

**Committee: Children & Young People Overview
& Scrutiny Panel**

Date: 4th July 2013

Agenda item: 5

Wards:

Subject: CSF DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2013-14

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

Lead members: Councillor Maxi Martin & Councillor Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

- A. Members of the Panel note the report and the key service priorities and challenges outlined.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To inform members of the Panel of departmental priorities for 2013-14 identified by Cabinet Members and senior officers.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 In 2012-13, 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 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 Board, Safeguarding Children Board and the more recently established 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 has been refreshed for 2013 - 16 with a stronger focus on vulnerable groups including children at risk of harm, looked after children, those with special educational needs and disabilities and young offenders. The plan also outlines 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 results of inspection activity undertaken in recent years demonstrate a clear and sustained trajectory of improvement in children's services in Merton. Elected members and officers have strong ambitions for further

improvement and consider the priorities identified in this paper as key to the achievement of these ambitions, albeit in the context of continued budgetary pressures, increasing demand for children's services because of demographic changes and continuing organisational change in many partner agencies.

CSF Department Transformation Programme

- 2.4 As part of the council's overall 'Merton 2015' transformation programme, designed to modernise service delivery and secure significant savings across the council, CSF Department has been implementing a programme of transformational change which will need to be further progressed during 2013-14.
- 2.5 Key to both improving outcomes for children and retaining financial control is achieving an appropriate balance of universal, targeted and specialist services provided to children, young people and families. Significant work has been undertaken in 2012-13 with partner agencies to revise Merton's long-established Child and Young Person Wellbeing Model through which additional needs children and young people may have are identified, assessed and met in order to improve the targeting and increase the effectiveness of our interventions. A 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)' has been established and assessment models have also been changed. This 'whole system' reform will require embedding during 2013-14 – via multi-agency and single agency training – and its impact reviewed.
- 2.6 Within CSF Department there has been significant organisational change to support the changes noted above and to adopt improved working practices outlined in national research, reports and inspection findings. Post implementation reviews of the new structures in Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion and Education Divisions will be undertaken and work will be completed to establish a new departmental commissioning team. The department's commissioning priorities during 2013-14 will be to complete the commissioning process for the provision of universal youth services in the borough, to re-commission 'crisis intervention' services following the ending of the NCH's Phoenix Project contract and to progress the integrated commissioning agenda with Public Health and Clinical Commissioning Group colleagues.
- 2.7 New public policy will drive other specific transformation activity in CSF department during 2013-14:
- In the area of safeguarding children, CSF department will lead implementation across partner agencies of the new 'Working Together' guidance and lead cross agency work to develop our local response to issues of child sexual exploitation. Lessons from last year's Serious Case Review will also need to be implemented. In line with government expectations to increase the pace of securing permanency for looked after children attention will also be focused on improving the efficiency of both care proceedings and recruitment of prospective adoptors/special guardians.
 - Although already established as a result of earlier national policy implementation, Merton's 'Transforming Families' service will need to ensure engagement with additional families during 2013-14 in line

with the funding model. Government is becoming increasingly focused on the impact of this 'flagship' policy initiative and the department will need to be able to evidence the effectiveness of local services during the course of the year.

- The Children and Families Bill is likely to be enacted requiring significant reform of services provided to children, young people and young adults with a range of special educational needs and disabilities – CSF department will continue to work with colleagues in the council's Housing and Community department to plan for and implement changes to assessment and care planning processes and transitions arrangements for this group.
- Merton has been successful in attracting pilot funding for local implementation of the national Family Nurse Partnership model of intensive support to young parents. Led jointly with NHS colleagues, services will need to be established during 2013-14 and should significantly enhance Merton's 'early help' offer. Further early education places for designated disadvantaged 2 year olds will also need to be provided.

Continuous Improvement

2.8 Officers will need to progress a number of key elements of the CSF department's 'continuous improvement' strategy during 2013-14. With colleagues in Corporate Services and Housing and Community departments, CSF officers are involved in the procurement of an improved client record ICT system which is needed to ensure improved data capture, recording and performance reporting. Quality assurance processes – including in particular regular auditing of 'casework' undertaken by staff across CSF department and more robust performance management of externally commissioned services – will need to be further embedded during the year. CSF department provides, perhaps, the most regulated services of all council provision and, as such, must ensure 'inspection readiness' at all times. Improved performance management and quality assurance mechanisms are critical to this methodical preparation for inspection.

2.9 Further improvement of the performance of Merton's schools remains a key priority for Cabinet members and officers. The Merton Education Partnership (MEP) is a key mechanism for school improvement in the borough and terms of reference and governance structures for the MEP are in place. Specific areas of work for the coming year include leadership development in and across the borough's schools; shifting overall teaching standards from good to outstanding and working as a partnership of schools to prepare for and implement significant changes to the curriculum introduced and planned by the current government.

Managing Demographic Growth

2.10 Data from the 2011 Census confirm both an increasing overall population of children and young people in the borough and an increase in the diversity of the population. Members of the panel will be well aware of the impact population growth has had on the provision of primary school places in the borough and officers are currently developing strategies for meeting the

significant additional demand expected by the middle of the decade for secondary and special school provision.

- 2.11 Pressures on other CSF services are also being experienced – eg increasing numbers of referrals to children’s social care services; more looked after children and more requiring transport to attend school. These pressures may impact on the department’s ability to deliver savings either in the existing Medium Term Financial Strategy or further targets arising from the current national spending review. Senior managers will need to be extremely vigilant during 2013-14 to monitor the impact of increased demand on departmental budgets.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. N/A for the purposes of this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None