

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11th January 2017

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

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

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel discuss and comment on the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last meeting in November 2016.

2 DETAILS

2.1 Members of the Panel will be aware of the plans for a new secondary Free School in the Wimbledon area to be provided by the Harris Federation. The council has worked closely with central government's Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Federation to support the establishment of the school and in November 2016 was able to announce officially the proposed site on High Path in South Wimbledon.

2.2 Assembling a site of sufficient size in an appropriate location has proved extremely challenging and involves:

- The purchase of two sites in the ownership of third parties – Domex and the Elim Church
- As part of the purchase of the Elim Church site providing the church with new refurbished and extended accommodation on the current Merton Hall site
- The reprovision of the High Path Adults Day Centre at a refurbished and extended Leyton Road building already owned by the council
- Agreement to the transfer of a small portion of playing field currently part of the Merton Abbey Primary school in return for a shared use agreement in respect of a multi-use games area to be built as part of the new secondary school and funding to enhance of the primary school's remaining outside space.

- 2.3 Subject to final ministerial 'sign off' and the usual planning permissions needed, it is envisaged that the new school will operate from the High Path site from September 2020. As additional secondary school places will be required from September 2018, the school will operate for an initial two years at the former Adult Education building in Whatley Avenue as has already been announced.
- 2.4 While the final financial arrangements have yet to be confirmed, EFA has committed to funding part of the site purchase costs and all works required for the temporary site, the new school building, and the new accommodation for the Elim Church. EFA has also committed to fund the majority of the refurbishment and extension costs in respect of the adults day centre re-provision at Leyton Road. Other costs remain in negotiation.
- 2.5 The council is required to contribute to the overall costs as the new school will be meeting what is known as 'basic need' for school places in the borough. At this stage it is envisaged that the council's overall contribution to the scheme will be in the region of £7.5 million. This represents good value for money for the council.
- 2.6 Fuller details in respect of the new school can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/learning/schools/moreschoolplaces/harriswimbledon.htm>
- 2.7 A number of Ofsted school inspection reports have been published since the Panel's last meeting. Wimbledon Park Primary School has improved its rating from good to outstanding. The Priory and Links Primary Schools have retained ratings of good. Liberty Primary School, currently rated as requiring improvement, is considered to be taking effective action, with the challenge and support of the local authority, to improve its rating following an HMI monitoring visit in November 2016. Benedict Primary School is considered to require improvement following its first inspection as an academy although leadership and behaviour were rated as good.
- 2.8 Central government has been consulting on fairly radical changes to the national funding formula for schools. An analysis of 'illustrative allocations' undertaken by London Councils suggests that Merton would gain in the region of £5 million from the new formula (likely to be phased in, however) against a background of reduction in London as a whole. A new formula for early years funding is also being introduced with Merton expecting to benefit from in the region of £4 million additional funding in 2017-18. The overwhelming majority of these gains will go directly to schools and settings.
- 2.9 Officers are currently consulting on a restructure within youth services aimed at reducing overall costs while maintaining current volumes of direct delivery of universal youth provision. Members of the panel will be aware of savings taken from these services over recent years and with reduced ongoing council funding available, the department has continued to work with partners to ensure the sustainability of a universal youth service offer in the Eastfields, Pollards Hill and Phipps Bridge areas, supported by income maximisation from s106 receipts and grant from local housing providers. Officers are also working with MVSC and youth organisations with a view to developing a 'youth foundation' approach across the borough to source alternative funding eg through charitable trusts.
- 2.10 Additional funding is being made available by central government to support the ongoing implementation of the SEN reforms introduced through the Children

and Families Act 2014. This funding will enable the continuation of additional capacity introduced into the SENDIS service in the current year to meet the increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans and also enable the council to undertake a strategic review of local high needs provision. Existing plans for expansion of Perseid and Cricket Green schools are in place, but this review will provide the opportunity to examine the broader high needs of Merton pupils and appropriate provision to meet those needs.

- 2.11 The council has provided central government with data in connection with the annual national census of the social care workforce. As at end September 2016, Merton was employing some 113 permanent social workers, an increase of 12 from the previous year. The turnover rate for these staff (23%) was reduced from the previous year (26%) as was the rate of sickness (1% from 2%). Merton is also now employing the least number of agency social workers (23% as at Sept 2016)) for some years. These figures compare well with London and statistical neighbour benchmarks and demonstrate the positive impact of the department's recruitment and retention strategy for the social work workforce.
- 2.12 Figures published by the London Family Justice Boards show that Merton has continued to improve its performance in respect of the completion of care proceedings for vulnerable children. The average duration of a case in quarters one (18.5 weeks) and two (22.5) of 2016-17 places Merton amongst the best performing councils in London and reflects the ongoing management focus on the timeliness of permanency planning for children.
- 2.13 Members of the panel may be aware of the disappointing recent HMIC report of the Londonwide police response to child protection. Locally, relatively good partnership practice continues with the police service recently allocating more investment to respond to missing children. Locally, we continue to have a strong focus on missing children and all other issues raised in the London-wide report including the numbers of children made subject to police protection; use of custody; and jointly responding to young people vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. We continue to work closely at a local level to ensure that practice continues to improve across all these key issues.
- 2.14 MOPAC funding decisions have recently been published. Merton has secured a further two years funding for key posts working with gangs and child sexual exploitation issues.
- 2.15 Despite successfully 'levering in' funds for specific purposes, the department continues to experience significant budget pressures, particularly in respect of placements for looked after children, transport costs for pupils with SEN and costs associated with unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those families with no recourse to public funds. The administration intends to support the department through budget growth of some £2.5 million over the next three years, subject to Full Council ratification of the overall budget.

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 N/A

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No specific implications from this report.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No specific implications from this report..

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1 No specific implications from this report.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No specific implications from this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No specific implications 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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None