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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 11 JANUARY 2017

(7.17 pm - 9.40 pm)

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

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad, Helen Forbes and Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mark Allison (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Paul Ballatt (Assistant Director Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Julia Groom, Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health), Janet Lewis (Director – Children’s Services, CLCH), Shelly Heffernan (Clinical Business Unit Manager, CLCH) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Skeete gave her apologies with Councillor Kenny substituting on her behalf.

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 minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting with the addition of a note that six Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children had been placed with Merton.

4 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (Agenda Item 4)

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the budget and business plan item:

- At the time of the October 2016 report to Cabinet, there was no budget gap in years 2017/18 and 2018/19, and only a small gap in 2019/20;
- However, subsequent to this substantial growth has been built into the budget from 2017/18 to benefit Adult Social Care, waste and regeneration, *futureMerton* and Children, Schools and Families;

- This will be funded using the balancing the budget fund leaving a gap (£1.6m in 2017/18, rising to £14.3m in 2018/19, £15,107m in 2019/20 and £21,450m in 2020/2021); and
- Other budget complications were noted including whether the level of funding from the *Better Care Fund* (from the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group) will remain unchanged, the announcement in the Financial Settlement of a potential Adult Social Care precept of 3% for 2017/18 and 2018/19, and the redistribution of the new homes bonus (now being given over 5 and not 6 years) for which the effect is roughly even for Merton in 2017/18 only.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- The £9.3m growth for Adult Social Care has been proposed based on further research conducted by Cabinet Members looking at delivery, overspend, savings and the need to deliver safe services against a backdrop of more complex needs. Further meetings are happening to better understand the cost implications of the reduction in residential and shift to home care; and
- Agreed that if increases to Council Tax are insufficient to cover budget gaps, it will be difficult for Corporate Services, as the only department without a growth budget, to cover any budget gap;
- Pressures on the budget for the Children's Schools and Families Department (CSF) are being caused by a range of factors including; demographic increases, the more complex needs of Merton's children, the requirement to support children in care for longer (potentially up to the age of 25 for those with complex needs or in education) and the increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (and for families for which there is no recourse to public funds);
- Examples of how CSF is seeking to alleviate budget pressures were highlighted; a new contract has been put in place to reduced SEND transport costs and placements are being negotiated to provide best value and cost reduction where possible. The success achieved in reducing SEND transport costs was noted as demonstrating saving proposals can be achieved despite being difficult;
- The cost to the Council of the new Harris Wimbledon Academy is not yet finalised but officers expect it to be in the region of £7.5m net. This represents a considerable saving on the typical cost of £30-40m for a new secondary school with the Education Funding Agency providing the rest of the funds. Merton's contribution includes approximately £200K towards the refurbishment of the new Adult Social Care centre and contingency costs;
- Proposed savings resulting from staff reductions will need to be carefully managed in order not to destabilise services. These will be carefully reviewed and managed in order to achieve required changes whilst maintaining services;
- Changes to revaluisation were explained as resulting from changes to definitions of capital expenditure;
- Proposed savings to be achieved from setting-up a multi-borough adoption service are a work in progress and will continue to be refined as the deadline gets closer; and
- Savings proposed now for 2019/20 will continue to be reviewed and assessed over the intervening period to ensure they are realistic. Where it is assessed that they cannot be achieved or only partially achieved, alternative savings will need to

be brought forward. Given the extent to which the department is delivering statutory services, all savings and any alternatives require great care.

Councillor James Holmes proposed a motion; “The role of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel is to challenge and champion the role of the Children, Schools and Families Department. We therefore recommend to Cabinet that the Adult Social Care precept be taken in subsequent years to reduce the pressure on the Children, Schools and Families Departmental budget”. The motion put to the vote and fell.

5 SAVINGS PROPOSALS CONSULTATION PACK (Agenda Item 5)

This was covered by the Panel under Agenda Item 4 (Budget and Business Plan).

6 UPDATE REPORT: HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (Agenda Item 6)

Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health, and Julia Groom, Consultant in Public Health introduced the item, highlighting successes and challenges in the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy theme 1: Best start in life:

- **Access to child mental health services:** the single point of access approach has seen an improvement; access to a tier three Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service assessment has shortened by three weeks since 2013/14. Referrals for Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis takes longer but an Autism strategy for all is being developed;
- **School readiness:** the gap in school readiness is reducing although data for 2015/16 is awaited. Work is on-going through Children’s Centres and other settings to support school readiness;
- **Immunisation:** this remains a challenging area. The Public Health team and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group are working with NHS England to improve the quality of data, parental awareness, visit the least well performing GPs in the borough and promote immunisation through all available channels (including *MyMerton* and health visitors). In 2017, the focus will include working with Children’s Centres to promote immunisation; and
- **Childhood obesity:** whilst the childhood obesity target has been achieved, there are still 4,500 overweight and obese children in the borough. The healthy weight action plan focuses on work with partners to achieve a wider preventative approach including developing a better food environment (ie: getting a catering commitment from local food suppliers, influencing school catering contracts, work on holiday hunger and promoting healthy school programmes) and supporting access to parks etc.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- There is a continual need to challenge and cleanse child immunisation data received from GPs. This is an on-going process. It was also noted that a new childhood information system is being developed;

- A full report on childhood immunisations will be given to the Commission at its meeting on 7 March 2017. This will cover progress against the recommendations of child immunisation task group;
- Promotion to parents to encourage healthy eating is being achieved using national and local resources (ie: *Change for Life* and the *Health Matters* website) being distributed through schools and Children's Centres. The team is continuing to work on how to target families with healthy eating and weight management messages;
- The team agreed to contact school governors and make them aware of the support available for parents to tackle and prevent childhood obesity;
- It was highlighted that parents cannot be blamed for increasing childhood obesity. Rather the focus is on giving practical help and suggestions such as encouraging schools to get children participating in the *Daily Mile* initiative; and
- It was noted that only 10% of all funding for mental health goes towards the children's service and that currently it takes 18 weeks to achieve an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.

Janet Lewis (Director – Children's Services) and Shelly Heffernan (Clinical Business Unit Manager), of the Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH) addressed the Panel (a slide presentation was laid round and is provided for the minutes). CLCH has been the provider of Merton's children's public health service since April 2016 and has challenging targets that have been jointly set by the Council and the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). These include that every baby born in the borough receives a visit from a health visitor in its first 14 days and has a one year review with the aim to provide the same at two years.

In response to member questions, CLCH's representatives clarified:

- It is in a strong position. It is getting support from the Children's Trust Board, it has been provided with a clear strategic direction and it was engaged through a joint commissioning process with the Council and the CCG working together. This was based on a robust procurement process, following a review of services and identification of gaps;
- It is fortunate to be working through Children's Centres which allows for better integration into the local community; CLCH now has 70 staff based in Children's Centres in Merton; and
- There is more work to be done to integrate GPs and hospital trusts into its joint working. Working with three local hospitals does make this more complex.

RESOLVED: The Panel resolved to receive a further, more detailed update on the childhood obesity strategy the timing for which is to be agreed.

7 RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER REVIEW (Agenda Item 7)

The Cabinet Member for Education, (Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah), highlighted the following:

- Harris Wimbledon: the location of the Merton's new secondary school was made public in November 2016. The Cabinet Member gave her thanks to officers for this achievement; and
- Ofsted inspections: Wimbledon Park and Priory Primary Schools have respectively been judged as outstanding and good. Liberty Primary School has been working with officers following its Requires Improvement judgement. A recent Ofsted monitoring visit has shown it is taking effective action.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member described how she holds regular meetings with officers to question, check and query the support and challenge they provide to schools and to keep informed of major issues eg to ensure Harris Wimbledon is delivered successfully.

8 TASK GROUP DRAFT REPORT: ROUTES INTO EMPLOYMENT FOR VULNERABLE COHORTS (Agenda Item 8)

Members were informed that the task group's report is approaching finalisation. A further meeting with relevant Directors is planned with the intention of bringing the draft report to the Panel's next meeting.

9 RAPPORTEUR SCRUTINY REVIEW OF USER VOICE: SCOPE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Neil introduced this item noting the focus on the voice of looked after children and young people. Additionally, he highlighted he would like to take a qualitative approach by hearing directly what children and young people have to say about their experience.

RESOLVED: To accept the terms of reference and scope of the review as well as appointing Councillor Neil to conduct the review.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 10)

It was noted that due to the timing of the meeting, data doesn't fully represent performance in December. The percentage of Education, Health and Care Plans issued within the statutory 20 week timescale continues to be monitored by the Panel as this is currently falling behind target. It has been highlighted that this is a national issue and that Merton's performance is on par with other London councils. As part of the budget process, members have been informed that Merton will receive a specific £150K funding allocation from government which will enable the department to retain additional staff who are undertaking EHC planning.

11 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 11)

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- The proposed youth foundation will be used to obtain funding that isn't available to the Council. It was highlighted that this model is used elsewhere and that alternative funding can be accessed eg from charitable trusts.

- Discussions are on-going with Merton Abbey Primary School in respect of the proposed transfer of some of its playing field to the new Harris secondary school. It has been agreed that Harris Wimbledon will need much less of Merton Abbey's playground space than originally proposed and that Merton Abbey's remaining playground area will be enhanced as part of the funding of the new secondary school;
- It was noted that Benedict Primary has been judged as requiring improvement by Ofsted and is a free standing academy. Officers highlighted their good relationship with the school and that improvement is being made; and
- The additional SEND funding being made available by central Government is being used to support the move to Education, Health and Care Plans.

12 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 12)

It was noted that a request has been made to the Housing team to support the Panel's scrutiny of corporate parenting at the March 2017 meeting. This will provide Panel members with the opportunity to look at housing solutions for care leavers as well as housing pressures that affect families and children.