

Committee: Children and Young People's Scrutiny

Date: 26 June 2019

Wards: All

Subject: Departmental Update Report

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

Lead member: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cllr Eleanor Stringer

Contact officer: Karl Mittelstadt

Recommendations:

- A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments not covered elsewhere on the agenda and affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department, since the panel's last meeting in March 2019. It focusses on those aspects of particular relevance to the department and those where the Panel expressed an interest in receiving regular updates. For this municipal year, the format of the report has changed slightly to include a paragraph about key issues in every service area within the directorate. This is to raise awareness and understanding of the full range of work in the directorate by ensuring even coverage across the services. Items specifically requested by scrutiny members will be covered under the service area to which they relate and are highlighted in the text as (*Scrutiny Request*). This report is accompanied by a structure chart for the Directorate.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Children, Schools and Families. Since the last meeting of CYP Scrutiny, the Children, Schools and Families Directorate has been through considerable change. We have seen the departure of the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion, to neighbouring Wandsworth, and some of the Heads of Service in that division move on too. After a period of interim leadership under Allison Parkinson, we have appointed a new permanent Assistant Director, El Mayhew, who joins us from Lambeth at the beginning of July.
- 2.2. The Safeguarding Board held a successful multi-agency conference Fight, Flight, Fright, focusing on the vulnerability of our young people to criminal and other forms of exploitation. The PPP service led a Visioning Event to contribute to the development of our new Children and Young People's Plan, which has been further developed through the involvement of the Children's Trust Board. The Permanency Service led a redesign of the terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure an increase in the young people's voice at those meetings.

- 2.3. The Service has engaged in the London Regional Improvement Alliance arrangements, through attending a South West London 'Quad' peer challenge and has responded to both a SEND Inspection by Ofsted and CQC, and the MHCLG 'Spot Check' of Troubled Families grant funding.
- 2.4. *MASH and Child Protection.* Following the departure of Nicole Miller to Surrey, Interim Head of Service, Michelle Waldron, has now been appointed permanently to the position. This will help to stabilise the service, which is facing challenges due to high demand, and some churn in staffing, both in social work and administrative staff. Some resource has been redeployed from the Safeguarding and Care Planning service into First Response order to ensure that the increased workload does not lead to any backlog. The service is also taking steps to further improve the coordination of information about young people missing, or vulnerable to going missing.
- 2.5. *Safeguarding and Care Planning.* The substantive Head of Service is on maternity leave (the latest new addition to the service is a baby boy, born w/c 10 June, congratulations!). Linda Goodhew, a Team Manager within the same service is acting up as Head of Service. This maintains continuity in the service and affords a good opportunity for professional development and progression. The service has redeployed some resources to support MASH and First Response. This has been possible because caseloads in this service are still at manageable levels.
- 2.6. *Permanency.* The priority development in the Permanency Service is the transfer of adoption functions to the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt London - South, which is a shared service between Croydon, Kingston, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. This is moving quickly and is on track to be implemented so that all TUPEd staff are holding the transferable adoption cases by 1 July 2019 and will be employed by Southwark from that date, with the intention that the formal move of premises will occur on 1 September 2019 when the service will be formally launched.
- 2.7. Because of these changes a consultation is under way in respect of a restructure of the remaining staff from the team who will not be transferring to the new arrangements, and associated changes in fostering and other related services. We anticipate that these changes will be implemented alongside the launch of the RAA in September.
- 2.8. *QA and Practice Development.* Following the departure of Caroline Muller to Croydon, Interim Head of Service, John Walsh has now been appointed permanently to the position. This is a positive and stabilising position to be in. The focus of the service is to implement the recommendations around quality assurance - and audit in particular - that arose out of the focused visit by Ofsted in January of this year. The service has secured funding to continue the roll out of the practice model, which will help to support the quality of practice not only across the social work teams, but more widely, into early help, as required by the safeguarding partnership's annual plan.
- 2.9. *Access to Resources and CWD.* The fostering services within the Access to Resources Team are impacted by the changes arising from the move to a Regional Adoption Agency. A consultation is under way about the restructure of these services in the light of those changes.

- 2.10. The family support service at Bond Road, which is currently line managed within this service area, is to be incorporated within our Early Help arrangements, which are currently under review in order to streamline them across all ages, to reduce the number of 'NFA' referrals into the MASH and First Response and to provide a more responsive 'step down' arrangement for children's social care.
- 2.11. The Children with Disabilities Team made a considerable contribution to the SEND Inspection, because the children open to this service have complex needs and are likely to require support through an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 2.12. *Youth Justice*. Within this service, the Transforming Families Team has successfully passed a MHCLG 'spot check' on payment by results claims arising from the Troubled Families scheme. The feedback was very positive. MHCLG were particularly impressed with practitioners' reflective approach and articulation of the interventions delivered. They are satisfied that whole-family working is happening in practice and that there is buy-in from senior management to the Think Family approach. There are no invalid PBR claims. They were pleased with the amount of preparation work undertaken and the well organised evidence presented. We have an area for development in relation to data systems; a suggestion to target working with JCP to increase progress to work outcomes and have requested a clarification of our outcome criteria for closed CIN cases in our Transforming Families Outcomes Plan.
- 2.13. The Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board, which is the statutory Management Board for this multi-agency team met on Monday 17 June and (among other agenda items) reviewed the Youth Justice and Crime Prevention Plan 2019-2022, endorsing priorities for the reduction of reoffending, enhancing the participation of victims in safety planning, improving mental health pathways, addressing disproportionality in the youth justice system and finding creative education solutions. During the coming year, the team is likely to be inspected by HMIP. The Board is focused on improving its strategic oversight of the work of the service in keeping with the Governance requirements of the inspection framework.
- 2.13.1 *Knife Crime (Scrutiny Request)*. The Knife Crime Action Plan follows a format prescribed by MOPAC, and has a number of actions across the Safer Merton partnership. The Youth Justice Team is leading on much of this, including interventions with those on an order, offering a range of engaging activities. The MARVE panel is embedded and oversees high risk cases. The Promoting and Protecting Young People (PPYP) subgroup of the Safeguarding Partnership includes performance oversight of knife crime and related initiatives. Plans are in place for a meeting between Head Teachers and Safer Merton for the new school year to discuss best approaches to crime preventions. There is a protocol already in place for Head Teachers to refer young people excluded for knife possession to MOPAC workers. MOPAC workers deliver training to partnership staff, deliver a Gangs and Exploitation Champion meeting and undertake group work in schools.
- 2.14. *School Improvement*. The school improvement team has continued to support schools across the local authority, including during inspections at

Garfield, Merton Abbey and The SMART Centre (which was inspected in the week of the SEND Inspection, thereby involving several key staff in both inspections at the same time.) Garfield remains 'Good' and Merton Abbey moved from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good'. The SMART Centre inspection outcome is unpublished at this time. Our Schools ICT support service has received several award nominations for the quality of its work. One nomination was for for the Data Protection Officer Service Level Agreement. The Service worked with London Grid For Learning to procure a cloud based system to help schools record their compliance in line with the GDPR's requirements around accountability.

<https://www.gdpr.school/merton-schools-dpo-leading-the-way-in-data-protection/> The service was shortlisted for the Data Protection Officer of the Year and invited to attend The ICO's Data Protection Practitioners' Conference 2019. The service has also been shortlisted in three categories in the Public Sector Paperless Awards 2019.

<http://www.paperlessawards.co.uk/shortlist> Winners are announced on 11th July 2019.

- DATA & INFORMATION SECURITY PROJECT OF THE YEAR
 - BEST SMALL SCALE DIGITAL APPLICATION / PROJECT
 - SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD
- 2.15. Our SEND Inspector continues to work with schools to ensure consistency of identification of children with additional needs and to promote self-assessment of schools across their SEND provision. We have a new Head Teacher for our Virtual School for Looked After Children, Anne Halliday. This service's highly successful Governor Services team has won the contract to provide governor services for Surrey County Council.
- 2.16. *Education Inclusion.* Our NEET rates continue to be low. The My Futures Team has an individual plan for each young person who is not in education, employment or training. The transition from the previous long-standing Manager of the MIAS Service to the new manager was remarked on in the course of our SEND inspection as very successful, and having carried along the parents who use the service, and effectively involved Kids First the Parents' Forum in the recruitment. Merton's Youth Parliament, part of our 'My Voice' arrangements for young people's participation, won the Young Volunteer Team of the Year Award. The Education Welfare Service continues to support the improvement of our school attendance figures. The Autumn Term 18/19 figures show that attendance in every phase and type of school is better than either National or Outer London averages, and in most cases better than both, with the exception of persistent absence in special schools, where we have improved from the previous year, but still have further work to do to be better than Outer London or National.
- 2.17. *Early Years and Children's Centres.* This service made a considerable contribution to the SEND Inspection, and many strengths were found in the service's early identification of children with additional needs in the 0-5 age group and their support for the families of those children.
- 2.17.1 *Early Years Provision – Funded Places Scheme (Scrutiny Request).* The current take up (January 2019) shows a small increase in the percentage of

2 year olds that take up their funded place. Significant activity continues to encourage and support families to take up their funded early year entitlement. However, in spite of this activity take up remains at around 60 % over the past few years. Merton's take up is 5th out of the 12 of our statistical neighbours, and sharing of practice takes place across our London statistical neighbours and through our partnership working with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) funded Wandsworth and Merton's Early Years Hub, with the aim of increasing take up.

2.17.2 Recent activity has included:

- Regular outreach (visits) in response to DWP lists, working to visit families who are unknown to us in the first instance and those with three terms of entitlement, followed by families who are known and with three, two and then one term of entitlement. Children's Centre staff support families to access their eligibility 'code' and broker into pre-school places (PVI and EY pre-schools)
- Outreach visits are co-ordinated via identified wards where there are higher numbers of eligible families, and staff work through the lists according to criteria above and make phone calls as well as door to door visits
- Targeted outreach to Tamil speaking families is now undertaken in collaboration with South London Tamil Welfare Group as part of a Greater London Assembly grant funded programme, and this includes via telephone and visits (same criteria from above is used for this outreach)
- Regular joint outreach to eligible families in Vantage House, Hall Place and Connect House with Family Support Workers and specialist Health Visitors.
- 'Birthday' cards are sent to children on the lists who are due to be two years old in the week before their birthday with encouragement to take up their offer
- Regular work is undertaken by Children's Centre staff during all groups and Health visitor clinics, to raise awareness of entitlement and encourage take up
- Early Learning Together pre-school is running this half term with a cohort of families who are eligible to take up their places but not doing so for a range of reasons (e.g. parents are anxious about separation and or thinking their children are too young for school) with the view that parents/carers will see the benefits of pre-school and be supported with separation via the programme format

2.17.3 More recently the GLA have launched a new campaign to support London families to take up provision, as there is lower take in London than elsewhere across the country. The Early Years' service will maximise the opportunities presented by this campaign and share widely with families and partners with the aim of supporting local take up.

2.18. *Special Educational Needs.* An Ofsted and CQC inspection took place between 10 and 14 June 2019 into the local area's effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities. The outcome of the inspection is

confidential until the report is published. However, some headline findings from the inspection include the following:

- Identification: Inspectors identified many strengths in this area, particularly in the <5 service, and youth justice teams. They were also positive about our efforts to identify additional needs in children new to the borough and living in temporary housing, the recommissioning of the 0-19 service and our focus on making things better for children with additional needs that don't require an Education Health and Care Plan (those on SEN Support).
- Assessment and Meeting Needs: This was the area where strengths were much more offset by weaknesses. Inspectors described EHCPs as being 'over-complicated' but also needing more health input (interesting challenge) and we'll clearly need to strengthen the processes around this. They found too many areas where the information flow from and to health partners didn't work, and this affected both the quality of plans and practitioners understanding of what plans required of them. They expressed concern about arrangements for young adults with additional needs who are not eligible for adult social care, and although they acknowledged our newly commissioned Mencap service in response to this, they clearly expect us to have these arrangements more embedded.
- Inspectors did still find strengths in this area (though they said that not all would make it into the final report), including our commitment to young people's voice, our MIAS service and Kids First (the Parent/Carer forum), our robust arrangements for checking that out of borough providers are meeting children's needs, specialist adult learning provision, portage, health visitors and the integrated complex needs team.
- Outcomes: Inspectors acknowledged many strengths here too; children's schools good or better, academic outcomes secure, NEET rate low, a decline in both permanent and fixed term exclusions. They gave a shout out for Education Welfare Service, My Futures, the St George's Hospital Programme, and they spotted the good attention paid to looked after children with additional needs and the use of pupil premium to support this. They liked the work we did to encourage independence, from travel-training to our support for participation and engagement in social and cultural activities (ballet, art, sport). They considered preparing for adulthood a relative weakness in this area and noted parents' continuing worries about the 'cliff edge' their adult children face when they reach 18.

2.18.1 *Education Health and Care Plans (Scrutiny Request)*: Agreement was made at both the TDA and Merton Improvement Board to procure the Education Health and Care Hub, the order will be raised by 21 June 2019. The implementation of the EHC Hub, which is a dedicated IT portal, is a significant priority for SENDIS, the portal will be a centralised system for the assessment and development of the EHCP. A working group has been established which includes parents/carers and professionals to develop the processes for this system and we would expect to start the pilot with schools in the Autumn Term and be fully implemented in the Spring Term 2020.

2.18.2 *SEN Funding (Scrutiny Request)*. The level of overspend in the DSG at the end of 2018/19 was such that the DfE has required a recovery plan from us. The Draft deficit recovery plan has been discussed at CMT on the 18th June

and then presented to Schools Forum on the 20th June. The plan is required to be submitted to the ESFA by the 30th June. Once submitted, the full paper will come to scrutiny for information in October.

- 2.18.3 Due to increasing cost pressures resulting from the high and increasing numbers of EHCPs that Merton is responsible for, the plan over the next three years does not show a recovery of Merton's deficit position but one of increasing cost pressures. The ESFA is planning to review our plan from July to September and they will provide us with a response from this review. Steps that we are taking to increase capacity in local special and mainstream schools will eventually assist in bringing this deficit down, by reducing the costs to us of placing children in the independent sector. However, because of the length of time it takes to bring new places into use, this will not be until after the 3-year term of the deficit plan and is more likely to have impact in years 4-7.
- 2.18.4 *Contracts and School Organisation.* This service has been working, with the SENDIS Team and with finance officers to develop the DSG Recovery Plan in an attempt to manage the significant overspend in the High Needs Block. The service also works particularly hard at this time of year to ensure that all the new taxi services that need to be in place to support children's educational placements in September are being commissioned on the most cost effective basis. The School Admissions Team have made the majority of school placements for Reception and Yr7 (based on the offers made in March and April) and will continue to work over the summer to secure places for new arrivals in the borough.
- 2.18.5 *Review of PFI Contracts (Scrutiny Request).* Officers have been undertaking work in the background to ensure the appropriate specialist advice is received to assist us in holding the PFI contractor to account; we can provide more information to CYP Scrutiny at a later date, which will need to be a commercially confidential item.
- 2.19. *Policy, Planning and Performance.* The new permanent Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships, Karl Mittelstadt joined the service at the beginning of May. He takes over from interim Sharon Buckby, and has already led his first inspection response, for the SEND Inspection. The summer term includes a large number of data returns, among them the statutory (Child in Need) CIN Census and the 903 Return (Looked After Children and Care Leavers).
- 2.20. This service includes Business Management of the Safeguarding Partnership, which has replaced the Merton Safeguarding Children Board. The Safeguarding Partnership arrangements have now been signed off by all three statutory partners (the Local Authority, the Metropolitan Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group) and are published on the partnership's website (<https://www.mertonscp.org.uk/>). They have been submitted to the Department for Education, who have confirmed that they comply with the relevant legislation and guidance. During the summer we will be recruiting to three new roles associated with the partnership arrangements: the Independent Person (who will chair the partnership meetings), the Independent Scrutineer and the Young Scrutineer who will work together to exercise scrutiny over these joint arrangements.

2.21. *Joint Commissioning and Partnerships.* The service is prioritising the continuing integration of Children, Schools and Families commissioning with public health and the CCG. This is particularly focused on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of our children and young people, actions within the ASD strategy, and work towards the re-commissioning of our community health services, which incorporate a range of therapies, nursing in special schools, health visiting and school nursing. We are considering other options for inclusion in this contract, and will bring more details to scrutiny in due course. The contract is up for renewal in 2021 and therefore preparation needs to be in place now so that we can complete the procurement in good time for the mobilisation period.

2.22. Within the department we are re-procuring our Risk and Resilience Service, which includes substance misuse arrangements, smoking cessation, return home interviews for children missing from home, detached youth work and work round CSE and CCE. The service continues to utilise social value within existing and new council contracts in order to secure employability opportunities for young people such as work placement, employment and apprenticeships.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. No specific implications for this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. None for this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. N/a for this report.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. None.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. None.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. None.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None.

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

- Children, Schools and Families Structure Chart

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None.