

## **Committee:**

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

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

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## **Recommendations:**

- A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report and identify any areas for more in-depth scrutiny.
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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. It focusses on those aspects of particular relevance to the department and those where the panel expressed an interest in receiving regular updates.
- 1.2. 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*).

## **2 DETAILS**

### **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES**

- 2.1. Since the last CYP Scrutiny in November, a range of key multi-agency meetings have taken place, namely the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Exec Board, the Children's Trust Board and the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 2.2. Among other agenda items at the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership, we considered plans for the partnership's Annual Conference. Early Help is one of the Safeguarding Partnership's Business Plan priorities, and given the recent re-organisation of Merton Council's own early help services into the Family Wellbeing Service, which launches next month, we are now keen to broaden the early help discussion to involve the wider partnership.

- 2.3. We've had some challenges in progressing the priorities of the Children's Trust Board. After some great work to develop the Children and Young People's Plan last year, the implementation plan to support it has had a slower start.
- 2.4. Nevertheless we were able to review some of the actions taken to date under two of our priorities: 'Enjoying and Achieving' and 'Getting Involved; Having A Say'. We will continue to review two of the six priorities at each quarterly meeting of the Children's Trust Board, and will have a full annual review of all six priorities at the final meeting of the year. We are expecting the work to start to pick up speed now we've had our first meeting in the new format.
- 2.5. At the Corporate Parenting Board we heard from two young people who shared their experiences at the start of the meeting. This helped to focus the Board's attention on what really matters to young people in our care. The Children, Schools and Families Directorate is wholeheartedly committed to increasing children, young people and families' voice in everything we do; and we have agreed four recommendations which will help to build the relationship between the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children in Care Council, including an 'Away' session together, and – with effect from August 2020 – the Children in Care Council's workplan becoming a standing item on the Corporate Parenting Board agenda.
- 2.6. In other news, in early January we received the welcome confirmation that Ofsted accepted our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) in response to last summer's SEND inspection. This will guide many of our service improvements over the coming 18 months until Ofsted return to satisfy themselves that we've made enough progress. As we take this work forward we will be supported by both the Department of Education and NHS England. Our first progress meeting with them is scheduled for 12 February 2020.
- 2.7. In terms key Starters and Leavers in the directorate, we welcome David Michael and Joanne Brown as new Heads of Service in the Children's Social Care division. David joins us from Lambeth, to lead the services for looked after children and brings with him a wealth of experience and passion. Joanne joins us from outside the local government sector to lead our improvement work and service support. Paul Bailey, who was the long-standing manager for Merton's Safeguarding Children Board and Partnership has left us to join Surrey. In his place we are joined by Joanna Georgiades. Who immediately picked up the work on the recruitment for an Independent Person and Independent Scrutineer for the partnership's work.

### **Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion Division**

#### **MASH & First Response**

- 2.8. Since the last scrutiny update, the First Response Team has lost two Team Managers. One to a higher paying local authority and the second to a Principal Social Worker post in another local authority. We have successfully permanently recruited to one post and the second post is currently filled by a permanent manager from the Safeguarding service.

- 2.9. In addition, our MASH Team Manager will be leaving in March having spent the last seven years in this role in various local authorities. She is now looking for a new challenge and will be a loss to Merton. We have successfully recruited a permanent manager to this post, who will join us shortly. This has ensured that we retain a permanent management team
- 2.10. With regards to social workers we continue to experience a level of instability. There are seven agency social workers across the MASH and First Response Team. We have a rolling advert for permanent social workers and continue to endeavour to recruit permanently to all posts.
- 2.11. Due to a quiet Christmas period we have enjoyed caseloads of 12-15 which are now starting to slowly rise again.
- 2.12. Our monthly performance data is positive with 93% of assessments being completed on time for the months of October-December 2019 and 95% of children being seen alone as part of the assessment process. The 5% not seen are our pre-birth assessments (for unborn babies). Despite some challenges in relation to resources, morale in the service continues to be good.

#### Safeguarding and Care Planning

- 2.13. In November 2019, one team manager and four social workers from Safeguarding and Care Planning Service moved to First Response on a temporary basis. This was to support First Response teams to meet high service demands. This has affected stability in the team, and has resulted in an increase in case load across the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service. The average case load is now 16 children per social worker which is an increase of 23% over a few months.
- 2.14. The Safeguarding and Care Planning Team is currently seeking to recruit 9 permanent social workers.
- 2.15. Number of children subject to Child Protection plans and Child in Need plans have remained stable for several months. Cases in care proceedings have increased slightly over the last few months.
- 2.16. There continues to be good feedback from the courts and CAFCASS. CAFCASS praised Merton for '*being responsive and having good care plans*'.

#### Permanency, Looked After Children and Access to Resources Team

- 2.17. The new permanent Head of Service for Children in Care and Resources, David Michael, began on 06/01/2020. The interim line management arrangements until the upcoming service transformation is that David will be responsible for the Children in Care/Permanence team, fostering services including special guardianship and connected persons assessments, Access to Resources. The 14+/Care leaver Team is currently under the leadership of the Head of Adolescent and Family Services.
- 2.18. With the regionalisation of the adoption service to Adopt London South, there have been some teething issues around roles and responsibility of key tasks – such as subject access requests and administration tasks, and, health partners sharing of information which may impact on the adoption

timescales of individual children. However, processes have been agreed, and are now bedding in.

- 2.19. One of the areas we will be focussing on is the use of semi-independent accommodation. This will include identifying more creative ways of finding better quality provision for young people in our care within existing financial envelopes. Our focus on this area reflects increasing levels of national coverage and interest.
- 2.20. The new HoS will take the lead on the fostering 'Mockingbird' project with the goal of soon being in a position to identify foster carers to the project. Lunch and learn sessions are currently being rolled out to promote Mockingbird across children's social care. Over November and December, 4 new foster carers were presented at the fostering panel and recommended for approval. SGO assessment training was commissioned and delivered. A fostering conference has been arranged for 5 March 2020.
- 2.21. The Children in Care/Permanence team has experienced considerable churn at both manager and social worker level but has now settled down with the appointment of a permanent Team Manager (started 01/12/2019). There are still social work vacancies which we are hoping to fill.

#### Quality Assurance & Practice Development

- 2.22. We have refreshed the audit framework and embedded a new audit programme for all managers to complete with a strong focus on collaborative and strengths-based approaches to auditing. We have strengthened and rolled out the use of monthly moderation and dip sample of audits by heads of service. This is increasingly allowing us to base training delivery on focused areas identified in our audits.
- 2.23. Our first 'practice week' took place in October 2019, and the second practice week took place from 3-7 February. The introduction of practice weeks not only allows us to identify strong practice, but importantly allows leaders from across education and social care to observe practice from across the directorate.
- 2.24. Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) timeliness is a strength in Merton. Only a very small number of ICPC's were delayed as a result of delays in receiving the request. The number of children subject to child protection plans has remained lower than at the beginning of the financial year.
- 2.25. As a service, we are under strength in terms of being able to support and resource development across children's social care. We are seeking to recruit two QA auditors/practice managers to support and strengthen practice across services. In addition, we are seeking to recruit signs of safety practice leads that will support and strengthen practice across services and we need to recruit to the QA fostering panel manager post on a permanent basis.
- 2.26. A new IRO manager joined us on the 2/1/2020.

### 14+ and Care Leavers

- 2.27. The service is currently under interim service management following the departure of a Head of Service and realignment of teams in Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion. The workers have been engaged in discussions about the vision to increase the number of Personal Advisors delivering services to Care Leavers, which is also linked to a savings target. The engagement of young people in the consultation period is being sought with the support of the Participation Team and Children in Care Council.
- 2.28. The 14+ Team are currently delivering a Home Office funded project for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, who make up the majority of looked after children in the team and a large proportion of Care Leavers. The team hold a regular coffee evening to engage young people in accessing support and information. The team also continue to deliver independence skills workshops to support young people preparing for adulthood.

### Adolescent and Family Services

- 2.29. The Youth Justice Team is preparing for Inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) which we are expecting at some point this year. This will involve an inspection of the governance and leadership, Court work and Pre-Court work. The team has been involved in Peer Reviews, external audits, visioning events with the Executive board and a self-evaluation of the newly updated National Standards. The board has been invited to join the team for the next Practice Week in early February to observe practice and confirm the findings of the self-evaluation. The team has received training in Restorative Practice to support all workers to provide a restorative practice focus for young people and victims.
- 2.30. The Tackling Exploitation Team continue to deliver services to vulnerable adolescents as per the Multiagency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation (MARVE) protocol. The Protocol has been reviewed and presented to Promote and Protect Young People (a sub-group for the MSCP). The Serious Youth Violence and Gangs worker from Transforming Families Team will be joining the Tackling Exploitation Team from February.
- 2.31. Both the Youth Justice and Exploitation teams have recently seen a worker leave to join the Step-Up to Social Work programme. These two posts are currently being held while savings proposals are being prepared.

### *Knife Crime (Scrutiny request)*

- 2.32. The Service is also delivering aspects of the Early Intervention Youth Fund from the Home Office, which includes community engagement, contextual safeguarding and detached youth work. This has seen a rise in engagement and a reduction in knife crime incidents involving youth in the hot-spot areas targeted. The funding will end in March 2020. The service is working closely with Safer Merton to consider ongoing avenues of delivery.
- 2.33. The Multiagency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation (MARVE) panel reviews incidents each month and considers both individuals and broader contexts of harm for tasking. The co-chairs (Head of AFS and DCI Safeguarding Police)

report to the MSCP sub-group "Promote and Protect Young People", where data sets in regard to knife crime involving youth are also reviewed.

## **Education Division**

### **School Improvement**

- 2.34. The new Ofsted framework for inspection was introduced in September 2019. Since then, six schools have been inspected in Merton, representing the full range of inspection options open to schools:
- All Saints and Aragon were both inspected under Section 8 (previously known as 'short inspections'). All Saints maintained its 'good' judgement. Aragon's report has yet to be published.
  - Malmesbury was inspected under Section 5 (a full inspection) and maintained its 'good' judgement.
  - Singlegate, which has an 'outstanding' judgement, received what is called a monitoring inspection under Section 8. This inspection found many continued and significant strengths in the school, and so it has maintained its 'outstanding' judgement.
  - Bishop Gilpin, which also has an 'outstanding' judgement, received a subject focused inspection. Only 100 schools nationally are being inspected using this framework nationally; the inspection does not result in either the confirmation of or a change of an Ofsted judgement, and focuses on the curriculum in one particular subject (in this case Modern Foreign Languages).
  - Benedict received a monitoring inspection because it is currently judged to be inadequate (in special measures). This inspection identified that leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures; the Trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose; and the school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose. Benedict, as an academy, is currently part of the Chapel Street Community Schools Trust. As a result of the Ofsted inspection outcome earlier in 2019 (when Benedict was judged to require special measures), the Regional School's Commissioner is now working to secure an alternative Trust to lead and manage the school.
- 2.35. Merton School Improvement Service continues to support schools to prepare for inspection under the new Ofsted framework. In particular, work over the next two months will focus on supporting schools with 'outstanding' judgements because the government have announced they intend to no longer exempt outstanding schools from routine inspection. They are currently consulting on this proposal and we expect this to become law from September 2020. This support will take the form of school reviews, led by the schools' partnership, ATTAIN.
- 2.36. ATTAIN continues to focus on common improvement priorities for Merton schools. In addition to providing reviews for schools expecting inspection,

these priorities include foci on: improving outcomes for pupils with SEND; financial stability for schools; foundation subject curriculum leadership; improving 6<sup>th</sup> form outcomes; and improving outcomes in primary phase reading and writing.

### Education Inclusion

- 2.37. Our Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) rates continue to be low. The My Futures Team over the autumn tracks young people to ensure that NEET levels remain low and then key work young people with high needs. We have supported a number of young people who are on youth offending orders into employment through our assisted employment scheme with local employers. We have also had success in supporting some young people with special needs into good destinations. Going into December we had slightly higher NEET than last year of 17 year olds and we will be working to bring this down.
- 2.38. The MIAS Service has continued to support parents and receive positive feedback. The service is moving forward with developments supported by a grant from Council for Disabled Children including a new data base, funding for a Post 16 worker and re-establishing the parent led MIASS steering group.
- 2.39. Merton's participation service has had a busy autumn. The young inspectors have been working with the Children's Trust and looking at health services' quality assurance. The participation service has taken over the running of the Children in Care Council and is re-establishing that group. Young advisors worked very hard as part of the recommissioning of the risk and resilience service – including visiting potential providers and participating in the evaluation. They brought insight that was an essential part of the decision making process.
- 2.40. 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. They have also been working with Ofsted to challenge an Illegal School running in another borough.
- 2.41. The Behaviour Support Service has restructured and has appointed new staff. These staff have had the challenge of taking over from staff who have worked in Merton for over 30 years and so we have been careful to establish and clarify ways of working. The team has continued to support schools where children have social, emotional and mental health needs. The team has been working with the Merton CCG and Child and Adolescent Mental Health service to establish a new regular network for school leads on mental health. We have discussed the rise in Permanent exclusions with secondary heads and we have agreed a deep dive into case files.
- 2.42. The Speech and Language Service recruited more therapists to respond to the rise in SEND issues over the last year. The team are facing a significant work load of assessments, buy back of SEN assessments and provision of therapy. The managers have been working on ways to refine the assessment process and proposing ways forward to meet demand.

2.43. The Youth Service had an excellent autumn with large number of children and young people accessing Pollards Hill and Phipps Bridge youth centres and the Acacia Adventure playground. At the end of term, we celebrated with the young people through a range of parties, events and visits. The service continues to work with a large number of volunteers and partners who deserve thanks for the contribution that they make to the lives of Merton's young people. Of particular note was the celebration of achievement at Pollards Hill youth club just before Christmas that was attended by the Director of Children Services, other officers and community members. Striking was the number of young people currently at university who came back to the club to support the younger children. They were an inspiration and excellent role models

*Early Years, Family Wellbeing and Early Help*

2.44. The existing family support services delivered through the 0-5s Supporting Families Team, Bond Road Family Services, Transforming Families and Short Breaks have been reviewed and a service re-organisation has now concluded. The new, all-age (0 – 25) family support service went live on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, with ongoing development and service improvement until the formal launch in September 2020.

*Early Years Provision – Funded Places Scheme (Scrutiny Request)*

2.45. Each year the LA publish the statutory Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, which provides information about the take up of the funded places scheme. The most recent assessment can be found here: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/childcare/mertons-childcare-sufficiency-assessment>

2.46. We know that other local authorities (who are statistical neighbours) achieve a higher take up than Merton. A key focus for the service has therefore been to increase the take-up of free early education for eligible 2 years olds in Merton, living in households that are eligible for certain benefits or are Looked after by the local authority. Our local strategies/action to improve take up include a range of actions, such as:

- through the Children's Centre services, assertive outreach to families where known to be eligible,
- partnership working with health visitors, social workers and voluntary sector to promote the offer and encourage take up,
- childcare care brokerage service for families that guides them in the process of sourcing a provider and borough-wide promotion ie JC Decaux boards.

*Special Educational Needs Service and EHCPs (scrutiny request)*

2.47. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities integrated service has continued to see increased demand for statutory assessments. Currently, we have 1930 Education, Health and Care plans and are undertaking 190 new Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments.

2.48. This is a reduction from 2087 at the end of December and is due to the Local Authority ceasing to maintain plans for children who no longer need special



educational need provision. This is a significant development following a prolonged period of increase.

- 2.49. The service re-organisation will be completed by the end of March. This will add increased management capacity to better manage and increase the quality of the work undertaken by the SEN Team. There will be a particular focus on annual review processes.
- 2.50. Despite the decrease in the number of plans maintained, the high number of live assessments still impacts on the capacity of partner agencies to provide professional advice within the 6-week statutory timescale (currently at about 50% compliance). This, in turn, impacts on the SEN team's 20-week timescale to issue a plan.
- 2.51. In order to address the delays in receiving professional advice, the HoS has been working with partner agencies to pilot templates for professional advice. This will streamline the way in which partner agencies provide their advice.
- 2.52. Since the last scrutiny meeting, we received the welcome news that Ofsted has accepted our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) in response to last summer's SEND inspection. This will guide many of our service improvements over the coming 18 months until Ofsted return to satisfy themselves that we've made enough progress. As we take this work forward we'll be supported by both the Department of Education and NHS England.
- 2.53. The SEN case management system and EHCP Portal has now been procured, and we are working on data migration and implementation. The introduction of the EHCP Portal should improve the timeliness of professional advice that is put in the plan and therefore improve the 20-week timescale.
- 2.54. The SEND strategy has now been finalised and is due for publication shortly. The strategy has been co-developed by children and their families, as well as our partner agencies. It is supported by an agreed action plan.

#### Contracts and School Organisation

- 2.55. **School admissions for September 2020 entry** – Schools Admissions offer day is 2 March 2020 for secondary school applications and 16 April 2020 for primary school applications. The October census showed there to be only 30 Year 7 vacancies this year. Demand is expected to remain at relatively similar levels for the next 3 years. We expect to ensure that there will be a secondary school place for everyone that needs it again for this September without further expansion, though again with few spare places. Primary school resident applications are slightly down this year.
- 2.56. **Harris Academy Wimbledon** – The school has filled to its capacity for Years 7 and 8 in line with the increase in demand in Merton for secondary school places. It is also expected to fill for this September. At this stage the school roll will be too large for its temporary site in Whatley Avenue so the new school site in South Wimbledon needs to be completed for September. The council's role in this development was to ensure a clear site, and the construction scheme is being managed by the Education and Funding Agency. As can be seen from the public highway, rapid progress is being made for the 5-storey school to be completed to this timetable.

- 2.57. **Additional SEND places** – Following completion of construction works in late October the ASD additional resourced provision at Stanford Primary School is open, and the final phase of the Cricket Green expansion is due to be completed in early March. We are currently at the early design stages in expanding Melrose School to include primary school provision, alongside other projects that can be announced in due course.
- 2.58. **Review of PFI Contracts (Scrutiny Request)** – In June, work commenced by a specialist to review the effectiveness of the four school PFI contract, to assist us in holding the PFI contractor to account. Their stage 1 report demonstrated that there were issues that led the council, following a workshop with the PFI schools, to commission a more detailed stage 2. This includes undertaking specialist condition surveys over the February half term period. We can provide more information to CYP Scrutiny at a later date, which will need to be a commercially confidential item.
- 2.59. Performance, Policy and Partnerships
- 2.60. Since the last Scrutiny meeting, the Performance team has submitted the following statutory data returns:
- The autumn school census
  - The School Workforce Census
  - The annual School Attendance Report; and
  - The Children’s Social Care Workforce Census
- 2.61. Members of the Panel may wish to note that all returns were submitted on time despite experiencing a short period of considerable capacity pressures.
- 2.62. The Policy Team continues to support the Children’s Trust Board, and has introduced an accountability framework which will enable partners to both monitor progress against the action plan as well as ensure children and young people are involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of agreed actions.
- 2.63. As part of the introduction of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership, governance arrangements were changed to include the roles of an independent chair, independent scrutineer as well as a young scrutineer. Interviews for these posts have recently taken place.
- 2.64. Merton’s Safeguarding Children Partnership has considered savings plans for the next financial year. The existing in-house training offer will be replaced by a commissioned service. Whilst reducing our training offer (but remaining compliant with statutory minimum standards), this option offers agility as well as releasing the necessary savings.
- Joint Commissioning and Partnerships
- 2.65. The Children’s Commissioning Team is experiencing some staffing changes. The long-standing Head of Service will be retiring shortly. In addition, an experienced Commissioning Manager will be leaving. As a result, the council’s Public Health Team in partnership with CSF is looking at reviewing the team’s structure and make-up.

- 2.66. Notwithstanding these imminent changes, some important pieces of work have been delivered since the last scrutiny meeting in October. The service continues to prioritise the integration of Children, Schools and Families' commissioning with Public Health and the CCG. This is currently particularly focussed 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.
- 2.67. The re-procurement of the Risk and Resilience Service is in the final stages. This service spans a range of service areas, including responses to substance misuse, 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 procurement exercise benefitted from the advice of a team of Young Commissioners throughout the procurement process ensuring the voice of Merton's young people was incorporated within decision-making.

### **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.
- Children, Schools and Families Glossary.

### **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. None

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