

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
15 MARCH 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.35 pm)

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

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help), Karl Mittelstadt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; Ed Foley, Stan Anderson and Omar Bush. Councillor Nigel Benbow attended as a substitute.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

A panel member asked for the minute to contain a more substantial mention of the young inspector who had attended the last meeting to provide an update on the outcomes from their survey.

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

4 APPRENTICESHIPS IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Head of Organisation Development gave an overview of the report and said the new strategy has been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team. Three positions have been approved and there is a dedicated resource in the Children Schools and Families Department helping care leavers and young people into apprenticeships. The challenges include the lack of awareness amongst staff and managers across the council about apprenticeships. Plans are in place to address this.

A panel member raised a concern about the amount of money sent back to government. The Head of Organisation Development agreed it is disappointing to return money. It will require a significant number of apprentices to reduce the money returned.

A panel member asked about measures to build links with local businesses and matching skills with young people, which would enable the council to use the government funding. The Head of Organisation Development said building relationships with businesses and schools, colleges and universities is the next step. There is an apprenticeship level policy.

A panel member said as many organisations require a degree - are we moving away from academic qualifications towards apprenticeship qualifications?

The Head of Organisation Development said some jobs need qualifications. Apprenticeships mirror the academic level required and include real work experience therefore young people do not need to go to college or university as well apprenticeships provide an equivalent qualification.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Education said she is deeply committed to apprenticeships, and this must be a collaboration amongst different departments across the council. They are not the full answer to youth employment and there many restrictions on how money can be used. Currently there is £111 million unspent across local authorities.

A panel member said there are limited apprenticeships available for manual roles. The Head of Organisation Development said there are limitations of what can be offered. There are some engineering roles, and a growing list of such roles on the Apprenticeship Society website. We can work towards meeting local need.

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said T levels offer opportunities in construction and less academic routes and some schools are providing them.

A panel member asked about the employment offer for disabled people how much employment is offered what is the success rate. The Head of Organisation Development said there is more to do to offer a wider range of opportunities for all. The Head of Education Inclusion said young people with disabilities have a range of opportunities, these are not all provided by the council. There is a focus on this area and aligning work in children and adult's services.

A panel member asked that officers refer to the recommendations from past task group reports regarding apprenticeships and report back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

To circulate Task Group review on Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts

5 UPDATE ON COVID 19 IN MERTON (Agenda Item 5)

The Senior Public Health Principal reported that we are in a transitional period with Covid, from 1 April there will be a number of changes. There is a general downward trend in infection rates. Vaccination is the main defence against Covid.

A panel member asked if Covid is leaving vulnerable people with months of illness even after the infection has gone away.

The Senior Public Health Principal reported that long Covid is a problem and , people who are vaccinated are less likely to suffer from long Covid. More research is needed to understand long Covid and how best to offer support to this group.

Resolved

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

6 SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help gave an overview of the report and said it provides an overview of the academic year 2021. Performance information is reduced due to Covid, as assessments did not happen in the same way.

A panel member said it is a fantastic report with good news on progress despite the impact of Covid. It is well set out on what the challenges are and how they can be addressed.

A Panel Member asked if officers and cabinet member do their best to commit to encouraging schools to strive for the best and outstanding rating despite stricter criteria from Ofsted.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Education said she is proud of what has been achieved, and there is no complacency amongst schools and headteachers.

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said progress will come through Merton Education Partner Programme to challenge schools, to understand outstanding criteria . They are also bringing in Her Majesty's Inspectors to talk to headteachers.

A Panel member commended officers on a good report and asked what support is given to academies which are not rated as highly. The Assistant Director for Early

Help said there are good relationships and officers scrutinise the range of data available to them to inform any conversation or challenge that is required.

Resolved

Thanked all officers and particularly to the Head of Education Inclusion and the Assistant Director of Education and Early Help.

7 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Director of Children, Schools and Families introduced the report stating that the recent Ofsted focussed on the effectiveness of children's service and arrangements for children in care and effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Panel members asked about the negotiations for the Safety Valve programme and what options are being put in place if the council is not accepted on the pilot. The Assistant Director of Education and Early help said it remains to be seen what the final outcome will be, however as a result of the negotiations, it is expected that we will receive some money.

The Director of Children, Schools and Families said the DSG recovery plan is looking to find ways to rebalance the SEND system and in particular to bring the deficit associated with spend on the High Needs Block under control. Proposals include enabling more young people to attend local provision. There is an over reliance on out of borough provision. There are also plans to support schools to further develop their inclusive practice and to enable more children with an EHCP to attend in a mainstream setting.

The Cabinet member for Children and Education thanked the Panel for their support and challenge and said her priorities are:

- Youth employment
- Special education needs
- Support schools in forthcoming Ofsted inspections
- Recruitment fosters carers

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Policy Improvement and Partnerships gave an overview of the report. The Chair thanked officers for the report.

9 TOPIC SUGGESTIONS FOR THE 2022-23 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel agreed to send topic suggestions to the scrutiny officer.