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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 FEBRUARY 2018

(7.15 pm - 9.10 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Linda Taylor OBE, Pauline Cowper, Charlie Chirico, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes, Stan Anderson, Brenda Fraser and Sally Kenny

Co-opted Member Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Paul Bailey (MSCB Safeguarding Development & Policy Manager), Chris McCree (Adult Mental Health Liaison Specialist), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Akyigyina, Brunt and Neil with Cllrs Anderson, Fraser and Kenny respectively substituting.

Statutory member Colin Powell also gave his apologies. It was noted that Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was unable to attend and that Paul Angeli, Assistant Director for Social Care & Youth Inclusion, was unable to attend due to sickness.

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 of the previous meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record (with the correction of the spelling of Gorringe Park).

Matters arising:

The following items were raised by members, on which clarification was provided by officers:

- **Wimbledon Harris nodal points:** Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families (CSF), provided clarification on the previous minute and agreed that every admission authority has to consult annually on the admissions arrangements for the next academic year. This will provide opportunity for further representations to be made by Councillors as well as the CSF Department. It was noted that the Department's previous representation had been based on a concern to avoid a situation where those able to apply to the Wimbledon Harris will walk passed those living closer to the school but who would not get a place due to the nodal point location as part of the admission arrangements. Cllr Taylor

expressed the need for a nodal point in Wimbledon Park and stated that the admission arrangements for the new school had not been treated as fairly as they could have been; and

- **Elim Church:** a full update on the correspondence with Elim Church and its approach to bookings/use of its facilities by other organisations is provided at the bottom of page 1 and the top of page 2 of the minutes of the previous meeting.

4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, provided members with an update, highlighting the following:

- **Harris Wimbledon:** a number of obstacles that were prohibiting the development have now been cleared allowing for the site for the new school to be cleared. (The Secretary of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ruled against listing Merton Hall and the Judicial Review of the planning consent for the hall was therefore withdrawn.);
- **Ofsted inspections:** the pre-school at the Abbey Children's Centre has retained its good judgement. The implementation of a new inspection process will mean that the ratings of Merton's schools are unlikely to change for the rest of the year: 100% of secondary schools are rated good or outstanding, 91% of all schools are rated as good or better and 93% of pupils are educated in schools rated good or better; and
- **Progress 8:** according to this measure of progress achieved between starting and finishing secondary education across eight subjects, Merton's schools are rated first in the country.

In response to member questions, the following clarification was provided:

- The school improvement team provides focused support for those schools not judged to be good or outstanding (Liberty, Merton Abbey, Sacred Heart and Benedict). It was noted that Liberty has received an interim inspection on which it received a good judgement and it is awaiting a full inspection;
- It was noted that Benedict is already an academy and that currently there are no plans for any of the other schools that aren't good or outstanding in Merton to become academies with all on a good trajectory for improvement. All have support and challenge meetings with the involvement of the chair of school improvement board, frequent reviews and any concerns are raised with the Headteacher and/or governors;
- Currently, there are no definitive plans for the use of Whatley Ave once Harris Wimbledon moves to its permanent site. It is possible that there will be some phasing of the school move to the permanent site meaning Whatley Ave might be needed for three rather than two years. However, it is clear that its further use won't be determined by the CSF Department. Rather this will be determined corporately as is the case for all surplus assets; and
- The CSF Department has considered University Technical Colleges (UTC) in the past. These are for young people aged 14+ and as with the experience of middle schools, their difficulty comes from pupils and parents being disinclined to move schools at points of their education other than primary and secondary transfer etc.

Taking young people out of secondary schools at this point can also undermine their ability to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. Therefore, UTCs are not popular with other schools in their locality. Merton is therefore disinclined to offer a UTC by itself but has discussed the possibility of offering a UTC in partnership with other boroughs.

Cllr Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was unable to attend the meeting but supplied a written update (which is available with the agenda).

In response to member questions, the following clarification was provided:

- An offer has been made for the Director of Children, Schools and Families position. Further information isn't yet available because this offer is yet to be ratified. As it is a statutory duty for the Council to have a Director in place, it will be for the Chief Executives to make suitable arrangements for any period between the current Director leaving and the appointee taking up their post.

5 ANNUAL REPORT: MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (Agenda Item 5)

Apologies were received from Keith Makin, the independent chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB), who due to other commitments was unable to attend the Panel meeting. Paul Bailey, the board's business manager, was in attendance in place of the independent chair.

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families (CSF), provided an introduction to the item. The production of the annual report is a statutory process and covers 2016/17 to allow for a period of reflection. The priorities of the board are:

- *Think Family* given parenting is the biggest issue for safeguarding;
- Supporting vulnerable adolescents as there is a growing number of looked after children who are older and coming into care later with issues such as trauma, loss, lack of attachment, child sexual exploitation, involvement in crime etc;
- The quality of early help with a refresh of the child and young people wellbeing model now happening;
- Confirming partnerships focused on prevention with the aim of curtailing growing need; and
- Work on early help entry points.

Paul Bailey added:

- Sections two and three of the annual report demonstrate the board's accountability; they detail what has to be done and what has been achieved;
- The board now has responsibility for implementing the Children and Social Work Act 2017;
- Partnerships with schools, health services and the police are strong;
- The emphasis is on holding onto what Ofsted identified as working best despite the trend towards sub-regional working; and
- The board is working to raise awareness of and professional competence on neglect.

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- The board is committed to continual improvement. The benefit of Ofsted's recent inspection is that the board knows itself well and has been identified as a beacon of safeguarding practice and can help other authorities. There is no sense of complacency despite Ofsted's outstanding judgement;
- Changes happening with the services working in partnership with the board were highlighted. Both the police and health service are being reconfigured locally (seeking to get efficiencies from a larger footprint) but a continued focus on Merton needs to be ensured;
- Any young person with a custodial sentence automatically becomes a looked after child. The numbers of those entering custody for the first time has recently decreased but this remains a focus of the Youth Crime and Prevention Board and the Youth Justice Service which are both looking at prevention;
- Work continues with colleagues in housing to improve the accommodation offer to care leavers. However, it should also be noted that some young people prefer to stay with friends and extended family. It is always hoped that they will make contact with the Council again and benefit from our assistance;
- Knife crime is a focus for both the Youth Crime and Prevention Board and the Safer and Stronger Partnership. They have mapped knife crime incidents and found that despite there being no deaths or incidents in the borough, 20% of all incidents in the capital have a connection to Merton. The link to county lines (older people exploiting adolescents to take drugs to the coast) was highlighted. Further information will be circulated to Panel members after the meeting (this has now been provided);
- The MSCB has been approached by other authorities to provide support with a particular focus on board effectiveness. The Department for Education has designated Merton as a sector lead for improvement to take its MSCB practice to other authorities. Given limited capacity it is hard to exploit the potential of selling Merton's MSCB experience for commercial benefit. However, a bid for £150K funding for two year has just been submitted which it is hoped will provide additional capacity and allow this commercial opportunity to be exploited;
- A range of interventions are used when a young person enters custody more than once. These include intensive fostering, moving them out of the area (often to disrupt patterns of behaviour that lead to crime). However, on some occasions this isn't successful. For example, some young people don't want to be bailed to their family and will end-up in custody as an alternative. Highlighted the difficulty of such situations and that the right worker is needed to achieve engagement;
- Noted that all the young people currently in custody are men and that females are in secure units as the tendency is towards self harm. The link to child sexual exploitation and filming for blackmail purposes was highlighted; and
- There is a range of ways in which the Department ensures the child's voice is heard. These include children/young people chairing their own reviews, tools for social workers to help them illicit the views of even young children (such as the house of dreams), the Children in Care Council, Youth Parliament etc. How this is collected will reflect the age of the child so drawings are used for the very young and online methods more as children get older including social media (with which young people feel comfortable despite the reservations of adults).

(Thought is currently being given to collecting the views of children and young people with SEND.) The child's voice comes to the Departmental Management Team meetings. It was considered whether young people should be members of the safeguarding board. This was given careful thought and it was decided it would be difficult given the formality and length of meetings. The emphasis is therefore on going out and talking to a wide breath and range of children and young people. It was highlighted that section 10 of the annual report includes the views of children and young people.

RESOLVED: To thank officer for their hard work and the MSCB annual report.

6 PRESENTATION: THINK FAMILY (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel benefitted from a presentation on the *Think Family* policy from Chris McCree (who has a nursing background in adult mental health). She highlighted that it is important her role is jointly funded by the mental health trust and the Council as it facilitates joint working. Noted:

- That one in three of the general population is likely to have experienced some form of mental health issue and that as Merton is a young borough this will include lots of parents;
- Having a mental health issue does not preclude someone from being a good parent;
- The risk to children of any parental mental health issue needs to be evaluated for which it is important to hear from children;
- It can be difficult for adults experiencing mental health issues to admit this given there is often an fear for their employment;
- Professionals that interact with parents will often find it difficult to talk to them about mental health issues. This means that often this isn't addressed until there is a crisis. Therefore it is important to raise the awareness of the early warning signs amongst professionals working with children and young people;
- 55% of serious case reviews have highlighted that mental health is a contributory factor. Having a child with a disability can be a trigger because it causes additional stress;
- There are barriers to adults and children services working collective which need to be overcome. For example, adult mental health workers need to know that they can make a child protection referral;
- Work is ongoing to understand the risks of mental health impacting on families and children. The objective is to enhance the *Signs of Safety* model;
- The approach is to develop a joint adult and child safeguarding approach so that adult mental health workers think more broadly to consider who is in the family and who needs support;
- A bid has been made for innovation funding that will allow adult mental health workers to learn alongside social workers;
- Updated protocols are being developed for all workers to ensure early identification including work with the prenatal; and
- There is a *Think Family* board that includes public health allowing good linkages between the strategic development and front line workers.

In response to member questions, it was further clarified:

- It is hoped that savings will be achieved through partnership working and improved understanding. For example, rather than doing separate visits to the same family, an adult mental health worker and social worker will visit together and plan support and services collectively;
- In reality child protection referrals come from a variety of places – work needs to happen about how best to signpost. Noted that the first action should not be to remove a child;
- There is undue worry about data protection when it comes to child protection referrals. Whilst professionals can't disclose information this doesn't prevent a member of the public making a referral. However, the Children Schools and Families Department advocates for a consent based referral approach;
- There is flexibility in the approaches taken to dealing with adult mental health needs such as home treatments and treatment cafes. As knowledge of an individual develops and patterns are understood, crisis plans can be developed;
- Work is ongoing with schools to support children, families and staff where needed. This is proactive. For example, helping pupils know how to deal with anxiety around exams; and
- Training for the children's workforce on how to talk to adults is going well based on the feedback being received.

7 UPDATE REPORT: CORPORATE PARENTING (Agenda Item 7)

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families (CSF), highlighted the following:

- There is a focus on improving placement stability particularly for Merton's very complex young people;
- Working to recruit more foster carers (this is in part to mitigate the effects of the *Staying Put* policy which allows looked after children to stay in foster care for longer and prevents foster carers from taking additional younger children);
- Merton's adoption performance is top in the country;
- There is value in embedding adult mental health and CAHMS services as part of the corporate parent provision;
- There are still more boys in Merton that are looked after compared to girls which is a common pattern. The ethnicity of looked after children reflects the general population in the borough;
- Child sexual exploitation remains challenging;
- The health care needs of looked after children are well met;
- Details of any offending are reviewed; and
- Work is happening to engage young people in their care and to celebrate their success.

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- The box of worries and house of dreams approach allows younger children to look at their past and their future through drawings; and
- The educational achievement of all looked after children will be examined in detail at the next Panel meeting which will receive the schools annual report. Broadly

the achievement of younger children is good. However, this isn't the case for those in KS4. This reflects that this cohort is coming into care later and there is a higher prevalence of special educational needs and disabilities making outcomes fluctuate. There is a tendency amongst this older cohort to opt out of education. This is being examined more closely including looking at where this is linked to the mental health issues of parents.

Cllr Henry thanked the CSF Department for all the support given to foster carers. Having previously been a foster carer, she understands the value of what is offered.

8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families (CSF) noted that most items had been picked-up elsewhere on the agenda. However, she noted:

- Merton's improvement in care proceedings having moved from being one of the worst performing in London, to best performing over the last 5 years with an average duration of 25 weeks;
- Merton's adoption score card remains better than the threshold using the provisional figures currently available;
- The Family Drug and Alcohol Court is just launching to provide intensive support in parallel with the care proceeding process; and
- A Social Impact Bond aims to provide systematic therapeutic treatment to keep families together and prevent children from being taken into care.

9 DRAFT FINAL REPORT: PREVENT TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 9)

Cllr Henry, in her role as chair of the task group, thanked officers, schools and local community organisations for their involvement in the work of the task group in addition to the scrutiny officer for their support. She highlighted that one of the group's recommendations is to look at how other organisations working with children and young people in Merton have implemented the *Prevent* duty. Following the speech by Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector of Education at Ofsted, it was noted that there may be a need to ensure that unregistered schools are being effective in their use of *Prevent*.

RESOLVED: To accept the final report of the task group review of how schools are implementing the *Prevent* duty in Merton and to refer this to Cabinet on 19 February 2018.

10 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT (Agenda Item 10)

The Panel noted the task group's report with thanks.

11 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 11)

It was noted that this is the third successive meeting for which performance monitoring data has not been provided.

Also, that there is one more meeting left during this municipal year and it will focus on the schools annual report.