

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 13 November 2012

Agenda item: 8

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.

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 September 2012.

2 DETAILS

Strategic issues

2.1 Members of the panel have received information previously on the development of a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and a Transforming Families service in the borough in response to specific central government policy initiatives. These drivers, alongside more recent public policy developments including a new Children and Families Bill; the introduction of a new more taxing Ofsted inspection regime for safeguarding and looked after children services; and changes in procedures and practices arising from national practice reviews eg Munro report, have prompted proposals for major organisational change within CSF department. Proposals for restructuring and re-aligning children's social care services and early intervention and prevention services, also informed by pressures on these services from demographic growth and the need for CSF department to make significant savings as part of the council's overall medium term Financial Strategy, are the subject of a separate report on the panel's agenda this evening.

2.2 Introduced in the last Queen's Speech, the new Children and Families Bill is due to enter parliament in early 2013. The Bill will have far reaching implications for CSF services. Provisions in the Bill will speed up the process

of care proceedings in the Family Court to support more timely permanency planning for looked after children and the Bill will also introduce a more pragmatic approach to matching children requiring adoption with prospective adoptive parents. Key measures also include the introduction of a simplified, single assessment process for children with Special Educational Needs supported by a single Education, Health and Care Plan for these pupils.

- 2.3 Ofsted has issued proposals for a new inspection framework for safeguarding and looked after children services. Unless the proposals are significantly altered following consultation, these inspections will in the future be unannounced, will focus more on the 'journey' and experience of children and families of services provided, will involve significant observation and 'shadowing' of practitioners and will focus more strongly on the quality of practice and its specific impact on outcomes for children and families. There will be a stronger focus on the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention services in preventing the escalation of need and risk. The new regime will require local authority services and partner agencies to embed a more robust quality assurance approach across all relevant services and there will be a need for agencies to be in a 'constant state of readiness' for these inspections as notice will no longer be provided.
- 2.4 Officers have made further savings proposals for 2013-14 which are contained in a separate report for this evening's panel meeting. As part of the council's overall Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2014-15 to 2016-17, CSF department has been set a further savings target of approximately £2.5 million. Officers are currently developing proposals to meet this extremely challenging savings target which will be presented to Cabinet in December 2012 and to the CYP Scrutiny Panel in January 2013.

Service Issues

- 2.5 Officers have continued to work with Merton's Youth Partnership to implement a new model of universal youth services in the borough. The model aims to commission area based partnerships of community and voluntary organisations 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. The model is being piloted in the Morden area and a commissioning process has been successfully completed. Preparation is currently underway for the pilot to be extended to the Wimbledon area. A post has also been established within MVSC to support the partnership development required for the sustainability of the new model.
- 2.6 The department has continued to implement an improvement plan following the inspection of Merton's Youth Offending Service in Autumn 2011. A restructuring of the service has strengthened management and quality assurance of the service's core casework function. An effective 'triage' function is in place. There has been a promising reduction in first time entrants to the youth justice system and the reoffending rate is below London average.

- 2.7 In response to central government's commitment to provide at least 15 hours early education per week for more disadvantaged children, Merton is now providing over 300 places for 2 year olds in our Children's Centres and in Private and Voluntary early years settings. In addition to central government's mandatory criteria of children in economic disadvantage and children looked after, Merton is using discretionary powers to enable children in need and those subject to child protection plans to benefit from this initiative.
- 2.8 Since the panel's last meeting in September, a further three Ofsted inspections of schools in Merton have taken place. St John Fisher Primary School retained its rating of good. St Marks Academy improved its rating from satisfactory to good and Harris Academy Merton retained its outstanding rating.
- 2.9 Following its major refurbishment over the summer, Brightwell Respite Unit was reinspected by Ofsted and retained its good rating.
- 2.10 LB Merton continues to meet the challenge of providing sufficient primary school places. We were able to offer a place to all children in September due to further school expansion - we are now providing an additional 21 forms of entry in reception year compared to 2007/08 (630 extra reception places). Beecholme, Pelham, Poplar and Garfield Primary Schools all provided extra classes for the first time in September 2012.
- 2.11 Permanent schemes or planned phases of permanent schemes were completed for the start of term at All Saints CE School (through the former South Wimbledon Youth Centre and Community Centre building), Benedict, Gorringe Park, Hollymount, Joseph Hood, Liberty, St. Mary's, Singlegate, and William Morris Primary Schools. Completion is due in November at Aragon Primary School.
- 2.12 Statutory consultation has commenced in connection with the proposed permanent expansions of Hillcross and Merton Abbey Primary schools and will begin in November for proposed permanent expansions at Pelham, Poplar and Singlegate Primary schools.

Miscellaneous

- 2.13 The council and South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust have been shortlisted for the prestigious Health Service Journal award for local authority/NHS partnerships for the successful Multi-Systemic Therapy service. One of CSF department's most experienced social work practitioners and managers has been shortlisted for the national 'Social Worker of the Year' award. The youth transformation project noted above has been nominated for a national 'Compact' award. Merton has been named as 'most improved' in the 2012 Good Food for London awards which includes evaluation of the quality of food provided in schools.

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**
- Appendix One – Provisional school level ‘A’-Level results
- 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 12.1 None.