

Committee:

Date: 6th November 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 usually 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. However, as this meeting of CYP Scrutiny takes place just one month on from the previous meeting, there is very little fresh information to report. With this in mind, the current report departs from convention and instead is a description of the purpose and main objectives of each service area that it covers. The intention is to provide the most helpful background information about the Children, Schools and Families Directorate to assist scrutiny members in their understanding of the Directorate and therefore on where to most purposefully focus future scrutiny.
- 1.2. 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 once again accompanied by a current structure chart for the Directorate. A glossary of terms has been added to the report for background information.

2 DETAILS

2.1. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

- 2.2. The Children, Schools and Families Directorate is responsible for all statutory and some discretionary services directed at children and their families from pre-birth to at least 18 years of age. In some cases the statutory duties extend to young adults up to the age of 25. In addition, the directorate provides services to and with schools in order to support children and young people's educational outcomes.
- 2.3. Statutory Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services is published by the government.
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404442/2017-2019-childrens-services-statutory-guidance.pdf)

[s/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf](https://www.merton.gov.uk/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf)). In alignment with this guidance, over 200 statutory provisions apply to this field of work, most originating with the Department for Education, but also from DHSC, MoJ and other government departments.

- 2.4. The directorate is broadly separated into two divisions: Social Care & Youth Inclusion, and Education. In addition, there is a team of commissioners of services for children, young people and families, which sits within Public Health, but where there is matrix oversight from the Director of Children Schools and Families. The structure of these divisions and this team can be seen in the Structure Chart attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.5. Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion Division
- 2.6. Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion is divided into five service areas, each led by a Head of Service and further subdivided into separate teams, each under the leadership of a team manager. The service areas broadly correspond with the 'journey' of child, young person or family that have been the subject of a referral to the Council because someone is worried about their wellbeing. These services are: MASH & First Response, Safeguarding & Care Planning, Permanency, Looked After Children & Access to Resources, Quality Assurance & Practice Development, and Adolescent & Family Service.
- 2.7. MASH & First Response
- 2.8. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, usually referred to as the 'MASH', receives the incoming contacts and referrals to the Council's Children's Social Care function. The First Response Teams carry out an assessment on the child and family to determine what the needs, risks and issues are, whether the family needs some kind of support or intervention, and if so, what the next steps should be. First Response may carry out some preliminary support work with a family while the assessment is being undertaken, but if families need longer term support or intervention their 'case' will be transferred to the Safeguarding and Care Planning Team. More detail about the MASH can be found here on the council website: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/social-care/children-young-people-and-families/safeguarding-children/mash>
- 2.9. Outside usual office hours an Emergency Duty Team, which is a shared service, hosted by LB Sutton, receives and handles any contacts or referrals on our behalf. These are then picked up by Merton's social care service at the start of the next working day.
- 2.10. Typically, 400-600 hundred contacts are made to the MASH every month. Contacts are incoming information about a child, young person or family. This may include information about a child who is missing from home, or school or from a placement; a family where there has been a domestic abuse call-out for the police; a family with no recourse to public funds presenting to the council for assistance. As the name suggests, the MASH is made up of multi-agency partners, which include police and health representatives, as well as colleagues from Early Help, Education and other functions. These partners work together to obtain and share information about a family so that there can be a shared understanding of the needs and

risks affecting them and what the most appropriate service involvement may be.

- 2.11. Of these contacts, 150-200 every month become formal 'referrals' – where the service will undertake additional work in order to understand whether detailed further action is required. When an assessment is undertaken, there is a balance between completing the assessment speedily, so the service can respond quickly to any presenting needs, and thoroughly, so the service can have a full, holistic understanding of the child and family. The majority of assessments are completed within 45 working days. **Performance against this standard is monitored.**
- 2.12. The majority of referrals end with no further social care involvement. These may be passed to an Early Help service, or may be judged to require no further action (NFA) at all. However, roughly a quarter to a third of referrals lead to further action from children's social care.
- 2.13. Where we have reason to believe that a child may be at risk of significant harm a multi-agency 'Strategy Meeting' is held, and this is likely to be followed by a S47 enquiry, which is a form of assessment which focuses explicitly on the risk of harm to a child (rather than evaluating need). Where the S47 enquiry provides evidence that a child is at risk of significant harm, this may progress to an 'Initial Child Protection Conference' (ICPC). As risk of harm is an urgent matter, this should take place within 15 days. **Performance against this standard is monitored.**
- 2.14. Safeguarding and Care Planning
- 2.15. The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service holds the majority of open Children's Social Care cases, undertaking active work with families with children in need (CIN) or children on a child protection plan (CP). The service also works with some of the children in our care. This work is usually undertaken in partnership with colleagues from other partner organisations also working with the family, such as schools and health services. Professionals from a range of disciplines meet regularly (both with and without the family in attendance) to monitor the progress of any Child in Need or Child Protection plans that are in place.
- 2.16. At any one time there are approximately 350 children identified as a 'Child in Need' and a further 100-150 children with a Child Protection Plan.
- 2.17. Where this team identifies increasing risk of harm to a child or young person and where the strategies and plans in place are not leading to the desired progress, it may be necessary to enter into court proceedings to make sure children are safeguarded, including children coming into local authority care where necessary. However, this is a last resort and wherever possible, this service tries to ensure collaborative working with families to improve the safety and wellbeing of their children. Where we do enter into proceedings to ensure children are protected, it is expected that we will complete this work within 26 weeks, in order to provide prompt protection for the child and to meet their timescales. This is a nationally set expectation. We can make it more likely that we will meet this timescale target if we make best use of our 'pre-proceedings' process. However, there are still challenges in progressing

court work promptly, often due to lack of court time. **Performance against this standard is monitored.**

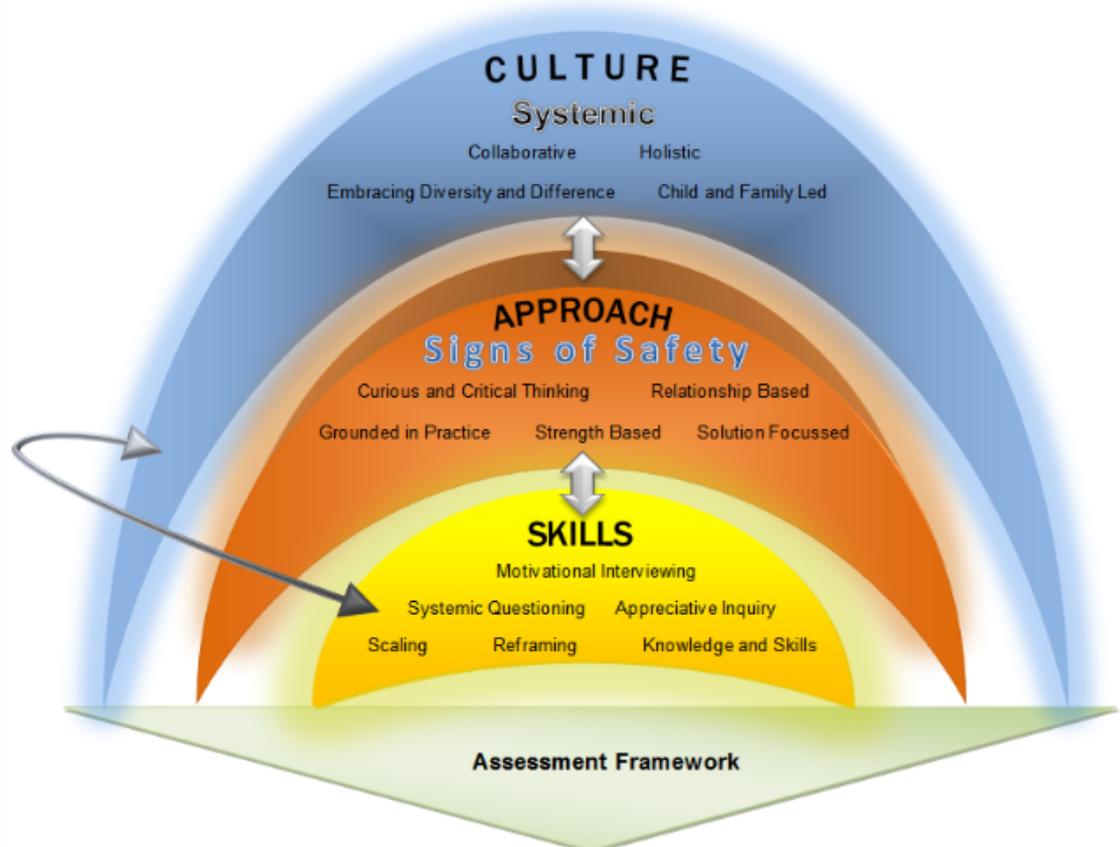
- 2.18. Children in Merton on a Child Protection Plan are most likely to be on a plan because of emotional abuse or neglect. This may often include exposure to domestic abuse, or the risks presented by parents who have unmanaged mental health issues or who are engaged in alcohol and substance misuse. Only a small proportion of children are on a child protection plan because of concern about physical or sexual abuse, although these are often the first issues people think of when they hear the words 'child protection'.
- 2.19. Work undertaken to support Children in Need may be protracted, because vulnerable families experience a series of obstacles to achieving the best environment and care for their children. For children on a Child Protection Plan, timescales are more pressing because the children are at risk of significant harm (and in many cases will already have experienced harm). We therefore monitor the length of time children remain on a child protection plan. There are currently no child protection plans that have been in place for longer than two years, and we will strive to reduce this further. At the same time, we have to ensure that children are not removed from a child protection plan prematurely, when they have not yet been effectively safeguarded. For this reason, we monitor if children return to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Usually between 12% and 20% of children will appropriately need to return to a child protection plan when they have been on a plan previously.
- 2.20. Children in Need and children on a Child Protection plan must be regularly visited by their social worker to assess whether their needs have changed and to ensure that they are safe. Social workers are expected to make time to see children alone as part of these visits. Children in Need should be seen every four weeks by their social worker and children on a Child Protection plan should be seen every fortnight (as a minimum). Child protection plans must also be regularly reviewed within agreed timescales. **Performance against these standards is monitored.**
- 2.21. *Permanence, Looked After Children and Access to Resources Team*
- 2.22. This service has overarching responsibility for ensuring that the children in the care of this local authority, and those who have recently left Merton's care are properly looked after and supported into adult life. Although some of our looked after children are supported by the Safeguarding and Care Planning service, children in long term care with Merton Council have a social worker within this service. Care experienced young adults (Care Leavers) have a Personal Assistant within the 14+ and Care Leavers Team which is part of the Adolescent and Family Service (see below). The service also includes the teams with responsibility for recruiting and supporting foster carers and the team which commissions those care placements that are not with Merton in-house foster carers.
- 2.23. The service used to cover adoption too, but the full function of the Adoption Team has now transferred to Adopt London South (1 September 2019). The number of children adopted from care is very low. This is in part because the number of children in care overall is low, and the majority of them are from older age groups for whom adoption is less likely to be an appropriate

decision. Low numbers of adoptions also reflect Merton's practice of seeking to return children home wherever it is safe to do so, or to place them with members of their extended family where possible. Merton has had no adoptions yet this financial year.

- 2.24. There are around 160 children looked after by Merton Council at any time, of which 30+ are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Some children are looked after by this local authority with the consent of their parents under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. These placements may be referred to as S20 placements. Other children are in our care on a care order, following care proceedings.
- 2.25. Although the service works hard to maximise the number of children who are in in-house foster care, it is still the case that fewer than half of our looked after children are in in-house foster placements. Work continues in this service to try to increase the number of foster carers recruited and to improve retention rates by providing foster carers with high quality supervision, support and training. Generally, the children in our care are stable in their homes, having fewer moves and staying longer in any placement than the national benchmark. **Performance against this indicator is monitored, including at Corporate Parenting Board.** The number of children placed in residential care, rather than a family-based placement is very low; usually fewer than 10 at any one time.
- 2.26. Looked after children should be visited by their social worker regularly, every six weeks. They should also have their care plan, their Personal Education Plan (or 'PEP') and their Health Care Plan reviewed and updated regularly too. **Performance against these standards is monitored, including at Corporate Parenting Board.**
- 2.27. Quality Assurance & Practice Development
- 2.28. This service incorporates several functions which help to ensure the quality of our social work practice. These are Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) / Child Protection (CP) Conference Chairs; the professional development and practice team, leading social work training for the directorate; the QA Manager, with responsibility for our audit programme and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The service also temporarily holds line management responsibility for the division's Business Support Teams.
- 2.29. In Merton the same staff act as CP Conference Chairs and IROs. CP Conference Chairs hold professional responsibility for drawing together all the multi-agency partners participating in a child's child protection plan, for ensuring that the plan is reviewed and updated and making progress to secure the child's safety and wellbeing, and for escalating into care proceedings or stepping down to 'child in need' status (or off a plan altogether) as appropriate. Child Protection Plans have to be reviewed regularly.
- 2.30. IRO's have to be outside the immediate line management of the social worker working with a child in care. They have oversight of the child's care plan and are empowered to act on the child's behalf in challenging the local authority if they consider there is 'drift' in the plan. Both Child Protection

Plans and Care Plans have to be reviewed regularly. **Performance against these standards is monitored.**

The Quality Assurance Manager leads Merton’s audit programme, with a focus on identifying good practice and areas for development in the quality of our social work. A recent ‘Practice Week’ that extended across all areas of the directorate further strengthens and supports this approach which is underpinned by Merton’s Practice Model for Social Work (Fig 1).



(Fig 1)

- 2.31. The LADO is a specialist role responsible for managing allegations against those working with children. If an allegation is made against anyone working with children and young people in Merton, their employer – if they establish there is some potential foundation to the allegation – has a duty to report the allegation to the LADO. Details about the LADO process can be found here: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/social-care/children-young-people-and-families/safeguarding-children/the-lado-process> The LADO provides independent advice, guidance and help to employers and ensures that allegations are appropriately referred to police and social workers.
- 2.32. Adolescent and Family Services
- 2.33. This service comprises the Youth Justice Team, Transforming Families, the Tackling Exploitation Team, 14+ and Care Leavers Team. It's also the location within Children, Schools and Families for the leadership of our Multi Agency Risk Vulnerability and Exploitation Panel (MARVE), Youth Justice,

Contextual Safeguarding and Care Leaver strategies and the key point of contact between the Children, Schools and Families directorate with MOPAC, MHCLG and the Home Office.

- 2.34. The Youth Justice Team is a multi-agency service with case practitioners and specialist practitioners, many of whom are from partner agencies. The team has a statutory requirement for a multi-agency partnership board, chaired by the Director of Children, Schools and Families and known in Merton as the Youth Crime and Prevention Executive Board (YCPEB). This meets quarterly and takes responsibility for the management, oversight and strategic direction of Youth Justice and Prevention services, including the staffing arrangements, resourcing and delivery of services.
- 2.35. The team has two dedicated police officers, qualified social workers, a seconded officer from the national probation service, an education officer, a CAMHS psychologist, a nurse, a speech and language therapist and benefits from a parenting officer, full-time reparation officer, seconded Substance Misuse worker and extended provision through the Liaison and Diversion service (CAMHS, SaLT and counselling).
- 2.36. First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System have reduced over recent years, and this team's objective is to continue to keep these numbers low. Another objective is to reduce the rate of proven re-offending among those young people open to the service. **Performance against these standards is monitored, including at YCPEB.**
- 2.37. Merton's Transforming Families team is the local response to the national Troubled Families programme. The team comprises family practitioners and a gangs worker, prevention parenting worker and mentoring service. The funding for this service is scheduled to end in March 2020, and although MHCLG has indicated that there will be a further year of funding of some kind, no confirmation has been received of the sums or duration of such funding. Meanwhile, the funding deadline, Maturity Self-Assessment and subsequent Action Plan have fed into the decision to consult on a move toward an integrated Early Help structure and referral process for those aged 0-25 across the Department, which seeks to maintain a sustainable level of appropriate early help support for adolescents and their families even if the grant is not renewed. (The Transforming Families Team was the subject of a full paper to last month's CYP Scrutiny).
- 2.38. There are more than 250 care leavers open to the Care Leavers' Service. We are in touch with over 200 of them.
- 2.39. Where we are in touch with Care Leavers, we continue to provide support to them up to the age of 25 to help them transition to adulthood. Our 'Local Offer for Care Leavers' covers education, training and employment, health and wellbeing, housing, money and finances, relationships and taking part in society:
<https://directories.merton.gov.uk/kb5/merton/directory/youth.page?youthchannel=6> For individual care leavers, this is all managed through the development, review and updating of a 'Pathway Plan'. Care Leavers should be in suitable accommodation and in education, employment or training. **Performance against these standards is monitored, including at Corporate Parenting Board.**

- 2.40. *Knife Crime (Scrutiny Request)*
- 2.41. No update since last month.
- 2.42. Education Division
- 2.43. Many local authorities no longer provide significant support for schools, because central government policy has progressively loosened ties between schools and the local authority through the development of the academies and free schools programme. Nevertheless, there continue to be a range of statutory duties which still apply to the local authority in the domain of education, and in Merton we have continued to provide support in discretionary areas, often on a traded basis.
- 2.44. The Education Division is divided into six service areas, each led by a Head of Service and further subdivided into separate teams, each under the leadership of a team manager. The service areas are: School Improvement, Education Inclusion, Early Years & Children's Centres, Special Educational Needs & Children with Disabilities, Contracts & School Organisation, and Performance, Policy & Partnerships.
- 2.45. School Improvement
- 2.46. The Merton School Improvement Service supports all Merton maintained schools, through the Council's School Improvement Strategy, and supports those academies in the borough that buy in the service. The success of the school improvement service is reflected in the high quality of Merton schools, of which 94+% are good or outstanding and in the levels of attainment and progress of Merton's pupils at every key stage. A challenge for the service and for Merton's schools generally is closing the gap in outcomes between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.
- 2.47. The effectiveness of Merton's service and strategy is monitored through the School Standards Panel and the production of an annual report, Celebrating Success:
<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s27174/Standards%20Report%202018.pdf> This report, which is reviewed by CYP Scrutiny, summarises pupils' academic performance at every key stage and also documents levels of attendance, absences, exclusions (both permanent and fixed term), elective home education and children missing education.
- 2.48. School Improvement work is increasingly school-led and provided on a school-to-school basis. To that end, Merton has established a local School Improvement Partnership, Attain: <https://merton-attain.net/>
- 2.49. Through the Governor Services Team, the service provides advice and guidance to school governors, head teachers and clerks to governors of schools and academies to support them in their professional role and to ensure governors operate within the regulations and in line with best practice. The service provides the information governors need, in a variety of ways, including through regular training and the provision of 'model' paperwork, and good practice guides.
- 2.50. The 'Virtual School' is also part of this service. This is not a physical school which children and young people attend, but rather a service that has formal

oversight of the educational support for looked after children and care leavers. The Virtual Head Teacher leads the service, which is provided by advisory teachers and other staff, drawing on the wider specialisms of the directorate as a whole.

- 2.51. The virtual school seeks to develop an in depth understanding of each looked after child's educational needs and challenges, and then works to secure the best possible educational provision to meet those needs. The Virtual School is responsible for coordinating, chairing and processing Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings, and working with partners to develop their understanding of the many ways looked after children may be prevented from achieving their full potential, including training schools about attachment issues or the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The Virtual School also tracks and monitors the use of the Pupil Premium + for looked after children.
- 2.52. **Performance of the Virtual School is monitored, including at Corporate Parenting Board.**
- 2.53. This service also incorporates Schools' ICT, which assists school to manage their management information systems, including SIMS and the London Grid for Learning. The team is highly expert and provides advice and training on everything from online safety to data protection and can support schools in their inspection preparation.
- 2.54. Education Inclusion
- 2.55. The Education Inclusion Service comprises the Education Welfare Service, the Virtual Behaviour Service, My Futures, Youth Services, Youth Participation, Merton Information Advice and Support Services and the Language and Learning Team. The service also holds the Education lead for CAMHS, Safer Schools, children missing education and 'Raising the Participation Age' (keeping young people in education, employment or training. This is a diverse service incorporating both statutory and non-statutory functions. It undertakes targeted work, in particular supporting young people who may struggle to thrive in mainstream school.
- 2.56. The Education Welfare Service monitors school attendance and takes action where children and young people's absences exceed 'persistent absence' levels (if 10% or more sessions are missed). The service also monitors rates of exclusion, both permanent and fixed term, and (in collaboration with the Virtual Behaviour Service – see below) works with children, young people, families and schools to ensure that absences and exclusions are reduced as far as possible. **Performance against these standards is monitored.** The service follows up on referrals from all partners about children who may be missing from education or failing to attend regularly. It also makes checks on children in employment, particularly those who may be involved in the entertainment industry, ensuring both that they are participating in education and that they are not being exploited by their employers. The service provides advice and support to families who choose to educate their children outside the school system (known as Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) or 'home education) and makes checks to ensure that education is to acceptable standard.

- 2.57. Although the initial response to attendance issues is likely to be the provision of advice and support to families, where necessary, the service will issue a School Attendance Order where children are not receiving an appropriate education.
- 2.58. The Virtual Behaviour Service works to promote inclusion of young people who may be struggling in mainstream school and particularly where that manifests itself in challenging behaviour. Solutions may involve 1:1 work, or work at a whole class or whole school level, including supporting the development of Nurture Groups. The service provides training, develops policy and shares good practice. It supports Merton's anti-bullying strategies.
- 2.59. The My Futures Team helps young people to find suitable employment with training, to ensure that they are not 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training). Over the summer the team focuses provision on young people at risk of being 'NEET', through a range of targeted activities which are planned and run by older young people who themselves are or have been 'NEET'.
- 2.60. In common with many local authorities, Merton has seen the funding available for Youth Services diminish over the years and work in this area has had to become increasingly targeted to more vulnerable young people. We have retained two Merton-run youth centres, funded by local housing associations as a partnership arrangement. These are in Pollards Hill and Phipps Bridge and offer a range of activities including cooking, arts, crafts, music and sport. In addition, the service runs the Acacia Adventure Playground in Mitcham. It also runs the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme on behalf of the majority of the borough's schools. Much of this work is delivered in partnership with other local private and voluntary sector providers, including e.g. local football clubs.



Acacia Adventure Playground

- 2.61. Merton's Children, Schools and Families directorate strongly prioritises hearing directly from children and young people to help us design, commission and deliver children's services. We also promote the idea that our children and young people are entitled to be heard as young residents in their own right and therefore seek to improve their involvement in service design across the council and with our partner organisations. This work is led by our Youth Participation Service, known as 'My Voice'. The work of this service includes Merton's Youth Parliament, an annually elected body of young people which has its own priorities for action each year, and which is part of the broader 'My Voice' arrangements for young people's participation. These broader arrangements include Area Youth Forums and employed Young Advisors, Young Inspectors and Young Commissioners. Young Advisors may help to "youth proof" a service to make it more young person friendly or may help services to understand the issues important to young people and deliver training to professionals about this.
- 2.62. The MIAS Service is for the families of children and young people in Merton who have a special educational need or disability and includes advisers for under-16s and post-16s. It provides impartial advice and guidance to parents and carers and directly to young people about the identification of special educational needs and how to secure additional support through Education Health and Care Plans. Ordinarily a family's first point of contact would be their child's school, specifically the child's class teacher or the school's 'Senco', but where additional support or specialist advice is required, this service can provide it, and it is line managed independently from our SEN and Disability services.
- 2.63. The Language and Learning / Speech and Language Service is a team of speech and language therapists, working directly with children and families and in collaboration with schools and with the Youth Justice Team to identify and help to meet children's educational speech and language needs. Language and learning difficulties have a knock on impact on many areas of children and young people's lives and specialist support is often required to help them to meet their full potential.

Early Years & Children Centres

- 2.64. The Early Years and Children's Centres Service incorporates a range of services, largely focused on families who have children in the age range 0-5. Much of this work is delivered on a multi-agency basis in partnership with health services, in particular Midwifery, Health Visiting and the Family Nurse Partnership. Teams include: Supporting Families (the 0-5 Enhanced Service), SEN Inclusion and Portage, Children's Centres and the Family Information Service and the SEND Local Offer. The service also runs a Day Nursery (Lavender Day Nursery) and Brightwell short breaks facility. It leads on the sufficiency of funded nursery places and the take up of those places by low income families. The service also leads on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) quality standards and workforce and practice development. More recently the service has taken over the running of the Bond Road Family Centre and the Supervised Contact Service, both of which extend the remit of this service beyond 0-5 years and into all ages.

- 2.65. Based at Steers Mead Children's Centre, the 0-5 Supporting Families Team is part of Merton's Early Help offer. The team delivers support and services for children under 5 years old and their families in the area where they live. The service operates on a referral basis, with referrals directed to them via the MASH. Following a referral, a lead professional will meet and work together with a family, brokering or providing them with a package of support that may include help with a variety of different needs including housing, benefits, access to free childcare, training, health services, etc.
- 2.66. The service makes use of tools such as the Home Inventory and the Family Activity and Family Daily Hassles scoring sheets to determine what the most appropriate work is to undertake with the family. For 'multi-stressed' families who have children with severe conduct problems, the 'Helping Families Programme' is in use within the service to help tackle these issues. Other evidence-based parenting programmes in use within the service include: Incredible Years (baby, toddler, pre-school and ASD/Language Delay).
- 2.67. Portage is a service for Merton children with additional needs aged from birth to three and their parents. Parents can refer their child(ren) directly to the service, and referrals are also made by midwifery and health visiting services or by children's centre staff. There is both a 1:1 service, designed around a child's individual needs and put in place to support cognitive, physical, communication, social and self-help skills development and also Portage Support Groups which bring these children and their parents/carers together to help them develop their socialisation and prepare the child(ren) for nursery.
- 2.68. Merton Children's Centres offer a range of services to families from pregnancy through to the end of a child's first year in school. There are currently nine children's centres located across the borough. These are: Abbey, Acacia, The Avenue, The Bridge, Church Road, Ivy Gardens, Steers Mead, Lower Morden and Newminster.
- 2.69. The Centres have a range of opening hours and scheduled activities, from just one or two days per week, at The Bridge and Lower Morden respectively, through to a full five day programme at many other centres, which also offer personal appointments for antenatal, midwifery and child health services and advice with weaning.
- 2.70. There are 'Drop Ins' for the Family Information Service Hubs and the Portage, Young Parents and Early Learning Together groups (the last, by invitation) and bookable Early Learning Together and Incredibly Years programmes. Detailed information is available on the Merton website: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/childrens-centres>
- 2.71. Merton Family Information Service runs the Family Services Directory (<https://directories.merton.gov.uk/kb5/merton/directory/family.page?familychannel=0>) and the SEND Local Offer (<https://directories.merton.gov.uk/kb5/merton/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>) sites.
- 2.72. Brightwell is a Specialist Out of School Provision. It is purpose-built, with specialist facilities and offers respite and short breaks for children aged 1-18

with complex needs who have a learning disability and / or physical disability.

- 2.73. Lavender Nursery is a fully equipped, purpose-built childcare facility in Mitcham for 2,3 and 4 year olds, with step-free access to a sensory room, garden and outdoor play space. Although Lavender Day Nursery is the only council run nursery provision in the borough, the service also has responsibility for ensuring there are sufficient private, independent and voluntary sector nursery places to meet the childcare needs of families in the borough and for promoting funded childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and all 3 and 4 year olds.

2.74. Early Years Provision – Funded Places Scheme (Scrutiny Request)

- 2.75. No update since last month.

- 2.76. Bond Road Family Centre offers family and parenting support to families with children aged 5-16. The team works with families who may have issues ranging from mental illness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, challenges managing children's behaviour or implementing routines and boundaries, issues with housing and homelessness. Both 1:1 work and group work is offered. This is part of Merton's Early Help offer and the service is one of the services which currently forms part of the Early Help redesign consultation. The Supervised Contact Service also operates out of Bond Road. Where it is safe for children in Merton's care to have ongoing contact with their parents or other family members, contact supervisors in this service will oversee that contact, either at the Bond Road Centre itself, or at other appropriate locations in the borough.

2.77. Special Educational Needs Service

- 2.78. This service includes the Special Educational Needs Team, the Education Health and Care Health Team and the Assessment Resource and Planning Team; a Short Breaks service, the Educational Psychology Service and the Sensory Service. More recently the specialist social work team for children with disabilities has been incorporated into this service.
- 2.79. The SEN Team coordinates the assessment of education, health and care needs in situations where a child's needs exceed the level that can be met through School Support and the child therefore needs an Education Health and Care Plan to ensure the commissioning of appropriate specialist provision. There are now almost 2,000 Merton children with an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 2.80. Assessments are usually undertaken after prior work has been done to seek to support the child and families appropriately within universal provision such as an early years setting or mainstream school. The Children and Families Act 2014, which led to the introduction of EHCPs envisaged a more holistic assessment of children, involving education, health and social care partners. The Health and Care Health Team ensures that there is direct professional health expertise within the service, in addition to the work that it carries out in partnership with health commissioners and providers outside the service.

- 2.81. When the assessment is complete, the local authority is responsible for commissioning the education and social care provision required in the plan, and the CCG has responsibility for commissioning the healthcare provision. In fact, because Merton has a Joint Commissioning Team which brings together Children, Schools and Families, Public Health and CCG commissioners of services for children, it is often possible to commission provision in an integrated way.
- 2.82. Once an EHCP is in place it must be reviewed every year. The SEN Team can delegate the running of the review to the early years setting, school or college that is supporting the child (or to any other appropriate provider) but remains responsible to ensuring that the review takes place and meets the requirements of the SEN code of practice. The recent Ofsted inspection of the local area's effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and / or disabilities identified many strengths in Merton, especially in relation to the identification of special educational needs and also children's outcomes. However, an area that was found to be weak was the quality of Education Health and Care Plans, and in particular the health input to those plans. As a result, a Written Statement of Action has been required from the council and the CCG, and the collaborative strategic oversight of this area of work is being strengthened.
- 2.83. *EHCPs (scrutiny request)*
- 2.84. Update since last month: As at end September 2019 there are now 1941 young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). There are over 150 more assessments currently in progress. We are currently at 56% of EHCPs being completed within 20 weeks.
- 2.85. As at the end of September 2019, we forecast an in-year deficit in the DSG, largely attributable to overspends in the 'High Needs Block' of £9.584m. We expect that this will continue to rise.
- 2.86. The Merton Educational Psychology Service provides Educational Psychology input to Education Health and Care Plans to identify children and young people's educational needs and to plan appropriate provision that meets those needs. The service works with Merton schools, liaising through the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and directly with families. The service identifies and addresses issues around child development and attachment, attention and concentration problems, emotional wellbeing and mental health issues, speech, language and communication development, autistic spectrum conditions, physical and sensory development, and other domains. Among the team's specialist skills is working with Video Interaction Guidance, which uses micro-analysis of video clips of parent-child interactions to help improve parents' relationships with their children.
- 2.87. The Merton Sensory Team is a team of specialist teachers that works with children and young people who have a hearing or visual impairment or a multi-sensory impairment and who have been referred to the team (usually by a medical professional) following their diagnosis. The team collaborates with schools and other settings that are accessed by the children and young

people to try to remove barriers to their independence and to achieving their full potential.

- 2.88. The Children with Disabilities (Social Work) Team is a team of specialist social workers that works with the children and young people in Merton with the most complex disabilities, including learning disabilities, physical or sensory impairments and mental health conditions, and their families. The team carries out social care assessments and carers' assessments. It can provide direct support in the family home, personal care and behaviour support and commissions short breaks, including overnight care where appropriate. The Team can also arrange a personal budget for eligible families so that they can make their own support arrangements. The team works closely with the adult social care team to support young people's transition to adulthood and – where eligible – to adult social services.
- 2.89. *Contracts and School Organisation*
- 2.90. This service is responsible for managing the Council's PFI contract, for four of the borough's secondary schools. It also commissions and manages the contracts for school meals, school cleaning and other outsourced services. The service commissions home to school transport for children with special educational needs, which includes bus routes as well as taxi services for small groups or individual children.
- 2.91. The service operates the council's School Admissions function, which includes an annual requirement to operate the admissions for primary and secondary schools across the borough at the start of each school year, as well as responding to in-year requests for a school place. The annual admissions round operates to a statutory cycle, with all primary and secondary places across the country offered on the same date to ensure fair process. This involves considerable coordination of information to parents and a high volume application processing activity, covering thousands of applications for places in both primary and secondary phases.
- 2.92. In order to be able to admit Merton children and young people to our schools, we need sufficient school places to accommodate Merton applicants. This service undertakes the school places planning function. This involves monitoring population growth and movement, as well as the way parental preferences are expressed for different schools (including in neighbouring boroughs and the independent sector) and determining whether additional school places are required, or even a new school. The service has been responsible in recent years for a significant expansion of places in our primary schools, and also for working with DfE and ESFA's free schools and academies programme to secure the opening of a new secondary academy in the borough.
- 2.93. Following the primary expansion, numbers in this age group are tailing off. The increase is working its way through to the secondary phase and is accommodated in existing secondary schools and the new academy. Now the pressure is largely on numbers in need of special education places. Currently too many children with special educational needs are having to be educated outside the borough and in the independent sector.

2.94. The school place planning function works collaboratively with the council's capital strategy and programme to deliver new school places through new build and expansion projects. The capital strategy also includes the building maintenance of the schools' estate.

2.95. *Review of PFI Contracts (Scrutiny Request)*

2.96. No update since last month.

2.97. *Performance, Policy and Partnerships*

2.98. The Performance, Policy and Partnerships Team is located within the Education division, but carries out work on behalf of the whole Children, Schools and Families directorate. This service leads on service planning, ensuring that each division and every service submits an annual business plan for its priority work that is consistent with the directorate's overarching 'Target Operating Model' (TOM). This service also produces the majority of the management information and performance reporting to enable the directorate to understand its business. This includes monthly reporting to the Directorate Management Team across both Children's Social Care and Education divisions, quarterly reporting to CMT and the regular performance updates to this Scrutiny Panel. The service is also responsible for a series of statutory returns to central government, again, across both divisions in the directorate.

2.99. The PPP service is responsible for administering the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Merton's Children's Trust and leads on Strategy and Policy Development, such as the Children and Young People's Plan and the SEND Strategy.

2.100. *Joint Commissioning and Partnerships*

2.101. This is an integrated service, bringing together CCG, Public Health and Children, Schools and Families commissioning functions. A high priority for this service is the recommissioning of our community health provision which is timetabled for April 2021.

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. Statutory Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children’s Services:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

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