

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
3 JULY 2014

(19.15 - 21.15)

PRESENT

Councillors Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the Chair), Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico, Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Katy Neep, Councillor Marsie Skeet, Councillor Peter Walker, Peter Connellan, Simon Bennett and Denis Popovs

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) and Councillor Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education)

Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Yvette Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No pecuniary declarations were made.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fidelis Gadzama, Colin Powell and Paul Angeli.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 MARCH 2014 (Agenda Item 3)

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

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

Councillor Linda Taylor asked about raising the age of participation and the number of apprenticeships, as discussed at the Panel meeting on 26 March 2014. Yvette Stanley agreed to send an interim update after the Panel meeting via email.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked what number of hard to reach families had been targeted through door knocking and other outreach work. Yvette Stanley agreed to send figures on this to the Panel via email after the meeting.

Peter Connellan asked what the outcomes were for the school leadership succession planning task group. Councillor Jeff Hanna explained that the task group's final report

and recommendations were considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 30th June 2014.

5 OVERVIEW OF SERVICES AND KEY CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT 2014-15 (Agenda Item 5)

The Panel received a presentation from the Director of Children, Schools and Families on the department and its priorities. Councillor Maxi Martin and Councillor Martin Whelton both gave an overview of their respective portfolios and their priorities for the year ahead. These included:

- Safeguarding children;
- School standards;
- PFI Schemes and on-going negotiation;
- Being inspection ready;
- Implementing provisions in the Children and Families Act;
- Commissioning and working with the voluntary sector;
- Tackling absenteeism;
- Secondary School Provision;
- Primary school places

The Panel heard that the services provided by the department were heavily regulated and based in statute. The presentation covered the following areas:

- Statutory and legal framework;
- Budget and staffing structure of the department;
- The role of the Children's Trust and the Merton Safeguarding Children Board;
- The Merton Child and Young Person Well Being Model 2013;
- The number of children that access the various services provided by the department;
 - Challenges and priorities in the early years service;
 - Challenges and priorities in Education;
 - Challenges and priorities in children's social care and early intervention;
 - Challenges and priorities in the youth service;
 - Key challenges facing CSF

Councillor Katy Neep asked officers to expand on the providers of schools. For example, Trinity High School. Councillor Martin Whelton explained that a proposal had been put forward for a secondary free school at Trinity High School. by the Chapel St Provider. In his view the DfE need to provide closer scrutiny of some proposals from well meaning organisations without a track record of success. Furthermore, all stakeholders should be consulted and all schools should be staffed with qualified teachers with providers having a track record of delivery.. Councillor James Holmes asked about the administrations view of free schools. Councillor Martin Whelton explained that a motion was agreed by full council in November 2013 and the council has a statutory duty to facilitate applications for a free school albeit that the decision making rests with the secretary of state . The council wants to work with organisations that will provide high quality education.

Councillor Joan Henry asked what methods were being used to track absentees. Jan Martin explained that most of the work done to tackle absenteeism is done by schools and later by the Education Welfare Team. The number of prosecutions has also increased to enforce attendance issues. But some young people are persistently absent although this is a relatively smaller number and more targeted intervention is undertaken in these cases. A new team is being launched to work with families who have resisted attempts to get children into school. Year 5 primary school children are targeted and this work will start in September. This will involve targeted work with vulnerable cohorts. Jan Martin agreed that the number of children the team are working with can be reported later in the year but that figures of absenteeism have reduced year on year.

Councillor Katy Neep asked about demographic change and anticipated pressure on services. She asked if heat maps could be provided to look at the potential impact geographically and according to groups. Yvette Stanley explained that a piece of work had been undertaken by the Policy Network which has this information and can be circulated. Some of the impact is not easily predicted, for example, birth rates in the borough are not a reliable indicator of service demand as it is difficult to anticipate how many will move out of the borough.

Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed that demographic information be presented alongside reports when appropriate. This was agreed.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked if better use could be made of ICT across the department and if officers were confident that changes planned would not negatively impact the operation of existing systems. Yvette Stanley added that a range of casework systems were in place. Care First has not been fit for purpose as it uses up a disproportionate amount of practitioner time. The Council is procuring a new system for casework in CSF and adult social care. This should increase staff productivity enabling them to spend more time with clients.

Councillor Peter Walker asked what specific programmes the Merton Education Partnership (MEP) were working on and also what jobs would be lost in the year ahead as part of the efficiencies that needed to be made. Jan Martin explained that 10 projects are funded each year by the MEP which will be complete in Autumn this year. A list of the outcomes of the projects can be provided to the Panel then if this is something the Panel wish to see. Further bidding for new applications is underway and a timetable has been agreed with the parameters for applications having been removed. Merton Leaders of Education have been appointed to support other schools and there has been recruitment to address the advanced skills shortage now that these teaching posts have been removed. Primary Expert Teachers are also to be recruited shortly. Jan Martin agreed to bring further information on the Merton Education Partnership alongside the school standards report that the Panel will consider as part of their work programme in February 2014.

Yvette Stanley added that the department will look at services that are substantial but present less risk. It is increasingly difficult for the department to deliver savings with the volume of work in the system, particularly in social care. There is also a reduced commissioning pot for commissioning in the youth and voluntary sector.

Peter Connellan asked if language support caused significant additional costs. Yvette Stanley explained that language support to engage in formal processes was a statutory requirement to enable people to participate in legal processes and access services.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked for information on lagging performance in schools. Yvette Stanley informed the Panel that this was a complex picture which was considered by the school standards committee. Paul Ballatt explained that this information is also provided to the Panel in the update report and is considered by the School Standards Committee.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report, agreeing that:

- i. demographic maps should be provided with future reports where relevant.
Information on school improvement work undertaken through the Merton Education Partnership should be included in the February School Standards Report.

6 AGREEING THE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel discussed an amended draft work programme, circulated at the meeting. Councillor Jeff Hanna explained that the Wellbeing item had been brought forward to October and Marketing Merton's School had been put back to the February meeting. He also suggested that the February Main Item, School Standards, had the words

“and on support provided by the local authority to Merton’s schools” added in the descriptive summary.

The Panel discussed the draft scope for their short task group review of online strategies in schools, accepting it in the interim, with the additional suggestions of looking at advice to young people about online drinking games, and positive advice on the use of IT to enhance lives, aid learning and explore opportunities.

RESOLVED:

Panel agreed their 2014/15 work programme, with the amendments as above.

Panel agreed to a task group review of online strategies in schools and nominated the following members to sit on the task group:

Councillors Katy Neep and James Holmes as joint chairs, together with Councillor Joan Henry, Denis Popovs, and Peter Connellan.

That the Scrutiny Officer scope the Panels task group review of online strategies for schools further with the joint Chairs of the task group.

Councillor Dennis Pearce volunteered to act as the Budget lead for the Panel.

7 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CSF (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Linda Taylor asked how many school places were still empty and how many children were still waiting to be placed. Paul Ballatt confirmed that 60 children are unplaced but that these children have had offers of school places. There are 10 children that are unplaced that haven’t had an offer.

Councillor Marsie Skeete asked when outstanding legal matters concerning the Dundonald expansion scheme would be resolved. Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that the hearing was held on 21st and 22nd May. The decision of the high court on this was still outstanding.

Councillor Peter Walker asked how many children going into reception had to travel more than a mile to get to school. Paul Ballatt stated that central offers are made to children in the west going to schools in the East.

Councillor Katy Neep asked if information could be shared on the successes of the transforming families programme and if these could be replicated in other services or with other families not identified for the transforming families programme. Councillor Jeff Hanna noted that an update on the transforming families programme was included on the Panels work programme.

Councillor Jeff Hanna informed the Panel that the research document referred to in the report on the take up of free school meals had been provided to him by Paul Ballatt, and that it seemed to him a worthwhile document with a good set of recommendations which might have formed the basis of a full report to Panel instead of an update item. He had circulated copies of draft leaflets for parents, and congratulated officers on the removal of much of the off-putting bureaucratic wording in previous leaflets.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and

- i. thanked officers for their work on the transforming families programme.
- ii. agreed that the research report on free school meal uptake should be provided to members of the panel in full.

8 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Peter Walker expressed concern about the size of font used in the printed agenda. Cllr Jeff Hanna requested that the A3 colour copy of the performance information be dispatched with the agenda as a matter of routine for future meetings. Councillor Katy Neep asked if there could be more of a focus on the top 3 issues to help the Panel scrutinise performance data more effectively. Councillor Katy Neep asked if, at the next meeting, 3 indicators could be selected for key service areas and more detailed information provided for the Panel to consider, including service context.

The Panel requested a training session on performance monitoring.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted and it was agreed that a training session should be delivered to the Panel on effective performance monitoring.

9 GLOSSARY OF TERMS (Agenda Item 9)

RESOLVED: Noted.