

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
27 NOVEMBER 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.50 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),
Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Michael Butcher,
Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes,
Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Linda Kirby,
Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Assistant Director for Education and Early Help), Octavia Lamb (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families), Asad Mushtaq (Executive Director of Finance & Digital), Tom Procter (Head of Contracts & School Organisation) and Keith Shipman (Social Inclusion Manager)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies from Councillor James Williscroft, Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Samantha Macarthur

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved with amendment to add Councillor Sally Kenny and Councillor Brenda Fraser in attendance.

4 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Christie introduced the draft budget and business plan.

Asad Mushtaq – budget reflects an update of MTFS since June Cabinet. Changes since June include the pay award which represents a significant cost since earlier in the year, high inflation throughout the year, investment income has been high and income rates have been held. Q2 budget monitoring - £8million net overspend with actions to mitigate. Budget engagement piece, details on council website, asking everyone to review and give opinions on council spend. This is running for a month.

Jane McSherry – savings proposal CLLF 148-9, increased income to reduce running costs - providing same services, growth proposal 47-48 re overspend on children's social care, feasibility study for own children's home, Capital proposals page 28. The Young Inspector and Youth Parliament members engaged with officers on details around foster care and the high spend on independent social care placements. There was also a discussion about contextual harm with JM giving details that the Council is now in second week of a joint targeted area of inspection of serious youth violence and working with partners like police, health and the community safety partnership.

Further discussion with the Members of the Panel about children in care, asking for specifics on numbers (133) and for reassurance around children being placed as close to Merton as possible if they do need to be placed elsewhere. The Council must statutorily report any children placed 20 miles+ outside the borough (currently 12). However, the Council never discharges its duty as corporate parents (this is unique to councils).

Regarding children's homes, there is work taking place for a pan-London plan for secure and specialist provision.

Regarding the overspend in CLLF most of it is due to children's social care placement cost, working hard to reduce agency staff and to convert agency to permanent.

Chair reiterated that this is a two-stage budget scrutiny process. The Budget Council is in March.

5 SCHOOL MEALS IN MERTON (Agenda Item 5)

Murray Davies introduced the report and summary of contracts.

A Panel member enquired about vending machines in schools. MD will action enquiry.

Chair – impact of inflation on cost of school meals but not much detail? How are schools coping? Central contract meant we could restrict increase for primary. Chair – MoL KS2 – MD – based on 90% take up.

6 YOUTH SERVICES (Agenda Item 6)

Keith Shipman introduced the report. Young Merton website (7k hits a year). Have to market directly to young people and also to parents. HAF is now available to book on an app. Wider youth service branding into family hubs.

Young Parliamentarians offered insight into their experiences including how different media work and are effective in keeping young people informed. The YPs and the Youth Inspector all said they feel the Council is very good at giving young people an opportunity to engage. It was suggested that there should be another way to express interest in joining the Youth Parliament as sending an email will immediately make a

lot of young people disengage with the process. They strongly advised disseminating information through schools.

Panel Members discussed the importance of diversifying the tools used for engagement, including written letters as well as phone calls and social media. They also suggested remembering to use local ward councillors as a tool of engagement. KS will think best how to do this.

Further discussion with Panel members regarding how long HAF will run for (current Cost of Living Support Fund allocation takes it up to May 2024). Regarding improvements to HAF for neurodiverse children, KS confirmed they have recently met with providers to discuss this. A questions about VAWG training engagement led to the suggestion from Councillor Brenda Fraser that Zoe Gallen be invited to a future CYP meeting. OL to Action.

7 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

Jane McSherry introduced the report and ran through the inspections currently being undertaken. ACTION - will come back on the timescale for the serious youth violence inspection.

A Panel member asked about the CYP consultation “80% mostly or all the time safe” and where is the detail on this? SU confirmed that this is just quantitative data at the moment, qualitative is to come. Taking details to the Childrens Trust Board in December.

A Panel member asked about attendance records and having more detail. Chair suggested this go to the School Standards Report. ACTION OL to follow up.

Joan henry – p244 – where have out of borough moved to and who is supporting them? This is “natural movement” and then the new LA takes over.

A Panel member asked for clarity around point 2.23 - 40% not completed in stat 20 weeks. This is due to a low number of therapists and SEND specialists, and often any process that is taking over 20 weeks is because the time is being taken to get it really right. This is being constantly monitored, looking to improve performance.

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

Tom Procter introduced the report.

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

Task group on self harm to Cabinet on 18th December

Feb panel – cancel, and shift agenda items to Jan and March – agreed

Jan – task group on youth funding

