

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

13 JANUARY 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.28 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Brenda Fraser (in the Chair), Hayley Ormrod, Stephen Alambritis MBE, Omar Bush, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes Carl Quilliam and Russell Makin

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Tobin Byers (Cabinet Member for Finance), Edward Gretton, Nick McLean and Eleanor Stringer (Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Hannah Doody (Director of Community and Housing), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Phil Howell (Assistant Director for Strategy and Improvement), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Karl Mittelstadt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Dennis Pearce and Councillor Carl Quilliam attended as a substitute.

Colin Powell has resigned as Co-opted Member representing education matters and Roz Cordner will fill the role on an interim basis

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record

### 4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN MERTON - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of her presentation. In response to questions she reported that:

The length of hospital stays for Covid patients varies according to age and co-morbidity.

Those who have been diagnosed with Covid will not receive the vaccine while they are infectious due to need to protect those administering the vaccination.

It is not known if a person can transmit the infection once they are vaccinated, so it is important to continue with social distancing and government guidance.

In response to questions on vaccines the Assistant Director of Strategy and Improvement reported that:

There have been approximately 40,000 vaccinations across Southwest London, figures are not available for Merton residents only.

The vaccines are currently being administered through hospitals who have the facilities to store the Pfizer vaccine.

There will be a roving team to vaccinate those who are unable to leave home.

## RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Director for her report

## 5 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2025 (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Corporate Services gave an overview of the budget report highlighting that as the Local Government Settlement was late there will be an additional scrutiny meeting in February before the final budget goes to Cabinet.

In response to questions the Director reported that:

The DSF Grant is in deficit, and is not sufficient to cover high needs spending which is increasing rapidly and in levels of complexity. The department are looking at options to mitigate the deficit.

The current budget gap is £11.7 million. The notional cost of an additional days leave for all council employees will be £300,000.

The current non-covid underspend at the end of October was £2.1 million there were covid costs of £900,000 so net underspend £1.3million. The underspend was due to savings in home to school transport costs during the first lockdown period.

The use of capital funds in revenue to help councils to release funds is complex. Consideration has been given to social impact funds which could be paid back over a longer period of time. Also, changes in the capital programme such as closure of the Merantun Development Company will release revenue funds.

A panel member asked the cabinet member for an update on progress with commercial opportunities and why last year savings were agreed as a matter of policy. The Cabinet Member for Education and Schools said savings could only be implemented after extensive consultation which had not been possible during this

period. The Cabinet Member for Finance said he is willing to meet with councillors to discuss income generating suggestions.

The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help gave an overview of the saving on rationalisation of children centres. She reported this work is in the very early stages more work to do on this area and will focus on deprived communities as well as look at different ways to deliver services. A panel member asked how extensive the consultation will be. The Assistant Director said they will target specific stakeholders, and ensure as many people can contribute as possible.

## 6 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT - TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 6)

The Director of Community and Housing and Interim Director for Children, Schools and Families introduced the report said this is a rapidly changing environment and work with schools has been very positive.

A panel member expressed concerned about the 200 additional children with social care needs, and queried how caseloads can be reduced to normal levels. The Head of Service Children in Care and Resources reported that a number of measures have been implemented including the recruitment of social workers and sharing workloads across department.

The Head of Policy Performance and Partnerships will identify data on additional children in system and comparative figures across London and south west London using the London data set.

A panel member asked why primary school attendance is higher than secondary school. The Assistant Director for Education and Early Years said this is possibly due to the needs of working parents and secondary school pupils are more independent.

A panel member asked about the impact on schools as the definition of key workers has widened, resulting in teachers required in both actual and virtual learning. The Assistant Director for Education and Early said teachers are managing this in different ways including working on rota basis, self-isolating staff are still working online, all schools are still able to operate effectively.

Performance monitoring report

## 7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships gave an overview of the report.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentations and thanked all staff for their hard work during this difficult time

## 8 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21 (Agenda Item 8)

The Panel noted the work programme.

9 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2021-25 SAVINGS PACK (Agenda Item 9)