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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 8 FEBRUARY 2023

(7.15 pm - 8.55 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),
Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Michael Butcher,
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Jil Hall,
Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Andrew Howard,
Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Samantha MacArthur,
Councillor James Williscroft, Mansoor Ahmad, Roz Cordner,
Cruise and Dr Stannard

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Brenda Fraser and Sally Kenny

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Dheeraj Chibber (Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Richard Ellis (Interim Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help) and Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence

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 of the previous meeting were agreed

4 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH (Agenda Item 4)

Panel members thanked officers for an excellent report and expressed gratitude that Merton is doing extensive work to improve children's mental health.

A panel member asked what is being done to prevent mental health issues from occurring and if the programme is reliant on self-referrals. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said there is the Mental Health in School's Forum, staff are skilled and empowered to support mental health. Professionals make referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

A panel member asked if information about reasons for referral can identify key challenges which can then support prevention. The Assistant Director of Education

and Early Help said the key presenting issues support discussions in the CAMHS Partnership Board.

Panel members said Merton work on mental health is a credit to the borough. It was asked if there is data tracking on ethnicity, sexuality and what further information should be captured. The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help said she will check if further contextual information is available.

In response to questions the Assistant Director for Education and Early Help reported that;

Merton is the leading authority for waiting times for CAMHS access as first contact was 6.9 days, the next local authority is 28 days. This is due to Merton's additional work on the single point of access.

It is too early to report on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis but anecdotally there is concern.

The Department are not aware of any proactive work in schools to support those whose gender identity may be triggering mental health issues.

A panel member noted there are lower rates of self-referrals for male clients. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said Rutlish and Wimbledon College are boys schools and looking at how we engage with this cohort and why they may be less forthcoming.

A panel member asked how the challenge recruiting therapists is being addressed and how good practice from Merton is being shared. The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help said she will report back on the shortfall in therapists and work undertaken by the Integrated Care Board to share good practice.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for all their work on the service.

The Department to report back on:

What demographical information is recorded for mental health referrals.

If there is a shortfall in therapists and how this is being tackled

Work undertaken by the Integrated Care Board to share good practice on Mental referrals.

5 TASK GROUP PROGRESS - VERBAL UPDATES (Agenda Item 5)

Task Group Chairs gave an overview of the work undertaken so far.

Councillor Linda Kirby reported that the task group has attended the Secondary Heads meeting, met with Head of Education Inclusion and produced a survey for schools and spoken to Healthwatch. The task group will also attend the schools mental health forum.

Youth Finding Task Group

Councillor Max Austin reported that the task group will focus on increasing access to funding for youth services. The Youth Partnership Foundation role is to pool different organisations to attract funding and is the preferred model for officers and the voluntary sector. The task group has met with Merton Youth Service and voluntary sector colleagues, as a next step will meet with other local authorities who have youth services different models and how successful they have been.

A panel member asked why the Youth Partnership Model was rejected in the past, Councillor Austin said it was thought that it could lead competition within the partnership and now organisations concerns have been addressed and are in unanimous support of the model.

Resolved

The Chair thanked the Councillors for their updates and looked forward to receiving their draft reports in due course.

6 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families gave an overview of the six pillars within the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy which was published on the 2nd February. Further detail will be brought back to a future panel meeting for discussion.

A Panel member congratulated Wimbledon Park for their outstanding rating from Ofsted and asked for an update on Hatfield School which was rated requires improvement. Panel members wished to understand if this would impact on their expansion plans. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said Hatfield has moved from 'Good' to 'Requires Improvement'. There is a school improvement strategy in line with need. The expansion of the Additionally Resourced Provision for pupils with special educational needs has started and will continue.

A panel member asked about for more information about the new special free school which was recently approved. The Assistant Director for Strategy Commissioning and Transformation said there are 120 places planned and that work continues with the Department for Education on site options and will report back in due course.

A Panel member asked if cooking lessons are included for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) in the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF). The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said there are cooking lessons with HAF and will check if this includes children with SEND.

A panel member sought clarification about consultation plans for family hubs. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said there will be consultations with communities. Also, parents will be involved in the governance of the programme.

Councillor Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong learning said 95% of Merton schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and are aiming for this to become 100%. The Department are also working to ensure pupils with special

educational needs are able to be educated in Merton where possible, Whatley Avenue has opened for 40 children, this keeps costs down and creates a better environment but some complex residential care may have to be provided out of borough. The Cabinet Member agreed that home economics in schools is important.

RESOLVED

Department to investigate if cooking classes are available for children with SEND on the HAF Programme.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was noted.