

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL 17TH SEPTEMBER 2013

7.15PM – 9:15PM

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors James Holmes, Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Oonagh Moulton, Linda Taylor, Peter Walker, Logie Lohendran (replacing Ray Tindle)
Co-opted members –Peter Connellan, Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children’s Services), Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education)
Yvette Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Paul Angeli (Head of Children’s Social Care), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Tom Procter (Contracts & School Organisation), Ben Sherlock (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Allison Jerrard, Dr. Jo Sullivan Lyons and Councillor Ray Tindle.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JULY 2013

The Minutes were agreed as a true record.

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

None

5 PROVISION OF SCHOOL PLACES

Councillor Jeff Hanna suggested that the section of the report dealing with secondary school places was considered along with Item 6, and that Item 5 dealt with Primary and Special Educational Needs (SEN) school places.

Paul Ballatt explained that Merton’s first focus for school places was on the primary sector, and that the challenge has been a significant one. More than 20 new forms of entry have been established permanently and additional special school places have also been provided. The focus of officers has more recently been on developing a secondary places strategy and the report outlines a direction of travel which had been developed through consultation with schools, education professionals in CSF and with elected members and which had been agreed by LSG. The report also notes that further expansion in the special school sector will also be needed. He added that Councillor Martin Whelton had agreed that a version of the report would go to Cabinet for consideration and that comments of the panel can be incorporated into that report..

Paul Ballatt stated that the primary school place issue was a complex challenge for Merton with a large amount of attendant risk, requiring detailed planning based on projection models and local intelligence.. He added that schools, parents and pupils had so far been satisfied with Merton’s provision of extra places and that LBM had achieved sufficient and

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affordable primary school place capacity.

Paul Ballatt told the panel that the strategy to date had proved a major financial challenge for the council as central government's 'basic need' allocation had been insufficient for the scale of expansion required. He added that Tom Procter, who was responsible for managing the capital team and contracts, had recently obtained significant additional (targeted) basic need grant money which would be very helpful for the council's overall financial position..

Councillor Jeff Hanna noted the volume of work that officers had done and asked the panel to give thanks to Paul Ballatt and Tom Procter, which was agreed.

Councillor Jeff Hanna distributed and noted the paper tabled for the meeting by the Protect Dundonald Rec (PDR) Campaign Group and invited comments from the panel.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton mentioned the proposed development of the YMCA building in Wimbledon and the housing development scheme mentioned in section 2.14. She stressed that the potential demand on school places needed to be considered alongside all residential developments.

Paul Ballatt responded that working relationships with E&R and CSF had improved over recent years, and that there was now a joint CSF/ E&R board overseeing the strategy chaired by the E+R Director. He said that demand for places was changeable and so the strategy was to remain flexible to adapt to need as appropriate.

Councillor Peter Walker stated that the Council needed to look at standards of education as well as number of places. He said that since we already have a good cohort of headteachers and school staff, it made more sense to expand their schools than to build a new school and take a risk on a new headteacher.

Councillor Peter Walker added that primary schools in Merton do have extra land for potential development, and that those objecting to expansion were often louder than the people who were in favour. He pointed out that previous plans for a new school on Gap Road had not worked out. He disagreed with the PDR paper's claim that there was no demand for extra places at Dundonald school and in the local Wimbledon area..

Councillor Oonagh Moulton agreed that there was a demand for school places, but said that there were limits on what could be expanded. She added that she believed Merton could attract good new headteachers as seen in Bishop Gilpin. She said that wards such as Wimbledon Park and Colliers Wood had a real need for a new school, especially with their high birthrates. She suggested that a free school may be suitable.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina pointed out that a new school was unfeasible due to lack of finances, not lack of land. She said that Merton's schools were doing a good job and should be encouraged to expand and continue that work.

Councillor Karin Forbes asked for the abbreviations of SEN categories to be added to the forthcoming CSF glossary.

Yvette Stanley informed the panel that Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was becoming more prevalent in Merton and nationally, though it was not clear if this was an increase in cases or in better diagnoses. She added that ASD was a continuum, and that different

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pupils with ASD could have different needs from their schools.

Yvette Stanley added that Merton was already exporting less children out of borough than in previous years, which meant less residential education and more children with SEN who could live with their families.

Peter Connellan asked where the cut-off age was for provision of SEN places. Yvette Stanley answered that it was currently 21 for Looked After Children and that the government was suggesting it be raised to 25 by 2014-15.

Councillor Peter Walker mentioned his frustration at the low level of public awareness for the work of the Perseid school.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and expressed thanks and appreciation to officers for the detailed work that had been done.

6 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE PROVISION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES

Councillor Peter Walker explained that there was sufficient provision of secondary school places for the next few years so the review was looking at the issue before the need was critical. He added that the borough is dependent on central government to an extent for expanding the provision of places, although there is land in the borough for school sites. He also stated that the task group had looked into partnerships with the private sector to raise money for new school sites. He said he was encouraged that there was consensus across four parties on the review's recommendations.

Councillor James Holmes agreed with Councillor Peter Walker and added that within the report were large opportunities that could be taken and should be explored. He thanked Councillor Martin Whelton and the officers who had helped with the report.

Councillor Martin Whelton thanked the task group and commented that the secondary school places situation was lined up to be the next big challenge for the borough after primary school places. He mentioned that 2018 would see a big increase in secondary school place demand and that the provision process needed to start now, so it was good to be looking at it already.

He explained that there were still 200 surplus places to be filled. After that Merton would need to look at expansion. He mentioned that he had met with secondary heads recently to discuss the matter and that proposals would be made this year.

He added that the council was looking to identify a site for a new school already. . A decision on this would be made by the end of the school year.

Councillor Martin Whelton also informed the panel that Cabinet had agreed for £28m to be put aside for this purpose, which was a positive step although still not enough. He said that government grants and other solutions would be needed. Finally he said that while forecasts for demand had been accurate so far, the council did have scenarios set out for various eventualities into the 2020s. He added that this was a challenge being faced across London and thanked the task group for their work.

Councillor Karin Forbes welcomed the mention in the report of the aim to limit secondary school provision to 10 Forms of Entry (FE). She asked if schools were made aware of this.

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Paul Ballatt said that the report had been presented to heads. A formal letter to each school would request their approval of the expansion plan and ask for their preference for consideration in the sequence of the programme. He said more than 10FE would be undesirable but that the council could not guarantee this position forever as circumstances could change over the years..

Councillor Iain Dysart stated that he thought it was useful to be looking at the issue at this stage, before it became too serious a challenge and while there was still a surplus. He spoke positively about the task group's discussions with neighbouring boroughs.

Colin Powell welcomed the report, but asked why diocesan boards had been referred to rarely and faith schools were so far down in the list of types of schools. He welcomed the reference to Faith schools in recommendation 3 but asked why it only mentioned interest in attendance and not their capacity to provide additional places. He asked that diocesan boards be consulted more as their schools performed well above the Merton average.

Councillor James Holmes replied that the task group had specifically looked into faith schools, did value their role, and had agreed for further work to be done looking at their role in providing additional places. He stressed that faith schools were a part of the strategy for providing places.

Colin Powell suggested that the council could benchmark its progress with other diocesan boards as well as other London boroughs.

RESOLVED: Panel endorsed the report and its recommendations to be forwarded to Cabinet for their October 2013 meeting.

7 ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE REPORT

Paul Angeli introduced the report. He mentioned that there was a drive from central government to focus on adoption performance. He pointed out that the low number of adopted children in Merton meant that the percentages were easily skewed.

He said that adoption was an important priority for Children's Social Care and that this year CSC would address the issue and place children quickly. He said that a lot of work was being undertaken to track children through the court process, and that care planning was being sped up. He pointed out to the panel that the report showed improved performance, and that the recent inspection had awarded a Good result.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked how many children had been placed for adoption. Paul Angeli explained that this year 5 children had been placed, 6 were waiting for an adoption order, and 4 more were yet to be placed. The department was hoping to place one more by the end of the year. Yvette Stanley added that CSF was not expected to place all 15 by the end of the year. She said that an aim of 8-11 placed would be a good number. Paul Angeli explained that there was no central government target for number of children placed: the focus was on quick decision and placement.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked what was being done to speed up the process. Yvette Stanley explained that it was not just up to CSF – that the legal system could also delay proceedings, parents could appeal etc. She noted that it was a time of a big cultural change in the adoption services and across the Family Justice system. All partners

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needed to improve..

Councillor Logie Lohendran asked what the age group for adoption placement was and whether CSF was working with other boroughs. Paul Angeli replied that Merton was working with Kingston, Richmond and Sutton in a consortium to create a system of potential adoptive carers across the boroughs to call on for placements.

Yvette Stanley said that regarding the age range, children being placed for adoption ranged from relinquished babies to any age, although children were rarely placed in their teenage years.

Councillor Peter Walker pointed out the report's mention of a problem recruiting adoption staff. Paul Angeli said that this was a wider problem across London. He explained that skilled and experienced people were needed for the positions and they were not available in the numbers needed. Social workers in Merton have the option to move to the adoption team but often do not choose to. Yvette Stanley said that the vacancy rate was 15% in Merton but in other boroughs could be up to 40%.

Councillor Iain Dysart commended the improvement in speed of matching children with families and said he appreciated the complexities of the process. He asked how Merton was doing compared to neighbouring boroughs as this comparison would be picked up on by the media.

Yvette Stanley said that Kingston and Richmond were not on the league table as they had too few adopted children. She added that Merton had only just met the threshold, which is why one or two cases could skew the percentages.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina agreed that the right decisions had to be made as a top priority. Peter Connellan asked what was being done to recruit adoption staff in schools. Yvette Stanley explained that young people were being encouraged to look at social work career opportunities, but that graduates were needed. She added that 5 or 6 LAC children were now going through university and they had a good history of social work careers. She pointed out that the high pressure and scrutiny of the role made it unattractive to people starting out in their careers although the work could be extremely rewarding..

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

8 TASK GROUP – SCOPING REPORT

The draft scope was circulated to members. Councillor Jeff Hanna explained that the task group had met to finalise the scope but added that Councillors James Holmes and Agatha Akyigyina had been the only ones at the meeting.

Councillor James Holmes said that the original aim of the review had been about school leadership in general. He said that Jan Martin had explained that Merton had little influence on leadership or succession planning in schools. He outlined his suggestion to look at a cohort of about 10 challenged schools in the borough and to analyse their needs, research good practice, and help them obtain funding from European grants, charitable organisations and local business sponsorship opportunities.

Councillor James Holmes added that he had spoken to Diana Sterck from the Merton Chamber of Commerce and she had been enthusiastic about the sponsorship idea. He

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thanked Jan Martin and asked for input from members.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina emphasised the importance of succession planning being a part of the review. She said that even if the council had little direct influence, it was important to look into it. She pointed out that despite 40-50% of schoolchildren being BME, a relatively low number of staff reflected that. She said training and planning was needed.

Councillor Linda Taylor said that the task group review needed more focus if it was to look at school leadership. Councillor Laxmi Attawar said she felt that ensuring a diverse and representative leadership was important. Councillor James Holmes said that this would be part of the needs criteria.

Councillor Peter Walker said that young people needed to see visible role models. Yvette Stanley pointed out that a small number of heads and deputies were of BME background, and that overall 19% of school staff were BME compared to about 30% of adults in Merton. It would be useful to hear the views of black leaders through any review.

Councillor Peter Walker said that while staff should not be appointed purely for diversity reasons and while Merton does not directly appoint staff, the panel could help to encourage BME people to apply for senior school positions. He said that Councillor James Holmes' suggestion of involving businesses was a good idea, but felt that diversity in school leadership was a key priority for the borough and needed to be a major part of the task group review.

Councillor James Holmes stated that it was important that the task group was able to make an impact. He said that the business support for schools did not have to be a task group review and that he was happy to take it forward as a separate initiative. He agreed to look at leadership succession planning in schools but expressed his reservations as to what could be accomplished.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton reminded the panel that a lot of the leadership succession was down to school governors. She asked what the task group could usefully do.

Colin Powell observed that a lot of information on BME representation in schools had already been done and could be used in the task group. Yvette Stanley added that the National College of School Leadership had done some good national work on BME Leadership succession planning. She said that Merton was already working with a South West London effectiveness partnership. She added that nationally the country faced a challenge increasing BME representation on PGCE courses and that it was a good area to look at.

She said it would be useful to talk to middle-level BME staff in schools as well, and that the task group review's recommendations could take the form of advice for governing bodies.

Councillor Karin Forbes agreed. She said the task group needed actionable recommendations. This did not have to be about appointing headteachers but could be to do with encouraging and supporting mid-management diversity.

Councillor Linda Taylor agreed that the focus should be on raising the motivation and aspirations of BME mid-level school staff.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked officers if the local authority gave support to governing bodies

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through the appointment process. Jan Martin said that schools could and often did ask for support, but it was not compulsory.

Councillor Jeff Hanna suggested the following changes be made to the draft scope:

- That the aims of the review specify a focus on representation of different ethnic groups in senior positions in schools.
- That the aims include a discussion on what constitutes a good head of a school.
- That the terms of reference include examining support for existing and potential senior staff.
- That the task group look at how posts are advertised.
- That researching best practice covers a range of schools and school types.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked if all schools would be looked at or just a few. Yvette Stanley said it would be good to look at a range of them.

Councillor Peter Walker reiterated his support for the Chamber of Commerce initiative suggested by Councillor James Holmes. Councillor James Holmes agreed that this could be taken forward outside of the task group and planned to liaise with Jan Martin, Yvette Stanley and Diana Sterck.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed the amended scope and referred the matter back to the Task Group.

9 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

Councillor Logie Lohendran asked why Kingston and Sutton had not been mentioned in the mapping of gangs across boroughs. Yvette Stanley explained that the Home Office had specified the Wandsworth, Croydon, Lambeth and Merton group. She said she would look into potential developments in Kingston and Sutton.

Councillor James Holmes asked for clarification about the Target Operating Model refresh mentioned in section 2.8. Yvette Stanley explained the TOM model and said that the refresh was about taking stock of progress so far.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked whether the Chapel Street academisation of Benedict School was on course for January 2014. Jan Martin said this was unclear and that there was no information on the location of the school yet. She said it was a live issue but that the decisions to be made were not council decisions. Councillor Iain Dysart expressed his hope that the site would be identified soon for the school to open in September 2014. Yvette Stanley confirmed the school would be in the year's admissions document but that the document would not specify its location.

RESOLVED:

Panel noted the report.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Councillor Oonagh Moulton pointed out that the glossary had not been published yet, and

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that without the A3 sheets it was not possible to read the information. Officers agreed to circulate the performance monitoring information and compile the glossary.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked for clarification about the poor performance from social workers. She felt the 77% of children with a Child Protection Plan visited within timescale was unacceptable.

Paul Angeli explained that sometimes it was difficult to gain entry to households, and that each failed visit had to be looked at on a case by case basis. He added that sometimes workers visited but did not record their visit in time and sometimes children had moved out or gone on holiday. He agreed it was right to ask the question but stressed that Merton is following up on every unvisited child.

Yvette Stanley agreed that it was a challenge but informed the panel that it was a high priority and was monitored and tracked at multiple levels of the organisation.

RESOLVED:

Panel noted the report and requested the performance monitoring tables and the glossary.

11 UPDATE ON SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REVIEWS

The panel thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED:

Panel noted the report

12 WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Jeff Hanna mentioned a recent induction event on public health. He suggested that the panel may wish to provide time for scrutiny of the health and wellbeing board later in the year.

Yvette Stanley said that the Children's Trust oversaw the 'good start' section of the health and wellbeing board's strategy, which is the relevant part to CYP. She said that CSF was completing an audit for the board which they could bring to scrutiny for the next meeting.

Councillor Jeff Hanna agreed to liaise with officers.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked for Yvette Stanley to circulate the Health and Wellbeing Board report.

RESOLVED:

Panel agreed to amend the work programme when appropriate.