

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 21st March 2017

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

Lead members: Cllr Katy Neep, Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel note the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last update in January 2017.

2 DETAILS

Education Division

2.1 Two primary schools, St Theresa's and William Morris have had Ofsted inspections since the last update report. Neither report has yet been published.

2.2 Following consultation, Aragon Primary School is formalising its intention to join the Multi Academy Trust proposed by Glenthorne Academy in Sutton. The council made representations during the consultation that the proposal was not in the best interests of the school or its pupils and regrets the school's decision.

2.3 At the end of February, the council made offers to applicants for secondary school places for 2017. There has been a slight increase in pupils being offered first preference schools (65.2% against 65% in 2016) although a slight decrease in overall preference offers (94.6% against 95.4% in 2016). With central offers, however, there was no pupil with no offer of a Merton school on offer day.

2.4 In February and March, The Harris Federation has been consulting residents in the Wimbledon area on admissions and curriculum issues in respect of their planned new secondary Academy. In advance of signing a funding agreement for the school, the EFA expects the sponsor to provide details of proposed admissions arrangements and sufficient interest in the school from prospective pupils. The Federation is consulting on a proposal to admit pupils from three 'nodal points' at Merton Abbey, and Wimbledon Chase and Park stations. To date over two hundred parents/carers have attended meetings and views on the admissions arrangements have been invited. The council will be submitting

views once all meetings have been held and elected members may make their own representations.

- 2.5 From April 1st, the responsibility for the procurement of taxis for pupils with SEN and complex needs to travel from home to school will transfer from the Environment and Regeneration department to the Children, Schools and Families department. Two staff members will transfer departments at this point. This decision forms part of a wider improvement plan that has seen the council adopt a new Direct Purchasing System which has substantially added numbers of taxi providers and increased competition into this particular market. The use of this procurement system and the further promotion of direct payments to families are enabling some of the pressures in SEN transport budgets to be better managed.
- 2.6 The council has completed the procurement of a new contract for cleaning school and other education buildings for a three year period commencing in June 2017. Although the award of contract decision has, at the time of writing this report, not been formally made by Cabinet, officers have completed the tender exercise and submitted recommendations. Should Cabinet agree, the new contract will deliver modest annual savings to schools over the coming years.
- 2.7 Works to expand Dundonald primary school and to the neighbouring public playground have recently been completed. This scheme represents the last in the long-term primary school expansion programme the council has been undertaking. Officers are currently completing a tendering exercise to obtain a contractor for the planned expansion at Perseid upper school. This scheme will provide over 30 additional places to match the expansion of the lower school already completed.
- 2.8 Merton's Early Years' Service has carried out two phases of community consultation, seeking feedback from service users and stakeholders on the proposed plans for revision to the delivery model. We have also carried out staff consultation on revised structure, which has now been confirmed. First phase assimilation has taken place and phase 2: internal recruitment for remaining vacant posts is currently underway. We are confirming that we will move forward with the plans for a revised model of delivery as detailed within the consultation, with phased implementation from April 2017. Key points to note are:
- A move from three localities to a single children's centre group with one management structure.
 - Children's centres operating a varied model of fixed opening hours with set annual timetable.
 - Family Support and evidenced based parenting programmes aligned under a single management structure (0-5's SFT, under social work team manager).
 - Reduction in open access stay and play sessions, with increase in targeted courses and programmes underpinned by research / evidence for families with identified needs.
 - Development of new programme for all first time parents of babies under 7 months.

- Revised referral pathways to ensure ease of access into services and improve communication and information sharing.
- Improved joint working with other early years services, with clearer definition of roles and responsibilities.

2.9 After careful consideration, the council took the difficult but appropriate decision in January 2017, to cancel our Children's Home registration with Ofsted for Brightwell Short Break Children's Home. The overnight provision requires a Children's Home registration which has the same requirements whether the Children's Home is providing 52 weeks, 24 hours a day or a few nights a week for a small number of children as Brightwell has done in addition to the broader short breaks offer. The staffing, leadership and management requirements for a Children's Home are very stringent and to consistently meet the requirements at all times for a small provider offering a few nights a week has been challenging. On this basis the decision was taken that we can no longer offer this provision. Families using the overnight provision have been fully consulted and officers have been reviewing the needs of individual children going forward. We remain committed to the continuation of our short breaks and day care services

Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion Division

- 2.10 On 1st March the MSCB held its annual conference. Attended by 100+ professionals from across all the agencies working together to protect children and young people it had the theme of domestic violence and abuse (DVA), a topic which cuts across adults and children's services and reflects our Think Family approach. National statistics suggest that 130,000 children live in homes where DVA is present and that 30% of them will also suffer another form of abuse. 50% of child serious case reviews (undertaken when a child is killed or seriously harmed and abuse is known or suspected) have DVA as a feature.
- 2.11 Later in March, the MSCB will be holding an awayday for Board members to consider how to take forward work on the three practice priorities identified by the Board in its current Business Plan. Groups will work on Think Families; Supporting Vulnerable Adolescents and Early Help priorities to develop action plans.
- 2.12 The MSCB has revised and relaunched its Prevent guidance for practitioners and has a leaflet aimed at parents and carers available on its website. There is one high profile case involving a Merton resident which is currently sub-judice.
- 2.13 The MSCB has published a Serious Case Review (SCR) involving a young person cared for by a vulnerable adult. The report has gone to the national SCR panel and the MSCB will be overseeing the action plan. The need for adults and children's services to further strengthen their "Think Family" approach is built into the recommendations which the MSCB will monitor.
- 2.14 On 18th March there was a national awareness raising day in respect of child sexual exploitation. The council supported this day and, locally, sponsored a week of awareness raising activity with local partner agencies. Topics covered included the dangers of grooming, on-line safety, CSE and gangs, bullying and sexual health and relationships.

- 2.15 The department has recently secured funding to support the further development of a Merton Practice Approach for social work with vulnerable families. This developing approach involves equipping social work staff with evidence-based practice tools designed to increase the impact of social work practice and improve outcomes for children and families. Funding will be used to support further learning and development in the 'Signs of Safety' model, a strengths based approach to working with families during child protection and children in need processes, motivational interviewing techniques for direct work with young people and in systemic social work practice.
- 2.16 As noted in previous update reports, Merton is working with several other London boroughs to adopt the Family Drugs and Alcohol Court model. For children subject to care proceedings because of concerns in respect of parental/carer substance misuse, this model provides more timely access to skilled assessment and intervention designed to mitigate risk sufficiently for children to remain or return to their families or, if intervention is not successful, to enable plans for alternative permanency to be made more quickly. Merton has recently assumed responsibility for the procurement of the specialist multi-disciplinary team on which the model is based and we hope to have a confirmed provider by June 2017.
- 2.17 The Division has recently conducted surveys of Merton's fostercarers and families of children subject to child protection plans. The survey of fostercarers demonstrated a very high level of satisfaction (c90%) with link social workers and with social workers of looked after children (c80%). These levels exceed national benchmarks. The survey of parents of children subject to child protection plans indicated that c90% of parents felt respected and listened to by professionals and that they were able to understand what they needed to do to keep their children safe. Although seemingly unrelated, these surveys together provide a useful indication of the clarity and quality of social work practice we are currently providing.

Departmental Issues

- 2.18 Findings of the councilwide survey of staff were recently published which show that despite savings and reductions in capacity over recent years and numerous reorganisations of services, CSF department staff maintain high levels of commitment to working for the council and high levels of morale. Staff across all levels in the department feel that they understand the council's direction of travel, feel supported by managers to achieve their personal and service work objectives and feel equipped by supervision and training to undertake their jobs well. The department's management team are currently developing an action plan in response to the survey findings.
- 2.19 From April 2017, the CSF department will operate from two divisions with Heads of Service in the old Commissioning, Strategy and Performance Division receiving new line management from the two remaining Assistant Directors or from the Director. The CSF commissioning service will join an integrated commissioning function with CCG commissioning capacity under the management of the Director of Public Health. In addition to the re-organisation

of early years services noted above, the department is reshaping management of youth services in order to maintain as much investment as possible in direct delivery to young people. The department continues to work with colleagues across London on the regionalisation of various adoption service functions.

- 2.20 The department continues to engage partner agencies in a review of Merton's Child Wellbeing Model, our well established framework for the identification of, and intervention with, children with additional needs. Pleasingly, this review has demonstrated the ongoing commitment of schools, health services, the police and voluntary sector to the multi-agency approach to working with vulnerable children. Work on re-launching the model supported by revisions to procedures and new training will now be undertaken.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 None for the purposes of this report.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 None for the purposes of this report.

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1 N/A

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No specific implications from this report.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No specific implications from this report..

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 No specific implications from this report.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No specific implications from this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 No specific implications from this report..

11. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- 11.1 N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None