve our ambition for outstanding local children's services.

- 2.6 The establishment of local Health and Wellbeing Boards, with their all age remit to lead and oversee multi-agency work to improve both individual and community wellbeing, requires strong engagement of children's services to ensure an appropriate focus is achieved on children and young people within the Boards' broader agendas. The Boards will need to be sighted on and will need to intervene in safeguarding issues as well as other priorities for children's services. These mechanisms will provide an opportunity for improved engagement of services with a predominant adults focus in children's services strategies – adult mental health issues and domestic violence are, for example, key practice issues in the safeguarding of children and in work with children in need and looked after. However, explicit protocols will be needed to ensure clear delineation of governance responsibilities for these key services. In Merton, the Director of Children, Schools and Families and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services have been core members of the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, influencing the emerging terms of reference and remit and ensuring a 'bridge' to the local Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Boards is established.
- 2.7 The whole system changes in the NHS provide children's services with both challenges and opportunities. New commissioning relationships need to be developed as a result of the ending of PCTs and the re-allocation of commissioning responsibilities to Clinical Commissioning Groups led by GPs and to national commissioning structures. Strengthening the engagement of GPs in local children's services strategic commissioning and governance represents a significant opportunity and the attendance of the Director of Children's Services at Merton's CCG has enabled the group to become better informed of local children's services issues as it develops its function. The transfer of public health responsibilities to local authorities should enable sharper alignment of priorities across children's services and public health sectors to occur. Improved sharing of information and data, for example, building on the established Joint Strategic Needs Analysis process, should allow more intelligence led strategies in areas such as childhood obesity and teenage pregnancy.
- 2.8 While no longer a statutory requirement, a Children and Young People's Plan is considered by Merton's Children Trust Board to be a key tool for articulating a shared vision, setting shared priorities for action and promoting shared accountability across local children's services. Partners have agreed that the next iteration of Merton's CYPP will be specifically focused on key vulnerable groups – children at risk of harm, children looked after, children with disabilities including SEN, and young offenders – and on early intervention and prevention services designed to minimise the escalation of need in families in the borough. Officers and partners are currently undertaking needs analysis to inform the new plan which is intended to be 'signed off' by the Children's Trust Board in Autumn 2012.
- 2.9 A number of key practice challenges which, by their nature, require local co-ordination and integration across agencies and strong local integrated governance, are emerging as a result of central government policy initiatives.

Council officers are currently beginning to engage partners in the Troubled Families Initiative and in the development of a Multi Agency Screening/Safeguarding Hub. In 2012-13, the Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Children Boards will need to drive forward these initiatives at a local level. The CTB will also need to oversee the delivery of the LAA Performance Reward Grant funded project on the Phipps Bridge estate which is likely to become a specific element of our overall Troubled Families delivery as opposed to the standalone project originally planned. Having commissioned the comprehensive review of Merton's early intervention and prevention strategy in 2011-12, the Children's Trust Board will also need to oversee the implementation of the new EIP approach agreed during 2012-13.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Children's services have a key role in promoting children's rights, equality of opportunity and community cohesion. The Children's Trust promotes the participation of children and young people and their positive contribution. It aims to narrow gaps in outcomes between groups of children and their peers. Services including youth provision and schools implement steps to promote community cohesion.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. A range of youth services including those specifically for young offenders are within the scope of the Children's Trust. They seek to minimise offending and engage young people in positive activities.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. N/A for the purposes of this report

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT
None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None