

Agenda Item 3

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 27 APRIL 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.40 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Brenda Fraser (in the Chair),
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Nick Draper,
Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Russell Makin,
Councillor Dennis Pearce, Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stringer (Cabinet Member, for Children and Education)

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Head of School Improvement), El Mayhew (Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Jane McSherry (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Karl Mittelstadt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships), Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion) and Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There are no declarations of pecuniary interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

A panel member highlighted the incorrect spelling of Covid on page three of the minutes. The remainder of the minute was agreed as a true and accurate record.

4 COVID-19 UPDATE - PRESENTATION TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of her presentation and highlighted that:

Covid infection rates have fallen

There are on-going concerns around the possibility of new variants emerging

A panel member asked if self-isolation is having a positive impact on reducing the spread of Covid. The Director of Public Health said surveys have highlighted that compliance with self-isolation is known to be the weakest link in the chain, we need

to ensure local communities are aware that the council is able to support self-isolation.

A panel member asked if we are close to achieving herd immunisation. The Director of Public Health said 50% of the population have been vaccinated whilst herd immunity for this disease is 80%, so we are moving towards it.

5 SCHOOL STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of School Improvement and the Social Inclusions Manager gave an overview of the report

A panel member asked about the next steps for the report. The Head of School Improvement said the report will be sent to schools and partners to understand priorities and areas where they are working well.

A panel member asked what support is available for students who are persistent absentees. The Social Inclusions Manager said schools work with the education welfare team to support families. The biggest cause of absenteeism is illness so appropriate support needs will be identified and put in place. The education welfare team will support and challenge parents to facilitate attendance.

A panel member asked about support for elective home education. The Social Inclusions Manager said the local authority will ensure education is appropriate, will send information resources, visit the home and give advice. There has been an increase in the availability of resources due to the pandemic.

A panel member asked for clarification about the Ofsted inspection regime for outstanding schools. The Head of School Improvement said they are prioritising schools which received outstanding before 2015. Schools with long standing outstanding judgements are not subject to routine inspections.

A panel member thanked officers for an excellent report and expressed concerned about lengthy presentations which reduced the time available for the panel to ask questions.

Due to the shortage of time, panel members requested a written response to the following questions:

Currently there are two MEP visits a year to most schools can these be increased

Given the increase in using technology during the pandemic What work is taking place to embed the learning from technology in schools into the curriculum

How can we make the Schools standards Committee more robust?

Is there a volunteer's programme to support pupils with reading?

What work is taking place to link employers with local young people to provide work experience and also building links with local employers who could provide laptops.

What are the priorities areas for school improvement?

What support is available for children who have struggled with attainment during the pandemic? What will the council do to help schools who need to raise attainment levels?

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their support.

6 CORPORATE PARENTING (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Children in Care and Resources gave an overview of the report covering 2019-2020 period giving an overview of support to children in care and care experience young people.

A panel member said the report referred to independence for care leavers but there is no mention of the task group that the panel set up to consider this area and it is important to ensure the recommendations are incorporated into the work. The Head of the Youth Justice and Care leaving team agreed to do some further research on the recommendations from the task group and respond.

A Panel member asked about the recruitment of foster carers, decrease of people in care proceedings from 63 children to 48. The Head of Children in Care and Resources said there a range of reasons including the practice model and they are only using statutory duties when absolutely necessary. There has been increase in foster carer recruitment due to a range of activities.

A panel member asked about the under-representation amongst some ethnic groups for children in care. The Head of Children in Care and Resources said there are a range of reasons including cultural approaches and reporting issues.

7 MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Policy Performance and Partnerships gave an overview of the report.

A panel member asked how domestic issues being raised over the last twelve months especially. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said there has been an increase in the severity of presentations and more serious concerns about what is happening in families. There were disproportionately higher rates of concerns around alcohol abuse and domestic abuse prior to the pandemic and this has continued and possibly exacerbated by lockdown. There is an internal review to understand the underlying issues.

A panel member asked what is being done to address the uptick in social care referrals when schools returned and if this can be managed. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said they have recruited additional social workers on a temporary basis, who are carrying out a range of activities such as deploying social workers within schools.

RESOLVED

The chaired thanked officers for their report

8 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE- PRESENTATION TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 5)

The Director for Children Schools and Families gave an overview of the presentation.

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said the Minute of the previous meeting is incomplete doesn't include departmental update and performance monitoring. The Chair said she will address this with the scrutiny officer.

A panel member asked about the uptake of the vaccines amongst social workers. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said the figure is 52% through the council we do not real figure as people may have had it elsewhere as and there is no requirement to report it.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

The Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships gave an overview of the report.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

10 TOPIC SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PANEL (Agenda Item 10)

The Scrutiny Officer asked for potential issues for the panel to consider in the next municipal year. These will be discussed as part of a long list of topics and developed into a work programme at the topic selection workshop on the 7th June.

Panel members agreed to send topic suggestions to the scrutiny officer. The Chair said we need to review the last work programme for the topics not discussed due to the streamlined work programme during the pandemic.

A panel member asked for a continuation of the departmental update and return of cabinet member update

Cllr Ormrod said she has been in discussion with the department about a possible task group review on children's mental health.

A panel member suggested the bereavement support for young people as a topic suggestion.