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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 13 MARCH 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.55 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair), Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor James Williscroft, Mansoor Ahmad, Roz Cordner, Becky Cruise and Dr Stannard

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

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help), Maisie Davies (Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships), Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families) and Keith Shipman (Social Inclusion Manager) Dheeraj Chibber, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion) David Michael (Head of Children in Care and Resources) Rachel Bowerman (Head of School Improvement)

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

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### 3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

### 4 CORPORATE PARENTING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

A panel member asked how the progress of children in care is measured. It was reported that key performance indicators are used alongside assessments and reviews. Childrens voices are heard through the Bright Spot Survey.

In response to questions, it was reported that:

In semi-independent accommodation there is responsible adult present. Quality assurance checks are undertaken on homes. Over 18s can access independent living when appropriate.

Health assessments, dental checks, eyesight checks are undertaken for looked after children. These take place alongside holistic checks including the emotional wellbeing of the child.

Details on the number of private children's homes in Merton will be provided to the panel.

The children's voice is represented in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Young people were listened to, and feedback had been provided on participation and involvement, and increasing time with birth families.

Challenges in recruiting foster carers is reflected across London. The council is working with London Commissioning alliance, using a digital campaign which is working effectively.

The Panel would like an update from the Catch 22 team to look at the number of youth workers and impacts of cuts to the service.

There is a significant shortage of secure children's homes, early work is being undertaken to scope a secure children home for London.

The Panel asked for the number of children placed in secure homes out of borough.

Merton takes its role as a corporate grandparent very seriously and supports young people if they have a child.

It was reported that some specific groups are targeted for foster carers such as the LGBTQI community.

It can be difficult to place larger sibling groups, but the Mockingbird model supports this with regular meet up time.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation.

5 CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

6 EDUCATION STANDARDS REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Education Inclusion and Head of School Improvement gave an overview of the report.

In response to questions, it was reported that:

In regard to truancy rates and children going away for holidays, the department work with headteachers and provide briefing for governors. There are also early help workers. The truancy levels in Merton are better than London and national rates.

If parents are home schooling, they are responsible for the curriculum but there is a link to the school nursing service.

During pandemic remote working made writing difficult. There is expertise in advisory teams working with schools to help with key stage two writing.

There are plans underway to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Windrush both within the council and in schools.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning highlighted the high level of success in Merton schools.

## 7 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Congratulations were extended to the Executive Director for Children Lifelong Learning and Families for being shortlisted for an LGC Award.

A panel member asked if the pay allowance is an issue for foster carers. It was reported that during exit interviews, allowance was not an issue as Merton pay above the minimum allowance.

## 8 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

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

A panel member noted several red and amber indicators and asked about the impact of this on children. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said the impact is different for each target. If there are any concerns, it is escalated to senior managers.

## 9 PLANNING FOR THE 2023 -2024 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

A panel member said a fact sheet for this panel would be helpful. This would be similar to ward profiles and include data on schools, Ofsted rating, school population. It could be provided at the start of the scrutiny year.

A panel member said accessibility and availability of reports can make scrutiny difficult. More time is needed to consider reports.

A panel member would like more in-person visits to community organisations and more service users attending the panel meetings.

