

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 29th June 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Overview of Services and Key Challenges for Children, Schools and Families Department 2015-16

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children's Services

Lead members: Cllr Katy Neep; Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

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Recommendations:

A. Scrutiny Panel notes the report and considers the key service challenges outlined.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides members of the new Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel with an overview of services provided by the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Department and the key service challenges facing the Department in 2016-17.

2 DETAILS

2.1 The work of CSF Department is informed by a complex legal and regulatory framework and by governmental public policy initiatives. In response to these drivers, the Department provides or commissions a comprehensive range of universal, targeted and specialist services for children, young people and families in Merton. Key statutory responsibilities of the Department working alone or with partner agencies include:

- Leadership of the statutory safeguarding and children's partnership arrangements in the local authority area
- The provision of sufficient, suitable early years childcare and education
- The provision of sufficient and suitable school places for children and young people 0-19yrs
- Statutory assessment of children's Special Educational Needs and the provision of suitable education for those with special/complex needs
- Improving school standards and pupil attainment in Merton Community schools and providing educational leadership to the wider school community

- Co-ordinating school admissions; ensuring school attendance including court action; quality assuring home education, commissioning alternative education
- Safeguarding and protecting children at risk of significant harm
- Providing support to children in need and their families
- Providing support services to children with disabilities and their families
- Looking after children and young people through compulsory & voluntary means
- Achieving permanency for Looked After Children through adoption, fostering or special guardianship
- Provision of leaving care services for young people who have been looked after
- Intervention with and supervision of youth offenders and prevention of offending
- Enabling the provision of positive activities for young people and a suitable local youth work offer

Overview of CSF Department Services

2.2 CSF Department is led by the Director of Children's Services, a statutory appointment, and 3 Assistant Directors who manage operational and strategic services. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the functions of each Division:

2.3 Education Division

- School Improvement including primary and secondary school improvement; continuous professional development of school staff; educational psychology; sensory impairment; schools ICT support; school governor support service; Virtual School for looked after children and care leavers
- Education inclusion including education welfare; virtual behaviour service; language and learning; speech and language; alternative education; youth services; young people's participation
- Early years and children's centres services including children's centres development; family information service; child care quality, standards and provider support; Portage; 0-5yrs Supporting Families Team
- Integrated service for Children with Disabilities and SEN including statutory assessment; social work service; parent partnership; shortbreaks service (including Brightwell Children's Home)

2.4 Social Care and Youth Inclusion

- Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH); First Response Team; 5-16yrs Vulnerable Children's Team; Bond Road Family Centre

- Social Work Intervention including core safeguarding and care planning social work teams undertaking casework with children at risk, children in need and children looked after; court processes
- Permanency, Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers services including fostering support team; adoption team; 14+ settled LAC and care leavers team
- Family and adolescent services including Transforming Families team; Youth Offending Service; My Futures Team
- Quality Assurance and Practice Development including quality assurance of casework; management of Independent Reviewing Officers; professional support to Merton Safeguarding Children Board; professional learning and development

2.5 Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

- Commissioning and Partnerships including CSF commissioning team; joint commissioning strategy for Children’s Trust; partnership development with local community and voluntary sector
- Access to Resources service including LAC/SEN placements procurement; 16+ accommodation; fostering recruitment and assessment; LAC contact service
- Contracts and School Organisation including schools PFI contract; schools catering and cleaning contracts; Service Level Agreements with schools; services for young people and families contracts;
- School admissions; school places planning; capital strategy and programme management
- Policy, Planning and Performance including strategic and operational planning; research and information; performance information and management reporting; continuous improvement co-ordination; policy tracking and cascade; Children’s Trust induction and communications

Budget and Staffing

2.6 The 2016 -17 revenue budget for the Department and current staffing levels are as follows:

Division	Net LA Budget	Headcount - FTE
Education	£10.776 million	269.0
Children’s Social Care and Youth Inclusion	£13.174 million	207.6
Commissioning Strategy and Performance	£9.302 million	45.6
Other Services*	£16.929 million	6.2
Totals	£50.181 million	528.4

* Note: Other Services include senior management; asylum seeker costs; schools related expenditure including PFI unitary charge; schools depreciation; schools pension and redundancy costs

* Note: Excludes Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant of £172.781 million

2.7 As part of the council's overall medium term financial strategy, CSF Department is required to deliver significant savings in the current and future years:

Year	Saving Target
2016-17	£2.191 million
2017-18	£1.161 million
2018-19	£1.853 million
2019-20	£0.187 million
Total	£5.392 million

2.8 Savings up to and including the current year have already been agreed by the council and included in budget figures. Proposals from the department to meet future years' savings targets will be published in the autumn budget setting round and reported to CYP Scrutiny panel.

2.9 In addition to the revenue budget, the Department also manages a significant capital budget, largely for the provision of additional school places to meet the council's sufficiency duty. In recent years, the growth in demand for school places has meant that CSF Department has been a major recipient of council capital funding and this is likely to remain the case for a number of years to come. Capital budgets in the council's medium term financial strategy for increasing primary and secondary school places, including for children with SEN are:

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Primary Expansion	4,027,230	0	0	0
Secondary Expansion	8,031,730	11,530,050	9,389,950	6,200,000
SEN	1,169,540	3,844,360	3,650,000	1,000,000
Other	1,490,170	754,450	650,000	755,000
Total CSF	14,718,670	16,128,860	13,689,950	7,955,000

2.10 The above figures will be reviewed within the budget setting process in autumn 2016.

Partnerships

2.11 The work of CSF Department is focused on improving outcomes for children and their families in Merton. In nearly all areas of our work strong collaboration with other agencies is necessary to deliver services which are well co-ordinated and/or integrated - research over many years, supported by public policy, has demonstrated the positive impact on outcomes from multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches.

2.12 CSF Department has had a strong track record over recent years, marked by successive inspection findings, for building strong partnerships with key agencies including schools; other council departments; NHS Trusts and

- Public Health; the police service and the local community and voluntary sector.
- 2.13 At a strategic level, ongoing partnership development and accountability is promoted via statutory multi-agency governance groups including Merton's Safeguarding Children Board and Merton's Health and Wellbeing Board. These groups, and Merton's Children's Trust Board, undertake strategic planning and commissioning of local services and multi-agency performance management.
- 2.14 At an operational level, strong local multi-agency partnership practice is seen across many areas of children's services including in the implementation of integrated procedures for the safeguarding of children in the borough; multi-agency delivery of early years services; integrated services for children with SEN and disabilities and in youth offending services.
- 2.15 A significant number of support services for children and their families and youth services have historically been commissioned from the local community and voluntary sector, although savings taken in 2016-17 have reduced the number and range of these services.
- 2.16 Partners in Merton's Children's Trust have for many years agreed that the production of a multi-agency Children and Young People's Plan enables joint priorities to be set and agencies to be held to account for their contributions. Officers and partner agencies refreshed the CYPP during late 2015 and the new plan for 2016-19 was published in January 2016.

Public Policy Issues

- 2.17 In May 2015, the Queen's Speech outlined the legislative programme for the new parliament and contained a number of Bills which will have an impact on the delivery of children's services:
- 2.18 A Children and Social Work Bill is currently going through the parliamentary process. Key elements of the Bill include measures to speed up the adoption process; a requirement for councils to establish and communicate a 'local offer' for care leavers; a requirement that councils offer all care leavers personal advisors; a duty on councils to promote the educational achievement of children who have been adopted; the intention to establish a new regulatory framework around the social work profession including a focus on training and professional standards.
- 2.19 The Education for All Bill intends to provide powers to convert under-performing schools into academies. The Bill signals the current government's ambition for all schools to be academies but it will not provide compulsion other than in the case of those schools which are under-performing. The Bill will transfer responsibility for school improvement from councils to Headteachers, although councils may continue to offer school improvement services. Measures in the Bill will strengthen the responsibility placed on schools for assisting excluded children. The Bill also signals the establishment of a new national formula for funding schools.
- 2.20 The Prison and Courts Reform Bill contains measures to establish 'reform' prisons, including for young offenders, which will have a greater emphasis on training, rehabilitation and education. The Bill will also provide for the

- modernisation of courts and tribunals, with the aim of reducing unnecessary delays.
- 2.21 The department will need to track the progress of these Bills over the coming months to enable detailed planning to address the implications and requirements of the new legislation.
- 2.22 In addition to new legislation, a number of other public policy measures will have implications for the department's work:
- 2.23 The inspection and regulation of children's services, including those provided by councils, partner agencies, schools and early years settings, continues to be a key focus for central government and regulators including Ofsted and CQC. The inspection regime comes with increasingly harder tests and higher expectations. A wider range of services – for example SEN services; thematic issues such as responses to child sexual exploitation; children missing from home, care or education – are also now subject to in depth inspection. While higher expectations are to be welcomed, the increasingly taxing regulatory framework demands constant 'inspection readiness' of council and partner agencies' services and significant demands on organisational capacity.
- 2.24 The government's position on dealing with failing children's services is continuing to develop, whereby responsibility for the delivery of these services may be taken away from councils and transferred under new arrangements - for example contracting with successful councils or the establishment of Trust arrangements. New models have already been seen in various parts of the country.
- 2.25 Government is also progressing with plans for regionalising and outsourcing specific children's services functions, including in adoption and youth justice. For example, Merton officers are currently engaged with DfE and other London councils in respect of the regionalisation of some adoption functions including marketing, adopter assessment and post adoption support. These areas of work could be delivered by private or voluntary organisations or through 'lead authority' arrangements on a contracted basis. Officers are also tracking developments in youth justice with the possibility of sub-regional arrangements for functions including court assessment work and supervision of young offenders.

Transformation

- 2.26 The significant budget reductions affecting the council since 2010 have been a major challenge. The council is responding to this challenge through its 'transformation' programme designed to re-engineer organisational structures and models of service delivery. Each department has been required to produce and implement Target Operating Models (TOMs) to inform transformation. Increasingly, the work on TOMs has been expected to provide the 'road map' for the shape of future services and also the reassurance that savings targets can be met.
- 2.27 CSF Department's overall approach to service transformation has been to focus on our statutory duties and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services to achieve the best value possible for the investment in

children's services received. The department has strengthened its approach to commissioning, external and internal performance management and quality assurance and has already undertaken major reorganisation in early years, youth services and children's social care services. Some of the key elements of our transformation to date have included:

- Establishing a number of shared/hosted services with other local authorities including for school admissions; school improvement and school governor services (although some of these arrangements are now under review with the other local authorities involved, largely because of further savings or transformation programmes in those other authorities).
- Transforming universal youth services in Merton through implementing a partnership commissioning model and securing funding from external sources to replace council funding lost through savings.
- Establishing a new Commissioning team and Access to Resources service to improve commissioning practice and the procurement of expensive placements and packages of care.
- Re-commissioning early intervention and preventive services and establishing 'enhanced' level casework teams to sharpen the targeting of such services and maximise their impact.
- Re-organising social care and youth inclusion services to improve assessment, planning and quality assurance in casework and to improve children's and families' experience of social work practice.
- Establishing a locality model for the Department's children's centres enabling efficiencies to be made through sharing of resources and expertise and making more efficient use of infrastructure.
- Implementing the corporate flexible working agenda and vacating costly outposted service accommodation enabling both savings and closer co-operation across specific CSF services.

2.28 In the year ahead and medium term, further transformation will be required to meet outstanding savings targets and ensure fitness for purpose to deliver children's services overall and address emerging public policy changes. Key elements of this work are contained in the department's refreshed Target Operating Model (TOM) and include:

- Reorganising the department into two Divisions, making savings in senior management and Head of Service levels and reviewing management portfolios going forward.
- Reviewing the department's data and intelligence and business support functions to address savings targets set.
- Making better use of ICT to support business needs and also to promote improved integration of CSF services. Following procurement of a new ICT system (Mosaic) to replace the existing Carefirst system, the department has been preparing for the system's 'go-live' date which has been delayed into 2016-17.

- Driving further economies and efficiencies through progressing the joint commissioning agenda in particular with Public Health and Clinical Commissioning Group partners and through exploring new forms of outcome based commissioning currently being promoted across the public sector.
- Undertaking a more strategic review of the department's property portfolio, agreeing the strategic direction for key sites, enabling income targets to be achieved and identifying buildings which could be vacated to support asset release for the council.

Service Specific Challenges

2.29 In addition to the department-wide changes noted above, there are a number of key service specific challenges which need to be addressed to support the further transformation of the department and children's services in the coming years:

- Reviewing with partner agencies Merton's Child Wellbeing Model, MASH and pathways into early help services. This work, in simple terms, will review the effectiveness to date of our 'whole system' approach to identifying the 'right' children who require a safeguarding response and those whose needs can be met through the delivery of typically more affordable 'early help' services.
- Maintaining our focus on effective recruitment and retention of social work staff – permanent social workers are a key foundation stone both for delivering high quality interventions and for enabling reduction in use of expensive temporary staff obtained through agencies.
- Extending implementation of evidence-based practice tools such as 'Signs of Safety' in order to increase the impact and, therefore, the cost effectiveness of our interventions with children and families.
- Developing a bespoke strategy for work with adolescents with a focus on prevention and integration of service responses. This group of young people are over-represented in our 'looked after' population and are often receiving multiple services. More effective interventions at an earlier stage will reduce pressures on key departmental budgets.
- As some adoption and youth justice functions are regionalised, the department will need to accommodate the residual local authority functions and understand the impact of any funding changes resulting from regionalisation within our overall budget planning.
- School improvement activity will need to be focused on further developing school to school support while targeting local authority support to those schools at risk of being judged by Ofsted as under-performing. The role and function of the Merton Education Partnership will be reviewed in this context.
- More broadly, in view of anticipated major reduction in the local authority's Education Support Grant, the department's school improvement and other 'traded' services will need to position themselves more strongly as services attractive to schools.

- The department's SENDIS services, with the CCG and community health provider, will need to maintain momentum in implementing EHC planning for children and in further developing the 'local offer' for children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families.
- Having concentrated to date on the provision of additional school places in our primary and secondary sectors, the department's focus in 2016-17 will be to develop and implement solutions for the additional SEN places required over the next few years.
- The department is implementing fee increases for directly provided childcare places in 2016-17 and will develop proposals during the year for possible rationalisation of this provision. Additionally, the service will need to ensure full-cost recovery of charges associated with the co-location of health provider staff in our children's centres.
- Further work is ongoing in respect of identifying and securing alternative funding streams for youth services to promote the sustainability of local direct access youth provision in the borough.

2.30 As part of the department's continuous improvement agenda, we will continue to review key service strategies including:

- timeliness of court proceedings and permanency for children looked after;
- overall sufficiency of placements, placement stability and use of out of borough placements for our LAC and care leavers;
- our response to missing children and those missing education;
- our work on the child sexual exploitation; violence against women and girls and Prevent agendas;
- the implementation of EHC planning in SENDIS and the transfer of 'obsolete' SEN statements;
- the work of school improvement services with the small number of schools rated by Ofsted as requiring improvement.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. This report outlines priorities and challenges for the department in 2016-17 and beyond.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The public policy developments and service challenges outlined in this report are occurring in the context of significant budget pressures within the department and current uncertainty in respect of key national funding streams. The department is facing ongoing budget pressures in the areas of

asylum seeking children/families with no recourse to public funds; LAC placements; SEN Transport and spending on agency staff, particularly social workers. Government has signalled significant reduction in councils' Education Support and Youth Justice Grants. These, along with savings outlined in paragraph 2.7, make delivering services to budget extremely challenging for the department.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There is a statutory framework around all services delivered by the department and the challenge for the council is to ensure that children's services provided or commissioned by the department meet both statutory responsibilities and local and national expectations.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Services provided by the department are designed to promote human rights, equity, narrowing gaps in outcomes and good relationships across Merton's communities.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Specific implications have been noted in the main body of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- 11.1 N/A

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. N/A