

Committee:

Date: 11th March 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

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department, since the panel's last meeting and not covered elsewhere on the agenda. 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*). Because only a month has elapsed since the last departmental update, only those service areas where there has been significant change have provided an update this time.

2 DETAILS

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

- 2.1. It is only a month since the last Departmental Update was issued, so the level of change across the Directorate is relatively modest.
- 2.2. Early in February, we held our second 'Practice Week'. (The first was in October last year). During practice week, Heads of Service and other senior leaders spent time with all the various services across the directorate, completing a range of pieces of work, from audit and practice observations to team health checks. These are now being collated to support our ongoing self-evaluation and practice development.
- 2.3. Also in February, the council's Family Wellbeing Service went live. The Family Wellbeing Service is our all ages (0-25) family support, parenting, short breaks and supervised contact provision. Teams from the existing 0-5s

Strengthening Families Team, Bond Road Family Centre, Transforming Families and Short Breaks have now become one team, working across the age range to a whole family approach, which aims to prevent escalation of need, working with families and their networks within their local communities.

- 2.4. In due course the new service will be mainly based at the former family centre on Bond Road (with the exception of the parenting service which will remain at the purpose built space at Steers Mead), though Bond Road is currently being refurbished with teams temporarily based at Steers Mead and the Civic Centre.
- 2.5. Since the last Scrutiny Panel, the Director attended Mitcham Town Community Trust Staff Conference delivering a workshop on the 'Start Well' theme, covering the Health and Wellbeing Board's Strategy, the Merton Health and Care Together Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan and the SEND Strategy. This provided an opportunity for school staff in Mitcham to reflect on the challenge of 'bridging the gap' and securing better outcomes for children and young people in this area, which currently has poorer outcomes than more affluent parts of the borough.
- 2.6. Having successfully appointed to the two crucial roles in our Safeguarding Partnership of Independent Person and Independent Scrutineer, the partnership was pleased to welcome the Independent Person, Guy Collings, to the February meeting of the Safeguarding Partnership. Guy is a retired Police Commander and knows Merton well having spent most of his career working for the Metropolitan Police in South West London. At the same meeting we said goodbye to our outgoing Independent Chair, Keith Makin.

Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion Division

MASH & First Response

- 2.7. No update provided this time.

Safeguarding and Care Planning

- 2.8. In terms of leavers and starters, the service welcomes William Bennett into the service as a team manager for Team 1. William joins Safeguarding and Care Planning from Merton Children with a Disability Team on a 6 month secondment. Trish O'Rorke left the service to join Croydon CSC. We have also welcomed two new agency social workers into team 1. Linda Goodhew, who is currently seconded into Head of Service for S & CP Service on a 12 month interim basis, will be leaving Merton at beginning of July 2020 as Joanne Forster returns from her maternity leave. This means that management oversight remains seamless. Recruitment for Linda Goodhew's substantive post as a team manager has commenced.
- 2.9. Recruitment for permanent social workers continues. We have successfully appointed one permanent social worker who is relocating from Cambridgeshire. The service has 29 social work positions and only 4 positions are covered by agency staff although there are 3 agency social workers being funded by S&CP service but they are based in First Response due to their staff shortage after the summer 2020. It is hoped that over the next three months, we will be able to fill all positions with permanent social workers by continuing a rolling ad for permanent social workers

- 2.10. S&CP service has completed court proceedings on two long-standing court cases. One case was completed at week 52 (one child) and the second case, which involved four children, was completed at week 34. Both these cases were completed beyond the recommended 26 week timescales and the delay was due to court availability as well as late challenge by a father around the care plan.
- 2.11. Average case load is around 15 children and stable. S&CP service is supporting about 180 children with CIN plans, 100 children with a child protection plan and 35 Looked after children. There is capacity to accept children into the service and be able to respond to the demands at the front door.
- 2.12. There are 8 children currently looked after under s20 open to S&CP Service. They have a clear care plan and 5 of the children under s20 are overseen by the court.

Permanency, Looked After Children and Access to Resources Team

- 2.13. No update provided this time.

Quality Assurance & Practice Development

- 2.14. The refreshed audit framework and monthly auditing continues to gain strength. A strong focus on a collaborative and strengths-based approaches alongside the programme of moderation from Heads of Service means we have a stronger understanding of what we do well and what we could do better. Interlinked with our training and development programme it will enable us to focus and plan the delivery of specific training and the wider development programme. Taken together, this will help to evidence what difference we make for children, young people and their families to strengthen the outcomes we want to achieve.
- 2.15. From June 2019 onwards, we have a suite of monthly audit reports that focus on key themes and actions required to develop practice further. Overview reports from the last six months and specific deep dives or thematic audits enable us to explore a range of practice areas. We now have an audit programme for the year ahead to explore areas that are more specific and with information shared across all services to strengthen practice.
- 2.16. Following the first 'practice week' in October 2019, the second was undertaken this month (3/2/2020). It enabled education and social care leaders to observe practice from across the directorate. We are producing summary reports and sharing these across the services to develop a shared understanding of our ambitions, strengths and the development needed.
- 2.17. The number of children or young people subject to Child Protection plans (CPP) has decreased further since the last report (January 2020). Whereas children or young people looked after (CLA) has a slight increase linked the number of unaccompanied children - UASC.
- 2.18. Timeliness of reviews for children subject to child protection plans and those children in our care remains strong. Although a small number of ICPC's were delayed (7), the reasons for delay for one sibling group (4) was linked to a

transfer in conference when another LA failed to attend and provide documents. For three young people, the request was received late (at 13 days) after initial investigations highlighted additional concerns.

- 2.19. In conjunction with other services and managers, QAPD and IRO's refreshed and implemented stronger monitoring processes to prevent drift and delay. Appreciative enquiries have been used for some children. This has strengthened the learning and provided clear outcomes the practitioners involved with children and young people want to achieve.
- 2.20. Whilst we are seeking to recruit a QA Fostering Panel manager on a permanent basis, we have made strong progress on the review and development of the fostering panel and strengthening support for our foster carers. In respect of staff recruitment and retention, when an experienced IRO left the service last month, we were able to recruit an experienced practitioner to join the service. Over the last month, we recruited a Practice Assessment manager to support our students and newly qualified social workers. However, we have been unable to recruit additional and experienced auditors or a Signs of Safety practice lead to join the service. Both of these roles are important as they support and strengthen practice across services, learning and the outcomes we want to achieve for young people.
- 2.21. For training and development, we have identified a replacement Signs of Safety consultant. Training pathways and plans are being updated. These will identify and plan not only general training pathways and those linked to cooperate with the MSCP, but also identify specific and bespoke training. Since January 2020, a Merton 'Continuous Practice Improvement (CPD) has been in place and we have moved from I-Trent in terms of recording and staff booking onto training. However, staff sign-up to the platform has been slow.
- 2.22. In relation to LADO, we have a strong and robust system of tracking and recording allegations. There is cross agency training and information sharing where appropriate, a strong integration between MASH and front line services. More recently, a follow up audit and dip sample was undertaken with the LADO. Whilst this this identified strengths in recording and practice, it also identified areas to develop when embedding the practice model across some of the records.
- 2.23. As a service, QAPD has continued to develop and strengthen its integration with development of practice and the communication links. We have utilised data reporting in and continue to develop systems and process to ensure the child's or young person voice is at the centre of intervention. Audits into areas such as plans and the child's voice have been explored alongside the collaboration and co-production of these with parents and families. We are proactive in external events such as teaching partnerships, Domestic homicide review, and Partnership Learning reviews with MSCP and CDOP. We recognise our strengths, but also areas we want to and need to develop further.

14+ and Care Leavers

2.24. No update provided this time.

Adolescent and Family Services

2.25. No update provided this time.

Education Division

School Improvement

2.26. No update provided this time.

Education Inclusion

2.27. The Speech and Language Service recruited more therapists to respond to the rise in SEND issues over the last year and the expansion of provision with the new ASD base at Stanford Schools.

2.28. The Youth Service has started the new year as it ended the last with lots of engagement at all sites. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme has seen a further increase in enrolments. Young people undertaking the duke of Edinburgh Award in Merton contributed 10,800 hours of voluntary time over 2019.

Early Years, Family Wellbeing and Early Help

2.29. No update provided this time.

Early Years Provision – Funded Places Scheme (Scrutiny Request)

2.30. No update provided this time.

Special Educational Needs Service and EHCPs (scrutiny request)

2.31. No update provided this time.

Contracts and School Organisation

2.32. **School admissions for September 2020 entry** – Schools Admissions offer day was 2 March 2020 for secondary school applications. After the unprecedented increase in applications for September 2019, demand for places remained just as high this year but the council was able to offer a place to all residents. As always, there will be a lot of movement after offer day to a second round of offers just before Easter, and through to September

2.33. The percentage of applicants getting preference places improved this year: 94.20% received a preference offer (up from 92.84% last year). 87.52% received an offer of one of their top 3 preferences (up from 85.54% last year).

2.34. A press release has been issued reminding parents to respond to their offer by 16 March and that our School Admissions website gives further details to parents in different circumstances on what to do next.

Performance, Policy and Partnerships

- 2.35. The Merton Safeguarding Partnership held a meeting of the full partnership at which the second half was a workshop on Neglect and the use of the Neglect Tool. The intention of this workshop was to assess the viability of using the tool more broadly across the partnership (it is currently being well used in schools). We'll be taking the outputs of that workshop as the starting point for the next phase of our work on Neglect, which remains a significant factor for children and families with a social work intervention.

Joint Commissioning and Partnerships

- 2.36. The Children's Integrated Commissioning Team is experiencing some staffing changes. The long-standing Head of Service will be retiring at the end of March. In addition, an experienced Commissioning Manager left at the end of January. As a result, a consultation on a restructure has been completed and agreed across the council's Public Health Team and CSF and changes will be implemented by April 2020.
- 2.37. The contract for delivery of the Risk and Resilience Service has now been awarded to the successful bidder (Catch 22) and dates for mobilisation meetings have been agreed. This revised service covers a range of service areas, integrating: Substance Misuse, Sexual Health and Stop Smoking promotion, Missing from Home and/or Care and Exploitation interventions; all achieved through a combination of detached youth work and direct interventions and group work. 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
- Glossary

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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