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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.20 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),
Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Caroline Charles,
Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes,
Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Linda Kirby,
Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Mansoor Ahmad, Roz Cordner, Cruise, Dr Stannard and
Councillor Robert Page

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sally Kenny (Cabinet Member for Education and
Lifelong Learning)

Richard Ellis (Interim Assistant Director for Strategy,
Commissioning and Transformation) Elizabeth Fitzpatrick
(Assistant Director for Education and Early Help) Dheeraj
Chibber (Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth
Inclusion) Maisie Davies, (Head of Policy, Improvements and
Partnerships) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Chessie Flack. Councillor Robert Page attended as a substitute.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

A panel member asked if an update on the immunisations work can be presented to the next meeting. The Chair said he will liaise with officers to determine if this will be possible.

The Minute was agreed as a true and accurate record.

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

4 DEPARTMENT UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

The Assistant Directors in the Children Schools and Families Department gave an overview of the report.

A panel member asked how the growth of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) will be slowed and what criteria is used to deny assessment. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said they are looking at evidence vigorously and fairly ensuring those children who need an EHCP can get it. They are also considering how needs can be met in school through ordinarily available school resources including Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) funding. There is a strategy to provide training and support to leaders and teachers and support staff in schools, to share best practice and improve consistency.

The Interim Assistant Director of Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation said the Department for Education encouraged the council to apply thresholds appropriately and consistently and look at other options not just EHCPs.

A panel member asked for the reasons why young people give no comment interviews. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said there is a correlation between stop and search and no comment interviews due to a lack of trust in the police. No comment interviews mean young people are more likely to be charged with a crime. In response to a question, it was also reported that it is likely that young people affiliated with gangs are also more likely to give no comment interviews.

A panel member asked about the support available for children who attend reception with additional needs. The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help said their needs are likely to be identified in preschool provision (if they attend this), in which case the provider would receive support from the inclusion support team. For some children (including those not attending a provision) where identified needs are particularly high, there is support from the portage. The transfer of records from pre-school to school is also very important.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their work and especially for exceeding national targets.

5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY - PROGRESS WITH WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION (Agenda Item 5)

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help gave an overview of the report.

A Panel member sought clarification on who had agreed the actions within the written statement. The Interim Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation said colleagues from the Department for Education have examined these and monitored progress against the three areas for improvement identified. The actions sit within the wider SEND strategy. A follow-up inspection, revisiting the three areas is expected when Ofsted will examine the evidence base provided to ascertain the progress made.

Resolved

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

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

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning gave an overview her priorities.

The overarching aim is to ensure there is a high standard of education for all children in the borough.

To ensure more children who live in Merton to be educated in the borough. Many actions are taking place to facilitate this including reducing transport costs.

Reduce the number of EHCPs and ensure all children get the best standard of education. The Cabinet Member expressed support for the development of the Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) as part of the Council's SEND Strategy.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for her update.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion and the Policy and Partnerships Manager gave an overview of the report.

A panel member asked for clarification on the indicator relating to "Percentage of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time" The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said a large sibling group has increased the numbers, and as numbers are traditionally low it has impacted on the proportions. There has been an increase in need, some post covid and some more complex cases.

A Panel member asked if schools should be asked to reduce capacity due to surplus of school places. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said the numbers of Children and Young People requiring school places has been impacted by Covid and Brexit as more families moved out of London. There is a Place Planning Strategy, which was brought to scrutiny last autumn and the situation is being monitored.

A panel member raised concern about the on-going need for in-house foster carers and the impact on children affected by lack of foster carers and how long children must wait, cost of living could affect foster carers.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care gave an overview of the provision for children in foster care and the national shortage of foster carers. The panel

considered if further scrutiny was required in this area. It was agreed to review as part of the special meeting on corporate parenting in February 2023 and an update to be brought forward if possible.

RESOLVED

Recruitment of foster carers will be considered during the corporate parenting meeting and an overview of the work will be brought forward if feasible.

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23 (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair said it is important to involve young people in the work of the Children and Young People scrutiny panel and therefore would like to work with officers to look at a number of options including co-option or involving young people in specific pieces of work. Panel members with an interest were invited to join the discussion and the vice-chair Councillor Chessie Flack would also be asked to be involved. Councillor Butcher agreed to participate.

Panel members expressed general support for the idea and would like further background information on how it will work. It was also suggested that the Panel could work closely with youth parliament and school councils. It was also highlighted that we need to be creative in the way young people participate.

Councillor Kirby said she is concerned about the rise in mental health amongst young people and is happy to lead a review in this area. Panel members supported this suggestion and Cllr Kirby will conduct a review on self-harming and mental health. Cllr Butcher supported the review and Cllr MacArthur and Cllr Hall agreed to participate in the review.

RESOLVED

The work programme was noted.

A report on involving Young People in Scrutiny would be brought to the next meeting.

A councillor led review on self-harm would be established.