

Committee:**Date: 6th October 2019**

Wards: All

Subject: Departmental Update

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

Lead member: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cllr Eleanor Stringer

Contact officer: Karl Mittelstadt, Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships

Recommendations:A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on 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 not covered elsewhere on the agenda and affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department, since the panel's last meeting in June 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 current structure chart for the Directorate.

2 DETAILS**2.1. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES**

2.2. Since the last CYP Scrutiny in June, the Children, Schools and Families Directorate has re-launched the Corporate Parenting Board with a new style agenda that focuses on the commitments of our Looked After Children's Strategy and Pledge to the children in our care. A new (early evening) time for this meeting ensures that we can secure the participation of young people outside school hours. The Children's Trust Board has met to develop the Action Plan that sits beneath the recently approved Children and Young People's Plan, and which will help to ensure all partners contribute to achieving our ambitious outcomes for Merton's children and young people. We have contributed to a Member Development Session 'Keeping Residents Safe', which highlighted our safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities. We have enjoyed a summer of successful exam results from our schools. We have held a cross-sector engagement event for IThrive, the new model for child and adolescent mental health, which we are promoting

across Merton. The Director shared information about the new Children and Young People's Plan with Chairs of Governors at the start of the new school term. Key members of the children's social care leadership team participated in the Signs of Safety Leadership Day which will help the service to embed this approach more strongly in our practice model. Proposals around our planned re-design of Early Help across the borough were shared with our safeguarding partners in a workshop in September.

- 2.3. On 18 September, Ofsted published the inspection outcome letter following the SEND Inspection which took place in June of this year. The letter requires the local authority and CCG to prepare a Written Statement of Action to respond to three key areas of concern in the report. The letter can be read in full here: <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50109801> Work on the Written Statement of Action is currently under way and officers from CSF and the CCG will be meeting with colleagues from DfE and NHSE to discuss our progress on 23 October 2019.
- 2.4. Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion Division
- 2.5. Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion has seen changes to the senior leadership team over the summer period. The interim Assistant Director handed over responsibility for the Division to the permanent Assistant Director in July.
- 2.6. Two interim Heads of Service, for MASH & First Response and Quality Assurance & Professional Development, were successful in securing permanent appointments to those roles. The Head of Service post for Children with Disabilities, Access to Resources and Fostering was disestablished and the services distributed across the portfolios of three existing Heads of Service.
- 2.7. The result of the above changes is that the Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion senior leadership team are now all permanent staff.
- 2.8. MASH & First Response
- 2.9. Following a period of instability, all managers in the MASH & First Response Service are now permanent. A number of agency staff have applied for permanent roles and are currently undergoing routine HR checks.
- 2.10. The summer months saw a reduction in caseloads to a more manageable size across the Service.
- 2.11. Safeguarding and Care Planning
- 2.12. Safeguarding and Care Planning Service enjoyed a calm summer with the usual seasonal reduction in new cases entering the Service. This allowed team managers and social workers time to review their case load and ensure that continued social work intervention was warranted for some families who had been open to the service for longer periods of time.
- 2.13. The current case load in the Service is manageable. 346 children are being supported with social workers holding an average case load of 13 children each. Manageable caseloads are supporting the achievement of the performance targets set out in the service plan 2019/20.

- 2.14. Stability of the Service can be affected by staff turnover, staff sickness and changes in the volume of work coming from the First Response Service. It is usual to see an increase in families referred to Children's Social Care after the summer break as schools and partner agencies resume their term-time work with children. The Service is seeking to recruit 6 permanent social workers to replace agency social workers. To date, 2 social workers have accepted our employment offers.
- 2.15. Permanency, Looked After Children and Access to Resources Team
- 2.16. The full function of the Adoption Service held within the Permanency Service has now transferred to Adopt London South (September 1st). This has resulted in a temporary re-location of allied services, including those that undertake Special Guardianship assessments, connected carers assessments and fostering recruitment.
- 2.17. The fostering recruitment service's ambition is to increase the numbers of in-house foster carers, to reduce the number of placements with independent fostering agencies and to ensure that children, when able, can live closer to home. However, the levels of recruitment to date this year are lower than planned. The long-term looked after children service, has a permanent Team Manager starting December 12th. The 14plus team (which oversees our offer to children with care experience) is currently in the process of being transferred to the line management of Head of the Adolescent and Family Service as an interim arrangement.
- 2.18. There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as London Labour Councils have agreed to increase their quota on the Pan London Rota from 0.07% of the population of under 18's to 0.08%. For Merton, this increases to 38 the number of UASC young people we will look after under the age of 18 at any one time.
- 2.19. The Access to Resources Team, (responsible for commissioning and placements) and the Fostering Service are currently being line managed by the Head of Service for Permanence as an interim arrangement. The focus of the fostering team is to integrate the Mockingbird Model into practice to ensure that there is greater support to foster carers and for children at risk of placement breakdown.
- 2.20. The commissioning of placements team has focussed on moving young people on from semi-independent accommodation and offering creative pathways to alternative housing, for example, accessing private housing, assisting with deposits, liaising with landlords and enabling care leavers to source their own housing.
- 2.21. The Children with Disabilities Team has now moved to the line management of Head of Service SEND and Integrated Services, located in the Education Division.
- 2.22. Quality Assurance & Practice Development
- 2.23. In terms of practice and QA, we continue to embed the practice model and strengthen the signs of safety approach. In June 2019, we refreshed the audit framework and embedded a new audit programme for all managers to

- complete. This enables us to demonstrate the strength of practice and progress made, as well as areas that require further development.
- 2.24. We now provide monthly analysis reports in respect of QA and the first practice week is planned for October 2019. The return of the Quality Assurance manager in August 2019 has strengthened this approach.
- 2.25. In terms of timeliness, there has been a very small number of ICPC's (5) when the request was received late: we have challenged this with the relevant service. However, significant progress was made in reducing the number of children subject to plans, which has led to around a 40% decrease. As part of the scrutiny and review into this area, we have investigated the reason for the decrease overall and the number of child protection enquires which led to no further action. The analysis has concluded that decision making was appropriate and the report will be shared across all senior managers shortly. From a Children Looked After perspective, we maintain reviews and meetings on time.
- 2.26. Finally, from a service perspective, the previous IRO manager left the service in July 2019 and we are currently recruiting to this post. We will at month end have a vacancy for an IRO and we are recruiting to this post too. Whilst we have one IRO on long-term sickness, the service overall has continued to strengthen and engage in discussion, challenge and ensuring children have positive outcomes. IROs have around 70 children allocated, which is a combination of children subject to a child protection plan, and Looked After children.
- 2.27. We have set out our service plan for the year ahead and the Head of Service currently oversees the administration service on an interim basis. The training and development section continues to identify bespoke and specific training across the organisation.
- 2.28. *Adolescent and Family Services*
- 2.29. The Youth Justice and Crime Prevention Plan has been completed, signed off by the Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board and sent to the Youth Justice Board. The main highlight from the Plan is that First Time Entrants have reduced further. Disproportionality for First Time Entrant outcomes is more diverse last year than the previous year with no definitive pattern in regard to those receiving a pre-court or post-court outcome for the same offence in regard to ethnicity. However, the plan includes an action to pursue the establishment of scrutiny panels to oversee proportionate outcomes. Reoffending continues to be a concern, particularly by those on court orders. The needs of those on court orders are complex and overlapping. The plan focuses on ensuring evidence led practice and refreshing Restorative Justice training.
- 2.30. *Knife Crime (Scrutiny Request)* – Merton experienced a spike in knife crime incidents in the first quarter of this year, with five s60 stop and search measures put in place by the Police. The level of violence is not as high as previous years but the Youth Justice team has experienced a rise in serious incidents involving young people open to the service. These are being reviewed by either the MSCP or internally with the aim of learning from these

and ensuring best practice is followed. The Youth Justice team is part of the Adolescent and Family Service, which has a range of services and interventions available to young people, working closely with partners and providers (such as Unique Talent) to ensure positive pathways are available to young people at risk of or involved in knife crime.

2.31. Education Division

2.32. School Improvement

2.33. In the last quarter, three Merton schools have been inspected. St Mark's and Lonesome Primary Schools retained their 'good' judgements, and Beecholme was inspected for the first time since becoming an academy and was judged to be good. The report for the SMART Centre was also published during this period, confirming that the provision remains good. Currently 95% of Merton schools are judged to be good or outstanding, with just four primary schools judged to be less than good.

2.34. Merton School Improvement Service has been supporting schools to prepare for the new Ofsted framework for inspection, which went live from the beginning of September this year. The new framework has shifted the focus of inspection to a school's curriculum which forms the basis of the new 'Quality of Education' judgement. Ofsted have said that they will continue to inspect more outstanding schools this year. These schools are exempt from routine inspection, but desk top risk assessments carried out by Ofsted (which look at performance in a range of indicators, in the context of length of time since previous inspection) identify schools where inspections may need to be carried out. The Merton School Improvement Service is supporting all schools, including those with outstanding judgements, through the Council's School Improvement Strategy.

2.35. Education Inclusion

2.36. Our Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) rates continue to be low. The My Futures Team over the summer targets young people at risk of being NEET through targeted activities which are planned and run by older young people who themselves are NEET. This summer we worked successfully with 23 young people.

2.37. The MIAS Service has continued to receive positive feedback from parents in line with the comments made about the service in the OFSTED SEND inspection outcome letter. Data from the 2018/19 school year shows that the service supported in a significant way 317 parents of children with special educational needs. The highest area of need from parents was support around the ASD diagnosis.

2.38. Merton's Youth Parliament, part of our 'My Voice' arrangements for young people's participation, won the Young Volunteer Team of the Year Award and have supported the drafting and roll out of the Children and Young People's Plan and presented a film on young people's views on crime and safety to the safer neighbourhood board.

- 2.39. The Education Welfare Service continues to support the improvement of our school attendance figures. The two terms 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. The Behaviour Support Service has seen the retirement of one of its managers after 30 years' service to Merton's schools and families. A restructure has taken place to ensure continuity of support. Raw draft figures for exclusions show an upward rise in permanent exclusions after a fall in the previous year. This will be investigated.
- 2.40. The Speech and Language Service has struggled to recruit sufficient therapists to respond to the rise in SEND issues over the last year. After significant work the team is now fully staffed for September and has seen the growth of 1fte therapists to support young people in mainstream schools.
- 2.41. The Youth Service had an excellent summer with large number of children and young people accessing Pollards Hill and Phipps Bridge youth centres and the Acacia Adventure playground. At the start of the summer we took our largest ever groups away to undertake Gold Duke of Edinburgh expeditions in Snowdonia. We have also seen a steep rise in completions of D of E over the past year. The service worked with a number of partners to enhance the offer including an excellent summer scheme project at Phipps Bridge delivered in partnership with AFC Wimbledon.

Early Years & Children Centres

- 2.42. The family support services delivered through the 0-5s Supporting Families Team, Bond Road, Transforming Families and Short breaks are currently being reviewed and consultation on a staff reorganisation is underway which proposes a single Family Wellbeing Service working in an integrated way across the age range of 0 – 25. The new service aims to provide an improved offer including:
- Easy to access single referral pathways for 0-25 Early Help and intensive family support services;
 - Outward facing information, advice and guidance for the sector to support families at Level 2 (Early Help) of the Merton Wellbeing Model (MWBM);
 - A refreshed MWBM and threshold document;
 - Redesigned suite of tools, assessment framework and guidance;
 - Improved web/electronic information;
 - Embedding the Signs of Safety/wellbeing practice model across agencies/children's workforce.
- 2.43. It is anticipated that the new service will be up and running in the new financial year, with staff office accommodation at Bond Road and Steers Mead Children's Centre.
- 2.44. Early Years Provision – Funded Places Scheme (Scrutiny Request)

- 2.45. The current take up in Summer 2019, shows a 10% increase in comparison to this time in 2018, and overall our take up level is now at 66%, which is the highest since the scheme began. Our significant activity over the previous months (as referenced in the last scrutiny report) through promotional activity and outreach led by our Childcare Engagement Team in Children's Centres has started to impact on the take up data, with many families receiving a personalised contact and follow on visit to facilitate take up in local early education provision. 440 children accessed a funded 2 year place last term, across our network of providers including nurseries, preschools, childminders and schools.
- 2.46. For 3 and 4 year olds, a total of 4495 children took up a funded 15 hour place and of these 1156 children took up the additional 15 hours provision for working families. In Merton we have 184 providers that now offer either 2, 3 and 4 year places or a combination of both, and each term we receive new requests from providers to sign up to the local register so they can offer early education places.
- 2.47. Special Educational Needs Service and EHCPs (scrutiny request)
- 2.48. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities integrated service has continued to see increased demand for statutory assessments. We currently have 1931 Education, Health and Care plans and are undertaking 163 new Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments.
- 2.49. The service is currently going through a re-organisation to reconfigure the use of current resourcing to meet the increasing demand. The SEN Team Manager has recently left and we have the opportunity to consider the management structure within the Service.
- 2.50. The increasing number of requests for statutory assessment is impacting on the capacity of partner agencies to provide professional advice within the 6 week statutory timescale which has impacted on the SEN teams 20 week timescale. We are currently at 56% of EHCPs being completed within 20 weeks.
- 2.51. The SEN case management system and EHCP Portal has been approved for procurement and should be implemented within the coming months. The Portal should improve the timeliness of professional advice that is put in the plan and therefore improve the 20 week timescale.
- 2.52. A multi-agency EHCP Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and signed up to by education, health and care colleagues. There will be a termly thematic audit of EHCPs to monitor the improvement and quality of EHCPs. These audits will explore the quality of practice, concentrating on the multi-agency footprint across the EHCP process and audit practice against agreed practice standards. The findings from the audits will directly link to the continuous professional development training schedule for staff within SENDIS, social care, education providers and health partners.
- 2.53. SEN services are delivered by various providers including primary and secondary mainstream schools and academies, mainstream special schools and academies, independent day and residential school providers as well as professional services like speech and language therapy and occupational

- therapy. These services are funded by the high needs block of the ring-fenced dedicated schools grant (DSG).
- 2.54. At the end of March 2019, Merton's DSG carried forward a cumulative deficit reserve of £2.909m. In the July financial report which went to Cabinet in September we forecast an in-year deficit of £9.183m which would result in a cumulative deficit at the end of 2019/20 of £12.092m. We expect that this will continue to rise.
- 2.55. The deficit is due to cost pressures in the high needs block resulting from the unprecedented increase in EHCPs from 1,075 in January 2016 to 1,712 in January 2019.
- 2.56. Merton submitted a deficit recovery plan to central government at the end of June. This showed that our deficit was expected to increase to £22.389m by 2021/22. Following this submission, it has become clear that EHCP numbers are increasing more than originally anticipated and we are working on updating these figures.
- 2.57. Merton has been working in conjunction with Association of Directors for Children's Services (ADCS), Society for London Treasurers (SLT), London Councils and the Children's Commissioner to lobby Central Government for additional funding in this area. All commissioned analysis shows that the funding shortfall is a national issue that requires additional grant funding.
- 2.58. Contracts and School Organisation
- 2.59. The School Admissions Team has been able to place all children who required a school place, both for this September, and through the first Hard to Place Panel in September. Despite the number of children flowing through from year 6 being stable compared to last year after the significant rise from 2017 to 2018, demand for our schools is higher and all secondary schools are full at year 7 with an additional class agreed by St. Mark's Academy to ensure there is scope to place in-year applicants.
- 2.60. Work is progressing on providing additional SEND places, with the main phase of the expansion works at Cricket Green completed on time for the September start, and a key phase for Stanford ASD additional resourced provision completing to enable the school to open and the full works to be completed for October half term. Capital maintenance works were undertaken at 25 schools over the summer holidays.
- 2.61. The service was extremely busy over the summer and into September to commission all the new taxi services that need to be in place to support children's educational placements in September. These are being commissioned on the most cost effective basis.
- 2.62. *Review of PFI Contracts (Scrutiny Request)* – Before the summer holidays work commenced by a specialist to review the effectiveness of the PFI contract, to assist us in holding the PFI contractor to account. Their stage 1 report is due shortly and we can provide more information to CYP Scrutiny at a later date, which will need to be a commercially confidential item.

2.63. Performance, Policy and Partnerships

2.64. Since the last Scrutiny meeting in June, the Performance Team has submitted the following statutory returns:

- The annual CIN Census covering Children in Need, Early Help and Child Protection
- The annual '903' return – covering children looked after and care leavers.
- The annual Fostering Return providing information of the authority's fostering service
- The annual Phonics return – measuring reading progress
- Key Stage 1 & 2 assessments providing feedback on attainment in maths, reading, writing & science.

2.65. Members of the Panel may wish to note that all returns were submitted on time.

2.66. The Policy Team has now finalised the revised Children and Young People's Plan which received sign-off at full Council on 18th September. The partnership is working to finalise an action plan and performance framework. The involvement of Merton's Young Inspectors distinguishes this piece of work from previous strategy developments. The scrutiny provided by the Young Inspectors has helped ensure the plan closely reflects the priorities articulated by Merton's children and young people.

2.67. The Policy Team is also overseeing the development of a revised SEND Strategy. An online consultation has just been completed. Together with direct engagement, the feedback from stakeholders as well as children and their families will inform the priorities of the plan. This can also be considered for pre-decision scrutiny.

2.68. The Merton Safeguarding Partnership has now replaced the Merton Safeguarding Board. This reflects statutory changes introduced by the Children & Social Work Act (2017) and incorporated into the new Working Together guidance from 2018. .

2.69. The transition process has been smooth and the team is currently overseeing the recruitment of a Young Scrutineer as well as an Independent Scrutineer in addition to the Independent Person who will chair the partnership meetings.

2.70. Joint Commissioning and Partnerships

2.71. 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.

- 2.72. 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 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (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