

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: July 3rd 2012

Agenda item: **5**

Wards:

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

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley

Lead member: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cllr Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

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Recommendations:

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

B.

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 April 2012.

2 DETAILS

2.1 The coalition government's policy interest in adoption of children in the public care system resulted in the publication in May 2012 of a national comparative scorecard setting out the performance of local authorities against a set of indicators which measure the timeliness of key processes related to adoption as well as absolute numbers of adoptions achieved. Merton's current performance overall against these indicators is below thresholds recently set by government. The council has engaged with BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) to support our improvement planning and recently met with representatives from the DfE in line with other councils whose performance is lagging in this area of practice. An action plan has been established which will be assessed for robustness by DfE. More details on these issues are contained in a separate report to panel on this meeting's agenda.

2.2 Panel members will be aware from previous information provided of the national initiative to establish local Multi-Agency Safeguarding/Screening Hubs (MASH). CSF Department is currently working towards a 'go live' date in Autumn 2012 for Merton's MASH. This will involve the physical co-location of staff and information systems from key partner agencies including social care; education; youth offending; the police service; the probation service and NHS trusts whose remit will be to receive and screen

all concerns relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Through sharing of appropriate information, analysing and assessing risk together, and decision making in respect of action to be taken, it is intended that the MASH will become a key mechanism for improving service co-ordination and safeguarding practice.

- 2.3 CSF Department is also progressing implementation of the national Troubled Families initiative – to be known locally as Merton Transforming Families. Further to previous information provided to panel, the council and key partners have now formally entered the programme, identifying the specific families for intervention in the first year and negotiating the financial arrangements with government which will fund the work with families and, given successful achievement of specific performance targets, secure an element of payment by results.
- 2.4 Knife crime has fallen significantly in Merton. In the year to date, there have been 28 offences of knife crime compared to 64 for the same period last year, representing a reduction of 56%. This is currently the most significant reduction in knife crime in London. There has also been a reduction in the numbers of young people who are victims of serious offences - from 33 victims last year to 30 this year - representing a reduction of 9%. There has been a 23% fall in robbery which is the main contextual factor for knife crime.
- 2.5 A workshop to review strategies to minimise serious youth crime including knife crime has been held involving schools, Merton's youth and youth offending services and the metropolitan police. An action plan aiming to further reduce the incidence of serious youth crime has been developed and is in the early stages of implementation. The action plan includes a focus on interventions in areas of the borough where young people feel unsafe; work by the police service to target individuals and programmes to work with victims and offenders. Schools are also undertaking a range of projects to further support the strategy.
- 2.6 Since the last panel meeting 2 further Ofsted inspections of Merton's schools have reported. Perseid school retained its rating of outstanding and Wimbledon Chase school's rating has improved from good to outstanding.
- 2.7 At the time of writing this report, all applicants for reception class places in Merton's primary schools, including all late applicants to date, have received an offer. 35 applicants have rejected offers made without informing us of where their children will attend – these parents will be those who may be seeking to secure independent provision, those who received a 'central offer' which they do not wish to accept, and those who are holding out for preference schools. There are currently 37 vacancies across 6 schools - William Morris, Beecholme, Garden, Lonesome, Liberty and Stanford – with further vacancies expected when parents in receipt of multiple offers make decisions. At this stage we are confident there will be sufficient places for those who require them.

- 2.8 In April 2012, government issued statutory guidance to schools in respect of the provision of careers guidance to pupils. Following the demise of the Connexions Service, section 29 of the Education Act 2011 now places schools under a duty to secure access for pupils to independent careers guidance which is impartial, which provides information on the full range of post 16 education and training opportunities available to young people and which promotes the best interests of pupils. The statutory guidance issued is designed to ensure that schools support pupils to make well informed and realistic decisions about their futures and ambitions in the context of the raising of the participation age in education and training to age 17yrs by 2013 and then 18yrs by 2015 mandated by government.
- 2.9 Schools will have freedom and flexibility to decide how to fulfil this statutory duty in accordance with the needs of their pupils and will be required to meet the costs of provision from their overall budgets. Schools may work individually or in consortia/partnerships to secure careers guidance services and may commission specific elements from external, expert and accredited providers. While not being prescriptive in detail, the guidance promotes the provision of face to face guidance for particular pupil groups – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities. It also promotes schools' engagement with local employers, work based education and training providers and FE colleges and universities to enable wider careers activities such as work experience, workplace visits, shadowing, mentoring etc.
- 2.10 The range of options available to Merton schools has been discussed in detail at various forums, for example, the curriculum development and sixth form forums. The LA has also supported schools by developing a range of impartial online resources that can be accessed by all pupils in secondary schools. A number of schools have expressed an intention to work collaboratively to ensure that all young people receive high quality impartial guidance and that they are well prepared for their next steps in education or into employment.
- 2.11 On the establishment of the new National Careers Service, LAs no longer have a duty to provide careers advice to pupils but will continue to be required to encourage, enable and assist young people's participation in education and training. Councils will be required to track participation levels of all young people locally and support participation, particularly, of vulnerable groups.
- 2.12 CSF officers have been working with colleagues in the council and NHS to prepare for the transfer of public health responsibilities to the council in April 2013. Mandated by the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, an initial health and wellbeing strategy is being prepared which will include a specific focus on children and young people issues including ante-natal care, early years support, childhood obesity, emotional wellbeing, substance misuse and teenage pregnancy. Officers have also been collating information on specific services commissioned historically by the NHS with a view to determining forward commissioning arrangements. While reflecting the broader change and turbulence in the NHS, transfer of public health

responsibilities provide clear opportunities for the further co-ordination, integration and partnership delivery of services in the borough.

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.