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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 9 FEBRUARY 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.43 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Sally Kenny (in the Chair),
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Nick Draper, Councillor Edward Foley,
Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor James Holmes,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stinger (Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet
Member for Children and Education)

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant
Director for Education and Early Help), Jane McSherry (Director
of Children, Schools and Families), Karl Mittelstadt (Head of
Performance, Improvement and Partnerships), Tom Procter
(Head of Contracts & School Organisation) and Keith Shipman
(Head of Education Inclusion) Sukpal Uppal, Participation and
Engagement Manager)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Omar Bush and Councillor
Thomas Barlow attended as a substitute.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

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

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

4 (Agenda Item)

5 IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Public Health reported that infections have fallen. There are still
outbreaks in schools.

General hospitalisations are steady and in decline, not seen serious disease in
children.

Vaccination roll out has slowed down and is now targeted to groups with lower vaccination uptake.

There is a vaccination offer for 5-11 year olds at high risk.

The next steps are looking at how to live safely with Covid. The Government will announce national plans on 24th February.

Resolved

The Director was thanked for her report

6 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Education Inclusion gave an overview of the report highlighting there is a significantly higher risk of mental health amongst young people. Off the Record reports numbers doubled during the pandemic. All Merton schools will have the opportunity to have a mental health team by Easter. The CAMHS Transformation Manager said the focus is on prevention and early intervention

A panel member asked about the impact of Covid and how can we support those who may have fallen out of the system during the pandemic

The Transformation Manager said the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Strategy was in place before the pandemic. Mental health complexities have increased and there are changes in the way young people need to be supported. There is increased capacity in services, recruiting into specialist areas and they are working with GP Surgeries to prevent hospital admissions.

A panel member asked if complexities increased or are we picking them up better, do we monitor for ethnicity and if resources sufficient.

The Head of Education Inclusion said there are increases in conditions such as ticks, related to social media. Some conditions may be being identified more because young people are more willing to talk. CAMHS does receive data on ethnicity. There has been increased investment in CAMHS over the last 5 years.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report and asked for a progress report.

7 MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Children Schools and Families gave an overview of the report highlighting that the independent chair is for both the adults and children safeguarding partnerships.

A panel member said they would like a better understanding what officers think of the work that has taken place.

The Director of Children Schools and Families said this is partnership report between health, police and the local authority. The Partnership is pleased with work on early help, and there is concern across the wider partnership on domestic abuse

In response to questions the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion reported that numbers of looked after children are low in Merton and boys are more likely to be looked after. Early intervention is keeping younger children out of care.

In response to questions on the success of foster care recruitment, the Director of Children Schools and Families said they are planning a big recruitment drive. There are potential foster carers in the system but Covid slowed down the recruitment process.

The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help said future reports from the Partnership will provide more detail on the impact of training courses.

RESOLVED

Officers were thanked for their report

8 HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL CONSULTATION (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Contracts and School Organisation gave an overview of the report and there had been a rich consultation. One of the major findings was that there was potential for independent travel to be supported more widely.

A panel member said independent travel is good for some young people but not all.

A further panel member welcomed the report but asked whether, rather than review the policy to potentially withdraw the service for some children, have we considered commissioning, for example putting more burden on the provider. The Head of Contracts and School Organisation reassured the panel member that whilst value for money in commissioning was not part of this paper it was consistently worked on both in establishing a competitive market, reviewing routes and improving the number of children on each vehicle. Transferring risk to a provider comes at a financial cost.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Education said there are increasing numbers of children with Education Health and Care Plans with specialist placements and so rising costs related to their transport to these placements – we are looking at policies to ensure they are fit for purpose so the right children get the right service and we commission as efficiently as possible. This consultation was specifically about the policy and eligibility.

Resolved
Officers were thanked for their report

Resolved
Officers were thanked for their report

9 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE - TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 8)

The Director of Children Schools and Families gave an overview of the report.

A member panel said we spent possibly £100m on expanding schools, and with the benefit of hindsight, should we have done this in a different way e.g. through temporary buildings.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Schools said estimating places is not an exact science, but based on the evidence the decision was taken to invest in better buildings. Families have appreciated the good quality classrooms rather than portacabins. The recent significant reduction in demand for school places is an issue across London and beyond and many council areas are in a worse position than Merton including needing to close schools. We have been creative in how this space is used and schools also hire out their spaces.

Resolved
The Director was thanked for her report

10 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE - VERBAL REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

The Cabinet Member said her key areas of focus include:

- Place planning and looking at projections to understand what is needed
- SEND provision - waiting for an update on Designated Schools Grant funding bid
- Youth voice and responding to the outcomes of survey
- Schools are preparing for Ofsted now that they have resumed routine inspection

The Cabinet Member reported that Harris Academy Wimbledon have consulted on making changes to admission their policy for 10% selection by music aptitude. There is concern regarding this kind of selection and should the Academy decide to implement this policy following the consultation Merton has the option to take this matter to the independent schools' adjudicator.

RESOLVED

The Cabinet Member was thanked for her report.

11 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 10)

The Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships gave an overview of the report and highlighted that more detail had been provided to indicator 16 as requested by the Panel at the last meeting.

A panel member said we need to look at things we can scrutinise including areas of challenge. The report contains too many indicators which are green, and some do not have a target at all. The role of panel should be to monitor improvement of amber or red indicators.

The Director of Children Schools and Families said the Panel may wish to be informed about important areas which may not have a specific target but will impact on resources, such as numbers of looked after children.

The Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships said the purpose of the dashboard is to provide an understanding on how system is behaving and the population we are working with. The dashboard also shows how well the system is doing and these measures have a target. This quantitative report and the qualitative departmental update provide the panel with a picture of how the service is working overall.

RESOLVED

Officers were thanked for their report

12 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 11)

The work programme was noted.