

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
20 SEPTEMBER 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.15 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 Corder,
Becky Cruise and Dr Stannard

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help), Octavia Lamb (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families) and Tom Procter (Head of Contracts & School Organisation)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Maisie Davies.

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 approved.

4 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

Jane McSherry welcomed Tom Procter into the Departmental Management Team as Interim AD after Richard Ellis moved on recently. Regarding the recent news story about RAAC in schools, Jane reassured Members that there was a survey of all our Community school properties last year and no RAAC was found.

Family Hubs were launched on 2nd August with a play day at Phipps Bridge, introducing the local community to the hub and getting lots of support from local parents.

CYP Survey – boroughwide refresh of the Early Help and SEND Strategy. This has been shared with the Youth Parliament and Youth Networks. Survey closes 29th September and they have had 450 responses so far. Focus has been on safety, green issues, and cost of living. Further details will come.

The Chair thanked JM for the report and requested that an update on the consultation comes to the panel.

Other questions were asked and answered on defibrillators at schools, the procedure for children missing education, quality control for electively home educated (EHE) children, mayor of London's plans for free school meals for KS1, sufficiency of funding for Early Years SEN providers, and youth violence.

5 SCHOOLS PLACES PLANNING STRATEGY (Agenda Item 5)

Tom Procter introduced the report, highlighting paragraph 2.7 of the report that summarises our broad strategy for managing surplus school places. He said the main concern is primary schools, and that currently Merton secondary schools are broadly full. There continues to be high demand for special schools places; Perseid is currently expanding and a new special free school is planned.

Councillor Kirby asked if we foresee any circumstances where there's an increase or is this a certain trajectory as it is hard to reverse a reduction. TP responded that the forecast is downward for as far as we can see but there is no certainty. Concerns around reversing a change is partly why the strategy focusses on reducing numbers rather than closing schools whenever possible.

Councillor Hall asked about the new free school special school and whether it would be better to look at existing capacity in our schools rather than build new. TP responded that free schools are through the Department for Education (not Council) but that a new school uses much more land and so it would be difficult to provide the size of school on an existing primary school that had reduced its capacity. However, primary schools were providing specialist provision through Additional Resourced Provision e.g. at Cranmer. The planned free school will cater for moderate and severe learning disabilities including with challenging behaviour.

Dr Stannard asked if proportionality is maintained for religious schools. TP responded they will continue to work with schools to meet pupil preference.

JM explained that the policy is not to close schools wherever possible but the strategy provides criteria. Any school closure, including academies, goes through a full consultation process.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 6)

Tom Procter introduced the report, stating that 9 indicators were red or amber, but the report detailed reasons against each one, which should provide reassurance. Questions were asked and answered regarding Child Protection Plans, the percentage of care leavers in NEET, the national target of the number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings, care proceedings taking place online, and agency worker staffing and stability of staffing.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

Self-Harm and Eating Disorders Task Group Report on way to Cabinet. Youth Funding Task Group Report due at next panel meeting. Upcoming Youth Participation Task Group is finalising its membership. Councillor Kirby would like to do another independent Task Group on Female Genital Mutilation.