

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: January 14th 2014

Agenda item: 6

Wards:

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

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

Lead members: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cllr Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Head of 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 report in November 2013.

2 DETAILS

2.1 During 2013, a number of key changes were made to social care arrangements in Merton. Members of the CYP Panel received reports on adjustments to the overarching Child and Young Person Wellbeing Model through which children with additional needs in the borough are identified and supported and on the establishment of Merton's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), designed to improve information sharing and multi agency planning for children at risk. Officers also reported on major restructuring of the CSF Department's children's social care services. These changes were designed to further improve services to vulnerable children and had significant implications for a wide range of children's services agencies in Merton.

2.2 In autumn 2013 a planned review of these structural and procedural changes was initiated by officers. This review examined data on work volumes and 'flow' and also involved consultation with staff and partner agencies. A key area of concern for staff was the volume of 'single assessments' being undertaken following referrals made to the MASH – this workload, spread across workers in a number of social work teams, was seen to be preventing social work staff from completing other, equally important, work. Consultation with partner agencies, including schools, demonstrated that they very much valued early support from social work staff in managing concerns about children at a lower level of need than would trigger child protection or children in need procedures. As a result of these findings, further changes have been made. The distribution of social work staff has been altered to enable a specialist 'single assessment' function to be established – performance in completion of these assessments has already improved as shown in the separate performance report. Social work staff in the

two 'enhanced level' teams are no longer undertaking 'single assessments' thus enabling more advice, guidance and consultation to be provided to schools, early years settings and other children's services agencies.

- 2.3 Officers in CSF department are currently working with corporate colleagues on the procurement and implementation of a new social care information system to support the casework function in both CSF department and adult social care. In simple terms a comprehensive electronic system is required to enable caseworkers to maintain a detailed record of their work with clients; managers to supervise work appropriately and data to be readily available for internal management purposes and for the submission of external, statutory returns. As requirements have evolved significantly since the establishment of our current system many years ago, a re-procurement process is currently underway. The system will need to be user friendly and enable other functionality including client specific financial processes. Following the procurement phase, training and proceduralisation will be required to ensure consistency and compliance.
- 2.4 Following the publication of national validated Key Stage 2 results, officers have been able to analyse Merton schools' results against national benchmarks. In terms of the headline indicators relating to achievement and progress in reading, writing and mathematics, Merton schools' performance is above national average in all measures with a greater level of improvement from 2012-2013 seen in Merton than was achieved nationally. Progress is also being made in narrowing attainment and progress gaps for disadvantaged pupils. No Merton primary school failed to achieve the nationally set – and rising – 'floor' targets for Key Stage 2 attainment and progress.
- 2.5 As at December 2013, 85% of Merton's schools were rated good or better by Ofsted. This is in line with London averages and compares well with the national figure (as at August 2013) of 78%. Since the panel's last meeting, St Matthews primary school has retained its Ofsted rating of 'good'. One of Merton's primary schools rated as 'requiring improvement', Benedict school, formally transferred to Academy status on January 1st 2014 and plans for the academisation of Garden school are also progressing.
- 2.6 Members of the panel have been kept informed of the delay in implementing the proposed expansion of Dundonald primary school. As a result of a number of complex legal issues this proposal has been the most difficult of the 21 additional forms of entry (FE) either delivered to date or in planning. At its meeting in December 2013, however, Cabinet was informed that the longstanding objection to the proposal by Sport England had been withdrawn and decided to proceed with the land appropriation necessary for the expansion scheme. It also decided to proceed with the permanent alteration of the school from 1 to 2 FE following statutory consultation. The scheme will now proceed, albeit still subject to possible Judicial Review.
- 2.7 Some time ago, the DfE published a report on free school meals registration. Merton was identified as a Local Authority with a significant under-registration rate for free meals - 27% of those entitled in Merton are not registered compared to a national average of 14%. Work is now being undertaken with schools which aims to increase registration rates and take up of free meals.

This work – including providing schools with data to inform their own efforts to increase registration and reviewing universal and targeted marketing strategies - should not only promote the wellbeing of individual pupils but also result in increased pupil premium income for schools. Officers are also anticipating guidance from central government on the implementation of policy announced in autumn 2013 to provide free meals to all pupils in reception and years one and two classes. Although capital allocations to support this policy have been announced, further detail on implementation remains outstanding.

2.8 In the update report to panel in November 2013, members were informed of the disappointing outcome of a CQC review of transitions arrangements for young people with complex health needs. Since then, council officers have worked with NHS colleagues to establish a new transitions ‘pathway’ to ensure improved planning and resource allocation for this group. A review of current ‘tripartite’ funding arrangements – in respect of health, social care and education needs - is also being undertaken. These new arrangements will be temporary while partners consider how best to implement the radical changes to the way in which agencies work with children and young adults with SEN and disabilities outlined in the Children and Families Bill. Current progress in planning for implementation of this new legislation is summarised in a separate report to this evening’s CYP panel.

2.9 Merton’s work to support children at risk of sexual exploitation has been marked recently by winning the 2013 London Safeguarding Children award sponsored by London Councils.

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.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. No specific implications.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. No specific implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. No specific implications.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No specific implications.

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

- N/A

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None