

**Committee:** Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Wards: All wards

**Subject:** User Voice Activity and Update Report

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cabinet Member for Children Services

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance

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**Recommendations:**

A. Members of the panel to discuss and consider the range of User Voice engagement activity undertaken with children and young people each year as summarised within the report.

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The Children and Families' Voice Framework end of year review 2017/18 provides members of the panel with information on some highlights from the range of 'user voice' activity undertaken within the Children, Schools and Families Department over the year 2017/18.

**2. DETAILS**

2.1 The department's 'user voice' framework has been in place since 2014 and states our commitment to ensuring that children, young people and families have a key role in influencing the design and delivery of children's services. The framework is underpinned by an annual action plan, which sets out the significant amount of engagement with children, young people and their families that is conducted across the department. This is an integral aspect of our service planning process and enables us to ensure that we consider how best to engage with our young people in ensuring that our services best meet their needs. This end of year review, attached as Appendix 1, shows cases 'user voice' activity during 2017/18 within CSF and across the wider partnership, and its positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.

2.2 The attached report summarises the key activities taken over the past year across our range of services. Some of the key highlights for the year include:

**Commitment One** – Delivering on our Participation Promise: providing opportunities for *all* children and young people to influence Merton the place. Notable activities and impact this year included:

**Youth forums (including pupil voice) and youth driven activities.**

Merton Youth Parliament (MYP) implemented a manifesto based on the top concerns of local young people – delivered a gangs 'think tank' event on crime prevention and gang awareness, a young lifesavers training event, and a 'Student Day of Action'

enabling local pupils of all ages to discuss improvements to health and well-being, local environment, and crime prevention. MYP members said their involvement in the forum enabled them to *develop teamwork, leadership and communication skills, confidence and self-esteem*. Pupil voice - review processes in schools are informed by pupil voice and have led to a range of developments in individual schools including, the implementation of a whole school survey, and a review of the costs of after school clubs.

Feedback from LGBT+ pupils informed the development of a Trans Inclusion toolkit for schools in Merton and Wandsworth. My Futures ETE team facilitated youth led summer activities – one young person said “*I really appreciate how understanding you are, it makes a change from all the other adults who just get angry with me all the time about stuff like this, thank you.*”

**Consultations to inform the development of priorities and actions in key strategies.** *Young Carers Multi-Agency Strategy; the Autism Strategy; and the Great Weight Debate 31 recommendations.*

**Activities which support the community.** Merton Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) are a uniformed youth group which supports the community in a broad range of events and activities “*This is one of the best days in Cadets, everyone pulling together to help each other, and it’s been great to cheer on the runners, they’re amazing!*” (young cadet who supported the London Marathon)

**Commitment Two** – Child focused: enabling children and young people *who are service users* to influence improvements to our systems, services and processes. Notable activities and impact this year included:

**Consultations to inform the development of priorities and actions in key strategies.** Merton Looked After Children (LAC) strategy consultation report states that the majority (94%) of children and young people said they felt safe in their homes ‘all or most of the time’, compared to 75% in the general population. Children’s views on all areas of their lives - home, school, activities, health and well-being, and relationships with carers and friends - have been used to develop the new LAC Strategy.

**User forums for vulnerable children in receipt of services.**

Children in Care Council informed discussions on a range of issues – housing, homelessness, budgeting, Staying Put in foster care, growing up undocumented, health, emotional well-being, LAC reviews, and Independent Reviewing Officer service. Transforming Families youth forum said they would like more access to positive activities and the team organised a go-karting trip. Young people placed Transforming Families as 8/9 on a scale of 1-10. Youth Justice Youth Board (forum for young people) requested a range of developments - organising home visit, timings of youth board meetings, and access to the youth justice service building, these have been implemented by the Youth Justice Team.

**Recruitment and training.** Care Leavers delivered workshops for prospective foster carers during the assessment process.

**Learning from serious case reviews.** *Part of our response to the expressed views of Child B* was the implementation a new Young Carers Multi-Agency Strategy and protocol.

**Commissioned and partner services ensuring effective youth participation.**

Commissioned services facilitated user led activities - service evaluation, planning and improvement; decision making about finances and strategy; recruitment; publicity; and the development of web based information and advice. One young person supported by the Catch22 risk and resilience commissioned service said, “*[C22 workers] listened to me and believed I could change...being positive and helpful and never judging me...I now have a course I enjoy at college.*” Uptown Youth Service set up a new ‘Saturday Step Up’ inclusive session supported by peer mentors, in response to requests from its young people.

**Commitment Three** – Delivering on Merton’s approach to casework practice: Putting the wishes and feelings of children and young people who are subject of a plan, at the centre of decision making and planning. Notable activities and impact this year included:

**Child centred practice approaches for assessment, planning and review.**

Child’s participation in their child protection (CP) conference - Twelve children attended their CP conference, and 8 gave feedback. The majority said they were happy or very happy with their conference, scaling at 9/10 or 10/10 for all aspects. Views expressed by children after their conference led to improvement actions including ensuring that the child’s feedback goes immediately to the Chair of the conference and is actioned before the next meeting, finding child and family friendly conference venues. Child’s participation in their LAC review – *Ninety nine percent* of reviews for looked after children were conducted within the statutory timescale, 99% of LAC participated in their review, and 68% of these attended the meeting and spoke for themselves. Foster Carer Review - views expressed by foster carers’ children during this process led to a number of improvement actions to ensure that carers are meeting the needs of their own children. Let’s Talk - views expressed to foster carers by their looked after child during this process were shared with the children’s social workers to inform individual casework. Young people’s youth justice self-assessment - views expressed by a young person during this process enabled the Serious Organised Crime project team to identify a suitably engaging work experience placement.

**Advocacy support for children and young people in care or on a child protection (CP) plan.** Jigsaw 4u commissioned advocacy service supported 53 children on a CP plan and 45 looked after children. One young person said: *‘My advocate got my opinions out loud, made people listen to me and got what I asked for’.*

**‘User voice’ included in case audit process.**

Bi monthly audit of children’s plans June 2018 (‘Stepdown’; CIN, CP, LAC and ‘pathway’) identified very good evidence of children and families’ engagement in the development of the plan. For example, in response to a child’s views, their plan was escalated to the CP process, and in another a CP plan remained in place because a parent said that her family need more support. As part of the audit process, a young person fed back that she is *aware of the LAC plan and is happy with it, her social worker listens to her and she feels she can always speak to her if she is not happy about any aspect of her care plan.* Audit of casework of the 0-5 Supporting Families Team identified good evidence of ‘persistence in engaging families in the intervention’. It also identified an improvement action to ensure that actions set during supervision are shared with parents.

**Commitment Four** – Think Family: enabling families, parents and carers to influence change, which empowers them to manage their own affairs, impact decisions about their children and ultimately deliver better outcomes. Notable activities and impact this year included:

**Families influencing casework and case reviews.**

Signs of Safety child and family centred casework practice approach enabled a parent to use ‘words and pictures’ to explain to her children how her mental health had impacted on her ability to be a parent. The parent initially said the process was *‘a waste of time’*, but now she sees *‘what a difference it has made’.*

Parent participation in CP Conferences Twenty two of the 27 parents who gave feedback on their initial or review CP conference rated their level of satisfaction as 8/10 or above, regarding how well their child’s views informed the meeting. Actions are in place to collect samples of qualitative feedback after conference especially to investigate reasons for low satisfaction. Merton advice and guidance for parents of children with SEN and Disabilities in a survey of 50 users of the service 92% said that the support *‘made a real difference’.* In response to parents’ concerns about their child’s support needs in education post-16, we are developing a support approach for

the South Thames College consortium (post-16 education) on Education Health and Care (EHC) planning.

#### **User forums for parents and families who are in receipt of services**

Kids First forum for parents of children with SEN and Disabilities fed back their concerns about inconsistencies in schools' applications for EHC plans; we have now streamlined the EHC plan process, and delivered training in schools for senior case officers on delivering an effective assess, plan and review process for pupils with SEND. Transforming Families parent forum requested a range of developments including access to advocacy, and developing a service leaflet to advertise the service to the community. *'The stability and support from my worker led to my own inner strength to change'* (feedback from forum). Parents who attended a County Lines workshop requested parenting support, and awareness raising sessions in schools, to help to prevent their child being involved in serious youth violence or child criminal exploitation; this is now being rolled out.

#### **Consultations to inform service and strategy developments.**

SEN and Disabilities High Needs Review consultation with parents is being used to set priorities for developments to education provision for children with SEND. Seventy seven per cent of parents who responded to the survey said that Merton does need to develop additional in borough provision, and 58% said additional provision should be by new specialist bases within mainstream schools. Foster Carers Survey 2018 highlighted a number of recommendations for improvements to our fostering service related to training for children's social work teams, fostering payments, placements, and carer retention.

#### **Feedback from users on their level of satisfaction with services**

Central London Community Health Care 'patient reported experience measures' show that 99% of patients said they were treated with respects, and 94% would recommend the service. Early Years, childcare and children centres service review states that 95% of families said they had experienced improved outcomes after attending a service or programme. 100% reported improved outcomes after attending a parenting programme. *'I feel comfortable sharing my worries and it made me feel more confident as a parent'*. Adoption and Permanence Team bi-annual report states that adopters are positive about their experience of each stage of the adoption process – *'we were allowed to progress at our own pace with a great deal of support and clarification'*. Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub received positive feedback from professionals during this year's MSCB conference who said that the services is *available, supportive, clear on thresholds, and gives feedback on the outcome of the referral*.

#### **Families and the wider community leading on delivering services which benefit children and families**

Monday Club Fit and Fun Club at Phipps Bridge is run by local parent volunteers for themselves and their children. It provides an opportunity for informal support through peers, and if necessary, access to appropriate local services.

Adventure Playground coffee morning is run by local volunteers supported by the Salvation Army who can learn new skills, and build social networks and confidence.

**Commitment Five** – Building capacity across the Children's Trust to engage in good quality, ethical and impactful 'user voice' activity, the learning from which is shared with all stakeholders, including participants. Notable activities and impact this year included:

#### **Processes in place to support meaningful and ethical participation in commissioned and partner services**

Kids First forum has refreshed its good practice guidance which clearly states its role to independently represent the voice of children with SEND and their families. Commissioned services contract monitoring processes collects quarterly information from services on their user voice activity and impact; this is reported annually. EHC plan process has been reviewed to ensure that it captures the views of children and families.

**Outcome of user voice activity communicated within organisations, across the Children’s Trust, and to participants.**

*Central London Community Health Care* put together ‘patient stories’, the key learning from which is shared at senior management meetings. In response to one patient story the children and young people’s occupational therapy (OT) team are taking forward actions to raise awareness of children’s OT needs in schools. *Newsletters* – a number of service areas share information with users via a regular newsletter, this includes South West London Adoption Consortium (SWLAC), and Kids First parent forum. *Young Merton Together* termly online magazine shares ‘user voice’ good practice articles across the Children’s Trust.

- 2.3 Whilst the summary above and the overall User Voice Report 2017/18 summarises much of the activity undertaken throughout the year, it is not possible to include everything, or the level of detail about some of the engagement that has been undertaken. One specific piece of engagement with our looked after children is particularly worth recognising, building on what is summarise within the report attached as appendix 1. This piece of work undertaken as Bright Spots is included as Appendix 2, which provides more evidence of the sort of opportunities that are taken to engage our children and young people, whilst updating the Panel on the views of these young people.

**3. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 No specific implications from this report.

**4. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No specific implications from this report.

**5. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 No specific implications from this report

**6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 No specific implications from this report.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 No specific implications from this report.

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

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – User Voice End of Year Review 2017/18

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1 None

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