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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
23 JUNE 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.15 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Brenda Fraser (in the Chair),
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Nick Draper,
Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet
Member for Children and Education.

Jane McSherry (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Karl
Mittelstadt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and
Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health) Stella Akintan
Scrutiny Officer, Sue Myers, Interim Assistant Director,
Children's Social Care, Nick Wilson Interim Assistant Director
Education and Early Help.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Co-opted Member Mansoor Ahmad said he attended the topic selection workshop but his name has not been recorded.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

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

4 COVID-19 UPDATE ON IMPLICATIONS FOR MERTON - PRESENTATION
(Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of her presentation highlighting that infection rates are rising nationally and steeply in South West London. The vaccine effectiveness means there is less severe illness, especially amongst the over 60s. The gap in vaccination rates between different ethnic groups is closing. All schools are open in Merton although cases are rising in schools.

In response to questions the Director of Public Health reported that;

Discussions have taken place with NHS colleagues about the availability of the Moderna vaccine for second doses.

Although some areas are using mass testing, vaccination is the best way to tackle the pandemic.

There are tools to respond to rise in infections rates amongst young people include testing, self-isolation, social distancing and vaccination.

Concern was raised that school pupils are not social distancing as they cluster outside schools, The Director said the risk is lower outside, peer to peer messages will help and our responses need to be proportionate.

5 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Children Schools and Families gave an overview of the report highlighting that two new Assistant Directors had been appointed. Aileen Buckton was also appointed as Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board.

In response to questions it was reported that:

Budget setting was delayed this year but the Department are working with schools on budget planning.

Further updates on the restructure in the children schools and families department will be shared in due course.

Three year budgets is a useful approach to financial planning because it helps when dealing with deficits, changes in spend and there are useful benchmarking tools.

Extra funding has been allocated for virtual schools to help pupils with their learning.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Policy Performance and Partnerships gave an overview of the report.

A panel member expressed concern that there is limited opportunity for scrutiny within these indicators. The Panel were reminded that the indicators were agreed by this committee and that the chosen indicators provide appropriate information of the full range of activities across the department. In conjunction with the departmental update, members of the scrutiny panel are provided with qualitative and quantitative information to exercise effective scrutiny.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report

7 CABINET MEMBER CURRENT PRIORITIES - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member thanked the Children, Schools and Families , schools and support staff for their work during the pandemic.

The Cabinet member reported that her priorities were focused on; education places, special educational needs and increases in the autism spectrum.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member reported that:

Head teachers issues of concern include; financial concerns particularly around the Designated Schools Grant, funding for special educational needs, school places and the logistical challenges of Covid.

In regards to supporting schools to embed racial in-equality, we are working across the borough to encourage learning and sharing on these issues.

In regards to support to young people in care Merton has lower rates than the London average but numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers are rising. The aim is to ensure there is sufficient housing.

RESOLVED

Future department update report to consider support to looked after children

The Panel would like an update on implementation of the recommendations from the Care Leavers Accommodation work which took place in 2017/18.

8 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2021-2022 (Agenda Item 8)

RESOLVED

The Panel agreed the task group review will consider digital technology in schools.

The draft work programme will be agreed at the next meeting.