

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
11 MARCH 2024

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),  
Councillor Max Austin, Councillor Michael Butcher,  
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Jil Hall,  
Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Linda Kirby,  
Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor James Williscroft  
and Roz Corder

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help), 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 Councillor Chessie Flack and co-opted members Mansoor Ahmad and Dr Oona Stannard.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declaration of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Panel members confirmed that these are a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

4 CORPORATE PARENTING (Agenda Item 4)

The Assistant Director for Social Care and Youth Inclusion briefly summarised the report.

In response to questions, further information was provided:

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are mostly 16–17-year-old males.

- With regards to the recruitment of foster carers, there is a Recruitment Strategy, and we will be recruiting to the currently vacant Fostering Recruitment Officer post.
- Finding fostering households that can take over two siblings is a major challenge.
- Foster Carers are trained to have cultural awareness and we encourage curiousness within the community, to ensure we are meeting the cultural needs of our asylum-seeking children.
- Care experienced, alongside other characteristics, will be included in Equality Impact Assessments going forward.
- Progress with apprenticeship opportunities is doing well.

Young Inspector, Marakie Tilahun, updated the Panel on the Young Inspectors successful bid to facilitate peer research as part of the Young Londoners Research Programme, which is funded by the Mayor of London. The programme supported nine youth organisations in facilitating peer research projects with training and support for groups of young people to design their own research projects, conduct fieldwork, and analyse their findings.

The Young Inspectors, who are part of the Participation and Engagement team, were supported by the Participation and Engagement Manager and colleagues at Partnership for Young London.

The Participation and Engagement Manager to share the links to the report and podcast recorded by Merton's Young Inspectors with the Panel.

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/young-people/young-advisors-and-inspectors/research-programme-2023>

## 5 EDUCATION STANDARDS REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help outlined the report, highlighting that 97% of Merton pupils attended schools which were graded good or better.

In response to questions about the report, officers provided further information as follows:

- Support and challenge meetings are held every six weeks for those schools' requiring improvement.
- Secondary schools not currently reporting an issue with regards to the recruitment of maths teachers.
- Schools legally cannot remove a pupil from the register unless they know where they are going so they can be tracked for safeguarding.
- School budgets – Seventeen schools set a deficit budget (the majority of which were primary). These budgets have been tracked throughout the year, alongside regular meetings being held for those schools to show the work they are undertaking to bring the budget back into balance and any recovery plans. Currently all the budgets are taking an upward trajectory. As far as possible, any measures undertaken do not negatively affect the children.

A Panel member suggested that, for contextual information, second language pupils could be added to the report in future.

## 6 CHILD HEALTHY WEIGHT REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

Mike McHugh, Consultant in Public Health introduced the report.

In 2022/23:

8% of children in reception were obese, and a further 10.6% were overweight. Combined total of 18.6%.

22.7% of Year 6 children were obese, with a further 13.2% being overweight. Combined total of 35.9%.

Merton's Child Healthy Weight Action Plan has three main themes:

- Making Child Healthy Weight Everyone's Business
- Supporting Children, Young People, and their Families
- Healthy Place

In response to questions, further information was provided as follows:

In the 1970's, it was estimated 1-2% reception children were obese.

A Panel Member asked why there was no data for the Village Ward on the maps of obesity rates in the report. It was explained that when there is no data, it is because too small numbers could lead to identification so are therefore not included.

Numbers attending Ready Steady Cook classes have been gradually increasing. The classes are focused on cooking well on a budget.

Daily Active Mile – Mike McHugh to provide data. We will know the figures at the end of the year but we estimate around 39 schools are partaking in the daily mile.

## 7 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Jane McSherry, Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families (CLLF) gave Members her departmental update, which provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting the CLLF Department, and not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

The Panel noted it will be Jane's last CYP Panel before her retirement at the end of May and thanked her for all she has done for Merton's children.

The JTAI (Joint Targeted Area Inspection) of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Merton, undertaken up to 8 December 2023, was published in February 2024. We are pleased the inspector report recognises that "Most vulnerable children in Merton affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation benefit from effective strategically aligned and integrated partnership arrangements" and that partners in Merton "respond swiftly together to ameliorate emerging risks to children in local communities".

A few areas for improvement were identified. In response, the inspectorates have requested a multi-agency written statement of proposed action. The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership has been determined as the lead for this and will be working to finalise this in the upcoming weeks before the deadline of 23 May 2024.

Since the last report there have been inspections at Hollymount Primary School and Harris Academy Merton Primary, both undertaken on 28 to 29 February 2024. One inspection report has been published. We are delighted to say that Singlegate Primary has once again been judged to be outstanding.

As reported in January, the Secretary of State has made the finalised decision to close Stanford Primary School at the end of the summer term (August 2024).

Secondary school offer day was on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Every Merton family received an offer of a school place, nearly 90% in one of their top three preferred secondary schools.

In May 2023, Merton committed £200,000 from its Cost-of-Living budget to deliver Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) in half-term holidays. An additional £10,000 was added for February 2024 delivery. HAF projects support children in poverty to access free holiday programmes with good food, exercise, enrichment and fun.

As at the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024, Merton maintained 2584 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

Merton celebrated our signing of the 'My Things Matter Pledge'. The pledge is a National Youth Advocacy Service initiative ensuring that Care Experienced children are moved with dignity; that their belongings, are treated with respect; that we check in with the child following their move; that children are supported to complain if their belongings are either lost or damaged when moving; and provide written guidance around moving.

The Chair thanked Jane McSherry for all her work and dedication to Children's Services.

## 8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Contracts and School Organisation highlighted a few areas of the performance information.

## 9 TOPIC SUGGESTIONS FOR 2024/25 (Agenda Item 9)

Members were asked for their feedback on what worked well / what didn't this year. Scrutiny to email Panel seeking feedback.

Members requested a Cabinet response to the eating disorders task group. Scrutiny to follow up.

Members were reminded to send in any topic suggestions by 5 April. Some topics ideas included: Emotionally Based School Avoidance  
Education of children and their attitudes of consent

VAWG, Misogyny and how can it be extended to primary school age.  
School Sports Partnership