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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 8 FEBRUARY 2017

(7.18 pm - 9.52 pm)

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

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad and Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Paul Ballatt (Assistant Director Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Head of School Improvement), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Jane White (Headteacher, Priory Primary School) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted member Colin Powell and Councillor Holmes (for whom Councillor Bush was substituting).

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 approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Matters arising

- Officers clarified that reductions in SEND transport costs are being achieved through the implementation of a new 'dynamic purchasing system'. This has resulted in a number of new taxi companies now being able to bid for contracts. Of those that meet the requirements, the cheapest is selected. Costs are also being managed through increasing the numbers of clients in receipt of direct payments. The impact of these measures is demonstrated through the reduction in the overspend; previously there had been a £350K overspend at the midpoint of the year but this has been reduced to £200K this year; and
- Work is on-going to provide the right placements for care leavers. Officers are reviewing use of semi-independent accommodation and the focus is on providing

the right housing options with the department working with the housing team within the Council.

4 RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER REVIEW (Agenda Item 4)

The Cabinet Member for Education, (Councillor Cooper-Marbiah), highlighted the following:

- Harris Wimbledon admissions consultation: a consultation on admission arrangements for the new Harris Wimbledon School has been launched. Due to demand for places, it is proposed the admissions policy will use nodal points to prioritise places. The council intends to give its views on the proposed nodal points and members were encouraged to participate in the consultation which closes on 31 March 2017;
- School performance: this is strong as demonstrated by Merton's results using the new Attainment and Progress 8 measures and local and national benchmarks. These are detailed in full in the schools annual report (Agenda Item 5); and
- Ofsted inspections: 91% of local authority schools in Merton are currently judged to be either good or outstanding. The Cabinet Member reported that she visits schools weekly giving her the opportunity to explore the issues they face.

The Cabinet Member for Children Services, (Councillor Neep), highlighted the following:

- Focus on vulnerable cohorts: whilst the overall performance of Merton's schools is strong, there is a need to focus on the attainment and attendance of more vulnerable cohorts such as those on *SEN Support*;
- Recruitment and retention of teachers (and other key workers such as social workers): Cllr Neep is concerned about the degree of change currently affecting schools (and Children's Services) and if this is causing burnout amongst workers;
- Mental health: Cllr Neep is concerned about the impact of stress on young people; and
- Employment of vulnerable cohorts: Cllr Neep expressed keenness to learn more about the work of the task group and to look at alternative ways to support vulnerable cohorts into employment.

5 UPDATE REPORT: SCHOOLS ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Jane White, Head at Priory Primary School

The Panel was addressed by Jane White, Headteacher at Priory Primary School, on issues around the recruitment and retention of teachers. She highlighted:

- This is a generic issue for schools in Merton as well as for other groups of key workers in the borough such as social workers;
- NfER research published in September 2016 ([Engaging Teachers](#)) highlights that there has been a significant increase in the number of teachers considering leaving the profession (up from 17% to 23%). Also, that teacher training targets have been missed for the last four years;

- The extent of the issue was demonstrated last year, when five teaching staff were on maternity leave at Priory Primary. This forced a reliance on expensive agency staff and teachers from overseas on two year visas. The school had to make significant investment in their training in order that they were up-to-date despite the fact that they were agency staff or could only work in the UK for a limited time;
- Given it is such a significant issue across a number of public sector positions, a corporate response from the Council was recommended including better promotion through the Council's website, more creative approaches to temporary housing solutions etc; and
- Noted that NfER recommends engagement as the best route to retention and that Priory has established a wellbeing team looking at securing teacher retention for a minimum of five years. This includes giving an extra day of leave in recognition of service of five or more years, sports packages etc.

In response to member questions, it was further clarified:

- Corporate marketing by the Council promoting the benefits of working in Merton generically would be advantageous;
- Merton's Continuous Personal Development offer is known to be attractive. Providing teachers with parking (given carrying numerous pupil books) would also be beneficial;
- Difficulties around teacher recruitment isn't a national issue but is concentrated in areas linked to housing supply; and
- There has been a growth in teachers applying for positions through agencies despite schools making it clear a direct approach is preferred. It is thought that agencies provide enticements and that this generation of teachers like the benefit of making numerous applications through an agency as opposed to applying for each post individually.

RESOLVED: to consider the recruitment and retention of key workers as part of the topic selection process for 2017/2018. It was suggested that this might be the focus of a task group or a deep dive by the Commission as an overarching subject.

Update report: schools annual report

The substantive item was introduced by Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education) who highlighted the report is for the academic year September 2015 to July 2016. This period is characterised by changes in assessment methodologies making it difficult to provide trend information. However, comparisons have been made throughout the report with national averages, London boroughs and outer London boroughs. On this basis, Merton is performing better than national averages. For reading and maths progress at Key Stage 2, Merton is 10th and 11th nationally and Merton's secondary schools are 10th nationally based on the new Progress 8 measure (the level of progress made from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school).

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, the Head of School Improvement, added that there has been a 6% increase in the number of Merton school's judged good or outstanding (now

accounting for 91% of all schools in Merton). All Merton's secondary schools are judged good or outstanding whilst there has been an increase in the number of Merton's primary schools in these Ofsted categories. Four primary schools remain to move from requires improvement to good. These are the focus of support and challenge groups, local inspectors and focused work with governors. The ambition is for all Merton's schools to be good or better which is being supported through collaboration and cluster working.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted that it does remain possible to provide some comparison with previous years as assessment for this phase hasn't changed. From this it is possible to demonstrate strong improvement with a 3% increase in the number of children achieving a good level of development.

It was noted that the piloted baseline assessment was withdrawn last year which was difficult for practitioners.

The achievement of the *SEN Support* cohort was highlighted as a focus. The department is doing work to understand why the attainment of this group in Early Years isn't improving as fast as anticipated. Those on *Pupil Premium* in this phase of education are doing better than the same group nationally but not as well as those in London and there is a gap between those in the *SEN Support* group and average attainment in this phase of education in Merton.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- The Early Years service provides an annual full training programme including moderation of outcomes and observation of lessons. This is working to ensure there is a common understanding of Early Years best practice; and
- Any initiative aimed at delivering school improvement has to be part of a whole school initiative and be adequately planned, implemented and evaluated. If the evaluation shows this isn't providing the improvement required, then the school should look at an alternative, more appropriate approach; nationally required changes have got to be delivered.

Key Stage 1

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted that it is possible to make a comparison with previous performance for this phase based on the phonics screening check which hasn't changed. Improvement has been made in both Year 1 and Year 2. Those on *Pupil Premium* and *SEN Support* are now the focus to ensure improving outcomes.

However, it is not possible to make a comparison with previous Key Stage 1 SATs assessments due to the change in methodology. The new expected standard that has to be reached by the end of Key Stage 1 is higher. The new assessment methodology is beginning to bed in. Merton's results are broadly in line with those nationally, for London and outer London but better than these benchmarks at the higher level of ability and especially so for reading. Areas of focus were again highlighted. For Key Stage 1 these are *Pupil Premium* children and those from the Asian Pakistani cohort group.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- The standard children are expected to reach by the end of Key Stage 1 has risen several times over the last 15 years and every time schools have responded. This rise in the standard has been exemplified in the introduction of the spelling, punctuation and grammar test;
- The Asian Pakistani cohort group is the lowest performing group at Key Stage 1 in Merton and is not performing as well as the same group nationally;
- Children on *SEN Support* are catching up with their peers to some extent by the end of secondary school. SEN funding is allocated for interventions. These are carefully planned and have their effectiveness reviewed every half term to a term. This approach to trialling and reviewing the effectiveness of interventions is being embedded more firmly in school business cycles; and
- Work is on-going to see if Merton has taken a more stringent approach to SEN definitions compared to other boroughs and whether or not this is skewing comparisons of attainment.

Key Stage 2

Again introduced by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, it was highlighted that changes in assessment approaches means no comparison can again be made based on previous performance. However, comparisons based on benchmarks for national, London and outer London show Merton's performance to be strong especially in reading and maths but not so strong in writing. It was noted that Merton has taken a particularly robust view of its moderation of writing which may make it difficult for valid comparisons to be made against other benchmark data. It was noted that the Department for Education (DfE) is working to ensure the parity of moderation of outcomes across the country to address this difference.

The progress of *Pupil Premium*, *SEN Support* and Black Caribbean cohorts was identified as a focus at Key Stage 2, (the Black Caribbean cohort is achieving 10% below the average level of attainment in Merton but is outperforming the same group nationally).

It was highlighted that all the assessment changes mean schools are less confident in monitoring progress generally and they need support to do this effectively for in year progress and not just at statutory assessment points.

In response to a member question, an officer clarified that the Black Caribbean cohort is a very vulnerable group in terms of attainment. Lessons from the *Black Children Achievement Project* included how to address barriers and engage parents. Focused activity based on these successful strategies is now taking place in five schools where this cohort is most represented.

Key Stage 4

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted performance at Key Stage 4 is strong with Merton achieving 10th place nationally. Ursuline High School achieved the 25th best performance at Key Stage 4 nationally. Using the new attainment measure,

Attainment 8, Merton's average (52.4) is well above the national average and in line with London.

Post 16

Again, new assessment methodologies mean it is not possible to provide a comparison based on previous performance. Performance is split by type of qualification and compared again against available benchmarks. Whilst this is on par for most types of qualification, it has been identified that academic students need to do better. The department is undertaking a series of 6th form reviews and challenging to achieve better performance.

In response to a member question, officers clarified that separate SEN data is not provided because it is not available for this phase of education.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Keith Shipman, Education Inclusion Manager introduced the item noting this measure has been redefined nationally to exclusively include 16 – 17 year olds and exclude 18 year olds (for whom there is no statutory requirement to be in education, employment or training). Performance for this group is good with the numbers of those not in education, employment or training falling faster than nationally. Merton is in the top quartile for its 16 – 17 year olds in training. This is linked to the increase in participation being achieved through apprenticeships. Whilst this is a small group it is having a big impact especially for those aged up to 18 years.

Additionally, the *September Guarantee* of a suitable place in education or training being offered for all 16 to 17 year olds has improved.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Examples of poor behaviour by some young people in the borough are often related to unemployment. ESF funding is being used to provide provision focused on getting into work and is provided across the locality and in partnership with other south London boroughs. *My futures* is working closely with the most vulnerable groups of young people and importantly providing support for transitions. Mental health support is also provided where needed to help young people into the work place;
- Merton's 6th form provision in addition to improvements in the provision at South Thames College means that 62% of 16 – 17 year olds remain in the borough for their post 16 provision;
- Strategies aimed at reducing youth offending were highlighted including those focused on enabling inclusion. For example, the training offer provided by South Thames College and the emphasis placed on staying within the borough for provision to enable diagnosis of SEN issues and for these to be addressed. The ADSD strategy was highlighted along with the targeted approach taken by *My Futures*. It was noted that offering a 6th form at Melrose Special School is being considered. This would aim to provide more support into post 16 provision with the correlation between exclusion and offending being noted and the intention being to break the link;

- All schools in Merton are working with *London Ambitions* which provides a minimum standard for careers guidance; and
- Access to governor training happens via two routes: either through buying into a Governor Service Level Agreement which gives free access to all training or by paying for individual training places.

Inclusion

Keith Shipman noted school attendance has increased and is above the benchmarks provided nationally, for London and outer London. Additionally, persistent absence is declining with an improving three year trend. However, there remains a focus on the *Pupil Premium* cohort for which absence is greater than the average in Merton although this group is doing better in Merton than nationally.

Again there have been no permanent exclusions from primary schools in Merton. This has been the case for over a decade. Permanent exclusions from secondary schools previously rose but have fallen in 2015/2016 in line with national trends. Permanent exclusions from special schools remain higher than nationally and are a focus with an on-going detailed examination of the contributory factors.

Fixed term exclusions are decreasing in primary schools meaning that there has been an increase in those that are reporting none in the academic year. Research has found that five pupils account for 24% of all primary school fixed term exclusions over the period which is indicative of their complex needs.

Similarly, there has been a fall in fixed term exclusions in secondary schools. However, there is a focus on children with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who, for the first time, have received proportionally more fixed term exclusions than the average in Merton's secondary schools.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Disengaged students who may not be attending school are the focus of support and challenge. Parents are reminded that it is their duty to ensure their child(ren) attends school and support offered to match the level of need. Barriers to attendance are addressed which may result in different provision being required potentially necessitating work with alternative curriculum providers; and
- Work is on-going with the public health team to look at the reasons for the link between fixed term exclusions and children on EHCPs at secondary school. This includes exploring the link to ADHD and whether on-going treatment for children in secondary schools meets their needs at this stage of their education;
- It was noted that there is no statistical prevalence of exclusions of children with EHCPs in Academies as opposed to local authority maintained schools;
- Pupils with an EHCP are given some protection from permanent exclusion. However, this doesn't prevent consideration of alternative provision where this is required including Pupil Referral Units; and
- Where individual pupil behaviour is an issue, schools will plan to minimise the impact potentially working with the whole class.

Virtual School

The performance of looked after children isn't as strong as that of all pupils in the Borough, but where comparisons are possible with the LAC cohort nationally at KS4, outcomes in Merton are in line. However, it was also noted that the comparatively small size of this cohort makes comparisons very difficult. There has been an increase in the number of looked after children achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C. Planning of educational provision for this cohort is achieved through the *Personal Education Plan* process with the department providing challenge to schools to put in place appropriate interventions where required.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Brunt, as the performance lead for the Panel, noted the following:

- Indicator 8 (the percentage of quorate attendance at child protection conferences): noted that the percentage for the third quarter is incorrectly reported as 67% and should be stated as 83%.
- Indicator 3 (the percentage of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued within statutory 20 week timescale): highlighted that this measure is showing a worrying trend. This is a cumulative measure with 153 plans having been completed over the period but only 31 completed within the 20 week target (20% in total against a target of 85%). Also, noted that the indicators do not provide an overall number for those plans newly requested in the period which would be a helpful context. It was also noted, that whilst some comfort is taken from Merton's performance on the completion of transfers from statements of SEN to EHCPs, being seventh in London, this data is from January 2016. Officers noted that this measure, in focusing on reaching the 20 week target for new requests to have ECHPs, misses that there is also an existing 1,080 to be transitioned. Merton has taken a thorough approach to this process which has resulted in positive feedback from parents and very few tribunals or the need for mediation;
- Indicator 15 (average number of weeks taken to complete care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks): questioned why this is higher than the national target. Officers highlighted that the average time taken for care proceedings is around 30/31 weeks, is routinely reviewed, can be skewed where proceedings are contested by parents through the courts and that any care proceeding taking longer than the average is reviewed in detail; and
- Indicators 29 and 30 (the percentage of reception year and year 7 surplus spaces): this is an annual measure, with data available for publication in February 2017. It was agreed that whilst this should be reported on the performance index in the month to which it refers (September 2016) as opposed to when it becomes available. Additionally, it was requested that if it is possible, without causing officers more work, that termly estimates of surplus places be provided to give indicative information in year. Officers agreed to look at this further.

RESOLVED: to look in greater depth at indicator 3 to understand:

1. the progress being made on transitioning existing plans (total numbers, average time taken to transfer, total completed to date);

2. by how much the 20 week target has been missed on issuing newly requested plans (for the remainder of the 80% of completed plans); and
3. The total number of new plans being requested.

It was suggested that this become the focus of a deep dive at the meeting in June.

7 TASK GROUP DRAFT REPORT: ROUTES INTO EMPLOYMENT FOR VULNERABLE COHORTS (Agenda Item 7)

RESOLVED: the Panel accepted the report of the routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts task group. This will now go to Cabinet for a formal response to the Panel within two months.

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair noted the motion to Full Council and its essence. It was highlighted that it is the responsibility of the Panel for it to consider its work programme at every meeting.

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families also noted that that there is a shared ambition for the Panel and what it aims to achieve.

Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director for Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, highlighted the importance of the Panel scrutinising the work of the partner organisations, with which the department is working to deliver services. For example, CLCH, its community health partner as achieved at the last meeting.

RESOLVED: to consider the points highlighted in the Full Council motion as part of the topic selection and work planning process for the next municipal year with specific focus on the use of external experts.

RESOLVED: the Panel took the opportunity on the occasion of his attendance at his last Panel meeting before retirement to thank Paul Ballatt for all his hard work on behalf of children and young people in Merton. Councillors Pearce, Taylor and Cooper Marbiah also noted and thanked Paul for the support he provided to them personally.