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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 17 JANUARY 2018

(7.15 pm - 9.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Linda Taylor OBE, Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Mike Brunt, Pauline Cowper, Charlie Chirico, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes and Brenda Fraser

Co-opted Member Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate, Mark Allison (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Paul Angeli (Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Hilina Asress (Senior Public Health Principal), Julia Groom, Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Sara Williams (Programme Manager, futureMerton) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer), Alison Roberts, Deputy Director of Commissioning, MCCG and Christa Blankenberg, CAMHS Project Manager, MCCG

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Colin Powell and Cllr Neil (with Cllr Fraser substituting for the latter).

### 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 of the previous meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record.

### **Matters arising**

The following items were raised by members, on which clarification was provided by officers subsequent to the meeting:

#### **1. Lettings of Merton Hall under the management of Elim Church**

Officers have had written correspondence with Elim Church representatives regarding their lettings and this was provided in Appendix 6 of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel call-in report dated 10 January 2018. In summary, Elim confirmed in writing that it will be offering the church site to the local community for groups and individuals to hire when it is available. Current activities that will move with Elim's current premises to Merton Hall include use by other church

groups, Slimming World (Thursday), Sun Group (Counselling Group), Pilates (Monday), Mums and Tots (Monday), Foodbank (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday) and Youth group (Friday). With regard to the specific question of use by the LGBT+ community which has been the main concern raised, Elim confirmed there would be no restriction on these groups accessing services, meetings, clubs etc. However, as with any organisation they would consider bookings of their premises on a case by case basis and would take bookings that did not conflict with the Constitution of their charity. This is provided in the conditions of hire form which was also provided to the council.

## 2. **Wimbledon Harris nodal points**

As stated in the 8 November 2017 CYP Overview and Scrutiny Panel report the admissions priority for 2018 entry is based on 'nodal points' - distance from Merton Abbey Primary School (33%), Colliers Wood Station (33%) and Haydons Road Station (33%). This will also apply for 2019 entry. The next time for any change will be next year for September 2020 entry. This is because all admissions authorities of open schools are required to consult annually on any change to their admissions policy by the end of January in the preceding year (so end of January 2019 for September 2020 entry). This is to allow sufficient time for any appeals to the School's Adjudicator and policies to then be finalised for the autumn when the applications process opens for the following year.

## 4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, provided members with an update, highlighting the following:

- **Ofsted inspections**: a number of schools have now received the outcome of their Ofsted inspections. Sherwood, St Marks, St John's Fisher and Abbotsbury have all retained their good judgements. Cricket Green has retained its outstanding judgement. Ricards has moved from good to outstanding and Gorringer Park from requires improvement to good. As a result, all of the secondary schools supported by the Council are good or outstanding and 91% of all the Council supported schools are good or outstanding. This means 93% of pupils are at good or outstanding schools in Merton. The school improvement team is working with those schools where education requires improvement;
- **Secondary school applications**: an additional 268 applications have been received this year compared to last for secondary school places. Of these 209 are from Merton residents and 255 list one of Merton's schools as their first choice. This matches the predictions made by officers. The increased demand will be met by the development of Harris Wimbledon; and
- **Harris Wimbledon**: work is currently ongoing with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Harris Federation to ensure the temporary school at Whatley Avenue is ready to be opened in September 2018. However, the focus is also on building the new school on the permanent site in High Path. One obstacle has been overcome with the completion of the call-in process on the Cabinet's decision to award the contract for the development of Merton Hall. The additional obstacles of the application to Historic England to list Merton Hall, the application to have it recognised as an Asset of Community Value and the Judicial Review

are all being dealt with as the new school is very much needed as demonstrated by this year's secondary school application numbers.

In response to member questions, the following clarification was provided:

- The application for a Judicial Review with regard to Merton Hall has been brought by a resident and relates to the planning consent received to redevelop Merton Hall for use by the Elim Church. Yvette Stanley, Director for Children, Schools and Families stated that she would brief members as soon as it is possible to make more information available. (As provided: the Claimant withdrew their Judicial Review. This followed the Decision of the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport not to add Merton Hall to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.);
- The school improvement team works with all the Merton family of schools but increases engagement with those that require improvement. This involves both support and challenge focused around the issues highlighted by Ofsted and the action detailed in the Ofsted action plan. This has been shown to work through the example of Gorringe Park which has recently moved from requires improvement to good; and
- Merton is on par with the rest of England and just behind the rest of London with regard to Ofsted judgements for its schools. The difference with the rest of London reflects the split between inner and outer London schools and the additional funding received by inner London schools.

Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, provided members with an update, highlighting the following:

- **Care leaver housing:** welcomed that this had been subject to a cross Panel conversation but noted there is more work to do especially as the duty on the Council is increasing and over-crowding is becoming more of an issue. Highlighted to the link to the *Think Family* policy, work on which is being accelerated as a result of these changing conditions;
- **Knife crime:** highlighted that 20% of knife crime incidents in London have a connection to Merton even though these occur outside the borough. Highlighted the need to work with adolescents and the importance of contextualised safeguarding;
- **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs):** these continue to be a focus. Feedback from families about this process is good but they take time which is causing pressure on resources; and
- **Local Government Chronical awards:** celebrated that the Children, Schools and Families Department is one of five shortlisted for an award from the Local Government Chronical. Regardless of the outcome, this is a successful achievement in its own right.

## 5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (Agenda Item 5)

### **Childhood obesity**

Hilina Asrress, Senior Public Health Principal, provided an introduction:

- 34.7% (2016/17) of Merton's children are currently judged to be overweight in Year 6 which means this figure has been reduced below the Health and Wellbeing target, is on par with England and better than London;
- However, there remains a ten percentage point difference between childhood obesity levels in the east and the west of the borough. The target is to reduce this to a 9.2% difference through targeted activity in the east of the borough;
- Further work continues in reducing childhood obesity overall as currently there are an estimated 4,500 children who are either overweight or obese equating to around 150 primary classes. The Child Healthy Weight Action Plan seeks to achieve this through communication and engagement, tackling the food environment, increased physical activity and health promoting physical environments and working with children in early years and schools; and
- Priorities for 2018 include reducing sugar intake (signing up to the Local Authority Declaration on Sugar reduction), better use of parks and playgrounds to increase physical activity, working to make Merton more baby friendly to increase breastfeeding rates and the introduction of the Merton Mile to encourage daily physical activity (including marking out a mile in parks to encourage activity as a family taking the Daily Mile in schools out into the community). Partnership working with key stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector is supporting the delivery of these priorities.

In response to member questions, it was further clarified:

- The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) focuses on Reception and Year 6. We know that there is a significant increase in obesity rates between Reception and Year 6 therefore many interventions are targeted at younger children. Intervention work also tends to be focused on younger children because this is when the greatest affect on long term health and well-being habits can be achieved;
- In addition to the initiatives identified within the paper to address the obesity gap, practical activities are being provided in the east of the borough such as a health and well-being awareness raising day where information on physical activity, opportunities to be active and nutritional information were provided. To support this, the Child Healthy Weight Action Plan will be refreshed in due course taking into account achievements as well a resident feedback from the Merton Great Weight Debate;
- The target for reducing the gap between the east and west of the borough (from 10% to 9.2%) does represent a significant ambition because it's predicated on the gap increasing to around 13% if no action is taken. Also the longer term target is to reduce the gap to 8% by 2020;
- The figure for the rate of childhood obesity in Merton is robust because it is calculated based on the NCMP that occurs in Reception and Year 6 and involves around 95% of children being measured. There are some schools in the east of the borough where 50% of the Year 6 cohort are either overweight or obese; and
- Whilst some children may have medical conditions causing them to be overweight/obese, they will still be included in the data given in the NCMP as this is a population level analysis.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**

Alison Roberts, Deputy Director of Commissioning and Christa Blankenberg, CAMHS Project Manager, both from the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group (MCCG), provided an introduction:

- Waiting times for a tier 3 CAMHS referral are within the eight week target and are reducing further;
- There is still pressure on waiting times for the neurodevelopment assessment service mainly due to increasing referrals for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessments. Waiting times are reducing and currently only 7% of referrals are waiting over 12 weeks in Merton. Across south west London, the six clinical commissioning groups are working together to review the service and have in 17/18 invested to reduce waiting times. The aim is to commission together, to benefit from efficiencies and develop a standardised service across all participating boroughs to ensure accessibility to appropriate services;
- The psychiatric service for those with eating disorders is receiving increased funding and is meeting its targets;
- Work is ongoing to increase access to self harm interventions. This deals with around 140 young people annually. It is hoped that a pilot project will lead to a longer term procurement; and
- There is also focus on services for those with anxiety and depression, work force development and training, maintaining a local mental health network for workers, training school staff to recognise and respond to pupil mental health issues, and developing a support offer for families with an ASD diagnosis.

In response to member questions, it was further clarified:

- The CCG representatives acknowledged the request from members for waiting times to be reduced further. Highlighted that targets are set nationally but that the objective is always to achieve under these times; also stressed that the CAMHS Single Point of Access aims to triage and assess all children and young people within two weeks of referral.
- Whilst it isn't possible to comment on the experience residents may have had several years ago, the additional investment into services aims to continue to improve waiting times;
- The pilot project looking at a counselling service for young people with depression and anxiety who do not meet thresholds for specialist CAMHS services is to be extended to June 2018 and it is hoped will provide the basis for commissioning a longer term service;
- The seven school pilot projects mentioned in the report are fairly small scale, giving one off funding to improve the offer provided. Learning from the projects will be shared across schools;
- The CCG representatives will share data on user satisfaction with services, this data is routinely collected and reviewed; and
- There has been a rise in diagnosis of ASD reflecting an increased awareness, a population increase and better guidance being available.

Given lack of time, the meeting agreed that the update item on the autism strategy will be taken when the consultation is complete and school readiness will be covered in the schools annual report which will come to the Panel in March 2018.

## 6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2018-2022 (Agenda Item 6)

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, provided an update on the business plan for 2018 – 2022. This includes changes made since the business plan was presented in late 2017. For example, there is allowance made for a two year pay award which would increase pay by 2.7% in 2018/19 and 2.8% in 2019/20. However, it is unclear how this will proceed with the outcome of an employers meeting and the Unite response to the proposal awaited.

Additionally, there has been an increase in the Council Tax base which was more than expected. Merton has signed-up to the business rate pilot for London proposed for 2018/19. Under the pilot, responsibilities previously funded by the Revenue Support Grant will be expected to be met by business rates.

Funding received from the New Homes bonus is lower than expected and there has been a further slippage on the capital programme budget of around £12m which is largely accounted for by the schedule of works for the leisure centre development and the timetable for the property company.

In response to member questions, it was further clarified:

- It is difficult for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (CSF) to make cuts to services without potentially impacting on vulnerable children and young people, given this is where the majority of the spend happens, with the resulting focus therefore on efficiency;
- It is clear that at least initially, the business rate pilot will not be sufficient to cover all of the funding provided by the Revenue Support Grant (estimated at £5m compared to £2.4m from the business rate pilot). However, it is thought that funding from the business rate pilot will grow over time, until revaluation and rebasing;
- The use of agency workers by CSF Department has reduced from around 40% two – three years ago, down to 20%. This reflects some maternity and long term sick leave but is also generated by the ongoing need to ensure safe caseloads amongst social workers. Currently there are 32 vacant posts within the Department with 10 of these already under offer;
- Within the Department those on long term sick leave number around half a dozen with 8.3 sick days on average taken by employees every year. These figures are monitored monthly at the Departmental Management Team meetings;
- Merton running its own agency for temporary staff has recently been explored as an alternative option to renewing the Council's employment agency contract. It was found this was unlikely to be a cost effective option or attractive offer for agency workers. Also no other London Borough is using this approach. It was therefore decided not pursue this option; and
- All but four of Merton's schools are currently buying back services but this year, anticipated income growth from service buy back is not as aspirational as in

previous years. This is the first year schools will be operating under the new funding model and there is a need to understand how this will impact on their purchasing of services.

## 7 SAVINGS PROPOSALS CONSULTATION PACK (Agenda Item 7)

Yvette Stanley, Director for Children, Schools and Families (CSF), introduced the deferred and replacement savings. The data review and potential centralisation is happening but is taking longer than planned due to the need to fully embed the new MOSAIC system and define future departmental needs. The review of the CSF staffing structure is happening and has been implemented in phases with the loss of an Assistant Director in April 2017 and further changes in administrative support happening in April this year. The Panel heard how savings will be made from the implementation of preventative services through the Social Impact Bond and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court. Evidence suggests that these approaches can reduce the chances of children staying in or returning to care from 60% to 40%.

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- Merton's involvement in the Family Drugs and Alcohol Court is just coming into effect so it is too early to say how this is working. It is hoped that this will also have an effect on the wider local economy beyond reducing the costs of children services. This will be achieved through successes such as better health outcomes, less engagement with the police and progression into work;
- It is not lawful to means test and charge for travel to school for students with special educational needs. This is a statutory duty on the council; and
- It would be possible for the Panel to consider having a more detailed review of the income generation of the CSF Department. This might be something to consider for the scrutiny work programme for the next municipal year.

**RESOLVED:** Councillor Holmes proposed a motion (seconded by Cllr Chirico): Recognising the excellent progress already made by the Children, Schools and Families Department in revenue generation, officers should explore additional opportunities for revenue generation in the same way as they are exploring opportunities for cost savings. Four Councillors voted for the motion, one against and five abstained meaning the motion was carried.

## 8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- **Foster carers**: whilst Merton has been relatively successful in recruiting foster carers, a number are retiring and there have been some resignations. Officers are therefore taking a very detailed approach to recruitment of foster carers. Merton is working as part of a local consortium to increase carer numbers with a specific focus on increasing capacity for the foster care of young people/adolescents; and
- **Special Educational Need (SEN) school expansion**: the expansion in SEN provision reflects a changing profile of needs which would have been impossible

to have predicted 20 years ago as this has resulted from significant medical advances. The Children, Schools and Families Department has worked to reduce the need for SEN residential care and is now working to do the same for day care in the independent sector which is cost prohibitive and to benefit children and young people with care closer to home.

9 ACTION PLAN: CARE LEAVER ACCOMMODATION REFERENCE (Agenda Item 9)

Paul Angeli, Assistant Director for Social Care and Youth Inclusion, thanked the Panel for its interest in care leaver accommodation and the workshop jointly hosted with the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel in September 2017. This has helped move things forward. A HMO (house of multiple occupation) has now been established and six young people are now taking advantage of the *Staying Put* policy.

In response to member questions, it was confirmed that the effect of the *Staying Put* policy does mean that some foster carers are not available for other placements whilst young people remain with them. However, it is thought that these arrangements are each likely to last for around a year to 18 months after which foster carers will again be available for new placements.

10 ACTION PLAN: VULNERABLE COHORTS INTO EMPLOYMENT TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 10)

Sara Williams, Economy Manager, futureMerton, provided members with an overview of the progress made to date on the recommendations. Several have been met (recommendations 1 and 3) whilst others are still work in progress.

In response to member questions, it was agreed that the officer will explore further why it's not possible to ensure through standard contract terms that contractors and service providers offer apprenticeships for Merton residents. It was agreed that the recommendations would be further reviewed by the Panel in six months time.

It was explained that more information is being made available on apprenticeships and other training opportunities through a dedicated webpage that is currently being designed as part of the Young Merton offer. It was also clarified that the *Economic Wellbeing Group* is a forum for local training providers to share information and offer signposting.

11 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 11)

Members were informed that performance monitoring updates will again be provided once the data becomes available following the implementation of the new Mosaic information management system by the Children, Schools and Families Department. This is in progress and it is hoped that at least some initial data will be available at the next meeting (1 February 2018).



Panel members agreed that they should write collectively to the Borough Commander to express their concern that no senior member of the local force is able to attend the next meeting at which the Merton Safeguarding Children Board annual report will be the substantive item.