

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 11 March 2020

Wards: All wards

Subject: Annual Corporate Parenting Board Report

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

Lead members: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cabinet Member for Children Services

Contact officer: El Mayhew, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion

Recommendations:

- A. Members of the panel note the contents of the Corporate Parenting Board Report and discuss performance.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Corporate Parenting Board report sets out an annual update on the corporate parenting arrangements in Merton, focusing on activity and performance between April 2018 and March 2019. It advises members on key legislation and guidance alongside key performance indicators for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The report was authorised by the Corporate Parenting Board on 23 January 2020.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 As at 31 March 2019 there were 157 Children looked after in Merton which represents a 1.9% increase from 2018 (154 children). In England and Wales there were 78,150 Children looked after as at March 2019, an increase of 3.6% from 2018 (75,420). In addition, Merton had 166 young people aged 18-25 years accessing leaving care services, making Merton a corporate parent to over 320 vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.2 Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This is a shared responsibility for the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is:
 - a) To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of children looked after and care leavers;
 - b) To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Merton is serving its looked after population through the provision of services and targeted initiatives;

- c) To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children and young people's life chances;
 - d) To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet and gain the views of stakeholders, especially listening to the views of children and young people looked after and members of the Children in Care Council;
 - e) To monitor and review progress on the delivery of 'The Pledge' to children looked after and care leavers
 - f) To ensure that decisive action taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people.
- 2.3 To deliver this council wide ownership, the Corporate Parenting Board meets 4 times a year and is chaired by the Chief Executive, London Borough Merton. The Board is comprised of senior officers and managers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our corporate parenting priorities.
- 2.4 During the performance year 2018 / 2019 the Board considered reports on topics including:
- Educational progress of Children looked after
 - Health outcomes of children looked after
 - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
 - Placement Stability
 - Voice of the child and care leaver / participation
 - Children Looked After Placement Sufficiency
 - CAMHS
 - Trends in the care population
 - Adoption
 - Number of cases in proceedings and outcomes
 - Independent Reviewing Service, impact and outcomes
- 2.5 Highlights from the Corporate Parenting Board Annual report are:
- 2.6 We continue to have a population of children looked after that has a high proportion of adolescent young people. The report sets out that whilst a high number of these are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, factors such as housing and anti-social behaviour are also impacting on the number of adolescents in our care.
- 2.7 There has been a decrease in the number of new admissions into care, however the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older children looked after aged 16 years and over.
- 2.8 Merton has seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Black' and 'White' ethnicity categories and an increase in mixed heritage and any other ethnic background groups.
- 2.9 Children being accommodated due to a disability has decreased, whilst there has been a small increase in children being accommodated due to parental disability or illness.

- 2.10 The number of children entering Merton's care decreased for the third successive year. There were 73 admissions, a 16% decrease on 2017/18. Of those entering care 47% were aged over 16, compared to 20% nationally, and 37% pan London. Unaccompanied asylum seekers accounted for 35% of all new starters, and all but one of these unaccompanied asylum seeking young people were aged 16 plus.
- 2.11 Of those in care on 31 March there was little variance in the number subject to a care order (a one child decrease to 97) or those accommodated under Section 20 (a one child decrease to 48).
- 2.12 The average duration for a child in care proceedings rose by 4 weeks to 35 weeks, with 34% of proceedings completing within 26 weeks, down from 48% in 2017/18.
- 2.13 The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) Service has now been decommissioned following a review of cost effectiveness and impact. There are 3 families that are currently in active FDAC proceedings and 3 families in pre-proceedings under FDAC.
- 2.14 There has been ongoing positive use of staying put arrangements. This increases the young person's stability and security and supports them through the transition to adulthood. Foster carers providing staying put are permitted to continue fostering but most are unable to accept new foster children due to lack of an additional bedroom . In 2018 -19, 7 young people leaving care entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements. If we include care leavers aged 19 plus, there were 17 'staying put' arrangements recorded during the year.
- 2.15 There has been a small rise in use of agency foster carers compared to the previous year. This relates to the increased number of older teenagers being accommodated. A targeted recruitment drive has been implemented to address the changing needs of the Children Looked After population.
- 2.16 Information from our case management system suggests placement stability as at 31 March 2019 Merton was 2% above the national figure at 71%. Merton's reported performance improved by 40% in 2015 and the rate has remained within the 68% - 71% range for the past four years. However, we are currently treating these figures cautiously as issues with the quality of this data and recording practices have recently come to our attention.
- 2.17 Adoption performance continues to be a strength in terms of clear planning and management oversight of cases. We will need to adjust parts of our service and some of our processes next year as we transfer our Adoption Team and most of their functions to the South London Regional Adoption Agency.
- 2.18 The CSC CAMH Team is embedded in the service and continues to offer an excellent service to children, young people, carers and practitioners. The contract for this provision ends in the summer of 2020. A review will be required to inform the future arrangements.
- 2.19 Good progress has been made to ensure that the voice of care experienced children and young people is heard, with the outcome of the 'Bright Spots'

consultation being used to update our Pledges and to inform the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategies.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.5. No specific implications for this report

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.5. No specific implications for this report

5 TIMETABLE

5.5. No specific implications for this report

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.5. No specific implications for this report

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.5. No specific implications for this report

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.5. No specific implications for this report

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.5. No specific implications for this report

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.5. No specific implications for this report

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.5. None