

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL  
16 APRIL 2013**

7.15PM – 8:45PM

**PRESENT:** Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Oonagh Moulton, Peter Walker

Co-opted members –Alison Jerrard

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children’s Services), 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 and Youth Inclusion)

**1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST**

None.

**2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Linda Scott, Councillor Simon Withey, Amanda Stuart-Fisher, Jo Sullivan-Lyons and Paul Connellan.

**3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2013**

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting subject to an amendment regarding the types of sessions that are delivered to a liaison group at the Mosque set up by Councillor Maxi Martin.

**4 MATTERS ARISING**

None

**5 EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION STRATEGY**

Paul Ballatt introduced the report. He outlined that CSF Department and partners deliver universal, targeted and specialist interventions. All children can access universal services, only some require targeted support and fewer still require specialist interventions

Getting the right level of services to children at the right time is a key challenge. There are principles involved – children should get as many of their needs as possible met in high quality universal services; those with additional needs should get those needs met in a timely way that prevents escalation and compulsory/specialist intervention should be kept to the minimum possible as these interventions are more intrusive. There are also financial considerations as the more specialist services are the most expensive.

Merton has had a well established model to help workers, usually in universal settings, identify children with additional needs, assess these needs and plan

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to meet them – the Child Wellbeing Model and the use of the Common Assessment Framework – which have been well evaluated by regulators Ofsted. However, the paper presented outlined a number of drivers for a review of our existing early intervention and prevention (EIP) practice in Merton and changes described in the paper.

In simple terms we need to develop our EIP services further, be able to demonstrate more specifically their impact on individual children and families and improve the targeting of these services to avoid the need to provide more specialist services at a later stage. Changes have been made to the wellbeing model which now has only three levels, we have rationalised and developed the old common assessment into a new 'common and shared assessment(CASA) and we have established new in-house and commissioned 'enhanced level 'services. The new in house teams will adopt a casework approach with families enabling better quality assessments and more accountable case management. The new commissioned services will support the work of the new in-house teams. The commissioning process for these services is almost complete.

Councillor Karin Forbes enquired about the burden on universal settings in completing the new CASA assessment. Paul Ballatt confirmed that the old Common Assessment Framework, now Common and Shared Assessment (CASA), had been simplified for use in universal settings and that this new documentation had been launched at three partnership events and welcomed by practitioners. Theresa Leavy added that the CASA was very bureaucratic and that this has been slimmed down with more simple language whilst still enabling the capture of the relevant information.

Councillor Peter Walker queried the status of Merton as one of the worst London boroughs for ensuring take up of measles vaccine. Yvette Stanley added that there was an opportunity to move this up the agenda now that the new Director of Public Health has joined the organisation. Paul Ballatt added that there was on-going work with Children's Centres to try and encourage up take with health professionals routinely visiting the centres and working with families.

Councillor Peter Walker asked if we had a high number of incidences of measles. Yvette Stanley confirmed that this was not the case.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked about the performance management and quality assurance arrangements. Paul Ballatt confirmed that the external providers would be subject to performance management arrangements, as the in-house services were, but that the basket of performance indicators was currently being worked upon.

Councillor Iain Dysart enquired about the opportunities for improvement that were expressed at the partnership event and how they have been taken forward. Paul Ballatt stated that there was a strong partnership in place and that the work to remodel the child and wellbeing model had been mandated by

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the children's trust partnership. Partners have been involved in its development and it has been a participative learning experience.

**RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and thanked Theresa Leavy for all of her hard work to date and wished her well in her future role elsewhere.**

### **6 INSPECTION REPORTS AND ACTION PLANS FOR FOSTERING AND ADOPTION SERVICE**

Theresa Leavy introduced the report.

Councillor Laxmi Attawar about the timescales for approving prospective applicants. Theresa Leavy added that there is a clear and structured process in place which has recently been reviewed and that prospective foster carer or adoptive parents now complete a self assessment in the early stages before the formal timescales for turning round applications commence.

Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed that the Panel keep an eye on progress of delivery of the action plans.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina enquired about the Positive Care and Control of Children Foster Carers Policy. Theresa Leavy explained that this was required to allow Foster Carers to have detailed guidance on how to manage behaviour and address issues with foster children. Yvette Stanley added that regulators require the council to advise on a range of potential circumstances.

Councillor Peter Walker noted the comments in the inspection about the leadership and management being adequate. Theresa Leavy explained the circumstances to which this referred on report which did not have sufficient detail on a case, despite all managers involved having a working knowledge of the case.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked if a training programme had been developed (as outlined in the action plan). Theresa Leavy confirmed that foster carers were complimentary about the level of training they receive and that this related to an extra level of training to really up skill foster carers to support children with complex needs.

Theresa Leavy also added that guidance is being made available to schools and other settings.

**RESOLVED:** Panel noted the report, welcomed the outcomes of the inspection and agreed to put forward the topic suggestion for consideration on monitoring progress of delivery of the action plans. Panel also welcomed the outcomes of the inspections.

### **7 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES**

Alison Jerard informed the Panel that she had been invited, along with other secondary heads, to be involved in the Home Office Peer Review Group in relation to gang culture and youth violence. She added that it was a privilege

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to be working with officers and agencies in Merton and that the good practice was evident.

Paul Ballatt added that the department had been informed that the engagement of Merton schools and Head teachers was praised by the peer reviewers.

Yvette Stanley highlighted that the Peer Reviewers had taken the sexual exploitation of children as one of the key issues to address. The Home Office and Merton's Children, Schools and Families Department were looking at possible approaches and best practice in this area. A successful bid for MOPAC funding had resulted in an additional 2 full time posts in the department addressing the issues raised in relation to gang culture and youth violence, specifically work with girls and diversion from gang activities.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked about the issues with the private nursery in Merton that had recently been in the media. Theresa Leavy confirmed that the nursery was not run by Merton Council but that support had been provided to parents wishing to relocate their children into other nursery provision by the CSF division.

Councillor Jeff Hanna offered his thanks to officers for their rapid response in this case.

Councillor Peter Walker asked about the issues surrounding the take up of Free School Meals (FSM), how take up could be increased, the loss of income to schools reflected in the poor take up rates, and if those in receipt of Universal Credit should be approached to highlight their potential eligibility for FSM.

Councillor Iain Dysart enquired if there was a stigma attached to take up of FSM that impacted on the figures or were there issues of families being unaware of their entitlement? Paul Ballatt confirmed that this was the case for some families.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked what links there were with agencies such as jobcentre plus to obtain information on specific claimants who would be entitled to apply for FSM. Paul Ballatt confirmed that getting this kind of data had not been possible in the past but that CSF would consider asking jobcentre+ to encourage FSM take up in their own dealings with benefit claimants.

Yvette Stanley confirmed that these issues regarding take up of FSM were being looked at by London Councils and that discussion was on-going and that more work needed to be done to promote FSM and make people aware of their eligibility. Paul Ballatt added that he council would aim to push up the level of take up of FSM over the next 2 years and that paragraph 2.9 outlined the approach to be taken. Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed to the Panel that they keep a watching brief on this issue as part of the 2013/14 work

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programme.

**RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.**

**8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina enquired about the reasons for the number of Red status performance indicators. Theresa Leavy explained that the changes to the single assessment process made the indicator redundant as of May 2013 and that performance had been affected by this change over, as well as the system appropriately recording completion of assessments within the timescales.

Councillor Jeff Hanna suggested that the traffic light system suggested a degree of failure that is not the case upon explanation. Could officers look at the RAG system to address this and the reporting of more accurate performance data.

**RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and requested that an update be brought to the Panel at their July 2013 meeting with regard to the feasibility of an alternative or enhanced traffic light system for rating successes and failures against the performance indicators listed.**

**9 BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE**

**RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.**

**10 PLANNING THE PANELS WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14**

Members commented that the suggestion to hold 2 hour focused meetings with a main item and then secondary and information items had been an effective use of the Panels time. Members also commented on excellent chairing by the Chair, Councillor Jeff Hanna.

Councillor Peter Walker requested a regular item to the Panel on innovation and best practice in children, schools and families departments in other boroughs.

Councillor Jeff Hanna suggested to the Task Group that they consider the following items at the July 2013 meeting:

- Gang Culture Home Office Peer Review findings;
- Transforming Families Initiative;
- Work Programme; and
- Presentation from Cabinet Members and Department on priorities

**RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and agreed to the items for the July 2013 meeting.**