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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 27 JUNE 2018

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Sally Kenny (in the Chair), Edward Gretton, Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Omar Bush, Edward Foley, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Hayley Ormrod, Dennis Pearce and Eleanor Stringer

Co-opted Members Emma Lemon

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Kelly Braund, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Mark Gwynne (Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance, Children, Schools and Families), Dawn Jolley (Head of Commercial Services), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion), Rachael Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Sara Williams (Programme Manager, futureMerton) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Colin Powell, Director of Education for the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education and a statutory co-opted member of the Panel.

### 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.

There were no matters arising.

### 4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, provided members with an overview of her priorities highlighting the following:

- Raising standards: all of Merton's secondary schools are judged good or outstanding. This is the same for most of Merton's primary schools. However, there are some that are judged to require improvement. These are the main focus. The aim is to raise standards. They are being supported and challenged by the school improvement team;
- Harris Merton: this will open in September 2018 on the temporary site in Whatley Avenue. This year, Merton received an additional 200 applications for secondary school places from within the borough demonstrating the need for this new

secondary school. In fact, it is already full with a waiting list. As a result, building of the new, permanent school site on High Path is now a priority;

- Progress of children with additional needs: whilst Merton is ranked first according to the Progress 8 measure (the progress made between the start of secondary school and the end of Key Stage 4), not all Merton's students are making the grade. There will be a focus on the progress of those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs);
- Cricket Green: following the successful expansion of Perseid, Cricket Green is undergoing a similar expansion to provide additional special school places. This is a priority because of the growth in the number of students with special educational needs;
- Fair access: making sure that all children in Merton have fair access to the borough's schools including those are new arrivals to the borough or country. This is crucial in ensuring equality of life chances;
- Smart Centre: this provision is for those that have been excluded from school. It offers support for reintegration and is of crucial importance to helping young people get their lives back on track;
- Recruitment and retention of heads: working to support the recruitment and retention of heads. Merton has the advantage of good schools. Currently, exploring a range of ways and means to encourage heads to stay; and
- All schools to have a full governing body: keen to make sure that Merton's schools all have a full complement of governors but that these also provide the specific skills needed for effective school governance. Whilst the range of skills needed by governing boards can sometimes make it harder to recruit, these skills are important.

In response to member questions, Cllr Cooper-Marbiah and officers clarified:

- (Rachael Wardell, Director, Children, Schools & Families) Significant changes to GCSEs mean it is difficult to provide any comparison of achievement year-on-year. In effect, a new baseline is being established;
- (Rachael Wardell) Will go away and explore the difficulties being experienced with school maintenance contracts (fulfilled by Sodexo). Examples provided included toilet rolls running out, meaning school toilets have to be shut and an alarm going off at Rutlish for over a year. A member expressed concern regarding the additional pressure this is putting on headteachers. The Director committed to report back to the Panel.

Cllr Braund, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, provided members with an overview of her priorities highlighting the following:

- Mitigating financial strains: need to continue to scrutinise the budget to ensure ongoing delivery of a user focused and first class/high quality service that puts children and families first;
- Ofsted outcomes: whilst the outcome of last year's combined inspection was good with outstanding features, need to focus on areas that are not outstanding and look at the timescales for achieving outstanding in all. Will continue to support and challenge areas where an outstanding judgement was achieved as it is important not to be complacent;

- Transition into adulthood: keen to ensure any unnecessary barriers that are encountered during the transition to adulthood are removed. For example, that there is commonality in the language used by services for children and adults so that there is progression and continuity. This is to prevent young people feeling like they are accessing a completely new service when they make the transition to adult services;
- Autism strategy: this has just been launched and endorsed by the Health & Wellbeing Board. It reflects the growth in children and adults in Merton who are autistic. Ensuring its delivery including redesigning the diagnostic pathway and making it accessible to parents, those with autism and other stakeholders is key; and
- Strategic framework for Diabetes: again, this has just been launched and endorsed by the Health & Wellbeing Board. Keen to focus on the education of residents. Additionally, to provide support for those with Type 1 and encourage those with Type 2 to use exercise and other lifestyle choices to achieve better management.

## 5 BRIEFING: EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS (Agenda Item 5)

Jane McSherry, Assistant Director for Education, introduced the item:

- The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has taken a lead over the last year on scrutinising the progress being made with the transfer to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs);
- These were introduced by Government in 2014, replacing statements of educational need. They reflect a change to a more holistic approach to the support provided to those with additional needs and an extension of the age range of application so that this now goes from 0 to 25 years. Additionally, they are co-produced in partnership with parents and children/young people themselves;
- Following the introduction of EHCPs, all existing statements of educational need also had to be transferred. Merton took the decision to do this properly and co-produce the transfer of all the existing 1,023 statements. This was a big process that had to be done in parallel to meeting requests for new EHCPs and be fulfilled by the deadline of the end of March 2018. This has now been achieved for all but 15. All these children/young people are within a tier 4 mental health facility or out of the country therefore making them inaccessible;
- Government introduced a deadline of 20 weeks between the initial request for an EHCP being accepted and production of the resulting plan. Over the last year, the Department has not been where it has wanted to be in terms of meeting this deadline. However, there has been a significant improvement in performance now the transfer of statements to EHCPs has been completed. As a result, 52% are completed within the 20 week target. Of the remaining 48%, 70% are completed within 26 weeks; and
- Highlighted that the department has been dealing with a significant increase in requests for EHCPs. In addition, that there have been very few cases of mediation or tribunal required as part of the EHCP process. This demonstrates that parents are happy. Ensuring that parents are engaged in the EHCP process has to be balanced with need to meet the 20 week deadline.

In response to member questions, Jane McSherry clarified:

- There is no additional funding being provided to meet the increased number of EHCPs. This is a budget challenge for the dedicated schools grant. This is also being affected not just by a growth in numbers but an increase in the complexity of needs and the fact that children/young people with a whole range of conditions have a better prognosis and therefore need support for longer. Specifically on transport costs, parents are being encouraged to have personal budgets, as these are more cost effective. However, parents can be resistant to taking on the additional responsibility. The Department is therefore providing them with support to ease the transition. In other cases, travel training is being provided to young people and pick-up points established to reduce costs. Merton's special schools are in the process of being expanded. This is already complete at Perseid and is in progress at Cricket Green. This achieves the objective of keeping young people close to home (cutting travel costs) but also reduces the need to use more expensive provision in the independent sector;
- Prior to EHCPs being finalised, children will be within mainstream provision, on SEN support with the school budget covering an additional costs. The Department is working with schools to speed up assessments to reduce this burden on school budgets as much as possible;
- Monthly data on performance against the 20 week target for the production of new EHCPs has been provided to scrutiny and is publicly available as part of the agenda for previous Panel meetings;
- Merton's performance on the need for medication and tribunal cases is good with use in Merton much lower than other boroughs. This will be helped by Merton having lots of good and outstanding schools; and
- Customer satisfaction/user feedback on the EHCP process is captured at a number of points. Firstly through case officer feedback and the parent/carer forum. Additionally, the Department is just about to complete a formal consultation on the experience of parents/carers involved in the EHCP process.

**RESOLVED:** for the consultation on the experience of parents/carers involved in the EHCP process to be shared with the Panel.

## 6 TASK GROUP REVIEW: USER VOICE RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel discussed the options available to ensure it hears the views of children and young people to inform its scrutiny of services. Rachael Wardell also suggested that it might be possible to get young people themselves directly involved in the scrutiny process. Jane McSherry suggests other methods might be used such as videoing feedback from children and young people. It was highlighted that the Department collects user voice/feedback by a variety of methods. This can be shared with the Panel.

The Panel was in general agreement that it would like to be informed in its scrutiny by the voice of children and young people. It was thought it would be most helpful to

have a designated member of the Panel responsible for considering how this might happen at each meeting.

**RESOLVED:** At the next meeting, to consider the role of a designated lead for the voice of children and young people.

## 7 TASK GROUP REVIEW: EMPLOYMENT OF VULNERABLE COHORTS RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 7)

Sara Williams, futureMerton, introduced the item. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel originally set-up a task group to look at the housing, health, education and employment of care leavers or those with additional learning needs. However, this was refocused to look solely at the employment of these groups. The task group's report and recommendations were presented to the Panel for review in January 2018. This resulted in a request from the Panel to review them further after six months. The task group's recommendations mainly focus on the role of Merton as an employer. Whilst the council has links with local businesses and employers, the main way in which it can influence the employment prospects of the target groups is through its own role as an employer.

Progress against each recommendation was then considered in turn with members being given the opportunity to ask questions:

- Recommendation 1: focused on better communications. This has largely been achieved through activities such as improved information online and the working of the Economic Wellbeing Group. The latter is well-supported and successfully allowing information to be shared by key partners. Additionally, Merton's HR team has been liaising with social and key workers.
- Recommendation 2: the Workforce Strategy Board now has a focus on both traineeships and work experience opportunities. Dawn Jolley, Head of Commercial Services, explained how working with Merton's contractors and suppliers to provide both traineeships and work experience is being built into a social value toolkit. This will be used as part of the commissioning process for contracts. This will take a little longer to finalise than planned but is being optimised following consultation with other boroughs. The toolkit will allow commissioners to evaluate bids received with ease and provide a framework that will mean using contractors to provide these opportunities will not be legally challenged. In response to member questions, it was clarified:
  - (Keith Shipman, Social Inclusion Manager) These opportunities are having a positive impact. With small cohorts of target young people, opportunities can be specifically matched to the needs/skills of the young person;
  - (Keith Shipman) Members and officers started to develop their thinking on using Merton's role as an employer and its reach through contractors at the same time;
  - (Melissa Stewart, Commissioning Manager) Section 106 funding is being used to support those at risk or categorised as not in employment, education or training to provide opportunities over the summer when risks can increase;

- (Melissa Stewart) One case study is of two young men known to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) for their risk of gang involvement. Both were offered initial opportunities by Veolia, now supplying waste, recycling and street cleaning services across the borough through the South London Waste Partnership. Following these initial opportunities both have remained with Veolia. One is now on a three-year apprenticeship for which Veolia lowered the application bar. The other has been offered a post and is training as a mechanic. This post has been specifically configured for him as it is understood an apprenticeship opportunity isn't suitable; and
- (Dawn Jolley) It is important to recognise the complexities of making these arrangements work. Whilst provision of an opportunity for a vulnerable young person can be a quick win, there are other complexities that need to be addressed to ensure the employer is happy with arrangements. In addition, it is important to ensure that putting these opportunities in place is not lost as part of the tendering process.
- Recommendation 3: improved attendance at the Economic Wellbeing Group has largely been met. In response to a member question, it was clarified that this had previously been a struggle. However, attendance at this forum is a key way for groups across the council and the borough to work together to make employment opportunities available to the target groups and others. The example of the Merton Employment Team that supports vulnerable adults into employment was given. This team is now attending the Economic Wellbeing Group leading to lots of additional opportunities for its client group.
- Recommendation 4: in terms of demonstrating its commitment to the employment of the target groups, a new strategy is being produced by the Council. Corum has been commissioned to survey and consult both Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Corum is an independent consultancy that has been specifically commissioned to undertake the work. This is specific and time limited.
- Recommendation 5: this has largely been covered above although it was again noted that the Workforce Strategy Board now has a focus on both traineeships and work experience opportunities.
- Recommendation 6: consideration of how to work with Merton's contractors and suppliers has largely covered above.
- Recommendation 7: it was highlighted that whilst data has been supplied in the agenda pack, this is generic for all apprenticeships as opposed to being specifically for the target groups.

**RESOLVED:** Panel members resolved the following:

- Noted how impressed they are with the opportunities being provided for vulnerable young people in Merton and the success these are having;
- A further report back is to be provided to the Panel in six months time;
- Expressed their interest in receiving information on the work currently being undertaken by Corum with Looked After Children and Care Leavers and seeing the resulting strategy; and
- Data should be provided to the Panel in six months time including the number of apprenticeships by Directorate fulfilled by those within the target groups. Of these how many have started, stayed and left should be stated. Members requested

that an appropriate representative from the HR team attend the meeting to explain these statistics.

Lastly, Melissa Stewart stressed to members that she is very interested in hearing from them if they have any connections with local employers that might be explored to provide employment opportunities for these target groups.

## 8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- (Rachael Wardell) Information will be provided to members following the meeting regarding the costs of using the Whatley Avenue building as a temporary site for Harris Wimbledon;
- (Jane McSherry) The Whatley Avenue site will only be used temporarily until the High Path permanent site is available. There will be no split site provision; once the High Path site is open, Whatley Avenue will be closed and returned to the stock of buildings held by Merton Council and managed by the Environment & Regeneration Department;
- (Rachael Wardell) Information will be provided to members following the meeting on the views of the 5% of families who weren't positive about outcomes having been improved as a result of engaging with children's centres;
- (Rachael Wardell) Both St Marks and Raynes Park secondary schools have places available for the forthcoming academic year (2018/2019). However, cumulatively these do not exceed the number of applications and places secured at Harris Wimbledon. Without the new school, a good number of applications would have needed to have been fulfilled out of the borough. St Marks is an improving school and received more applications this year than it did in the last academic year;
- (Rachael Wardell) Concerned about the current lack of data on Children's Services resulting from the implementation of the new Mosaic system. Noted that this is the longest time for which she has not had access to data. It is hoped that this will be forthcoming by the middle of July. The process of providing data for returns to Government is being used to provide the Department with some confidence. This situation is being addressed through support from the provider company and improved report writing capacity in-house. However, once data starts to become available again, the Department will need to ensure that this is correct in the system. It is increasingly likely that the longer the system is not being used the greater the disincentive to input to the system. As a result, it is likely that when the system is first run, performance will have deteriorated. It is important that all users understand the importance of updating; and
- (Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning & Performance) Returns that are happening now are helping with understanding of what information is missing from Mosaic. As a result, work is underway to help users understand where data has to be inputted. Training will also be provided from September to October including for super-users who will support the training of other officers.

**Resolved:** Members resolved that they should be notified by the Director of the Children Schools & Families Department should the Mosaic system not be online and working effectively by mid-July 2018 as outlined at the meeting.

## 9 SETTING THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018/2019 (Agenda Item 9)

**RESOLVED:** Members resolved:

- To agree the work programme as outlined in the meeting agenda (pages 22 – 23);
- In addition, to take a report from the Governor Support Team looking at school volunteers in Merton;
- To look at school admissions in Merton. The scrutiny officer to consider how best this can be done;
- To take a report from the scrutiny officer looking at what other councils have done to provide support for parents;
- To undertake a task group focused on children, mental health and what can be done to support prevention/resilience. Cllrs Irons, Akyigyina and Gretton all volunteered to take part in the task group;
- Cllrs Stringer and Ormord were selected as performance monitoring leads for the Panel; and
- Cllr Bush was selected by the Panel as its budget scrutiny lead.

Cllr Stringer noted an error with the note of the topic suggestion workshop (04/06/18). She was present at this although she is not included on the list of attendees.

## 10 CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES GLOSSARY (Agenda Item 10)

Noted for information with thanks. Members were encouraged by the Chair to retain this and refer to it throughout the year when reading the agenda for meetings. This will be updated and reissued at the start of the next municipal year.