

**LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM**

**A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF**

**TRANSITIONS PROCESS FROM CHILDREN'S TO ADULT**

**SERVICES**

**2004/2005**

## FOREWORD BY PANEL CHAIR

The issue of transitions has been a matter of concern for many years, so that, although there is some discussion going on at present as to how to improve the process, it was considered appropriate that it should be the subject of the first cross-scrutiny panel review. The task group has consisted of two councillors from Life Chances Scrutiny Panel and two from Health and Community Care Scrutiny Panel, with support from a dedicated scrutiny officer.

We have been very fortunate that so many people involved in various ways in transition were prepared to meet with us and tell us of their experiences – officers, other agencies such as Connexions and Carshalton College and parents and young people. We considered it vital in such a review that all levels of involvement were interviewed, especially receivers of the service.

There was much concern about the shortcomings and failed communication in the present system, which emerged through hearing evidence. Staff working in the area of learning difficulties, which has been the subject of major reorganisation, have been tackling this area and have made some progress, which has been acknowledged by Social Services inspectors. However, they have highlighted the need for work to be done in other fields. We therefore particularly focussed on physical and sensory impairment, as well as learning difficulties.

It was decided at this stage not to look at children and young people with mental health problems, and referral to adult psychiatric services where necessary. We considered that there are so many problems in this area, that it would take considerable time to locate the people we needed to talk to. Our report highlights the fact that this area will be scrutinised in other ways in the near future, through alternative review work.

The Task Group does not consider that improving the transition process needs expensive solutions. A team of newly appointed social workers is not needed; if a team is established, this should consist of existing workers who know their way around the process and are aware of the areas requiring joined-up working.

Equally, waiting until the forthcoming departmental reorganisation is also considered to be unsatisfactory. If Children's and Adult Services do not have effective liaison systems when located in the same department, it is not guaranteed that these will improve when Children's are unified with Education Services, as these are very different disciplines. Before reorganisation takes place, a new process needs to be defined, worked on, and implemented.

We would like to thank all those who gave up their time to meet with us, and we hope that our report will be the subject of positive action, so recipients of the service can hope that in future it will be working more effectively.

**Councillor Sheila Knight , Chair, Health and Community Care Services  
Scrutiny Panel and Transitions Review Task Group Chair**

**TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP (drawn from the Health and Community Care Services Scrutiny Panel and the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel)**

**Councillor Jillian Ashton  
Councillor Sheila Knight (Chair)  
Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender  
Councillor Maxi Martin**

**Officers:**

**Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer, Policy and Performance Division**

**Acknowledgements:**

The Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review, through preparing reports and attending meetings to answer questions.

For further information relating to the review, please contact:

Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer  
London Borough of Merton,  
Chief Executive's Policy and Performance Division  
Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden, Surrey SM4 5DX  
Tel: 020 8545 3390; E-Mail: [barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk](mailto:barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk)

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- A Review terms of reference, scope and timetable
- B Questions used for parental interviews

## REPORT SUMMARY

Two Members from the Health and Community Care Services Scrutiny Panel and two from the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel formed a Task Group to undertake a review of the transitions process by which young people move from Children's Services to Adults Social Services. The Task Group has undertaken the review through interviews and visits with a range of individuals and organisations involved in the transitions process, in order to gather first hand evidence and make appropriate recommendations for improving the service.

Members have looked at both aspects of the transitions process – for those with learning disabilities and those with physical or sensory impairments.

The key areas of concern to emerge are that there is a general lack of effective communication between transitions staff and parents, resulting in confusion and worry for families and the young people moving through transition. Parents are not clear what should happen and when. They find they have to take the responsibility for moving the process forward in terms of identifying options for their children. Also, the transitions process does not always start at Year 9 (14+ years) as it should.

The current system does not operate smoothly and, particularly in the case of those with a physical or sensory impairment, there is insufficient advice and guidance given in a consistent way on what benefits are available to assist in the workplace.

The Task Group has made 16 recommendations throughout the report aimed at improving the transitions process in relation to communication; advice, guidance and support; and need for identification of a range of realistic options for young people moving into adulthood. These recommendations are detailed below:-

- R1.** *There should be a structured transitions team of social services staff located together to provide continuity of service and one point of contact for parents and young people.*
- R2.** *Although Social Services does not have resources to allocate a social worker to every case, an assessment system is needed to enable the caseload to be effectively dealt with and to ensure provision of
  - a) *Support for those who need ongoing Social Services involvement;*
  - b) *Social worker availability at critical times when Social Services intervention is required;*
  - c) *Knowledge and advice about additional benefits available to facilitate job placements etc.**
- R3.** *There should be a periodic assessment by Social Services to ensure whether help is needed, so that support is forthcoming when required.*

- R4.** *A system needs to be put in place whereby Community Care Services acquire a knowledge of people moving into adulthood, even if there is no allocated social worker.*
- R5.** *If Social Services cannot attend a transition review meeting where they are expected to be in attendance, a letter should be sent in advance to parents and other agencies to advise them of the absence, rather than have the parents find out at the review that Social Services are not in attendance. This will contribute to improved communication between the parties involved and help prevent disappointment.*
- R6.** *Any relevant guidance such as the booklet 'A guide to Social Services Support for Young Disabled People Approaching Adulthood' must be made more widely available in educational, social services and other establishments, rather than just be placed in the Civic Centre Reception area, where only a few visitors can access it.*
- R7.** *More use must be made of mainstream employment opportunities, rather than using sheltered workshops, to help break down the barriers to meaningful work and develop social inclusion.*
- R8.** *Emphasis must be placed on providing a range of options for young people leaving compulsory education. However, these options should be realistic in terms of the needs of the individual, rather than raising expectations too high, only for them to be unachievable.*
- R9.** *Connexions and transitions staff regularly need to visit establishments such as Carshalton College to see what is on offer, to enable them to advise students appropriately.*
- R10.** *The use of mentoring should be considered as a way for parents and young people to gain support and advice.*
- R11.** *The transitions process must commence at 14 years of age in all cases, to allow early consideration of case options and minimise uncertainty and stress for families. Social workers must also ensure that they have actually met the child whose case they are dealing with.*
- R12.** *Consideration should be given to further developing the initiatives being piloted at High Path Day Centre with the College Leavers Group.*
- R13.** *A system should be put in place to ensure that all those needing support are identified to prevent them being overlooked. This should include a mechanism for social services staff working on physical disability and sensory impairment being trained in the 'social model of disability' and being involved in transitions cases at an earlier stage.*
- R14.** *Students with a physical disability or sensory impairment often have a problem in getting appropriate advice on the benefits available to them, as they are not always known to Social Services. Therefore, there*

*should be easy and consistent access to information about benefits which can be provided, e.g. travel passes, funds for adaptations in the workplace such as specialist IT equipment, reading materials in braille etc*

- R15.** *Where education is/has been provided outside of the Borough, thought should be given to how young people coming back to the local area can integrate with their local peer group through holiday activities etc.*
- R16.** *Discussion about future opportunities for employment for young people should be considered through Connexions being involved earlier in the process, rather than waiting until leaving school or college is imminent.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Each year in Merton, key issues are identified which are scrutinised through a review process. A review aims to address areas of weakness or poor service, through making recommendations to improve outcomes for the local community. Elected Members undertake these reviews, working together in task groups.
- 1.2 The Commission for Social Care Inspection recently reviewed the services for people with learning disabilities and the findings have been reported to Members. One of the inspection findings was that

*'transition arrangements from childhood to adulthood were being reviewed and planned collaboratively across relevant agencies and the model of a 'virtual team' was being developed'.*

The report further stated that

*'considerable work was still required to improve transitional arrangements to achieve effective communication, co-ordination across services and involvement of families'.<sup>1</sup>*

- 1.3 The Health and Community Care Services Panel and the Life Chances Panel jointly agreed that there was a need to review the transitions process, whereby young people move from Children's to Adult Social Services. This process takes place from 14 years to 25 years of age. A joint review process was agreed as Children's Services falls within the remit of the Life Chances Panel, whilst Adults' Services falls under the Health and Community Care Services Panel. Two councillors from each Panel volunteered to undertake the review.
- 1.4 Review terms of reference and review programme were approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. These set out the parameters for the review focus and identified key witnesses and stakeholders to be engaged with. (See Appendix A)

## **2. THE PROCEDURE FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW**

- 2.1 The Task Group met 17 times between August 2004 and February 2005. Councillors agreed that, wherever possible, they would hold meetings and undertake visits during the daytime.
- 2.2 Councillors agreed that they should meet with relevant officers, parents, external bodies and young people themselves, so that as wide a perspective as possible would be gained. Officers were asked to outline the Authority's strategy and process for transitions. Witnesses

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Social Care Inspection: Report on Inspection of Services for People with Learning Disabilities, London Borough of Merton.



were contacted and invited to a meeting to outline their personal experiences of the transitions process and to answer questions put to them.

- 2.3 Visits to voluntary organisations and educational establishments were also arranged, so that members could see what facilities are provided and also meet young people going through transition as well as parents.

### **3. OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PROCESSES**

#### **3.1 The Transitions Team - Evidence**

- 3.1.1 As a first step in providing a picture of the current situation, the Task Group met with some of the officers who are responsible for operating the transitions process on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004. The Head of Community Care Services within the Housing and Social Services Department takes the lead on transitions for the Authority. A considerable number of other officers are involved in the process on a day-to-day basis. However, these officers are not located together as one standing team but liaise with each other on individual transition cases as necessary. The Transition Team is therefore in effect a 'virtual' team of officers from different areas within social services. These officers also liaise with other departments, including the Education Department and health professionals.
- 3.1.2 The officers interviewed acknowledged that the transitions process has not been very successful in the past, largely due to a very large caseload for a very small number of staff to deal with. Social Services do not have time to allocate a social worker to every case. The Task Group were concerned about the problem of staff shortages particularly in terms of the effect of using locum social workers and the lack of continuity for clients.
- 3.1.2 The Transitions Team, which has only been formally set up for about one year, meets regularly. The Task Group learned that the Education Department takes the initial lead, providing the names of young people who are of the relevant age (14+ years). There is also the involvement of other organisations in the process, such as Connexions, whose role should be to provide career and employment guidance for students. All children with a statement of special educational needs have a transitions review; however not all of these make use of social services. The review's key focus is on transitions where there is a link with Social Services.
- 3.1.4 There are around 300 transitions review meetings each year and due to resources, the Task Group was informed that it is not possible for a member of staff from Social Services to attend every one of them. However, where the young person is known to Social Services, the

department does try to send a social worker to the review meeting, with the child allocated a transitions social worker. The Task Group considered it essential for all the relevant officers and staff involved with a client to attend review meetings once they have been set up.

3.1.5 Officers accepted that there had been cause for complaint about repeat assessments during the transitions period; however the aim now is to work more closely together with all the agencies involved, to avoid duplication. The specific problems encountered are:-

- Social workers are in short supply;
- There may be difficulties in seeking residential placements too far in advance, despite the desirability of forward planning;
- Out of borough residential placed children often come back into borough for adult services (there is a policy of trying to reduce the number of out borough placements);
- There may sometimes be a lack of options to be offered to some young people of transitions age.

3.1.6 Initiatives have been devised to improve the circulation of information to parents. These include a Transitions Fair organised at the Chaucer Centre in Canterbury Road, with the aim of providing information for young people and their parents and details on useful contacts within the Authority and the voluntary sector.

### **3.2 Social Services/Education Heads of Service – Evidence:**

3.2.1 In order to gain a strategic perspective to transitions, the Task Group invited the following heads of services to meet together and outline their perspective and the opportunities for joint working/liaison:-

- ◆ Head of Children's Services (Social Services Department)
- ◆ Head of Community Care Services (Social Services Department)
- ◆ Head of Access, Opportunity and Inclusion (Education Department)

3.2.2 Children with disabilities are only one aspect of care responsibilities; child protection cases and children in care are also included. There is a small team dealing with children with disabilities. Over the last ten years the increase in demand on services has grown substantially, due in large part to a change in expectations as to what support services should provide. The intention is to try and make services fair and equitable but there is an eligibility criteria to be applied. The transition process should be smooth, but clients are often approaching service delivery from different perspectives. Children's Services view service delivery from the perspective of children being members of a family; Adult Services consider the client as an individual. The Task Group's view was that it should be possible to achieve a smooth process.

- 3.2.3 The Task Group raised the issue of Merton's statutory obligations in relation to transitions and for assurance that these were being met. The Council does have statutory responsibilities but work and service delivery involve other agencies and partners, including local health providers; therefore the legislation is not restricted to Children's Services alone. Officers are working together to develop the transitions procedure to improve the service provided. Whilst acknowledging the need to work in partnership with a range of agencies, the Task Group considered that the number of agencies involved contributed to the confusion for parents and young people. This therefore makes it essential for strong communication channels to be in place, so that clients know what is happening and when and can receive advice and guidance promptly when required.
- 3.2.4 The statutory legislation in which the Authority operates is the SEN and Disabilities Act 2001. There is a responsibility for carrying out reviews for all children with a statement of special educational needs at Year 9 (age 14+). However, not all of these children will have disabilities. Schools are responsible for carrying out the review and key partners should be involved in the process, which includes reviewing the individual curriculum to be followed. If a child has a disability, then Social Services and Connexions should be involved. A transition plan is produced and monitored through the Statement Monitoring Team.
- 3.2.5 The review of Inclusion and the Learning Continuum is being undertaken to assess the whole issue of special care needs. There is also a 16+ provision review, which involves partners working together to improve services and the quality of process and how it impacts on children and their families. The main aim is to try to ensure continuity and a single point of contact for the individual and their family.
- 3.2.6 With regard to the number of children involved in transition, officers advised that this depends on whether the clients in Children's Services moving to Adult Services are included in the count. Some clients moving through transition do not engage with Social Services at all. For this reason, workshops were being organised, as there is a need to build in processes, which will develop staff culture and encourage working together. The monitoring of complaints indicated that the main issue was the gap between clients' expectations and actual service provision available.
- 3.2.7 The Task Group raised its concern about the issue of appropriate provision of work opportunities for young people moving out of education. It was agreed that there is a need to analyse past years' performance, including special schools, colleges and out of borough schools. Many clients are capable of undertaking real work opportunities and these must be encouraged wherever possible.

### **Findings and Recommendations from interviewing Transitions Team and Heads of Service**

3.2.8 There do not appear to be effective mechanisms for handling of caseloads to ensure that those requiring social services involvement receive the support and advice they need, when they need it. This would appear to be largely due to the lack of a structured transitions team of staff permanently located together to provide continuity. Although continuous involvement of a social worker may not be necessary in all cases, it is important that there is help and guidance for clients when required. Also, there appears to be a lack of effective communication, particularly communication to parents, who are often left feeling unclear about what is happening and what the next steps in the process are. The Task Group recommends that:-

- R1.** There should be a structured transitions team of social services staff located together to provide continuity of service and one point of contact for parents and young people.
- R2.** Although Social Services does not have resources to allocate a social worker to every case, an assessment system is needed to enable the caseload to be effectively dealt with and to ensure provision of
  - d) Support for those who need ongoing Social Services involvement;
  - e) Social worker availability at critical times when Social Services intervention is required;
  - f) Knowledge and advice about additional benefits available to facilitate job placements etc.
- R3.** There should be a periodic assessment by Social Services to ensure whether help is needed, so that support is forthcoming when required.
- R4.** A system needs to be put in place whereby Community Care Services acquire a knowledge of people moving into adulthood, even if there is no allocated social worker.
- R5.** If Social Services cannot attend a transition review meeting where they are expected to be in attendance, a letter should be sent in advance to parents and other agencies to advise them of the absence, rather than have the parents find out at the review that Social Services are not in attendance. This will contribute to improved communication between the parties involved and help prevent disappointment.

### **Learning Disability and Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment**

3.2.9 It was suggested that the Task Group should focus on engaging and consulting the Kids First Forum, a group of parents of children with special needs and disabilities. Kids First kindly offered to circulate a flyer advertising the review and asking interested parents to contact

the Scrutiny Lead Officer. From this, some useful evidence emerged. However, Task Group Members also identified other groups and organisations they wished to consult and made separate arrangements to do so. (See also paragraph 4.3 below).

3.2.10 Having learned about the strategic and operational processes currently in place for transitions, the Task Group commenced a range of interviews and visits to gather first hand evidence in relation to transitions for those with a learning disability and for those with a physical disability or sensory impairment. The Task Group has presented its findings and recommendations under these two separate areas, to provide focus on the specific nature of clients' needs, their expectations of the transitions process and the problems encountered by each group.

#### **4 TRANSITION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY**

4.1 The Task Group were advised through their discussion with Heads of Service that The Community Care Act relates to the most vulnerable adults in society and Valuing People legislation relates to people with learning disabilities. The aim is to allow clients to live as independently as possible and provide fair access to care. Merton allocates its care provision on critical and substantial criteria, which means that clients have to have severe needs in order to be eligible. This means that there is a gap between expectations for services and the reality of what can be provided in Adult Services.

4.2 A review of learning disabilities service provision has been undertaken over the past year and it seems that a gap exists in Merton's provision, due to there being very few alternative services for adults with disabilities in the voluntary/independent sector. However, this is now being given more focus in terms of providing more innovative options and choices by working with families through the transitions process, with:-

- Staff communicating the changes. Clients need to be aware that there will not be the same level of support that is provided in Children's Services;
- Helping families deal with the change to Adult Services through more dedicated support to these families;
- Taking a more phased approach to transition. Aspirations and expectations should be the same for disabled and other children;
- More effort being made to link with young people with physical disabilities and sensory impairments who can become 'lost' to the process. (See section 5 of this report for physical/sensory impairment). A partnership board for people with physical and sensory impairment is to be set up.

4.3 The Learning and Disability Partnership Board was set up, with a designated Transitions Champion. Six parents nominated by the Kids First Forum sit on the Board, forming a base for parents to be represented. The Task Group considered interviewing representatives from Kids First Forum, but this proved difficult as there was a change of Forum co-ordinator being dealt with at the time of the review. However, during individual interviews with parents, the Task Group did gain an insight into the Forum's role as a support network. Also, the Forum circulated details about the review to its members asking parents if they had any evidence to give in relation to their experience of transitions.

4.4 There should be a planned pathway to be built up over time for each young person. A child may have a social services plan, an education plan and then a transitions plan. For example, at St. Ann's Special School, a child will have a social services care package already in place, which may be changed or adapted and integrated into a transitions plan. There is also involvement of health service partners. Although it has been acknowledged that the links with health have not been good, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) now chairs the Children with Disabilities Partnership Board, which has resulted in an improvement.

4.5 The Task Group held several meetings with individuals and undertook visits to various establishments to hear evidence about transition in relation to the experiences of young people with a learning disability. The following gave evidence:-

- ◆ Young people
- ◆ Drug and Alcohol Action Team
- ◆ Individual parents
- ◆ Connexions
- ◆ Social Services Employment Adviser
- ◆ Carshalton College
- ◆ St. Ann's School
- ◆ College Leavers Group

#### **4.6 The Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) - Evidence:**

4.6.1 The Task Group learned that work has been undertaken to draw up a Transitions Strategy for Young People with a Learning Disability, as part of the valuing people agenda. This Strategy places specific emphasis on learning disability but the principles apply to other young people moving through transition. The Strategy aims to raise the profile of this process and enhance provision. The Task Group interviewed the Drugs Action Strategy Manager, to determine any links between his work and the transitions process within Social Services. The DAAT Manager confirmed a link between children with a disability and substance misuse and a perceived gap when clients moved to Adult Services in terms of the problems they faced.

4.6.2 With regard learning disabilities and substance misuse, the Task Group learned that a review of this area had been undertaken. If clients are placed in a residential care setting with supervision, exposure to substance misuse is low; but if placed in a community care setting, exposure is much higher as people are more easily targeted, particularly in relation to drugs, due to their vulnerability. Some good work in this area has been achieved in Lambeth, where there is a Floating Support Group Scheme providing better support for vulnerable residents. However, Merton does not have such a scheme.

4.6.3 The DAAT funds substance misuse work in all the education SMART Centres. With such treatment, there is also a need for a large amount of after care. For children, there is no real facility to provide this and the only option is really to wait until they reach adulthood, when there is access to facilities and services provided by partner agencies. It was considered important for the Council to work with partners to review this issue and to look at treatment for young people as well as older people. The Task Group fully endorsed this view.

#### **4.7 Interviews with parents - Evidence:**

4.7.1 A series of individual interviews were set up with parents who had links with social services, so that they could outline their experiences of the transitions process as it had affected them. In view of the social services involvement, the interviews focused largely on clients with learning disabilities. A set of standard questions was used as the basis for the interviews. (See Appendix B).

4.7.2 The following key issues emerged from the interviews:-

- Some parents are not at all clear about what the transitions process is about;
- The expected advice and support does not always materialise as parents expect and often only emerges through parents pushing for guidance;
- Although the transitions period should commence at 14+ years, in reality it seems to start later for many children, sometimes as they are reaching school leaving age. So for many the process starts too late;
- Some parents feel that they are not given sufficient options for their children. They might hear about options through speaking to other parents rather than through the professionals involved;
- There was some experience of parents not feeling involved in the decisions being made for their children's future;
- Poor communication channels means it is not always clear to parents what is going on and what stage the process has reached. Calls to officers might not be returned. There was one example

- cited where the child returned home from a residential school for the holidays and had to re-register each time the holidays ended;
- The process does not appear to be smooth and seamless;
  - Parents are not given clear advice on what benefits they can rightfully claim and may not therefore receive all the benefits they are entitled to;
  - All the agencies which should be involved do not necessarily all attend reviews when they should e.g. social workers, health professionals, Connexions staff; interviews were sometimes postponed or cancelled at short notice by professional staff;
  - Parents do not always see a clear plan or pathway for their children during the 10 year transitions phase and are therefore unclear about what the futures holds;
  - There are some useful networks such as Kids First Forum which can provide information and support for parents. However, the professionals involved in transitions should also provide information and guidance without parents having to seek it out;
  - The Task Group heard about a case where the parents had to formally challenge the Authority to get the appropriate placement for their child;
  - It appears that forms are completed and detailed information provided to Social Services but nothing is done with the information;
  - One view expressed by parents was that the Authority only becomes involved in cases at pre or post external inspection stage, when the spotlight is on performance

#### **4.8 Connexions - Evidence:**

- 4.8.1 Connexions is the Government's support service for young people. For clients with a disability, Connexions should be involved to age 25 years.
- 4.8.2 The Task Group met two officers from the local Connexions, to learn how they engage with young people as part of the transitions process and what service and advice they can offer. Connexions gave a brief introduction to their services and then responded to questions from the Task Group. The organisation forms part of Prospects, the national organisation which was set up in 1996 when the careers service was privatised.
- 4.8.3 It was confirmed that Connexions are statutorily required to attend both Year 9 and Year 11 review meetings. However, in mainstream education, there are not sufficient resources to allow for Connexions to attend all Year 10 reviews. Connexions also make links with other partners such as health and youth partners, including Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Youth Offending Team (YOT), Grenfell Housing Association and Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT). There are also links with social services disability teams where social services have contact with young people after education ends.



4.8.4 The following key concerns emerged from the presentation and responses to questions:-

- The Task Group was concerned to learn that, although Merton Connexions makes links with all young people in Merton's schools, whether Merton residents or not, for out-borough placed young people, it is the host Connexions office which makes the links and not the home Connexions branch. This is a different process to Social Services, where the professional involvement is from the home authority regardless of where a client is placed. Connexions' arrangements require very strong communication channels to be in place between home and host offices, to ensure that advice and support are maintained for the young people involved.
- Connexions make use of Remploy, an organisation which deals with providing special employment opportunities. The Task Group's view is that much more use should be made of mainstream employment opportunities to help break down the barriers to meaningful work and to ensure that real options are offered.
- Whilst it is acknowledged that Connexions try to approach every case individually with the potential for involvement up to the age of 25 years, including steering young people towards opportunities, there was concern that young people end their education and the Connexions input, only to be passed on to somebody else to sort out future options such as employment or opportunities for independent living.

#### **4.9 Social Services Employment Adviser - Evidence:**

4.9.1 The Task Group interviewed the Council's Employment Adviser and the Direct Provider Manager for Learning Disability to learn about their roles, experience and perceptions of the transitions process. The Task Group learned that the Employment Adviser post commenced about 18 months' ago to deal with helping people with learning disabilities aged 19+ to get out of day centres and into work. Traditionally people don't seek employment at 19+, as they continue in education. The majority of clients are therefore aged 22 – 24 years. The perception is that not enough work is being done to advise and prepare young people for the future.

4.9.2 There is some contact with Connexions; however, whereas Connexions deal with a diverse range of people, the people in the day centres are a more specific, defined group with particular needs and these require greater effort to address.

4.9.3 Efforts are being made to take a more holistic approach to addressing clients' needs, but there are difficulties with different databases being held by different agencies, such as the education database and the learning disabilities database and not everybody is included on all of them.

- 4.9.4 With a need to forge links with schools and colleges to provide a more proactive service at a much younger age, the Employment Adviser is now focusing on colleges and attending parents evenings with Connexions etc. to provide information on the options that are available. However, sometimes the courses offered at colleges are not the most suitable for work, as they focus on acquiring life skills rather than employment skills. Courses therefore need to be more vocational and social workers need to be involved at age 14+ to assist in this process. The Employment Adviser visits individuals as well as colleges and employment providers. There have been occasions when Connexions have sent people on courses and then referred them to the Employment Adviser to find work, rather than assist themselves. Referrals are also received from job centres who are unable to place applicants because their needs are too severe.
- 4.9.5 Some courses are too short for people with learning disabilities to acquire a skill. However, Pathway, which as part of Mencap, is located at High Path Day Centre and has funding from the voluntary sector for various courses taking a much longer-term view of the prospects for clients and providing on-going support.
- 4.9.6 People who have been educated outside the Borough have to re-adjust when they come back to the local area and employment is a good way to forge new links.
- 4.9.7 The suggestion was made that the best approach is to look at the skills and experiences of the individual to see what works. This can include paying for shadowing someone else to enable learning and ability within the role. Once an individual's needs are better known, it is easier to cater for them and provide the appropriate courses and facilities.
- 4.9.8 Although statutory reviews do take place at 14+ years, the actual benefit of some of these is questionable. Also, people with learning disabilities are much better catered for than other disabilities, although this may be due to the fact that the options to choose from are very limited.
- 4.9.9 Members were advised that Merton College and the Adult College at Whatley Avenue are now more responsive and flexible about the approach to providing courses, but students are still not integrated into the rest of the college community. This is largely due to a lack of facilities to allow social engagement to take place between these clients and the wider college community.

#### **4.10 Carshalton College - Evidence:**

- 4.10.1 Carshalton College offers a range of courses aimed at particular students with special needs, including mainly learning disabilities, but also physical disabilities. Students residing in a number of surrounding

boroughs and from various schools are enrolled each year. Two Task Group Members visited the College on 23<sup>rd</sup> November to meet the College Programme Manager to learn about the curriculum and how the students are supported, both by the College and by the home authority.

4.10.2 The College provides several courses and strives to place students according to their abilities which are assessed when they enrol and what they can realistically achieve. Students are enrolled from a range of feeder schools, including St. Ann's School in Merton. Students with a range of needs are catered for and access to facilities is good for those with physical disabilities. The ethos is to ensure that students form part of the mainstream setting of the College as a whole, so that they are not segregated.

4.10.3 There is strong learning support provided and, although the courses are relatively new, they are expanding. However, the College strives to be flexible on the numbers of students it can take each year, bearing in mind the resources available. Class sizes are small – most are around 8 students, up to a maximum of 12 where appropriate.

4.10.4 The College has two student intakes every year. Courses include:-

First Strand: (developing skills):-

- Supported Independence (underpinning life skills)
- Promoting Independence ((as above but more challenging)
- Workability (providing work experience in -house, using creation of mini businesses, such as plant care, to build confidence)
- Inter-Community (2 days per week, working with Pathway and leisure activities and based off site)

Second Strand (ability to undertake employment):-

- Life skills
- Vocational access
- Realistic aims/options
- Work preparation based around work experience

4.10.5 All courses include development of literacy, numeracy and social skills. Some students remain in the College for 3 to 4 years, up to age 24. The College tries to maintain links with local schools and staff visit schools to meet Year 10 pupils and their parents.

4.10.6 The Task Group was interested to find out where students go after their courses end. It appears that, while Sutton has the Pathway service and Surrey has a similar scheme, there is no equivalent in Merton (other than the Employment Adviser at High Path). The College advised that it places a lot of time and effort into a student's final review, but it is difficult to have any influence over other agencies,

such as Connexions. Members were advised that Connexions can have unrealistic expectations for students and no input once the age of 25 is reached. The College maintains contacts with appropriate local employers such as retail outlets, catering concerns and garden centres. Supermarkets such as Tesco and Asda are also involved. Local councils can also provide opportunities and these should be developed. (Merton Civic Centre has employed only one disabled College student in the past).

4.10.7 Practical activities such as travelling, working together, preparing meals at home, sport, gardening and daily living are all underpinned with academic elements, such as planning journeys using timetables and dealing with money.

#### **4.11 St Ann's School - Evidence:**

4.11.1 The Task Group Chair visited St Ann's School on 3<sup>rd</sup> December to meet a group of parents who were taking part in a lunchtime event.

4.11.2 Parents indicated that they felt extremely supported by the school. However, there seemed to be a lack of information emerging from other agencies such as Connexions in terms of what options might be available for school leavers. Parents thought there was a tendency to make assumptions about post-education options, rather than being innovative, with focus on the usual provision of the Further Education (FE) Unit at the School, Carshalton College Supported Learning courses and the Jan Malinowski Centre (JMC) providing sheltered workshops, once any further education had ended. More advice, knowledge and guidance would be welcomed to provide real options for the future and a clear planned pathway.

4.11.3 Parents generally had an understanding of what the transition process was about and agreed that they did not necessarily require social services involvement for their child. However, there were times when a social worker was expected to be at a review meeting and parents had been disappointed to find that the social worker did not attend.

4.11.4 Parents were not always sure about what the next step in the process should be. There was also concern expressed about what would happen if an option was chosen for a student which turned out to be unsuccessful.

4.11.5 The general view was that parents did not know what they did not know, i.e. it was difficult to be sure they had all the information they needed. They did not seem to have ready access to leaflets about transition, which were located mainly in The Link at the Civic Centre rather than distributed around the borough in various establishments where people could readily have access to them. The perception was that parents had to be prepared to fight for

information and learn to argue their children's case, with the onus on them to progress matters.

4.11.6 The future of Brightwell Respite Care Home was raised by parents who were united in their praise for this facility. Although they would welcome daytime activities, they also supported the need for overnight care which gave a breathing space to families.

#### **4.12 The College Leavers Group – Evidence:**

4.12.1 Task Group Members met with five members of this small group of young adults with a learning disability at High Path Day Centre on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2004, together with some parents. The Group numbers about 15 people and was set up as a pilot scheme three years ago to provide opportunities for people who were leaving college but who did not only want to attend a traditional day centre.

4.12.2 The Group attends courses at Merton Adult College in Whatley Avenue for part of each week and also use High Path as a base, taking part in activities at the Centre on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Activities include:-

- Cooking
- Performing arts
- Yoga
- Art/creativity
- IT
- Road signs
- Health and safety issues
- Trips and visits
- Basketball

4.12.3 The young people had mostly attended local colleges such as Carshalton College on leaving school. The pilot scheme aimed to fill the gap left on leaving college. It is proposed to keep the group small, although there will be some new joiners, and hopefully develop other groups around the borough, so that people do not just sit at home.

4.12.4 The young people found the activities very enjoyable. Transport through use of a minibus is now provided which allows for better use of time by reducing travelling times.

4.12.5 Future options had been identified for the people when they left school and college, but parents had been largely left to take the initiative in identifying these. The uncertainty was very worrying.

4.12.6 The Group has been useful in helping to keep together young people who know each other well. It also provides an opportunity for parents to network. These contacts are lost when students move onto college and so the Group has helped to re-establish local links. Parents

expressed disappointment that there were no college courses for people with learning disabilities provided in Merton when students left school, as this would help to retain local links for young people.

4.12.7 High Path is looking at person centred planning to enable people to continue developing once a particular adult course is completed at Whatley Avenue.

### **Findings and recommendations for Learning Disability transitions**

There is a range of guidance and information for young people with learning disabilities going through the transitions process. However, access to this is appears to be inconsistent and difficult. The advice provided by agencies such as Connexions does not always appear to result in realistic options for clients, in that expectations may be raised too high, or alternatively, mainstream employment opportunities are not sought out. The need for continuity of advice and consistency of support through the client's home authority is a key issue in cases where young people are or have been placed in out of borough establishments. The Task Group recommends that:-

- R6.** Any relevant guidance such as the booklet 'A guide to Social Services Support for Young Disabled People Approaching Adulthood' must be made more widely available in educational, social services and other establishments, rather than just be placed in the Civic Centre Reception area, where only a few visitors can access it.
- R7.** More use must be made of mainstream employment opportunities, rather than using sheltered workshops, to help break down the barriers to meaningful work and develop social inclusion.
- R8.** Emphasis must be placed on providing a range of options for young people leaving compulsory education. However, these options should be realistic in terms of the needs of the individual, rather than raising expectations too high, only for them to be unachievable.
- R9.** Connexions and transitions staff regularly need to visit establishments such as Carshalton College to see what is on offer, to enable them to advise students appropriately.
- R10.** The use of mentoring should be considered as a way for parents and young people to gain support and advice.
- R11.** The transitions process must commence at 14 years of age in all cases, to allow early consideration of case options and minimise uncertainty and stress for families. Social workers must also ensure that they have actually met the child whose case they are dealing with.
- R12.** Consideration should be given to further developing the initiatives being piloted at High Path Day Centre with the College Leavers Group.

## **5. TRANSITION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY/ SENSORY IMPAIRMENT**

5.1 The Task Group undertook a range of interviews and visits to gather first hand evidence in relation to transitions for those with a physical disability or sensory impairment.

### **5.2 The Guardian Centre - Evidence:**

5.2.1 The Manager of the Guardian Centre made arrangements for the Task Group to visit the Centre on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004, to meet with some young people aged 17 –18 years, with a visual impairment, to learn about their experiences during their schooling, their future plans, the options open to them and the advice and support that they had received.

5.2.2. The visit proved very informative and the following issues were raised:-

- When the young people had attended mainstream schools, there had been some difficulties with obtaining special equipment needed. There was also some experience of being isolated in a mainstream setting, but these problems were overcome in a special educational setting;
- The young people were generally unaware that a review had been held at 14 years of age (Year 9) – reviews were held annually but the one at the Year 9 stage did not seem to be anything special;
- There was help provided with coursework at the colleges attended; also help with learning new routes in the local environment;
- There was some interaction with Connexions in terms of future options and also some assistance in securing funding; however one young person in particular had not received any specific advice at all about his future options;
- The general feeling was that future plans and pathways did not seem to be drawn up, with targets restricted to one year at a time. This results in some apprehension about what the future may hold;
- It emerged that social services did not always know what benefits young people were entitled to, e.g. travel passes;
- There is a general lack of holiday schemes for young people with a sensory impairment, particularly for teenagers, who might wish to use gyms, play sports, attend social events. This results in a lack of social contact locally;
- The Guardian Centre was a very helpful resource, providing Talking Books etc. However the different criteria for Children's Services compared to Adults Services was highlighted, which makes it difficult to get services for children and young people generally. Registration certificates (BD8s) are sent to social services, but it is much more difficult to get a card as proof that a child is registered as visually impaired than it is for an adult;

- The Authority's Parent-Partner Officer was helpful in giving advice and steering families in the right direction; however, it appears that not all parents are aware of his existence;
- There is a problem for students with physical/sensory impairments in getting appropriate advice on the benefits available to them, as they are often not known to social services. This means that they may not be aware of the funding available for adaptations to aid their employment at work.

### **5.3 Social Services for Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment – Russell Road - Evidence:**

- 5.3.1 Two Task Group members attended a meeting of social workers at Russell Road on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2004, to hear staff views about transition for people with a physical disability or sensory impairment.
- 5.3.2 Members were informed that the recently held transitions conference had raised interesting issues about the transitions process. The staff view was that, for people with learning disability, there was a comprehensive transitions strategy now in place and this client group represented the larger number. However, this was not the case for the smaller client group of those with a physical disability or sensory impairment. The need for a similar strategy for clients with a physical disability/sensory impairment had been highlighted with social services policy officers.
- 5.3.3 Staff advised that there used to be regular meetings for clients moving through transitions with a named transitions worker and a clear plan for hand over to Russell Road. However this had not been maintained. Staff do not now know the client and arrangements had to be made in haste at the last minute. The view was expressed that it would be much better for staff to be involved earlier in the process, at about 16 years of age, to give a proper lead-in time and enable good relationships and continuity to develop.
- 5.3.4 An operational meeting was held every month and a list of those people coming through was provided. However, some people, especially those with a visual impairment, were often overlooked as they did not meet the criteria to be dealt with by the Learning Disability Team.
- 5.3.5 There is no effective joint working where those with a hearing or visual impairment are concerned due to a lack of communication and cases are just referred as required. It was agreed that families do not necessarily need the constant involvement of social workers but may need support at specific times and this should be available.
- 5.3.6 Connexions staff attended operational meetings (usually held at their offices) and were very supportive. This link was generally how Social Services learned about young people who were placed out-borough



coming back into Merton. There were, however, no real links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

- 5.3.7 There is a clear need for proper procedures to be put in place with effective communication channels and joint working, including links with other establishments such as Carshalton College. This would ensure that clients were not overlooked. Generally, Children's Services need to be more aware of what Adult Services can offer clients.
- 5.3.8 The staff at Russell Road were able to offer a considerable amount of help and support but relied on information from other areas being provided on clients needing their involvement. The main problem was that the transitions process is disjointed rather than smooth.

### **Findings/recommendations from Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment Evidence**

Clients requiring social services through having a physical disability or sensory impairment can slip through the net as they are not necessarily known to staff. Information on benefits which are available for clients to claim is not widely known. It is clear that these benefits are consistently not being taken up, which is of serious concern to Members. Generally there appears to be a less comprehensive service provided for clients with a physical disability or sensory impairment than there is for those with a learning disability, which is a situation that needs rectifying.

- R13.** A system should be put in place to ensure that all those needing support are identified to prevent them being overlooked. This should include a mechanism for social services staff working on physical disability and sensory impairment being trained in the 'social model of disability' and being involved in transitions cases at an earlier stage.
- R14.** Students with a physical disability or sensory impairment often have a problem in getting appropriate advice on the benefits available to them, as they are not always known to Social Services. Therefore, there should be easy and consistent access to information about benefits which can be provided, e.g. travel passes, funds for adaptations in the workplace such as specialist IT equipment, reading materials in braille etc
- R15.** Where education is/has been provided outside of the Borough, thought should be given to how young people coming back to the local area can integrate with their local peer group through holiday activities etc.
- R16.** Discussion about future opportunities for employment for young people should be considered through Connexions being involved earlier in the process, rather than waiting until leaving school or college is imminent.

## **6. MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

6.1 As it proved difficult to gain ready access to staff working in the field of young peoples' mental health, the Task Group decided that it would not focus on local mental health services as part of this review. However, mental health will be focused on in the near future through joint scrutiny of proposed service changes in the South West London & St George's Mental Health Trust and through looking at integration of mental health services in Merton.

6.2 The Mental Health Foundation has produced a series of reports on mental health issues in relation to young people which have been researched nationally. The Task Group has acknowledged the following key points which have emerged from this research:-

- ★ Young offenders are at risk of having higher than usual rates of mental health problems, which are not being met by existing services; expertise and resources are lacking within custody and there are problems in providing specialist services within the justice system and also with referring young people to external services such as CAMHS. The result is likely to be further offending and worsening mental health problems.<sup>2</sup>
- ★ Research commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation shows that the mental health needs of homeless young people are considerable, but current services do not generally provide adequate support. There is under-representation of young homeless people using CAMHS which must be rectified through use of community based approaches to identify the people who need help. Key professional groups (health care, social care, education, housing) in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, need better education and training on mental health issues.<sup>3</sup>
- ★ A committee of inquiry into meeting the mental health needs of young people with learning disabilities found that parents complained of a lack of information and forward planning for the transition to adult services. The situation is even more complex for those who also have mental health problems. Therefore multi-disciplinary support, respite care, appropriate information and practical help are vital for families, to whom professionals must listen and work with in real partnership.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Mental Health of Young Offenders (report commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation)

<sup>3</sup> The Mental Health Needs of Homeless Children and Young People (as above)

<sup>4</sup> Count Us In (Report of the Committee of Inquiry into meeting the mental health needs of young people with learning disabilities)

## **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 The Task Group's view is that the recommendations do not represent any major implications in terms of needing to find additional resources for the service. The focus of the review findings is based on the need for improved working relationships and structures. Notwithstanding this, Corporate Resources have been asked to consider any resource implications prior to the report being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The Task Group concluded the review by holding an informal meeting with the Cabinet Member for Care Services and the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. Both Cabinet Members acknowledged that it was very important to implement changes to improve services as soon as possible. They considered that some of the review recommendations could be actioned quickly, prior to the impending corporate restructure arising from the requirements of The Children Act, and undertook to consider the best way forward in terms of early action where possible.
- 8.2 Once the recommendations are formally approved, an action plan will be drawn up for implementation by officers and Cabinet Members as appropriate, with progress on implementation being monitored through the scrutiny process.