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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 JUNE 2016

(7.15 pm - 10.53 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Mike Brunt, Pauline Cowper, Joan Henry, Jerome Neil, Marsie Skeete, Linda Taylor OBE and James Holmes

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes, Denis Popovs and Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), David Chung, Abigail Jones and Russell Makin

Paul Ballatt (Assistant Director Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Jacquie Denton (Principal estate surveyor), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Tom Procter (Service Manager - Contracts & School Organisation), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Agatha Akyingyina, Charlie Chirico and Edward Foley.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillors Pauline Cowper and Abby Jones declared their interest as trustees of the South Wimbledon Community Association.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

There were two matters arising;

- Performance Report - Children, Schools and Families Department (item 10, page 8): Yvette Stanley reported quoracy of child protection conferences is improving. A new community health provider has been in place since April 2016 (Central London Community Healthcare). Attendance at these conferences is a requirement of the contract. Discussion about police attendance is continuing. This is a London-wide issue in part caused by the pressures on the service and responsibility for attendance falling across three different police command units.

Discussions are continuing between the Department and the Borough Commander.

- Corporate parenting (item 5, page 4): Paul Ballatt noted that it is the duty of the Council to provide a wide range of placement options for looked after children. A children's home to provide for teenagers in care is still being explored (either as part of a consortium or directly with a third party provider). The Panel will be kept informed of progress.

4 ELECTED MEMBER AND DEPARTMENTAL PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Yvette Stanley, Director for Children, Schools and Families, highlighted her key priority is to address the growing pressures on services caused by a growing population when the Department's budget is contracting by 30%.

Councillor Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children Services, highlighted her priority in the face of pressure on services is to encourage more partnership working going beyond the voluntary sector and looking, for example, at the corporate sector. Councillor Neep also noted her desire to work in partnership across the Council to provide for young people highlighting, for example, the importance of a housing offer.

Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah noted all the hard work of officers and schools. Key priorities in her portfolio going forward are to continue to implement plans for providing sufficient school places for Merton's children and to retain a strong focus on continuing to improve school standards.

In response to Members' questions, the Director noted the impact of the changing policy arena on services. Firstly this is causing uncertainty in some areas – eg youth justice and adoption - and in others is causing concern (the proposed new assessment criteria and licencing of social workers may lead to some leaving the service). There is a risk that some policy developments may be hard to deliver (the lack of funding for youth justice requirements was noted). It was highlighted how the service is meeting these challenges with innovation; for example in developing new partnerships with and between LB Merton schools to continue delivering school improvement. Also, that risk for children is increasingly being managed in the community with partners. This requires there is shared understanding of thresholds and procedures. Representations are being made through London Councils and the Associations of Directors of Children's Services to influence these policy changes.

Resolved: for the Panel to receive regular updates on this developing policy arena. This will begin with an update at the next meeting on the policy changes affecting social workers.

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 5)

In response to Member questions, officers clarified:

- Performance indicators 29 and 30 (% of surplus Reception and Year 7 spaces): surplus places in Reception are currently low and those at secondary will reduce

over the next couple of years with the increased demand coming through from our primary schools. In fact, additional provision will be needed in September 2018; and

- Performance indicator 11 (% of children who became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time): this is well monitored through the quality assurance process, DMT and the Safeguarding Board. It was noted that whilst families have been supported to achieve change how to make this resilient to other factors and allow families to recognise their own strengths to achieve systematic change is being pursued.

Councillor Joan Henry congratulated the Department on its success in recruiting 14 foster carers during the last municipal year.

RESOLVED: Councillor Mike Brunt was selected by the Panel to act as its lead on performance monitoring.

6 AGREEING THE PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel's draft work programme (page 34 of the agenda) was accepted.

RESOLVED: task group selection to be discussed at the next meeting.

7 TASK GROUP UPDATE: ROUTES INTO EMPLOYMENT FOR VULNERABLE COHORTS (Agenda Item 7)

Progress since the last meeting was reported; the Council's current offer to support vulnerable cohorts into employment has been mapped and task group members have met with those currently leading on the provision of this offer. This has resulted in a number of suggestions being made on how this offer might be improved. The task group will now consult more widely on these suggestions. Task group meetings will be held as required over the summer and it is anticipated a draft report and recommendations will be presented to the Panel at its meeting in October.

8 SCHOOL PROVISION: NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY (Agenda Item 8)

Paul Ballatt introduced the item at the public session with reference to the public scrutiny report:

- The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide sufficient and appropriate school places;
- The new school will be financed by the Government (through the Education Funding Agency – EFA) with the Council contributing some funding as the new school will be meeting some of our 'basic need' for school places;
- It will be a Free School in line with Government policy;
- The Council has increased its primary place provision by 20+ forms of entry to meet need. This increase in demand is now progressing to secondary;

- The need for the new school is based on pupil number projections. This will be affected by the retention of pupils in Merton between primary and secondary phases;
- The EFA had originally planned for the new school to open in Sept 16 although a deferral until September 2017 was agreed some time ago. There may be a need to delay this further to September 2018 because of the difficulty in identifying a suitable site. Additionally this may be beneficial to Merton's other secondary schools as the increase in secondary pupil numbers is not due to hit until 2018; LB Merton's existing secondary schools are concerned about the potential impact on their admission numbers if the new school opens before the increase in demand for secondary places occurs;
- The school will initially have to use a temporary site (the vacant Whatley Avenue Adult Education site has been identified); and
- Details of the proposed permanent site are currently exempt because it involves commercially sensitive negotiations with third parties.

With the agreement of the chair Julia Waters, the Head of Ursuline High School, representing Merton Secondary Heads, also provided a short presentation. This supported the new school but only on the basis of it opening in September 2018 rather than September 2017; opening in 2017 would be before the forecast significant rise in pupil numbers so would lead to spare places in existing LB Merton secondary schools with significant financial consequences.

In response to Member questions, officers clarified:

- Demand for the new school is based on projections based on the number of children already in LB Merton primary schools (a paper was tabled at the meeting on the projections which is now part of the agenda pack for the meeting);
- If the projected increase in demand is realised, eight new secondary forms of entry will be needed. This can all be achieved through the new Harris Wimbledon development and the expansion of Harris Merton. Other expansion is available if this isn't sufficient;
- The Department has brokered meetings between the primary school (Joseph Hood) adjacent to the Whatley Avenue site and Harris Federation to support the development of a good relationship. This has focused on safeguarding younger children at the primary school. Harris Federation's delivery model has a strong focus on safety;
- The South Wimbledon location has been determined on need. This is where most of the increase in primary provision is located necessitating more secondary places that are accessible from Wimbledon and Colliers Wood;
- The proposed date for opening is still being considered; September 2017 is very ambitious and demand isn't projected to rise until September 2018. Extra provision in advance of this demand may destabilise existing LB Merton schools especially at a time when Sutton is also providing additional spaces;
- The new school, as a Free School, will be its own admission authority. It will still have to comply with the School Admissions Code and Harris Federation has given reassurances it won't be a selective school;

- There are currently no plans for expansion of other schools beyond Harris Wimbledon and Merton. Other secondaries in Merton will only be expanded if demand dictates. The disappointment of the Church of England Diocese was noted; it highlighted that current plans do not allow for a range of additional places to be offered including those in faith schools;

EXEMPT SESSION

Having fully explored the information provided in the public agenda, members of the public were asked to leave the meeting to allow information on the exempt agenda to be discussed. Details of this exempt session and the reference to Cabinet are contained in the exempt minute and report.

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