

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 3rd July 2014

Agenda item: 7

Wards:

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

Lead members: Cllr Maxi Martin, Cllr Martin Whelton

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel note 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 Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last update report in March 2014.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 At the last panel meeting in March 2014 two recent Ofsted inspections of schools had taken place but reports had not been published. The full inspection of Morden primary school resulted in the school retaining a rating of good. The report of the HMI monitoring visit at Garden primary school confirmed that reasonable progress was being made. Three further school inspection reports have been published since March 2014. Hillcross school was rated as good having previously been judged as outstanding; Hollymount school moved from satisfactory to good; Cranmer school has retained its rating of good.
- 2.2 The conversion to academy status of Garden primary school is expected to be completed by September 2014. Responsibility for the school's childcare provision will also be transferred although it has been agreed that the children's centre attached to the school will remain under the management of the council.
- 2.3 Applications for school places have continued to be processed since the last meeting of the panel. There are 60 children who are currently unplaced for primary school reception year, but all but 10 have received a central offer of a school place which has not been accepted. Following the additional 'bulge' classes added there are a number of vacancies at schools in all areas of the borough and some multiple offers that will eventually provide some extra places, as will the 'Park Community' Free School. Officers are therefore confident that all residents that require a reception place for September will be able to receive one, even though it may not be at a preference school. Experience of past years is that a number of parents opt for independent schooling. In the secondary

phase all applicants have received an offer although a small number have not accepted.

- 2.4 To meet additional demand the council is providing 150 additional reception places compared to last year at maintained schools. Poplar and Singlegate are admitting an additional 30 each as part of their permanent expansions, and Garfield, Joseph Hood and West Wimbledon will accommodate 30 additional children in a single year 'bulge' class. Cabinet recently approved the contract award for the final phase of the Merton Abbey permanent expansion, which is part of seven major expansion schemes currently under construction, the others being Cranmer, Hillcross, Pelham, Poplar, Singlegate and St. Mary's RC Primary School. It has also been agreed to award the first phase contract for the proposed Dundonald expansion scheme although outstanding legal matters need to be resolved before this contract is signed.
- 2.5 Members of the panel were aware of the successful application to DfE by Chapel Street to open a new primary Free School in the borough. Uncertainty regarding its location and planned opening date has added to the complexity of planning for sufficient primary school reception places this year. In the event temporary accommodation has been secured to enable the school to open as the 'Park Community' Free School in September 2014 and, as noted above, places are being offered by the Free School provider at the time of writing this report. A permanent base for the school has been purchased by the Education Funding Agency at the site of the former Trinitarian Church in Morden.
- 2.6 Officers have continued to undertake preliminary work with schools on planning to meet the rising need for places in Merton's secondary and special school sectors over the next decade. Cabinet has agreed a high level strategy of establishing new school provision as well as expanding existing schools and site searches and feasibility studies have been undertaken in recent months. It is expected that a more detailed strategy will be confirmed in Autumn 2014 and will be reported to CYP Scrutiny Panel at that time.
- 2.7 Preparation is underway for the implementation of the government's initiative to provide universal free school meals for all primary school pupils in reception and years one and two from September 2014. Merton is relatively well placed to deliver the new responsibilities due to significant investment made in recent years in primary school kitchens to enable all schools to cook hot food on site. Surveys have been undertaken and minor works and adaptations will be undertaken in schools over the summer holiday period. Officers are working with one school with particular challenges due to the size of its kitchen and dining arrangements but are confident suitable arrangements will be in place.
- 2.8 Pupils registered for free school meals because their families are in receipt of certain welfare benefits or tax credits also attract pupil premium funding which is allocated to schools' budgets. DfE research published in November 2012 demonstrated an under- registration rate in Merton above comparator authorities, meaning Merton schools were not benefiting from the level of pupil premium funding possible.

- 2.9 A project is therefore being undertaken in the borough to maximise registration for free school meals. To date, research has been completed enabling sharper targeting of support provided to specific Merton schools to increase registration levels. This research has been shared with headteachers. Publicity and application materials have been amended to promote accessibility and reduce potential for stigma. Discussions internally with officers in revenues and benefits and externally with DWP are being held with a view to obtaining specific claimant information to enable direct contact with families known to be eligible. Short-term Public Health funding has also been secured to employ a member of staff in the autumn term who will work in schools to 'market' free school meals and directly support parents in making applications.
- 2.10 The CYP panel has previously received reports and updates on the work of the 'Transforming Families' service, Merton's response to the high profile national 'Troubled Families' initiative. Through this initiative, central government is seeking to 'turn around' the lives of families characterised by unemployment, anti-social and criminal behaviour and poor school attendance, those families likely to place the largest burden on public services and the public purse.
- 2.11 National performance data on this initiative is published regularly. In 2013, Merton's performance was seen to be lagging due to relatively slow start up of the new service locally and as a result of Merton interpreting the requirements of the initiative more accurately than was the case in some authorities. As at March 2014, however, Merton is now ranked 3rd in London for the numbers of families with whom the service has engaged (320) and the numbers successfully 'turned around' (175). For these families, Merton has been able to demonstrate either that anti-social or criminal behaviour has ceased or that families are no longer 'workless'.
- 2.12 Good progress has been made by the My Futures team in reducing numbers of NEET young people. As at mid-June, 4% (225) were not in education, training or employment compared to 5.3% (288) in December 2013. Significant effort has been made in identifying 'not known' young people with 5% (299) young people now in this cohort as against 11.5% (683) six months ago. These gains have been made through improved data tracking and tenacious practice from staff in the team making contact with young people via correspondence, telephone calls and home visits and through good liaison with schools and other professionals involved in working with young people.
- 2.13 In the Panel's last update report it was noted that central government was in the process of consulting on a new funding regime for schools which, if implemented, could result in an increase in Merton's Dedicated Schools Grant of some £6 million. Although the 'Fairer Schools Funding 2015-16' consultation closed at the end of April, there has been no announcement on plans to implement or amend the proposals to date. Officers understand that DfE plans to announce the findings of the consultation by the end of July and any details will be reported to Panel in a future update report.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

- 4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**
- 4.1. None for the purposes of this report.
- 5 TIMETABLE**
- 5.1. N/A
- 6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**
- 6.1. No specific implications.
- 7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**
- 7.1. No specific implications.
- 8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1. No specific implications.
- 9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**
- 9.1. No specific implications.
- 10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 10.1. No specific implications.
- 11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- N/A
- 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 12.1. None