

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL  
13 NOVEMBER 2012**

7.15 – 9:15PM

**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 members –Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons (Parent Governor Representative – Secondary School), Amanda Stuart-Fisher (Parent Governor Representative – Primary School)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children’s Services), Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education), Mark Allison (Cabinet Member for Finance)  
Yvette Stanley (Director of Children Schools and Families), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Teresa Levy (Interim Head of Children’s Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

**1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda item 1)**

None.

**2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Alison Jerrard (secondary head teacher representative) and Anna Juster (Roman Catholic Diocesan Representative).

**3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 September 2012 (Agenda item 3)**

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

**4 MATTERS ARISING (Agenda item 4)**

Paul Ballatt drew the Panels attention to the note in the Minutes of the meeting on 4 September 2012, to reiterate his apology for providing incorrect information to the Panel at the September 2012 meeting.

Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that the findings of the review of primary school provision undertaken by Capita would be available in November 2012. This report could then be made available to Members of the Panel. Paul Ballatt proposed consideration of the report at the Panels January 2013 meeting. It was noted that the report may need to be treated as confidential and therefore could not be considered in a public meeting if this was the case. A decision on how necessary this was would be taken closer to the time.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed to consider the Capita Report at their meeting in January 2013 in closed session.

**5 MANAGEMENT OF THE MEETING**

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Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed that the Panel consider Item 7, Youth Violence and gang related offending be deferred to the January 2013 meeting of the Panel due to more time being available at the January meeting to consider this item. Panel agreed to defer the item to the January 2013 meeting.

Councillor Peter Walker requested that reports be presented in the appropriate format, clear to enable Members and the public to access the information provided and that an Executive Summary is provided with a clear purpose for the report and statement for where Scrutiny could contribute, challenge and add value. Councillor Oonagh Moulton and Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons echoed these sentiments. Councillor James Holmes expressed his frustration at the information items presented to the Panel that did not allow for scrutiny of the issues.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton requested that a glossary be provided to explain key terms and acronyms.

Councillor James Holmes and Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed that a meeting be set up with Yvette Stanley and Paul Ballatt to address the issue of the reports that were being presented and how scrutiny could add value, particularly in relation to the format of the reports etc for future meetings. Panel agreed that this would be a helpful way forward.

### **6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-17 (Agenda item 5)**

Caroline Holland introduced the report and explained to Members that the report set out proposals to bridge the budget gap and proposals to address budget issues for 2013-2017. The Panel were informed that for 2013/14 there was currently a 1.6 million revenue savings target which was being met from three areas. as outlined at para. 2.2 in the report. For the Panel, there were no new revenue proposals, however, there were implications for the Capital Programme, particularly in meeting demand for primary school places. The Panel heard that an additional £21 million was required to meet additional primary school places need.

Panel noted the difficulties in reading some of the appendices to the report with such a small font and that the lack of a glossary didn't help. Caroline Holland apologised and committed to including a glossary and ensuring that materials were printed in larger font for the January meeting for Members.

Councillor Peter Walker enquired about primary school expansions that have temporary classrooms and which schools this applied to. Paul Ballatt explained that temporary solutions would be in place at some schools until a permanent expansion was required and that no decision has been taken on schools to be temporarily expanded from 2015 as yet.

Jo Sullivan Lyons asked about the rate of inflation and why the estimate outlined was 1.5% given that the current inflation rate was 2.9% and was this prudent. Caroline Holland explained that the council never fully budget for full

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inflation as this was a further additional cost and we look to cash limit certain budgets where possible.

Councillor Peter Walker commented on the financial situation and its problems and challenges and the need for the council to have a hold on where it is going and what budget gaps there are in the next 3 to 4 years.

Caroline Holland informed Members that some information to map out the budget for the next 3 to 4 years was not yet available as the government grant settlement wasn't going to be announced until 19<sup>th</sup> December and the Capital Grant funding allocation from the DfES would not be announced until January 2013.

Paul Ballatt added that an estimated 29 forms of entry for 2007-2016 had been estimated and that many schools would need temporary accommodation initially and if the level of places need was sustained then permanent accommodation at a later date.

Councillor Peter Walker questioned what financial impact moving schools to Academy Status would have on the council's budget. Paul Ballatt confirmed that funding would need to be taken from the capital budget for this. Yvette Stanley added that, if a Free School scheme was innovative, DfE funding might be available but would be considered on a case-by-case basis. It was not clear what impact this might have on the council's capital allocation.

Councillor Karin Forbes asked about the cost of asbestos removal and how many schools are identified as requiring this. Paul Ballatt explained that he did not have that information at the meeting but that he could produce a note and circulate to the Panel. The process of prioritisation would be based in the number of schools and re-assessment undertaken.

Amanda Stuart Fisher asked about the relationship between temporary and permanent expansion in the primary school expansion programme and how long expansions would be in place. Paul Ballatt confirmed that this would need to be reviewed year on year according to demand.

Councillor Agatha Akygyina asked what length of time an expansion could be considered temporary with reference to Merton Abbey school. Yvette Stanley confirmed that historically developments were initially temporary and then turned into permanent expansions as need is sustained. There has been temporary accommodation at Merton Abbey for some time and this could be permanent when need was sustained.

Cllr Holmes enquired about the assessment of posts identified and if shared services had been considered. Cllr Holmes also asked about the process the department had gone through to arrive at these transformation proposals. Paul Ballatt responded to the Panel by explaining that historically have entered into a number of shared services and that as part of the transformation programme the department are thinking about how it can move from its current operating model to its target operating model. The department are also alert to any

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opportunities to share posts/expenses.

Councillor James Holmes asked how opportunities would be identified and pursued. Yvette Stanley confirmed that every service has been through a service review and has considered the department's statutory responsibilities, local drivers and issues and the direction of travel of services within CSF. A review and 'taking stock' is underway within all service areas as a pre cursor to 2014 - 2019 savings.

Yvette Stanley drew Members attention to the Equality Impact Assessments for each service appended to the report. Jo Sullivan Lyons enquired as to the outcomes of each assessment as classifications were not provided. Paul Ballatt explained that this was a failure of the template and outlined the categories to Members.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

**7 SAFEGUARDING, LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN, NATIONAL AND LOCAL UPDATES – INCLUDING PROGRESS ON PERMENANCY AND THE SLAC INSPECTION ACTION PLAN (Agenda item 6)**

Yvette Stanley apologised to the Panel if they felt that it was not an accessible document. Yvette Stanley outlined that the report was presented at the Panels request in relation to a range of services in children's social care. The summary report outlined how the department were responding to the reduction in resources, the changing and growing population in Merton, national initiatives around safeguarding and new initiatives to be implemented. Such changes and pressures impact on service delivery and have required the department to ensure that services are targeted more sharply to ensure the right intervention.

Appendix 1 provided an overview of the structural changes currently being consulted on in relation to children's social care and Appendix 2 outlined the departments approach to investing resources in the most critical early intervention and prevention services. Appendix 3 and 4 were the action plans following the safeguarding and looked after children inspections and the actions to improve permanency and adoption as requested by the Panel.

Councillor James Holmes asked about the process followed when arriving at the outcomes and recommendations for taking the service forward. Yvette Stanley responded that the covering report set out this detail and highlighted some of the key paragraphs.

Councillor Peter Walker asked how early intervention is taken forward given need to identify problematic families earlier. Theresa Leavy commented that the figures in paragraph 3.3 of the report highlight demand that has increased by a third in the past year. There has also been a rise in the number of children subject to child protection plans and so preventative services needed to be even more purposeful and targeted. The whole approach was founded on close working with partners. Commissioning services does not mean a loss

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of access to the services due to the established links with partners by the council. Partners are co-located with CSF staff and contribute jointly to planning and actions to support children and families.

Councillor Peter Walker asked how many families were defined as having high level needs. Theresa Leavy confirmed that the Troubled Families initiative has identified 500 families in Merton that the department and its partners will be working with over the next 3 years and that at any one time there are 1200 cases open during the year.

Paul Ballatt added that families are identified with a view to preventing them going up the hierarchy of need. Staff have been trained in Merton's child and young person's well being model and the Common Assessment Framework issued by all partners to support this. The department is to become increasingly more methodical in how they identify chaotic families.

Councillor Iain Dysart asked if there was a significant impact on the timeliness of intervention at the moment and if the caseload volume per member of staff was sufficient. Theresa Leavy reiterated that there had been an increase in volumes but noted that timeliness around core assessments had improved due to a reduction in bureaucracy. The department aims to have more equitable caseloads across all teams and the service following the restructure. Theresa Leavy added that caseloads could differ because they are complex but that the department is working with partners to look at how this is managed safely.

Councillor Iain Dysart enquired if staff have access to support to manage their caseloads and if staff are encouraged to voice concerns. Theresa Leavy confirmed that structures were in place and that this was key to the service and to the restructure, to share worries and concerns and respond appropriately.

Councillor Agatha Akiygyina enquired about the number of services that would stop. Paul Ballatt clarified that the department had to consider where best to prioritise resources given the reduction in budgets.

Councillor Agatha Akiygyina asked if, by stopping certain services that are not viewed as critical, would families ultimately end up higher on the hierarchy of need and require access to other services. Paul Ballatt confirmed that a balance would need to be struck to avoid this.

Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons asked how the restructure diagram in appendix 1 of the report would support inter- agency working. Yvette Stanley informed the Panel that the diagram simply provided an internal structure chart for the purposes of consulting staff on where their team/service would sit. It is not a diagram of the relationships between agencies. Theresa Leavy added that the structure had been configured to ensure efficient working in a multi agency way.

Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons enquired if, in commissioning external providers, there were issues in only offering 1-year contracts and how local organisations

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could competitively bid to deliver services if they were only guaranteed funding for one year. In addition, Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons asked how we ensure that services commissioned respond to changing needs. Paul Ballatt added that the department would like to give certainty to a provider and have recommended 3 year contracts in the past for early intervention services. However, given the timing of the 14-17 budget decisions it is unlikely to commission services for long periods. The department put the ability to extend the contracts and have developed tighter specifications to ensure providers are meeting client need. Service providers commissioned by the department, of which there are currently 30 early intervention services, are monitored on the basis of risk and finance and there have been instances with these providers where the specification has been changed in response to this risk based monitoring.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton questioned how the department were intending to ensure all amber status tasks within the safeguarding and looked after children post inspection action plan would be achieved and listed as green in future updates. Yvette Stanley confirmed that the action plan was being monitored through regular audits by the local safeguarding children board and all agencies were providing regular updates. Some actions would be ongoing and are therefore likely to remain amber.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton commented on the need to be robust in ensuring delivery of the action plans (at appendix 4 and 5 in the report). Yvette Stanley suggested to the Panel that they could have updates within the regular performance report on a 6 monthly basis and that the adoption score card would be published shortly which would further determine the direction of travel and a progress update could be included in the next performance monitoring report to the Panel.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

### **8 YOUTH VIOLENCE AND GANG RELATED OFFENDING (Agenda item 7)**

RESOLVED: Panel agreed to defer this item for consideration at their January 2013 meeting.

### **9 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (Agenda item 8)**

Councillor Maxi Martin drew attention to the Youth Transformation Project winning a national Compact Award for innovation at a recent Awards Ceremony.

Councillor Jeff Hanna expressed thanks and congratulations from the Panel to Councillor Maxi Martin and the partnership.

Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that since this report had been published the department had received notification of an inspection of their fostering services that will commence week beginning 19<sup>th</sup> November 2012. An update

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will be included in one of the standing reports.

Yvette Stanley added that Melissa Caslake (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion) had left the organisation and that Theresa Leavy, Melissa Caslake's current cover, would stay on in the interim until an appointment to the post could be made to ensure a seamless transition.

Yvette Stanley also informed the Panel that Michael Sutherland (Research and Information Manager) had left the organisation and that this vacant post would be appointed to in due course.

Councillor Peter Walker requested an update on Dundonald School. Paul Ballatt outlined that the planning process was ongoing and the CSF department would be providing the additional information requested to demonstrate why it was not possible to propose a scheme that incorporated an extension on the existing site. This report will go to the Planning Committee in December 2012. Councillor Peter Walker followed up this question by enquiring about expressions of interest within the covenant. Paul Ballatt confirmed that no expressions of interest or evidence had been received at this stage.

Councillor Karin Forbes asked if the documentation relating to Dundonald School would be made public. Paul Ballatt confirmed that planning would provide information online.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton commended the department on the OFSTED ratings it has received for Merton schools and asked if Merton had primary schools in the lower categories central government had recently announced. Yvette Stanley confirmed that Merton did not have any schools in this category.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

**10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda item 9)**

Councillor Iain Dysart requested that the performance information be received in A3 prior to the meeting to enable Members to prepare fully.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and the department noted the request and would direct the request to Democratic Services.

**11 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 10)**

The Panel agreed to defer and consider the Youth violence and gang related offending item at their January 2013 meeting. They also agreed to consider the outcome of the work of Capita on the Primary Strategy at their January 2013 meeting. Councillor Iain Dysart requested sight of the Capita Report ahead of the January 2013 meeting, following consideration by LSG at their November 2013 meeting. Paul Ballatt agreed to circulate this report to Members in due course and stressed the confidential nature of aspects of the report that would probably need to be considered in closed session.

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RESOLVED: Panel agreed the Agenda for the January 2013 meeting and noted the work programme.