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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 11 OCTOBER 2016

(7.18 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Linda Taylor OBE, Mike Brunt, Pauline Cowper, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes, Jerome Neil and Marsie Skeete

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes and Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Paul Ballatt (Assistant Director Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Tom Procter (Service Manager - Contracts & School Organisation), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Chirico gave her apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The public minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the public part of the meeting.

Matters arising:

- Councillor Taylor, (in relation to item 4), asked for clarification on why there had been no event in the Wimbledon area to promote adoption. Yvette Stanley will clarify where events have been held and how the Wimbledon area has been covered and report back at the next meeting.

4 EXEMPT MINUTE FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 4)

The exempt minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the exempt part of the meeting.

Matter arising:

- Councillor Holmes noted that it is now the policy of the opposition in Merton to support the development of Harris Wimbledon in the agreed site location;
- The Panel's reference on the development of Harris Wimbledon was accepted by Cabinet; and

- It was agreed at the call-in of the Cabinet's decision regarding the site proposal for Harris Wimbledon not to refer the decision back and it therefore took effect immediately.

5 CABINET MEMBER UPDATES: (Agenda Item 5)

1. Cabinet Member for Education (Councillor Cooper-Marbiah):

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Merton's excellent exam results for 2015/2016: noted the following pass rates: at A Level 86% achieving at least three passes; 81% A* - C English GCSE and 77% A* - C Maths GCSE. The department is planning a celebration event to recognise these impressive results. Schools are awaiting further information on the new Progress 8 measure which will in future replace the 'percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English and Maths' as the national headline key performance indicator;
- School inspections: St Peter and St Paul RC Primary School has recently been inspected and has moved from a requires improvement to a good rating. Sacred Heart RC and Stanford Primary Schools have also been re-inspected and remain in the requires improvement category, albeit with some elements rated 'good', with support for improvement being provided by CSF officers; and
- School expansions: the contract has now been awarded for the expansion of Harris Merton.

In response to member comments, the Cabinet Member clarified:

- Harris has a good track record and a strong rapport has been developed between the Academy chain and the Children, Schools and Families Department. Consideration will be given to future Academy partners when and if this becomes appropriate.

2. Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Neep)

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Demographic shift: Merton's demographic shift means there is growing demand for SEND places and additional need to support these pupils through school transition. The Cabinet Member is mindful that Merton wants to continue to have the best provision despite these pressures;
- Fragmentation of school types: consideration of how to maintain and enhance Merton's education provision as schools continue to change (eg: become Academies). How does the council continue to deliver its education duties around education in these changing circumstances?; and
- Education, Care and Health Plans (ECHP): currently the target of issuing new ECHPs within 20 weeks isn't being met (25% within the timeframe against an 85% target). This reflects that this is about personalised provision and this takes time to frame including working across departments within the council to deliver for this group.

In response to member comments, the Cabinet Member (with support from officers) clarified:

- Not familiar with schools having large reserves and this doesn't fit with her experience of schools looking for efficiencies and cost savings. Schools do keep around 5 – 10% of their budgets in balances in accordance with guidance from the Audit Commission. Some may keep more for a finite period in order to pay for larger items such building works. Typically this will vary with some schools at risk of a deficit budget (which is addressed through the school improvement process). Yvette Stanley, Director of the Children, Schools and Families Department, committed to understand if there are some schools with larger reserves than recommended in guidance; and
- There is an increase in pupils with SEND. The percentage increase is larger than the percentage rise in the general child population in Merton. This is reflected in a rise in the number of and requests for ECHPs. There is a growing population of children in Merton on the Autistic spectrum and with complex needs.

6 SCHOOL PROVISION IN LB MERTON: (Agenda Item 6)

1. Provision of sufficient school places in Merton:

Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director for Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, introduced the item; provision of sufficient school places is one of the council's key statutory duties and currently the council is operating in the context of demographic growth. An appropriate increase in primary places has been achieved with expansion now focused on secondary and special school places.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Brexit may have a future impact on demand for school places in Merton. Currently, it is hard to know what this might be but it may have an affect on Merton's child population as well as labour costs for school development. There was agreement that it will be important for the department to continue to consider Brexit and its implication on school place provision;
- The council's preference is to provide additional school places itself. However, requirements mean that any new school has to be either an Academy or a Free School. Parents want choice in school type. The department has a good relationship with Harris and it provides a strong brand and focus on science and arts. The borough already has other Academy providers and one school is now in a Multi Academy Trust. In the future, decisions about Academy providers will focus on provision of a mixed economy of school types;
- Electoral Commission constituency boundary changes will not affect the geographical boundaries of the borough and therefore have no affect on consideration of school place provision;
- Harris Wimbledon will be its own admissions authority. Its policy isn't yet confirmed but it will be determined by distance from the school with some nodal points to the west of Wimbledon;

- The projected increase in surplus primary places in excess of the level advised by the Audit Commission is now being revised downwards as birth rate projections are again increasing. This demonstrates the complexities of school place forecasting. Planning for further increases in school places is in place but not yet realised reflecting on-going changes to forecasts. This has resulted in a reduced call on the council's capital programme;
 - The Free School programme is focused on diversity of provision as opposed to school place demand. There is therefore a risk that a new Free School in Merton would result in excess school places destabilising school provision. However, there is some comfort in there being little or no land available in the borough to feasibly provide any additional schools, especially over and above the planned Harris Wimbledon school - this has been demonstrated by the difficulties encountered finding a location for Harris Wimbledon;
 - The Education Funding Authority is undertaking to fund the majority of the cost of Harris Wimbledon including the on-costs of relocating those services currently occupying the required site and also the development of the temporary site at Whatley Avenue. The council has to make some contribution to the costs because the school is fulfilling some of the council's 'basic need' provision. However, the EFA's commitment means the costs to the council have decreased considerably down from around £30m (if the council had to fully fund a school) to around £8 – 10m which represents good value for money for the council. Merton's commitment will be met through the capital programme, spread over a number of years; and
 - Harris Federation does provide some SEN provision in Merton (including SEN primary ARP). The benefit of the recent school expansion programme is that developments have all focused on inclusion and making schools more accessible.
2. The changing national landscape for education and Merton's work with schools in the borough:

Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education, introduced this item: the department will be working with the Merton family of schools over the next 12 months to explore maintaining the role of the council in providing school improvement services, (whilst forced Academisation is no longer the policy this is still the direction of travel). Schools are being encouraged to formalise their relationships and models for maintaining the involvement of the council in school improvement are being researched. The commitment is to support all and not leave any school/children behind. A steering group has been established on which heads and chairs of governing boards sit.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Whilst the council will be able to maintain its support for school improvement over the next two to three years, the worry is what happens in five to ten. There is a need to be realistic that funding for school improvement is diminishing and there will be less ability to support schools where needed. Schools are being encouraged to work together to develop resilience. It is hoped partnerships and structures can be further developed now that will maintain the family of schools ethos across Merton;

- A local authority can only comprise 20% of a multi academy trust. This would mean excluding some schools. This is therefore being explored by the steering group;
- The Government's policy is still evolving and it isn't clear how it will be delivered. It's important that the department continues to research the options; and
- The role of the Regional School Commissions is focused on approving academies including multi academy trusts and stepping in where any academy is failing. They don't have a remit around school improvement. Inner and outer London is covered by a number of Commissioners. Merton falls into the remit of the Commissioner for South East England and South London.

Colin Powell, co-opted representative and Director of Education at The Diocese of Southwark, highlighted the importance of the forthcoming consultation on the fair school funding formula. He expressed his concern that fair funding would ultimately mean less funding for London boroughs including Merton which would undermine the success of the Merton family of schools.

RESOLVED: To accept the two reports.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Brunt, the performance monitoring lead for the Panel, reported on activity since the last meeting. As a result of a pre-meet and workshop held with department officials the following has been agreed:

- The current basket of performance measures presented to the CYP Panel will evolve gradually if/when needed. An addition might be made if members want to review a specific additional measure on an on-going basis or, if through their scrutiny, they decide that a specific issue requires additional focus;
- Volumes will be added to the performance measure (in addition to percentages) to give members some sense of scale and relativity;
- Further information will be added to the title of the performance indicator to help members better understand to what these refer; and
- An explanation of why the indicator is important will be provided.

The objective is for Panel members to have more context and to understand the linkages between measures. It was highlighted that measures that remain green will be included as they continue to be worthy of discussion.

8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

In response to member questions, Yvette Stanley provided the following clarification:

- An update on youth participation will be provided; and
- There has been a reduction in the numbers of agency social workers. The department has recruited a number of newly qualified social workers necessitating restricted case loads.

Members congratulated the department on its reduced reliance on agency social workers.

9 ONLINE STRATEGIES TASK GROUP: SIX MONTHLY MONITORING OF RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 9)

Yvette Stanley highlighted the importance of online safety and the how the department is continuing to work closely with schools to maintain focus on this issue.

10 TASK GROUP UPDATE: ROUTES INTO EMPLOYMENT (Agenda Item 10)

Councillor Holmes reported on the progress of the task group. He thanked officers for their time in supporting task group meetings and for providing it with valuable information. As a result, the task group is beginning to focus on a strategy to support vulnerable cohorts into employment by working with a few key local employers supported by volunteer mentors with the aim of helping young people prepare for working life. Other task group members were encouraged to participate further and provide their feedback on the ideas that are currently being considered.

Using young people themselves as ambassadors for any initiative to improve the employment of vulnerable cohorts was encouraged by Councillor Neep.

It was noted that the work of the group needs to come to completion with a final report to be presented to the Panel at its next meeting.

11 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 11)

- The voice of children and young people: Councillor Neil volunteered to undertake a piece of work looking at how the department engages with and captures the voice of children and young people before reporting back to the Panel;
- CYP task group 2016 – 2017: it was agreed to reserve the Panel's task group capacity to provide dedicated scrutiny of any work programme resulting from the expected Ofsted inspection; and
- Member training: a range of member training opportunities were highlighted including scrutiny's role in creating resilient communities, devolution, budget scrutiny and what local authorities can learn from House of Commons scrutiny. Members were encouraged to look out for the additional information being sent to them and to sign-up to take part.

12 CYP GLOSSARY (Agenda Item 12)

RESOLVED: To thank officers for this useful resource.