

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: July 3rd 2012

Agenda item: 7

Wards:

Subject: CSF Priorities Report

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. This report outlines for CYP Scrutiny Panel the current portfolio and service priorities for children's services in Merton.

2 DETAILS

2.1. In 2011-12, the council's Children, Schools and Families Department continued to lead Merton's Children's Trust partnership in planning, commissioning and delivering services which aim to improve outcomes and life chances for the borough's children and young people. Lead elected members and officers remain committed to the core principles of partnership, co-ordination and integration of services across partner agencies as providing the most effective framework for improving outcomes and in the current year will seek to further strengthen the multi-agency governance of children's services provided by Merton's Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Boards. Further work will be undertaken in the year ahead to clarify and delineate governance responsibilities for children's issues with the developing Health and Wellbeing Board.

2.2. For some years, Merton's Children and Young People's Plan has been the overarching strategic plan used to outline key priorities and actions for children's services locally. While no longer required by statute, the plan is being reviewed and refreshed in 2012-13 with a stronger focus on vulnerable groups including children at risk of harm, looked after children, those with special educational needs and young offenders. The plan will also outline priorities for early intervention and prevention services in the borough – this is in line with new statutory guidance requiring councils to “assure” delivery and impact of appropriate preventive services.

- 2.3. The ratings of 'good' in Ofsted's major inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services, the good or better ratings of our children's centres, the continued improvement in key stage tests in Merton's schools including progress made by pupils with special educational needs, the increased participation of young people in positive activities and reduction in levels of youth crime and anti-social behaviour all demonstrate that there is a strong foundation on which to build further improvement in the services for which CSF Department has specific responsibilities in the coming year.
- 2.4. The strong ambitions of elected members and officers for further improvement need to be set in the context, however, of continued reduction in CSF budgets – over £1 million savings have been made in the current year's budget and significant further savings will be required as part of the council's overall medium term financial strategy – and of the continuing 'raising of the bar' in terms of central government expectations of children's services.

A number of key challenges and priorities for 2012-13 have been identified:

Safeguarding and Looked After Children

- 2.5. Members of the panel will recall that an action plan was established following Ofsted's inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services. In addition to items in the plan which are the responsibility of partner agencies, CSF department is implementing improvements in a number of areas of practice including feedback to referrers in respect of the outcomes of referrals, monitoring of child protection investigations, management oversight of child protection work in the integrated service for children with disabilities, transitional arrangements for children with disabilities, awareness of young people looked after of the Children in Care Council and the Merton Pledge, communication with parents and carers, and case recording. Progress in implementing the action plan is being monitored by Merton's Local Safeguarding Children Board and an update will be provided to CYP Panel in November 2012.
- 2.6. Following the publication of the national adoption scorecards in which Merton's performance against a range of indicators relating to adoption did not meet thresholds set, the department has put in place an improvement plan, the implementation of which is a major priority for the coming year. Details of the plan are contained in a separate item on this panel meeting's agenda.
- 2.7. In line with national policy, work is currently being undertaken to establish a Multi-Agency Safeguarding/Screening Hub (MASH) in Merton. Staff and information systems from key services and agencies including social care, education, youth offending, police, probation and NHS Trusts will be co-located with a remit to receive and screen all concerns relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The MASH is designed to assist in the better sharing of information, risk assessment and decision making in response to these concerns and to achieve more timely and integrated interventions.

- 2.8. CSF department services and those of partner agencies will also need to respond to the revisions to the pan- London 'working together' guidance currently being undertaken in respect of multi-agency safeguarding practice and to the further implementation of recommendations arising from the national Munro report into safeguarding.

Early Intervention and Prevention

- 2.9. Given the financial constraints on CSF services noted above, it is increasingly important that early intervention and prevention services are targeted more effectively to reduce the need for more expensive and intrusive interventions. Existing EIP budgets are to be used to establish remodelled multi-disciplinary 'enhanced' level services during 2012-13. Children, young people and families appropriate for referral to these services will be identified through use of an amended Common Assessment Framework assessment and it is anticipated that the services will operate just below the current threshold for children's social care intervention. It is planned to retain a commissioning budget to procure services which will support the work with families undertaken by these new teams.
- 2.10. In advance of the establishment of these remodelled EIP services, some refocusing of existing early intervention provision has been necessary to enable the establishment of Merton's Troubled Families (Transforming Families Together) service. During the course of this year and for a subsequent two years, the service will work with identified families to support and increase their engagement with education and employment and to reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. This initiative is an early example of central government's intended 'payment by results' approach and close local monitoring of progress and learning from practice will be needed in the coming year.

Education

- 2.11. The way in which schools are funded is due to change significantly with a reformed funding system from April 2013. Central government is seeking to introduce a simpler national funding formula and to delegate more of local Dedicated Schools Grant directly to schools to further increase their autonomy. CSF Department is currently working closely with our schools to model and understand the implications of the proposed changes for them and for local authority education services. In line with learning from other authorities, implementing the new funding system is likely to result in significant turbulence with Merton schools being better or worse off and historical models of funding local authority services no longer possible. While a minimum funding guarantee will continue to be applied which will enable some of the impact of the new regime to be moderated for individual schools, the continuation of council services will increasingly be dependent on 'buy back' from schools.

- 2.12. This emphasis on increasing choice and autonomy for schools needs to be set in the context of a strong local commitment to partnership between schools and with the local authority as embodied in the Merton Education Partnership. The year ahead will see 3 schools functioning as teaching schools further enhancing Merton's approach to encouraging and facilitating school to school support and the council and schools jointly addressing the funding challenges noted in the above paragraph. There will also be further consultation with schools in the autumn on the direction and shape of the partnership in the medium term.
- 2.13. CYP panel members will be aware of the current plan to achieve the academisation of Bishopsford School by September 2012 under the proposed sponsorship of the Harris Foundation. Resolving the status of the school is essential to enable the improvement in outcomes and popularity needed and officers will work closely with the school, Harris Foundation and DfE to achieve a timely and smooth transition.
- 2.14. A new Early Years and Foundation Stage curriculum comes in to effect from September 2012 as does the new Ofsted Childcare Framework. Through the autumn we will be firming up plans to meet new statutory duties to secure places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds. We will be consulting on the new funding formular for Early Years in September as part of the funding changes noted in para 2.11. Work has begun on a Locality Model for the delivery of the Children's Centre programme and there will be extensive consultation on those emerging proposals in the autumn.
- 2.15. Further changes to the national curriculum are expected over the coming months and there have been early indications that the GCSE level examination framework may be reformed in the medium term. Officers will advise on developments as they arise
- 2.16. In the SEN Green Paper there are a number of proposals which will need to be implemented by 2014. The remit for SEND services will extend to 0 - 25yrs and there will be a revised SEN Code of Practice. A single Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) will replace statements and S139a assessments aimed at improving co-ordination and integration of services. The single assessment process will be more streamlined and completed quickly (26 weeks down to 20 weeks). The draft Bill is expected in the summer 2012 for consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny.
- 2.17. CSF department will continue to implement its primary school places strategy in 2012-13, with 4 additional classes being opened in September 2012 and plans to be developed for a further 3 in September 2013. Recent GLA pupil projections indicate that the rise in demand in the primary phase will continue and officers will need to develop further options for increasing available places. Levels of government grant are not yet known for the years ahead and further call on the council's capital budgets will inevitably be required. Officers have begun to engage with schools in the secondary sector to discuss the significant increase in pupils projected from around 2014-15 with early projections indicating in the region of 25 new forms of entry needed in secondary schools in Merton by 2020.

Youth Inclusion

- 2.18. The department will continue to implement the youth offending team post inspection action plan in 2012-13 and some restructuring will be undertaken to strengthen management and quality assurance in the service. Officers will continue to work with Merton's Youth Partnership to implement a new model of universal youth services in 2012-13. The model aims to commission area based partnerships of third sector providers which will deliver local youth services and seek to increase capacity of youth provision at a local level through engagement of other community, voluntary and business partners. A pilot for the model is currently being planned for the Morden area with commissioning planned for autumn 2012.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

N/A

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None 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.