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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 8.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Brenda Fraser (in the Chair),
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Edward Foley,
Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor James Holmes,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Marsie Skeete and
Councillor Dave Ward

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Children's
Services and Education

Rachael Wardell, (Director of Children Schools and Families),
Tom Procter (Head of Contracts & School Organisation) and
Rachael Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families
Department) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from co-opted member Colin Powell

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Billy Christie was present at the meeting but not recorded in the minutes.
The remainder of the minute was agreed as a true and accurate record.

4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Children, Schools and Families reported that COVID-19 had a significant impact locally from the beginning of March. Merton had one of the first schools in country to close. From that point they have working to support schools to stay open. During the lockdown all schools closed except for key workers and vulnerable children. Day care provision also remained open for key workers and vulnerable children. Schools re-opened gradually over the summer term and opened fully in September albeit with a staggered start. There have been some understandable concerns from communities and from school staff but all schools are now open.

In response to questions the Director of Children, Schools and Families reported that:

There has been excellent support from health and the police and leadership from schools with good workforce capacity amongst council staff. Everyone has adapted to this challenging environment.

Preparations began at the end of summer in the event there is another lockdown. The Government aim to keep schools open as a priority. Education materials will be provided in a lockdown situation and schools will be able to mobilise their lockdown offer should it be necessary. It will be the same response as last time but now with improved understanding and capacity because of all we have learnt in the first half of the year.

There are no financial resources available from the council for schools who have been impacted by COVID. The Government have offered some help. Fewer schools are forecasting a deficit this year.

Students who have developed a knowledge gap due to the lock down are receiving support and remedial action within their school. Government funding is available to schools to help them meet individual pupils' needs. Schools are aware of widening gaps across education, health and income. Resources have been made available to address wellbeing needs.

A Panel Member asked about the data gathered on children who had a knowledge gap during lock down. It was suggested that this Panel should monitor their progress over the next 12 months. The Director of Children, Schools and Families confirmed that schools held individual pupil data and there were no plans to gather or monitor it centrally. The Director confirmed that pupil progress is otherwise monitored through SATS, GCSE's and A levels. There is no evidence that repeatedly testing children is beneficial. Schools are supporting the young people they know based on their current and expected levels.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education expressed concern that inequalities have been exacerbated because of COVID-19. Schools are already concerned, as is the council.

A panel member said it is important to ensure both parents and children's mental health is supported, they urged the Director and Cabinet Member to pay attention to this issue.

A Panel member said a young person in Pollards Hill has asked for clarification about the potential changes to GSCE's and A levels next year. The Director of Children, Schools and Families confirmed that we do not know at this stage but extensive changes are not expected.

A panel member raised concerns about the registration of new-borns and inoculations cancelled during lockdown. The Director of Children, Schools and Families said that registrars have resumed birth registrations have cleared the backlog and have not missed any babies. Parents were concerned about taking children for vaccinations or were delayed. During the Pandemic there has been

strengthened partnerships, stronger communities and Merton is performing well on many measures.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked Panel Members for their report and highlighted that the Pandemic has led to more neighbourliness as well as highlighted existing inequalities.

5 HARRIS ACADEMY WIMBLEDON (Agenda Item 5)

A Panel member noted that the school is over-subscribed and queried where additional pupils are coming from. The Head of Contracts & School Organisation said the majority of the pupils at the school reside relatively closely to the permanent school site around South Wimbledon, Collier's Wood and areas to the south of the school.

Panel members asked about the children accommodated temporarily in the sixth form building at Harris Morden. The Head of Contracts & School Organisation said it is an underused building and while the temporary arrangements were not ideal, the Headteacher said pupils have settled in well.

6 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Director of Children, Schools and Families gave an overview of the Department Update. In response to questions it was reported that:

In regards to the increase in demand in domestic violence services during the lockdown there was initially a reduction in the number of referrals, reduction in contact from members of public. Numbers have now increased significantly. Now seeing an increase in referrals and increase in severity.

The Department has taken a pro-active response in relation to the Black Lives Matter Protests. There has been a re-examination of anti-racist practices, educational resources within teams and with managers to talk to staff and discuss practice. Corporately we have re-invigorated the BAME staff forum. Looking at monitoring policies and procedures.

Cricket Green School planned a grand opening but had to cancel due to lockdown. They provided great support to vulnerable pupils during the lockdown period. It has been a success story and a tremendous support to children and parents.

A Panel Member thanked the Director for the innovative things that are happening across the department and queried if there is an opportunity for more volunteers and more fund raising capacity and grants from big foundations and companies as well as the government. The Director of Children, Schools and Families said volunteers are used in early help, such as Home Start a befriending service for children under 5 for families who may be struggling. The department want to do more work with voluntary sector to apply for funding.

RESOLVED

The Director was asked to provide details of support for anti-racist education in Merton Schools for the next meeting.

7 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT - APPENDIX ONE (Agenda Item 6a)

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was noted.