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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 9 NOVEMBER 2016

(7.18 pm - 9.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Linda Taylor OBE, Mike Brunt, Pauline Cowper, Charlie Chirico, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes, Jerome Neil and Sally Kenny

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Paul Angeli (Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Paul Ballatt (Assistant Director Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Keith Makin (Independent Chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board), Steven Wallace (Acting Borough Commander), Nuzhat Ali (Muslim Women in Morden) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Co-opted representative Simon Powell gave his apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Matters arising:

- Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families (CSF), reported that events promoting adoption are organised regionally and will cover the Wimbledon area in rotation; and
- With reference to discussion of the Panel's task group activity for 2016 – 2017, (under Agenda Item 11), Councillor James Holmes expressed his concern that scrutiny is being eroded. It was agreed at the October meeting that the Panel will not have a standing task group for 2016/17 but instead use this capacity following the anticipated Ofsted inspection to scrutinise any resulting work programme. Councillor Holmes notified the Panel he had contacted Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, and Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services. It was agreed that the concerns expressed will be discussed subsequent to the meeting by Councillor Holmes and Councillor Pearce, the latter in his capacity as chair of the Children and Young People Panel.

4 UPDATE REPORT: SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

Keith Makin, the independent chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board, provided the Panel with an introduction to its work as detailed in the annual report. Effective partnership working, good lead member representation and multi-agency quality assurance were all highlighted as strengths. The provision of training, listening to the voice of children and young people and the link with the safeguarding adults board were noted as key focuses during the year. It was also explained that the board has undertaken a self evaluation ready for Ofsted inspection. Additionally, it has conducted a serious case review and undertaken a number of task and finish groups looking at *Prevent*, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), neglect and the performance management data set. Over the next year the three key focuses for the board will be on 'think family' approaches, supporting vulnerable adolescents and early help for families to support them in strengthening their own resilience to address problems. The Panel was asked to note that the Wood Review of local safeguarding children boards has been published but that, at this stage, it is not clear what impact there will be on arrangements going forward.

Yvette Stanley emphasised that the board's annual report (which will be inspected by Ofsted), its independent chair and membership of the board by the police, health agencies and the council are all statutory duties. Also, that the board, through its independent scrutiny of the service, is part of the overall quality assurance framework for children's services. Over the last year there has been an improvement in front line practice and a reduction in use of agency staff. Whilst FGM, radicalisation and child sexual exploitation have long been issues, the profile of these has increased and it is right to reflect on whether the response being given is correct. There has been additional investment in addressing child sexual exploitation and missing children. Also, processes for dealing with child sexual exploitation and gangs have been strengthened. Whilst the service is increasingly successful, the focus is now on continuing to refine practice to drive up quality standards. Against the background of funding reductions, the focus is on working together to make sure every penny counts.

Councillor Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, emphasised that the board provides the opportunity for partners to come together, to interrogate challenges and share good practice. The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of the interface with the safeguarding adults board and the challenges for safeguarding caused by housing issues.

Acting Borough Commander, Superintendent Steven Wallace (Crime and Operations) noted that many of those in borough for whom there are safeguarding concerns aren't residents. Offender management is good and improving. As a result of investment, there are now dedicated officers addressing child sexual exploitation and the 'safer schools' police officers have been retained. It is a focus to divert young people before they access the criminal justice system as a key prevention strategy. However, reflecting the increase across London, there has been a 30% rise in missing children in the borough during this year. Knife crime in London is also a challenge which is being addressed through planned searches and education

programmes. The Borough Commander noted the toxic trio of domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse; further investment is needed to address these before they become issues to be dealt with by the police.

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- The role of the chair of the board is established in statute facilitating its independence. Additionally, this is supported by being part of a national network of safeguarding children board chairs, allowing for comparisons to be made against other services and again supporting the quality assurance process. It is also important that the board is a partnership allowing all to have a voice and for a range of opinions to be heard;
- The response to a child's request for confidentiality will depend on a variety of issues such as the individual context, the child's capacity to understand their request, whether not sharing information disclosed would be detrimental to the child etc. Merton observes the good practice of discussing with the young person when their information is going to be shared and why. Also, no practitioner will ever guarantee to a child/young person that their information will not be shared;
- Lower police funding for safeguarding children boards in London as opposed to other metropolitan areas (ie: Manchester, Merseyside, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands), is not a local police decision but determined by the Met Police. In Merton, the local authority is the key funder with the health service contributing more than the police. The ambition currently is for health funding to be more equitable with that of the local authority. The police in London also provide dedicated support for safeguarding children boards through its special command units such as Sapphire (focused on rape and serious sexual assault), CAIT and the child sexual exploitation unit;
- Knife crime is being addressed by a two strikes policy which reflects that a young person is twice making a decision to carry a knife, signalling their involvement. Merton has a formal schools programme seeking to address knife crime, has had a knife amnesty and sweeps on estates. This has seen a reduction in offences;
- Merton police will be getting body worn cameras in phase two of the rollout which is scheduled to happen early in 2017. This aims to provide better evidence (including for use in prosecutions for domestic violence) and protection for officers;
- Merton's *No More* campaign against domestic violence and disability hate crime is becoming established and has the explicit target of increased reporting. This includes cases of domestic violence against men;
- There has been a focus on training foster carers to know how to deal with children going missing and absent. This is trying to strike the correct balance of not over reporting but getting it right where there is a heightened risk for example of child sexual exploitation or involvement in crime. This includes exploring the difference between a child being absent and missing. Police involvement in such cases includes visiting the child when they are found to check they are physically alright and a referral to Jigsaw4U, a service commissioned by the council, that helps understand why a child has gone missing. Most of the young people missing in the borough are placed here from other boroughs which adds complexity to the

police task. This is being addressed by standardised packs which the police use to collate uniform information when any child goes missing;

- Given the detail contained in the board's annual report, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to provide either an executive summary or a child-friendly version to make it more accessible to all. Additionally, the members' request for more detailed information on the board's budget will be considered for next year; and
- The board's current business development manager was supported to become established in their post by being given regular access to and support from the previous post holder over a six month period.

The Panel was then addressed by Nuzhat Ali, a representative of Muslim Women in Merton. Ms Ali highlighted the group's interest in working with the council. Soft evidence was cited of the negative impact of the *Prevent* strategy on Muslim families and children showing that this is having the opposite effect to that intended; it is dividing and stigmatising rather than promoting and countering. The impact on wellbeing was noted, with children being bullied at school and families discriminated against. Outside Merton, there is evidence that *Prevent* is leading to self-harm and suicide. The strategy is seen to be putting teachers into the position of policing children based on detailed criteria that generate suspicion resulting in over reporting. The National Union of Teachers recently voted to reject the strategy's requirement on teachers to report children.

Ms Ali posed a number of questions to the Panel:

- What measures are being used to judge whether *Prevent* is successful?
- Is the number of children being reported from Merton known and the percentage of these for which reporting is appropriate?
- Are there systems in place to allow the community to feedback anonymously about its experience of the *Prevent* strategy?
- Is data available from health partners on the impact of *Prevent*?
- What are competences of providers to deliver *Prevent* training?
- Are parents and/or the Muslim community involved in developing *Prevent* training?
- Is *Prevent* training cost effective? If so, how is this evidenced?

In conclusion, Ms Ali asked that the equality impact of the programme in schools be assessed, the Muslim community be engaged in developing training materials and more be done to understand the pastoral relationship between teachers and children and how this might be affected by *Prevent*.

In response, Steve Wallace and Yvette Stanley noted that *Prevent* is as much about right and left wing extremism and that radicalisation isn't a significant issue in Merton. Schools are encouraged to take a broad approach to the prevention of extremism, including taking up consultancy support to prevent any over-reaction. *Prevent* training is nationally provided and currently, any link to bullying isn't notable through the reporting of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. However, it was

agreed to follow-up the group's specific concerns in a separate meeting and to explore how the group might be able to help inform training delivery.

5 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 5)

This item was introduced by Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has a gap of £1.4m in 2019/20 and £16m in 2020/21. The proposed CSF Department replacement savings for 2017-18 are achievable partly through the deletion of the Commissioning, Strategy and Performance Assistant Director post and a Head of Service post. Other savings have either been brought forward into 2017-18 or moved into subsequent years. Savings are also being made to the capital programme which is anticipating funding from the Education Funding Agency for the development of the Harris Wimbledon Free School. This has been fed into the MTFS, reducing the funding gap and decreasing the level of required revenue savings.

In response to Panel member questions, it was clarified:

- Significant items of school maintenance are funded through a central government grant to local authorities (more minor items valued at up to £20K are funded by schools themselves through their own budgets). The council maintains a register of school maintenance issues which establishes priorities. Over recent years the priority has been on the school expansion programme meaning there is now a need to invest in the schools estate and over time this will become an increasing priority. Whilst the government's grant for school maintenance isn't ring fenced, there is a need to keep the level of investment under review and to potentially increase this in the future. It was noted that there are sufficient funds available to achieve the expansion of SEND provision;
- The savings process is framed over a three year period. Additionally, the CSF Department is projecting a £1.5m overspend during this financial year. This means that savings are continually subject to review to ensure they can be realised. Proposed CSF savings resulting from a new information system will come to fruition over a longer timeframe than originally envisaged. The Department has responded proactively, bringing through alternative savings resulting from changes to the Department structure;
- Savings to be realised through a reduction in staff numbers will be handled very carefully over a two year period. It will be important not to destabilise staff and cause a loss of social workers for instance. It was highlighted that many posts in the Department are proscribed and others required as a result of guidance; and
- Funds raised through solar panels on school roofs were noted as the responsibility of the Environment & Regeneration Department. Whilst these were initially subject to a very sound business case, this has been undermined by the Government's reduction in feed-in tariffs. However, these are still financially beneficial to the council given energy costs for schools.

6 RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER REVIEW (Agenda Item 6)

1. Cabinet Member for Education (Councillor Cooper-Marbiah):

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Harris Wimbledon: more information about the new secondary academy will be made public shortly - officers are working on communications;
- Ofsted inspections: these have happened recently at Wimbledon Park, the Priory and Links Primary Schools. The reports are not yet available;
- School visits: these have highlighted how difficulties recruiting and retaining good teachers are linked to the provision of housing. Also the Cabinet Member has seen how schools are utilising the diverse languages spoken by pupils to boost their teaching provision; and
- National teaching award: congratulations were given to Richard Brown of Cricket Green School who has been awarded a Pearson Teaching Award for Excellence in Special Needs Education.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified:

- Her vision for education over the mid to long term is that there are sufficient school places and a consistently high quality of education across the borough;
- A public meeting is being planned to provide more information about Harris Wimbledon. The precise timing and details are currently being discussed. Officers are continuing to work closely with all those involved in the new school and taking time to go through questions raised by stakeholders. Careful management of information into the public domain is needed given that some information has already 'leaked' into the public domain. Rather than being drawn into discussion about what of this information is or isn't correct, it has been agreed that communication should focus on this public meeting when all can be clarified; and
- Clarification will be sought about the ownership of the pavilion at Sherwood School.

2. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Neep):

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Voice of children and young people: the Cabinet Member expressed the desire that the Panel should hear more of the voice of children and young people as this is at the heart of all we do;
- Housing: specifically overcrowding is a significant issue for children and young people and is a priority. This is linked to the Merton Safeguarding Children Board's focus on think family; and
- The great weight debate: a resident consultation is currently happening and looking at what is causing the increase in childhood obesity which is an issue across the whole borough.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified:

- The majority of youth provision and participation is no longer funded by the council but it has been successful in gaining alternative funds to support provision in Pollards Hill and Phipps Bridge. The focus is now on securing sustainable funding. Social landlords are being targeted. It was emphasised that whilst this activity isn't council funded, it is important provision which should be supported and endorsed;
- The aim is as near as possible to have sufficient in-house foster carers to end the use of agency foster carers. Recruitment was reported as going well and existing capacity is being used more efficiently including a reduction in the time taken between initial interest being expressed and approvals being given (with Merton comparing well nationally and to London). However, it was also highlighted that there is a need for more foster carers for children with special education needs and/or disabilities and for adolescents and that there is a group of foster carers who are close to retirement. Also, many are trained to care for looked after children aged under 8 whereas there is a growing profile of those in care in Merton who are aged 15 – 17 (unaccompanied asylum seeking children are changing the profile of those in our care);
- The Troubled Families Programme is on-going and focused on supporting families to develop their own skills and abilities to take action themselves; and
- Child Protection Plans are based on careful judgements and a signs of safety approach (a strengths based and safety focused approach to child protection). This looks at areas of concern and how these can be addressed to reduce risk. Interventions are reviewed and the impact assessed.

Members suggested looking at the issues highlighted by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services through the Panel's future work programme.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Brunt, the performance lead for the Panel, highlighted volumes are now included on the monitoring information. The rationale for the inclusion of each measure in the performance monitoring information is also now available to the Panel. Additional context information has been requested where there is no target measure - for example, the cohort size to illustrate the relative scale. Where measures are annual, the department has been requested to provide any information that is available within the year.

In response to member questions, it was clarified that the number of new Education, Health and Care plans issued within the 20 week target continues to be a focus. This is behind target because of the increase in demand for these plans. The council is performing relatively well, however, in transferring 'old' SEN Statements into EHC Plans (Merton's performance on this measure is currently 7th in London). Good feedback is being received from parents going through the new EHC planning process with a decline in the number of associated tribunals taking place. It was agreed that Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education, would provide more

information on the transfer of these plans to the Panel at the next meeting through the update report.

8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

In response to member questions, it was clarified that:

- More detail on the restructuring of the CSF Department has been provided to the Department Management Team and will be shared with Panel members subsequent to the meeting. The restructure provides the opportunity to bring together CSF Department commissioning with Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide the benefit of integrated services through single contracts in addition to achieving a financial benefit for the council.
- CSF taking over SEND travel reflects that the Environment & Regeneration Department is changing shape with increased outsourcing of service but that the commissioning of passenger transport will need to stay inside the Council. In taking over responsibility for the taxi element of this service, CSF is aiming to use tighter controls to bring down the cost; and
- Merton is doing what it can to support unaccompanied asylum seeker children that are being relocated from camps in Calais. This includes coordination for the London area.

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

Members were informed that Councillor Neil will provide information to the next meeting on his individual review of the voice of children and young people.