

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 JULY 2015

(19.15 - 21.05)

PRESENT

Councillors Councillor Katy Neep (in the Chair),
Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico,
Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Marsie Skeete,
Councillor Dennis Pearce, Denis Popovs, Councillor Jeff Hanna
and Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)
Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Yvette
Stanley (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Jane McSherry
(Assistant Director of Education), Paul Angeli (Assistant Director of
Children's Social Care), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Martin Whelton, Simon Bennett
and Colin Powell.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 MARCH 2015 (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING (Agenda Item 4)

Councillor Linda Taylor asked what work had ben undertaken to promote
apprenticeships, as discussed at the last meeting. Paul Ballatt advised that meetings
had been set up to discuss with departments across the council as part of a wider
piece of work.

Councillor Katy Neep welcomed Jane McSherry to the meeting and stated that the Panel looked forward to working with Jane in the future.

5 OVERVIEW OF SERVICES AND KEY CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT 2015-16 (Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Maxi Martin outlined her priorities which included budget pressures, increase in child population and demand on services. In particular, how the department can respond given reduced funding. Also, the recruitment and retention of quality social workers and how to manage child sexual exploitation and prevention of FGM and the new requirements surrounding OFSTED.

Councillor James Holmes asked what policies and solutions were in place or planned to address some of the issues raised. Councillor Maxi Martin explained that work was underway in a number of areas; for example, policies are in place for the recruitment and retention of social workers and, as Cabinet Member, has regular dialogue with the department on responses to all of the issues and priorities raised to ensure that progress is being made and solutions generated.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked what guidance had been published on radicalisation and what support was being provided to vulnerable children. Yvette Stanley explained that the department are implementing policy around the Government's 'Prevent' agenda. Schools are also briefed on referral routes through MASH should they have any concerns and protocols have been shared. Schools also promote the right value set and explore issues around radicalisation with students. A multidisciplinary group has also been convened by the MSCB to look at good practice guidance in this area. Parents have received safeguarding leaflets so that they are aware of this issue.

Councillor Linda Taylor asked if there was consensus across schools as to how to approach this issue. Councillor Maxi Martin explained that schools were supportive of this agenda and have taken differing approaches. Jane McSherry explained that there is a regular slot on Prevent in meetings with Heads and there has been positive engagement with the agenda.

Yvette Stanley outlined the following key areas that are departmental priorities for the year ahead:

- School expansion
- Support to schools including Academies and Free Schools and continuing focus on standards;
- Changes regarding care proceedings and adoption;
- Reducing time for adoption process building on recent improvements

- Difficulties in recruitment and retention of social workers (as Merton employ 40% of its social workers as agency staff). Salaries have been benchmarked against other London Boroughs and incentives have been offered. Merton also has reasonable caseloads but budgetary pressures mean that competing for staff with some boroughs is difficult.
- Changes in legislation regarding leaving care and support to be provided for up to 25 year olds despite this not being accompanied by an increase in funding to do so.
- Continuing to develop services in the transition from public health services to the local authority
- Changes in legislation surrounding the council's role in intervention

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked if some children do not receive the 15 hours free childcare due to lack of funding and how the additional hours for childcare announced would be provided. Jane McSherry explained that the current 15 hour allowance has different take up across the borough particularly for children in the 0-2 age bracket. The council are finding ways to reach out to families that are entitled to free child care. The funding to cover the cost of the additional hours proposed in the recent Government announcement is not yet clear. Councillor Linda Taylor enquired about the proposals to outsource some aspects of the adoption service. Yvette Stanley explained that this is a complex issue. Yvette Stanley added that she is the budget lead for the London Directors group looking at the policy and legislative changes underway and in discussion with civil servants to advise on this and necessary resources.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked how basic need grant was accounted for in the costs outlined for school expansion. Paul Ballatt explained that there is an annual bidding round for capital funding in the council as part of the MTFS. The figures outlined are indicative year on year and adjusted accordingly annually. The Government provides a basic needs grant but it is not sufficient to meet demand. It is incorporated in to the corporate capital budget but is not reflected in the figures shown in this report as they are not known at this stage. An additional 20 forms of entry are estimated to be required with additional 10-14 forms of entry required before 2020. The development of Harris will provide a 6 forms of entry school and 3 existing schools have agreed to expand by an additional 2 forms of entry if required. The council have been asked by Harris Federation to identify a site for the new school.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked for more information on what was planned regarding shared school improvement services and if this was focused more on savings than improvements. Yvette Stanley explained that there were economies of scale to be achieved in running services on a shared basis. Jane McSherry explained that there were current shared services which were well established however there were no

current plans to change the delivery model of our school improvement service. A new Head of School Improvement has recently been appointed.

Councillor Jeff Hanna enquired about out posted accommodation and what implications this would have for the service and savings. Yvette Stanley explained that the department had been proactive in disposing of outposted services accommodation and savings had already been realised. The integration with health services will reduce costs and the council are discussing options with CAHMS at present which could help to reduce unit costs.

Councillor Jeff Hanna noted that the figures provided regarding the required additional forms of entry required in the secondary sector had been amended following previous updates to the Panel. Paul Ballatt explained that the figures were kept constantly under review had changed and that an update could be provided to the Panel on what has been delivered to date and new estimates/projections. Additionally, there should be opportunities for pre decision scrutiny on a report that it is planned to take to Cabinet in October in connection with site options for the new secondary school although timing for this is not yet certain.. This would cover the support provided to the EFA, site options for schools given the pre opening approval and options appraisal for the available sites.

Councillor Joan Henry asked about the transfer of universal youth services to a new provider. Yvette Stanley explained that there were on-going discussions with two potential funders.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked about plans to employ entry level social workers to replace agency staff. Paul Angeli informed the Panel that newly qualified social workers have been employed through a specific programme that has been extended.. This recruits 10 students per year and they are evaluated to determine if they are suitable for the newly qualified programme. This delivers 10 qualified social workers per year for Merton and is a well established scheme; The council have also just joined a DfE led programme, First Line, bringing in high quality graduates from Russell group universities to qualify as social workers. This is expected to commence in September. Working with HR, the department expect to be fully staffed with social work practitioners by September 2015 although the position is always fluid. Councillor Charlie Chirico asked how many social workers come through the First Line Programme and how many social workers are employed by the council. Paul Angeli explained that this should generate 4 per year and that there is a significant amount of central government funding to support this. Councillor Charlie Chirico congratulated Paul Angeli and his team on their good work.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked if students from non Russell Group universities were also employed on the training programmes. Paul Angeli confirmed that this was the case.

RESOLVED: The Panel hold their rearranged October meeting in September 2015 to allow for pre decision scrutiny on school places at that meeting subject to timing of the cabinet item.

6 AGREEING THE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Katy Neep outlined the draft 2015/16 work programme for the Panel's agreement.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked what could be expected in the budget report. Yvette Stanley explained that the report may include some revised/replacement savings, up to 2016/17, when it is presented to the Panel in October 2015.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed their 2015/16 work programme.

7 DRAFT FINAL REPORT - ONLINE STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Jeff Hanna expressed his thanks to the task group for their work.

RESOLVED: Panel endorsed the report and agreed to forward to Cabinet for consideration at their September 2015 meeting.

8 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Paul Ballatt introduced the report and explained that there would be more data included which would be relevant to the thematic meetings as part of the Panel's agreed 2015/16 work programme.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina expressed her concern about the red status on a number of the performance indicators and enquired about the possibility of monitoring school standards data throughout the year at each panel meeting. Yvette Stanley explained that the department are only able to provide an annual data set but that other associated data regarding school standards is received and monitored by the schools standards committee and the Children's Trust board. Paul Ballatt drew the Panel's attention to some of the indicators that are relevant re school standards on the data set it receives at each meeting. He added that the data is benchmarked on an annual basis and that this year's results are due to be received by the Panel in February 2016 which will provide performance of Merton's schools and benchmarking information where available.

Councillor Jeff Hanna expressed his concerns at underperformance against some of the indicators and asked if the narrative in the report needed to be clear regarding the circumstances surrounding this e.g. against stability of placements for children in care and also on the percentage of children in care participating in reviews. He added that this should not be a prompt to criticise social workers. He asked why some children do not attend their reviews. Paul Angeli explained that the attendance at a review is often beyond the department's control. The department are looking into why children are not attending their reviews. It is older teens that tend to be absent. An alternative may be to have the young person chairing their review encouraging them to participate and shape the services they receive.

Paul Angeli informed the Panel that placement changes are reviewed constantly and issues reported to the corporate parenting panel. The council have also established a new team that deals with permanency and ensures young people have long term support through a stable social work team. The team are tracking all cases in which concerns have been expressed about the placement. One of the possible causes for the lack of stability of placements can be down to the fact that there are a lot of older children who are looked after and there can be particularly complex and challenging behaviour.

Councillor Joan Henry asked about BME pupil exclusion rates. Yvette Stanley explained that these would not be ready until spring 2016.

Councillor Charlie Chirico asked if all school places were now offered and agreed. Yvette Stanley explained that school places have been planned and not overprovided but that some parents wait to try and take up places that they want. Paul Ballatt added that the school appeals process was underway.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked if any parents had not received an offer. Paul Ballatt explained that the department have made central offers which are not always parent's first choice but that the council has been effective in providing places. A report on school places will be provided in the update report at the next Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

9 CHANGE OF MEETING DATE - OCTOBER 2015 (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Katy Neep informed the Panel that the meeting date for the October Panel meeting was to be changed and that dates would be consulted on shortly.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed this change.

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