

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 3rd July 2014

Agenda item: 5

Wards: All

Subject: Overview of Services and Key Challenges for Children, Schools and Families Department 2014-15

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children's Services

Lead members: Cllr Maxi Martin; Cllr Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

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Recommendations:

A. Scrutiny Panel notes the report and considers the key service challenges outlined.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides members of the new Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel with an overview of services provided by the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Department and the key service challenges facing the Department in 2014-15.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 The work of CSF Department is informed by a complex legal and regulatory framework and by governmental public policy initiatives. In response to these drivers, the Department provides or commissions a comprehensive range of universal, targeted and specialist services for children, young people and families in Merton. Key statutory responsibilities of the Department working alone or with partner agencies include:
- The provision of sufficient, suitable early years childcare and education
 - The provision of sufficient and suitable school places for children and young people 0-19yrs
 - Statutory assessment of children's Special Educational Needs and the provision of suitable education for those with special/complex needs
 - Improving school standards and pupil attainment in Merton community schools
 - Co-ordinating school admissions; ensuring school attendance; quality assuring home education, commissioning alternative education
 - Safeguarding and protecting children at risk of significant harm
 - Providing support to children in need and their families
 - Providing support services to children with disabilities and their families

- Looking after children and young people through compulsory & voluntary means
- Achieving permanency for Looked After Children through adoption, fostering or special guardianship
- Provision of leaving care services for young people who have been looked after
- Intervention with and supervision of youth offenders and prevention of offending
- Providing positive activities for young people and a suitable local youth work offer

Overview of CSF Department Services

2.2 CSF Department is led by the Director of Children's Services, a statutory appointment, and 3 Assistant Directors who manage operational and strategic services. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the functions of each Division:

2.3 Education Division

- School Improvement including primary and secondary school improvement teams; continuous professional development of school staff; schools ICT support; school governor support service; looked after children Virtual School
- Education inclusion including education welfare team; virtual behaviour service; alternative education; youth services; young people's participation
- Early years and children's centres services including children's centres development; family information service; child care quality, standards and provider support; 0-5yrs Supporting Families Team
- Integrated service for Children with Disabilities and SEN including statutory assessment; educational psychology; sensory impairment; parent partnership; social work service, shortbreaks service (including Brightwell Children's Home)

2.4 Social Care and Youth Inclusion

- Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH); First Response Team; 5-16yrs Vulnerable Children's Team; Bond Road family centre
- Social Work Intervention including two core social work teams undertaking casework with children at risk, children in need and children looked after; Court Processes Team
- Permanency, Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers services including fostering support team; adoption team; 14+ settled LAC and care leavers team

- Family and adolescent services including Transforming families team; Youth Offending Service; My Futures Team
- Quality Assurance and Practice Development including quality assurance of casework; management of Independent Reviewing Officers; professional support to Merton Safeguarding Children Board; professional learning and development

2.5 Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

- Commissioning and Partnerships including CSF commissioning team; joint commissioning strategy for Children's Trust; partnership development with local community and voluntary sector
- Access to Resources service including LAC/SEN placements procurement; 16+ accommodation; fostering recruitment and assessment; LAC contact service
- Contracts and School Organisation including schools PFI contract; schools catering and cleaning contracts; Service Level Agreements with schools; services for young people and families contracts; school admissions; school places planning; capital strategy and programme management
- Policy, Planning and Performance including strategic and operational planning; research and information; performance information and management reporting; continuous improvement co-ordination; policy tracking and cascade; Children's Trust induction and communications

Budget and Staffing

- 2.6 The 2014 -15 revenue budget for the Department and current staffing levels are as follows:

Division	Net LA Budget	Headcount - FTE
Education	£13.1 million	251
Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion	£13.0 million	207
Commissioning Strategy and Performance	£8.7 million	56
Other Services*	£13.2 million	6
Totals	£48.0 million	520

* Note: Other Services include senior management; asylum seeker costs; schools related expenditure including PFI unitary charge; schools depreciation; schools pension and redundancy costs

* Note: Excludes Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant of £132.5 million

- 2.7 In addition to the revenue budget, the Department also manages a significant capital budget, largely for the provision of additional school places to meet the council's sufficiency duty. In recent years, the growth in

demand for school places has meant that CSF Department has been the major recipient of council capital funding and this is likely to remain the case for a number of years to come. Capital budgets in the council's medium term financial strategy for increasing primary and secondary school places, including for children with SEN are:

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Primary Expansion	£23.56 m	£10.96 m	£3.99 m	£7.10 m
Secondary Expansion	£0.28 m	£1.46 m	£14.50 m	£13.70 m
Total	£23.84 m	£12.42 m	£18.49 m	£20.80 m

Partnerships

- 2.8 The work of CSF Department is focused on improving outcomes for children and their families in Merton. In nearly all areas of our work, strong collaboration with other agencies is necessary to deliver services which are well co-ordinated and/or integrated - research over many years, supported by public policy, has demonstrated the positive impact on outcomes from multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- 2.9 CSF Department has had a strong track record over recent years, marked by successive inspection findings, for building strong partnerships with key agencies including schools; other council departments; NHS Trusts and Public Health; the police service and the local community and voluntary sector.
- 2.10 At a strategic level, ongoing partnership development and accountability is promoted via statutory multi-agency governance groups including Merton's Safeguarding Children Board and Merton's Health and Wellbeing Board. These groups, and Merton's Children's Trust Board, undertake strategic planning and commissioning of local services and multi-agency performance management.
- 2.11 At an operational level, strong local multi-agency partnership practice is seen across many areas of children's services including in the implementation of integrated procedures for the safeguarding of children in the borough; multi-agency delivery of early years services; integrated services for children with SEN and disabilities and in youth offending services. A significant number of support services for children and their families and youth services are currently commissioned from the local community and voluntary sector.

Key Challenges

- 2.12 Key challenges facing the Department need to be seen within the context of rising demand for most CSF services due to demographic growth and the sustained and significant reduction in public spending from 2010-11 affecting local authorities and other public services. These factors have led LB Merton and authorities across the country to implement 'transformation' programmes to establish new ways for services to be organised and delivered. The Department and our partners must also respond to particular legislative and public policy changes introduced by the present government.

Demographic Factors and Demand for CSF services

- 2.13 Merton's 0-19 population is rising significantly. From a baseline of 45,725 in 2005, there were 47,499 in 2011 and we project a figure in the region of 50,700 by 2015. This growth places inevitable pressures on universal, targeted and specialist services for children and their families. For example, the need to provide additional primary school places over the last few years and the financial and logistical challenges resulting has already received much attention. In the coming years the council is faced by similar challenges in the secondary school sector. Increases of children receiving specialist services, eg children looked after and children with disabilities, although relatively small in number, place particular pressure on council budgets because of the inherent high cost of such services. The diversity of the population is also increasing significantly with particular growth in numbers of children from Asian and other black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Services need to be flexible and responsive to these changes with, for example, particular demands on language teaching in schools, how family support and child protection services are provided and the need for targeted recruitment of carers for an increasingly diverse population of children looked after by the council.

Funding and Service Transformation

- 2.14 Since 2010 CSF Department has made significant savings from its general fund budgets amounting to some £5.42 million. From 2014-15 to 2017-18 a further £2.26 million is required. These significant budget reductions represent a critical challenge to CSF Department and to other council departments. The council is responding to this challenge through its 'transformation' programme designed to re-engineer organisational structures and models of service delivery.
- 2.15 CSF Department's overall approach to service transformation has been to focus on its statutory duties while maintaining investment in preventive approaches which, when successful, can avoid more costly and intrusive interventions. The department has strengthened its approach to commissioning and progressed its longstanding commitment to partnership working. Some of the major 'transformation' already undertaken by the Department includes:
- Establishing a number of shared services with other local authorities including for school admissions; school improvement and school governor services
 - Transforming universal youth services in Merton through implementing a partnership commissioning model
 - Establishing a new Commissioning team and Access to Resources service to improve commissioning practice and the procurement of expensive placements and packages of care
 - Recommissioning early intervention and preventive services and establishing 'enhanced' level casework teams to sharpen the targeting of such services and maximise their impact

- Re-organising social care and youth inclusion services to improve assessment, planning and quality assurance in casework and to improve children's and families' experience of social work practice
- Establishing a locality model for the Department's children's centres enabling efficiencies to be made through sharing of resources and expertise and making more efficient use of infrastructure
- Vacating costly outposted service accommodation enabling both savings and closer co-operation across specific CSF services

2.16 In the year ahead and medium term, further transformation will be required to meet outstanding savings targets; to meet the demands of demographic growth; to achieve the Department's ambitions to further improve outcomes for children and families and also to respond to the ongoing public policy focus on children's services. Key elements of this work will include:

- Engaging with the corporate flexible working agenda to enable further economies in the use of accommodation and increase efficiency of staffing resources
- Examining ways of changing customer contact 'channels' to achieve economies. Although the majority of CSF services will continue to require 'face to face' contact between service users and staff, as part of the ongoing corporate strategy, the Department will need to explore the potential for other, more economical, approaches to customer contact
- Making better use of ICT to support the above strategies but also to promote improved integration of CSF services – a major procurement process has recently been completed to replace an existing casework ICT system. The implementation of the new system will enable improved co-ordination of casework across social care and education functions
- Driving further economies and efficiencies through progressing the joint commissioning agenda in particular with Merton's Clinical Commissioning Group and with Public Health services now located within the council

Service Specific Challenges

2.17 In addition to the Department's overall approach to further transformation noted above, there are a number of key challenges facing specific service areas within the department:

- As a result of a general increase in expectations on children's services and the 'raising of the bar' demonstrated by the new Ofsted inspection regime, the department needs to maintain a relentless focus on the quality of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. As part of the Department's continuous improvement strategy, we will seek to further improve the quality of assessments and plans for these children and young people; improve the timeliness of achieving permanency for children looked after; increase placement choice for children looked after and care leavers and further develop quality assurance of casework practice

- As the funding for the national 'Troubled Families' initiative is time-limited, succession planning for Merton's Transforming Families Team will be necessary. As this model has demonstrated impact, officers will use learning to inform a broad review of targeted and specialist services to adolescents provided by the Department
- The Department and NHS colleagues will need to implement duties arising from the Children and Families Act 2014 in respect of children with special educational needs and disabilities. The CYP Panel has previously received information about the requirement to replace old SEN statutory assessment by new Education, Health and Care Plans from September 2014. This will require major re-organisation of the existing SEN and Disabilities Service, the establishment of a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency model and significant learning and development for staff
- Officers will work with schools to ensure that there is a 'seamless' transition of service offer from schools to pupils with SEN and disabilities arising from the implementation of new Children and Families Act duties
- School improvement capacity will continue to be more sharply targeted to schools with lagging performance and on narrowing gaps in progress and attainment for certain pupil groups
- Officers will continue to support schools in the further development of the Merton Education Partnership
- In the area of Early Years services, further increase in provision for vulnerable 2 yr olds will be needed to meet government targets. Work will continue to increase alignment and integration of CSF, Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health commissioning of under 5's services
- Having focused to date on implementing a major expansion strategy for primary school places in the borough, officers and elected members will continue to develop and implement strategy for the significant expansion of Merton's secondary schools sector

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. N/A

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. N/A

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. N/A

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report

- 8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report
- 9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**
- 9.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report
- 10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 10.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report
- 11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 12.1. N/A