

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
3 JULY 2012**

7.15 – 9:00pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, James Holmes, Oonagh Moulton, Linda Scott, Peter Walker, Simon Withey

Co-opted member Alison Jerrard

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) and Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education)

Yvette Stanley (Director of Children Schools and Families), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Theresa Leavy (Interim Head of Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina declared a personal interest in relation to item 8 on the agenda as a member of the Adoption and Permanency Panel.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Amanda Stuart Fisher (parent governor representative). Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Maxi Martin. The Panel was informed that Keran Currie has resigned as the primary headteacher representative and that a replacement would be sought. Similarly, elections are being held to fill the parent governor representative (secondary and special schools) vacancy on the Panel.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 April 2012 (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes are agreed as an accurate record of the meeting subject to Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance) checking on the accuracy of the figures on applicants for school places given in the fourth paragraph on page 4.

4 MATTERS ARISING (Agenda item 4)

None

5 MANAGEMENT OF THE MEETING

The Chair announced that at the workshop held on 29 May and attended by many of the Panel members it was recommended that each Panel meeting should comprise one major agenda item to which 60 minutes would be allocated, two secondary items allocated 20 minutes each and 20 minutes in total for any other items, therefore aiming to complete the meeting in two hours. He proposed that for this meeting, Items 6 and 7 together represented one of the secondary items, and the additional report in Item 9, requested at

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the last meeting, represented the second.

It was proposed to vary the order of the agenda so that items 6 and 7 were taken first, followed by items 9, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12

RESOLVED:

(1) That the approach set out above would be adopted for this and subsequent meetings.

(2) That items 6 and 7 on this agenda should be taken together and first, followed by items 9, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12.

6 OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (Agenda item 6) and **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES PRIORITIES** (Agenda item 7)

Yvette Stanley (Director of Children Schools and Families) introduced the reports, explaining that item 6 (the overview) sets the context by providing information on what the department does. Item 7 is an annual item that sets out the priorities for the year ahead, therefore providing a context for consideration of the Panel's work programme.

The Director outlined the key priorities for the year ahead, all of which she expects the Panel will wish to scrutinise during the year – adoption and permanency, prevention services, education standards, school places and support for children with complex needs.

Panel members expressed concern that the figures provided on staff numbers were open to misinterpretation, and did not provide adequate information to help in reviewing budget proposals when this happened, due to a lack of detail in the nature and level of posts, and requested further detail on staff numbers and structure in order to provide a clearer picture on numbers involved in frontline service delivery compared to supporting roles, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

(1) To note the reports

(2) To seek further information on staff numbers and structure, the detail of which is left to the discretion of the Director.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda item 9)

Theresa Leavy (Interim Head of Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion) introduced the briefing paper on the social care case file audit. In response to questions, she explained that:

- the 114 cases analysed in the report had been audited over a 12 month period and categorised on a four point scale

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- feedback from external inspection was that officers' grading had been robust and challenging
- the aim is to improve and learn from experience locally and elsewhere – hoping to achieve scores in the high 80s in future

Panel members discussed the current level of performance shown on the performance data sheet, focussing on those indicators showing amber or red. Officers made a number of points in response to questions:

- the higher than average level of secondary school fixed term exclusions is due to high levels in a small number of schools. The level has decreased this year.
- The number of social care assessments completed within 10 days has improved from red to amber and the 90% target is an ambitious one
- The proportion of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time is kept under constant review by the Director examining individual cases. Numbers involved are small.
- A similar approach is adopted for children in care cases that were not reviewed within required timescales

RESOLVED: To note the concerns raised by members of the Panel in relation to the indicators that are amber and red.

8 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (Agenda item 5)

Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance) undertook to provide updated figures on school admissions (paragraph 2.7 of the report).

Panel members expressed concerns about how careers advice will be provided in future and asked whether collaborative options were being explored. Jan Martin (Head of Education) and Alison Jerrard (secondary headteacher representative) said that this was under active discussion by schools and that examples of partnership working have been identified. Jan Martin added that the scrutiny task group review of post-16 careers pathways contained some very useful ideas that would be taken forward.

In relation to the transfer of public health responsibilities to the Council, the Director said that the Council was lobbying the government for more money to carry out these responsibilities and the recruitment of a Director of Public Health was being progressed.

The Panel was pleased to hear that knife crime has fallen in the borough, but disappointed at the rate of progress on reviewing policy for discouraging young people from carrying knives, and asked to see the action plan referred

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to in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Chair should meet with the Director (and Kaeith Shipman, the Education & Youth Inclusion Manager) in order to discuss how best to share information from the action plan. It was agreed that Councillors Holmes, Akyigyina, Forbes, Attawar and Dysart should also be invited to this meeting.

9 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY SERVICES IN MERTON (Agenda item 8)

Theresa Leavy (Interim Head of Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion) and Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet member for Children's Services) introduced the report and reassured Members that although there is a tension that sometimes presents between achieving targets and meeting the best interest of the child, the interests of the child is always paramount in these decisions.

Members praised the clarity of the report and the action plan, suggesting that the action plan could be improved by including measurable success outcomes.

Theresa Leavy provided additional information in response to questions:

- the two stage assessment process is designed so that an initial assessment is undertaken quickly to identify prospective adopters that are likely to be approved and then move on to a more in-depth assessment in those cases rather than for all prospective adopters as previously
- advertising and recruitment is taking place to find adoptive parents and a good number of people are coming forward at present
- some children are placed outside Merton through consortium arrangements when it is in their best interest
- there was a typo in paragraph 2.23 - "March 31 2011" should read "March 31 2012".

RESOLVED: that the Director will use a future "update on developments" report to the Panel to feed back on how success criteria have been incorporated into the action plan.

10 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF POST 16 CAREER PATHWAYS – DRAFT REPORT (Agenda item 10)

The Chair thanked the task group, in particular the two co-chairs for their work on this report and invited Councillor James Holmes, as one of the co-chairs, to introduce the report. Councillor Holmes thanked all the participants and supporting officers on behalf of the two co-chairs. He said that the report will be shared with secondary school headteachers for advice and comments

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before taking the report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: To endorse the report and to forward to cabinet for approval and implementation of the recommendations, once the report has been considered by the secondary school headteachers.

11 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 (Agenda item 11)

RESOLVED:

(1) To agree the 2012/13 work programme as drafted in the revised Appendix 1 that was laid round at the meeting.

(2) To appoint Councillor Oonagh Moulton to lead for performance monitoring on behalf of the Panel

(3) To appoint Councillor James Holmes to lead for budget scrutiny on behalf of the Panel

(4) To carry out a scrutiny task group review of secondary school places – to be discussed further on item 12 of this agenda

The scrutiny officer and the secondary headteacher representative will offer a short briefing to the new primary head teacher representative prior to attendance at his/her first Panel meeting

12 TASK GROUP REVIEW OF PROVISION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES (Agenda item 12)

RESOLVED:

To agree the title and terms of reference as set out in the report .

That the first meeting should take place in early October. The scrutiny officer will confirm other meeting dates with task group members.

To appoint Councillors James Holmes, Oonagh Moulton, Peter Walker, Agatha Akyigyina, Karin Forbes and Iain Dysart to the task group, as well as co-opted member Alison Jerrard (secondary headteacher representative).

To agree that the task group will be co-chaired by Councillors James Holmes and Peter Walker