

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL 14TH JANUARY 2014

7.15PM – 9:16PM

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors James Holmes, Agatha Akyigyina, Peter McCabe (substitute for Laxmi Attawar), Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Oonagh Moulton, Linda Taylor, Peter Walker
Co-opted members –Peter Connellan, Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children’s Services), Councillor Mark Allison (Cabinet Member for Finance) and Councillor Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education)
Paul Angeli (Head of Children’s Social Care), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Yvette Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Kaye Eilbert, (Director of Public Health Merton), Julia Groom, (Consultant in Public Health), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ray Tindle and Councillor Laxmi Attawar.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2013

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

The order of the agenda was changed to the following:

1. Apologies for absence
2. Declarations of interest
3. Matters arising
4. Minutes of meeting held on 6 November 2013
5. Business Plan 2014-2018
6. Children’s Health Services

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7. Children and Families Bill
8. Transforming Families programme update
9. CSF Update Report
10. Performance Report
11. Work programme 2013/14

RESOLVED: Panel agreed to re-order the agenda.

5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2014-2018

Caroline Holland introduced the report and highlighted that there were no new savings being brought forward for 2014 but that in future years, despite the savings proposed, there was a £2 million shortfall. The Capital Programme was dominated by primary and secondary school expansion. A briefing note, as requested by the O&S Commission on the funding of free schools was also included in the report.

Councillor Hanna proposed that the budget be scrutinised in the following order:

- Overall process; Savings proposed together with Equality Impact Assessments;
- Capital Programme; and
- Service Plans

Panel agreed.

Overall process:

Councillor Linda Taylor requested clarification on what third party payments were. Caroline Holland informed the Panel that they related to contract payments to providers.

Councillor James Holmes asked about the process for determining the savings proposed. Yvette Stanley outlined the process by which each department is responsible for an identified savings target and the process they undertake to identify potential savings within that service. The larger areas of expenditure are looked at which cover SEN Transport, and social care placements. The CSF department have undergone a transformation programme and have tried to identify savings where possible which align with our transformation approach. Given much of what we do is statutory and heavily regulated we have had to focus savings on areas where there is higher amounts of general fund spend and where the statutory requirements still give some scope for savings. Areas where there may be some scope for savings are:

- Youth services (via our commissioning approach);
- Early years;
- School improvement

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Councillor Iain Dysart asked if the basic need capital maintenance grant amount had been determined as yet. Paul Ballatt confirmed that this figure had not been received as yet.

Proposed savings:

CSFO1 – Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that this saving was phased over 3 years and services would increasingly be targeted at those most in need. Services to children's centres would also be differentiated which may result in a reduced offer in certain areas in the borough. The Early Years savings will retain certain services, for example, safeguarding, and will place expectations on settings to self serve more for the rest. Support for example on statutory and data returns will be reduced for settings. The provision of free training will also be withdrawn and will be on a cost recovery basis. Paul Ballatt added that these were indicative examples of where some of the savings could be made. More specific proposals would be drawn up closer to the time.

Yvette Stanley highlighted that this saving would not impact on maintaining direct provision for the most vulnerable children and that the council are committed to keeping children's centres open.

Councillor Iain Dysart asked about the fluctuation in the savings over the three years. In addition, Councillor Iain Dysart added that he was pleased to hear that children's centres would stay open. Yvette Stanley confirmed that the fluctuation would be addressed when proposals for savings year on year were firmed up. The council will remain focused on supporting vulnerable children whilst trying to set a balanced budget.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina added that it is a difficult task to find savings in these service areas and that the children's centres were important and should remain open.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton enquired about the 10 redundancies indicated. Yvette Stanley explained that an equalities impact assessment had been undertaken and was included in the report. The majority of the redundancies would be in central functions. There would also be scope to increase income from training. Consultation would need to be undertaken in due course.

Councillor Iain Dysart stated that he would not support this saving in its current form. Cllr James Holmes added that he could not support Councillor Iain Dysart's comments in this instance.

CSF02 – Paul Ballatt informed the Panel that this saving related to reduced school improvement capacity. This saving would result from the reduction of one school improvement advisor or alternatively the service would look at increasing income generation, with the possibility of a mix of both approaches. The school improvement service has become more targeted and risk based. The department are using data and intelligence to identify schools that need help. This does mean that remaining staff will have to cover increased targeting work in a smarter way.

Councillor James Holmes asked what work had been done to look at outsourcing or of the council offering a service to generate income. Yvette Stanley confirmed that other agencies offer this provision. The department currently sells services to other boroughs.

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Specialist provision is brought in when required for our schools. The council also works with the south west London consortium and has reciprocal arrangements with other boroughs. Intelligence suggests that other boroughs have struggled to do this.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton expressed concerns about the saving reducing the good provision currently offered, which is well regarded and suggested that the department look at further options for income generation.

CSF03 – Councillor Jeff Hanna expressed concerns that this saving wasn't specific enough and that the Panel would like to see a more detailed proposal in due course.

Equality Impact Assessments –

Noted.

Capital Programme –

Councillor Jeff Hanna noted that a more detailed breakdown on a school by school basis where details are known in future would be useful.

Service Plans –

Noted.

RESOLVED:

With regard to the proposed savings, the Panel agreed that the following resolutions be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for consideration:

Proposed saving CSFO1 (Early Years) - Whilst some reservations were expressed regarding the impact of the savings, Panel did not wish to reject the proposed savings, in the light of the overall budget pressure.

Proposed saving CSFO2 (School Improvement) - Whilst reluctantly accepting the proposed saving, Panel expressed some concern regarding the potentially negative impact a reduction in resources might have upon the service, and also recommended that further work be undertaken to consider offering the council's school improvement services on a commercial basis as a potential income stream for the authority.

Proposed saving CSFO3 (All Divisions): This saving related to making further reductions in staffing across CSF, without specifying the nature of the posts involved. Panel felt unable to scrutinise the proposal. Panel agreed neither to accept nor reject the proposal but asked that further detail be brought back for scrutiny in due course and before the proposal is agreed.

Capital Programme: The Panel noted the Capital Programme having previously undertaken in depth scrutiny of the councils school expansion programme.

MEETING ADJOURNED FOR 5 MINUTE BREAK. 8:15PM

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MEETING RE-OPENED AT 8:20PM

6 CHILDRENS HEALTH SERVICES

Julia Groom introduced the report outlining that responsibility for public health functions had been taken on by the Council from 1st April 2013 and that a new Director of Public Health was in place to oversee this service. The service will seek to address some of the social determinants of health. Work has been undertaken in the following areas:

- Early years;
- Children centres;
- Breastfeeding rates;
- Childhood immunisations;
- Healthy weight services; and
- School Nurses

Strategies regarding teenage pregnancy and substance misuse and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment are also being refreshed.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina enquired about the council's plans for school nurses and what work was being done to encourage exercise to tackle obesity in children and young people. Julia Groom confirmed that a number of programmes are in operation aimed at encouraging exercise. There is also work beginning with two clusters in Mitcham and East Mitcham to promote healthy diet and exercise. Schools also promote physical activity.

Kaye Eilbert added that she is the lead for London Directors of Public Health on the school nursing programme and that specific standards are being developed to measure success. A local review is already underway in Merton to benchmark the service and once the national standards are agreed (expected April 2014) these will be reflected upon and further benchmarking undertaken. An additional £30,000 has been placed into the school nurse budget but it is unlikely that school nurses would be placed back in schools full time. This is not negative as all schools meet standards required by the Healthy Schools London programme at present.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked about immunisation and incentives for Doctors to encourage take up. Julia Groom advised that a team of nurses is sent to schools to encourage take up, this is not done through Doctors and incentives.

Councillor Peter McCabe asked about the council's approach to tackling smoking. Kay Eilbert explained that there was a lack of focus on prevention in this strategy which needed to be addressed locally; this could include activities with organisations that would go into schools and talk to children about not taking up smoking.

Councillor Peter Walker noted that the number of fast food restaurants in the borough was an issue in seeking to address obesity. Kay Eilbert informed the Panel that we need to be careful in this area because, whilst we need to encourage healthier food choices, we also

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need to be mindful that these are peoples businesses. There is a London wide checklist that aims to improve the quality of what fast food restaurants offer.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked about immunisation rates for 10-16 year olds. Julia Groom explained that there was a catch up campaign with 10-16 year olds over the summer period and that data is still being collected on this. This data can be shared once available. Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked for this data to be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

Kay Eilbert explained that the public health function is not responsible of vaccinations locally. They are the responsibility of the NHS. Health Scrutiny is looking at the way this is delivered. Julia Groom added that there have been improvements in quarter one in this area.

Councillor Jeff Hanna proposed that public health be considered as part of the Panels topic selection process for the 2014/15 work programme.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and agreed to consider if they wished to scrutinise specific areas of the health services as part of their 2014/15 work programme at the topic selection workshops.

7 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BILL

Yvette Stanley introduced the report and explained that planning would need to take place alongside presenting needs. Information on funding had not been shared as yet for delivery of the proposed changes within the Bill.

Councillor Peter Walker added that we should be lobbying local parliamentary representatives on this Bill and ensure that they make clear, the need to allocate funding for delivery of the proposed changes to services within the Bill. Yvette Stanley confirmed that the council was in discussion with representatives at regional levels.

Councillor Peter Walker proposed that the council write to local MP's to say that we welcome the transfer of powers but that sufficient funding is required for delivery. This letter should be copied to all Members of the council.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report. Panel agreed that the CSF department should write this letter on their behalf and asked Directors to lobby professional representative organisations on this.

8 TRANSFORMING FAMILIES PROGRAMME UPDATE

Paul Angeli introduced the report and informed the Panel that the programme had been working with 60 families to date. A number of children's social care and child protection cases also require intervention through this programme. Progress with this cohort is reported back to the DCLG and improvements against the troubled families' criteria have been made. A Business Analyst has been engaged in the programme to identify the 300 families the programme will assist.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked how the programme compares with other boroughs.

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Paul Angeli explained that there is no formal national benchmarking data.

Councillor Iain Dysart asked about the high levels of unemployment in these families and what was being done to address this and how success could be measured within the programme. Paul Angeli explained that capacity within the team to work more broadly to try and support families back into employment was limited. A target of 12 families per year had been set in terms of getting people back into employment. On a national scale, the transforming families programme has found this the hardest area to address. Measures are used such as 12 week work placements to try and increase chances of securing employment.

Peter Connellan asked who was responsible for housing troubled families and if some of our troubled families lived in other boroughs. Paul Angeli informed the Panel that none of the families were living in other boroughs and that Merton was responsible for ensuring these families were housed. Moving families into a new area can have difficulties and benefits.

Councillor James Holmes asked if poor attendance of children in families identified for the programme was an issue. Paul Angeli explained that attendance was a challenge for children in the programme.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked if the high number of cases in the Phipps Bridge area was impacting on addressing need across the borough and how these cases were assessed as being in greater need, and how the panel could tell if progress in general was good, bad or average. Paul Angeli explained that the programme must focus on the highest level of need. Merton has been commended on its approach to tackling complex cases. He also explained that Merton had been tackling some of the more 'difficult' cases, and had been commended for its approach and level of success. Councillor Jeff Hanna commended officers for the work undertaken.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report, and endorsed the commendation of officers for the work undertaken.

9 CSF UPDATE REPORT

Paul Ballatt introduced the report and informed the Panel about the status of Garden School which was progressing towards becoming an academy.

Councillor Peter Walker asked if warning could be given about schools under notice and ensure that scrutiny plays a role in reviewing school standards information at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina expressed her concerns about areas which were underperforming.

Paul Angeli informed the Panel that with regard to percentage of single assessments

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completed within 45 days, that the overall figure for the year will be closer to 80% and that the department expect to see on-going improvements.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

11 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: Panel noted the work programme.