

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
6 NOVEMBER 2019

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Sally Kenny (in the Chair),  
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,  
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Edward Foley,  
Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Joan Henry,  
Councillor Russell Makin and Councillor Dave Ward

Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Jane  
McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Karl Mittelstadt  
(Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and Rachael  
Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were apologies for absence from Councillor James Holmes (with Councillor Andrew Howard as substitute), Councillor Dennis Pearce (with Councillor Billy Christie as substitute) and Councillor Brenda Fraser.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

4 BUDGET/BUSINESS PLAN SCRUTINY (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief summary of the savings report and explained that the upcoming General Election may cause a slight delay in presenting the figures for the second round of savings. In response to Panel Members questions, the Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Children, Schools and Families responded as follows;

- The initial outcomes of the SEN Transport review are due in February 2020 though there will be further work required as a result.
- The number of EHCP's has increased as has the cost of placements.
- Overspend in the high needs block is driving the deficit of the Dedicated Schools Grant. We are working on a revised DSG recovery plan. We are hopeful for funding and the recovery plan will return to scrutiny in due course.
- CSF2019-04 – We currently have Social Workers in this role working with our care leavers and care experienced young adults, however Personal Advisers are the standard. The work is

personal support, not social work intervention. To maintain quality standards we will utilise our oversight mechanisms including regular supervision, audit work undertaken and external scrutiny through Ofsted.

- CSF02019-06 - Same oversight mechanisms as CSF2019-04 will be used to monitor staff retention and recruitment. We do offer other incentives to work at Merton, such as small numbers reporting to Team Managers, high quality supervision, In house CAMHS team that can offer support to Social Workers, a supportive culture and flexible working. From a more corporate perspective, we offer employee assistance programmes, career breaks, cycle to work scheme and childcare vouchers and a regularly reviewed workforce strategy.
- CSF2019-11 – Redesign of the team has led to closer integration which enables us to reduce this role. We will continue to monitor and take action if detrimental.
- The savings shortfall of 2 million will be addressed in the next budget cycle.
- The Director of CSF agreed to explore the Panel Member’s suggestion of using Cricket Green School (for example) as an agency, by recruiting and employing teaching assistants to support mainstream schools with 1:1 and EHCP, instead of using agency workers.

REMINDER: Budget Scrutiny training is available on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in Committee Rooms B&C.

## 5 SEND STRATEGY 2019-23 (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Children, Schools and Families introduced the report along with the Assistant Director for Education who both clarified;

- The action plan that complements this strategy will include the targets and measures of success.
- Neurodevelopmental Pathway (Diagnosis of Autism) - We have set out to recommission that pathway specifically in order to place support with families before a diagnosis is made.

Action: Scrutiny Officer to circulate Autism strategy from CYP last year to Panel.

## 6 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Director of Children, Schools and Families invited questions on the departmental update. In response;

- 2.79 – There are now almost 2,000 Merton children with an Education Health and Care plan. We are trying to understand why we have higher numbers than our neighbouring boroughs.
- 2.25 – The Panel expressed an interest in scrutinising the level of in-house foster carers. The Director of CSF agreed to return with an update. Update: Added to 12 Feb 2020 agenda

## 7 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 7)

CLlr Kelly Braund is currently prioritising the SEND Strategy and budget review.

Cllr Eleanor Stringer is focusing on the Dedicated Schools Grant (specifically High Needs spending). Will be meeting with Merton's Head teachers next week to discuss.

## 8 TASK GROUP UPDATE: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM (Agenda Item 8)

Cllr Makin summarised the update and discussed the school visits undertaken by the task group so far.

The Panel agreed the terms of reference.

The final report of the task group will be brought to the March 2020 CYP Panel.

## 9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

The Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships brought the Panels attention to the correction of Line 39 - The revised figure for Agency Social Worker rates is 15.1% (not 50% as mentioned in the previous October performance report).

In response to Panel Members questions;

Line 3 EHCP completed within 20 weeks from 35% to 56% - We have made improvements but it is not where we want it to be. There are an increased number of EHCP's but we have SEND case workers working specifically on these assessments/plans.

Line 5 – Child Protection Plans 174 to 106? There were a number of Child Protection Plans that ran for too long due to court proceedings, family members etc. We are more focused on children on plans for more than 2 years, with a sharper focus on whether they are making children safer.

The Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships proposed a few amendments to the index:

- Removal of Line 24 (Children's centres)
- Lines 7 and 15 to be replaced with a combined indicator outlining average caseloads.
- Line 23 to be separated into two sections (23 number of LAC adopted and 23a Special Guardianship)

The Panel agreed to all changes proposed

## 10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

Agreed