

From Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member update us on the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children that Merton has supported?

Reply

As at 31st December 2016, Merton has supported 32 unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) under 18 during the current financial year. The monthly figure varies as we take in young people through the London rota or they reach the age of 18 and become a care leaver. In recent months it has varied between 16-20 UASCs being supported. Each young person has had an allocated social worker and has been provided with a care placement or semi-independent accommodation depending on age. Support in respect of education or employment and immigration status is also routinely provided. Merton continues to support our UASCs as they become care leavers and into independence.

From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet Member update me on how effectively the pupil premium is being utilised in Merton?

Reply

Pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium in Merton schools are doing well. At all key stages, with the exception of progress scores at KS2, the gap for these pupils with their peers is smaller than that found nationally.

Accountability for schools with regard to the spending of the Pupil Premium has been tightened this academic year (as of 1st September 2016), with each school required to produce a detailed pupil premium strategy. These strategies are monitored by governing bodies. In addition, Ofsted scrutinise a school's strategy during an inspection, and identify how current pupil performance indicates that the spending has had an impact on outcomes for targeted pupils. For the five schools inspected by Ofsted this academic year, Ofsted have commented particularly positively in the reports for four:

- "Excellent support ensures that disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils make rapid progress." (Good school moving to outstanding)
- "Leaders have used the pupil premium funding effectively to provide pupils with well-targeted support that ensures that they are ready to learn. Leaders have already taken steps to refine their use of the pupil premium to diminish differences in achievement for the most able." (School judged to require improvement).
- "Your disadvantaged pupils also made better progress than was typical nationally. However, despite this better progress some disadvantaged pupils did not attain as highly as all pupils nationally." (School judged to require improvement).
- "The distance between those pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by additional government funding known as pupil premium and other pupils has

dramatically diminished over recent years.” (Good school retaining a good judgement).

The achievement of PPG eligible pupils remains a focus for the Council.

From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the Transforming Families Programme?

Reply

The Transforming Families team can work with around 65 families at any given time over a period of six months, which can extend up to nine months for complex cases. The TF programme in Merton is on course to successfully meet the target of engaging 378 families on the Troubled Families Expanded Programme in 2016/17. In terms of the number of families achieving significant and sustained progress, we estimate a total of 210 by 31 March.

The DCLG recently visited to look at the work of the team and programme in Merton. Their feedback was largely positive. They were particularly impressed by the passion and commitment demonstrated by TF staff. The DCLG officials also spent some time talking to parents. They relayed to us that they found the words of a number of the parents that attended the session very moving. Merton is thought of highly by DCLG and we continue to have a good working relationship. They have offered to support our case for maintained core funding next financial year. With respect to service user feedback, we conduct quarterly forums to hear the views of families. We usually hold separate forums for children and parents. At the most recent young people’s service user forum, the majority of young people stated that they felt supported by their allocated TF Practitioner.

The DCLG funding formula poses on going challenges for the team as part of our income is dependent on payment by results. This will continue to pose a considerable challenge to us in the future and this will be monitored closely.

From Councillor Jill West to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services

The Youth Service in Merton has been cut severely in recent years. What innovative ideas does the Cabinet Member have for providing activities that engage young people without adding to pressures on the Children and Young People budget?

Reply

Merton Youth Services and their partners have responded with great creativity to the national situation of reductions in funding to councils which has impacted on spend available for youth services. Merton still runs three key hubs for youth work in Pollards Hill, Phipps Bridge and Eastfields (the adventure playground).

Each centre is developing community partnerships to bring in new organisations with their own external funding to support young people to enhance the work of council youth workers. This year we have had an excellent animation project funded by

Wimbledon Tennis Foundation for example, Fulham Football Club, the Joseph Maye project and AFC Wimbledon have both provided additional sports sessions, including football and gym training. Catch 22 have a run a mixed martial arts project in 2 of our centres. The May Project are currently working with young people from Pollards on a film project. We have had a woman mentor working with our young women and we are working with Morden Hall Park to get our young people involved in environmental projects. "The Monday Club" has been established at Phipps open to local residents to use the centre to get together with their children in order to promote community ownership of the centre. These residents are planning how to increase the numbers of parents and their children involved. At the Adventure Playground the Salvation Army run an excellent community drop in during the day and are developing plans for their own Monday session.

In addition through working with local housing providers they are offering employability support to residents and receiving free rent but contributing to a fund that support the delivery of youth work.

Going forward we have set up Friends of Pollards Hill Youth Club with parents and ex members of the club as a charity that can seek external funding. In addition we have the exciting development of working with a charity called BECS Link who are supporting us to connect with new charities, sports clubs and businesses in a partnership with Rayners Park School. We hope that this will enhance the offer even more in 2017. We are also working with two primary schools and Fulham Football Club to deliver 'Double Club' providing curriculum support to identified children followed by an hour of football with a Fulham coach. The latter is funded by Circle Housing.

The future funding position remains challenging for our youth services but we will continue to work hard to sustain this very important local youth offer.

From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Following the release of examination data can the Cabinet Member update us on school performance in Merton?

Reply

Pupils in Merton schools continued to perform strongly in the exams and assessments carried out in the summer of 2016.

- In the EYFS, the proportion of pupils achieving the Good Level of Development (GLD) has risen by 3.5 percentage points to 71.2%, maintaining outcomes in Merton above the national average for the second year in a row, and in line with the London average.
- In Year 1, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check has risen by three percentage points to 80%, which is just below the national and Outer London averages.
- At the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1), in Year 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the new expected standard in the core subjects is 74% in reading, 64% in writing and

73% in mathematics. Merton outcomes are in line with the national averages in reading and mathematics and just below in writing.

- At the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2), in Year 6, the proportion of pupils achieving the new expected standard in the core subjects is 57% and four percentage points above the national average. No schools were below the Department for Education (DfE) Floor Standard. One primary school has hit the threshold for the new DfE Coasting Schools Standard.
- At the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4), in year 11, the Attainment 8 score is 52.4 (in comparison with the national average of 48.5); and the new Progress 8 score is 0.27 (in comparison with the national average of -0.03). The proportion of students achieving at least A* - C grades in English and mathematics rose by eight percentage points to 70%. This remains well above the national average of 59%. No Merton school was below the DfE Floor or new Coasting Schools' Standards.

From Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Education

In view of the limited outdoor space on the proposed site for the new secondary school, how does the Cabinet Member propose to ensure pupils have plenty of scope for exercise and games, in line with current government policies on fitness and reducing childhood obesity?

Reply

The specifications for the proposed new secondary school have been drawn up under the supervision of the government's EFA. Any criticism of the site should be directed at the government and the site requirements introduced with their "free school" policy. Nevertheless, we believe that the borough's new school will provide an excellent offer for young people, in partnership with the excellent Harris Federation, whose schools continue to achieve very good results.

Due to the challenges of building in an urban area, most new schools in London are built on small sites. Harris has already demonstrated it is possible to build an outstanding school on a similar sized site at Harris Boys in Dulwich.

The new school will have a small outside sports facility on site and playing fields will be within walking distance so that students can participate in two hours per week of physical education as all schools do. It is also possible to phase lunch times to make best use of external space. The school will have a modern 4 badminton court sized sport hall.

The Harris Federation are launching a consultation on the new school next month including 7 public meetings, and the Executive Headteacher will be able to explain how he will be able to effectively ensure quality PE activities for children.

There has been widespread criticism of the government for "watering down" their childhood obesity strategy. Despite having limited resources, the council is working hard to overcome the paucity of government ideas, and we have published our own strategy for helping to reduce childhood obesity, our Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, published in December 2016.

From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

How many foster carers do we have in Merton?

Reply

Merton had a total of 62 fostering families as at 31st December 2016.

In house fostering is the placement of choice for most of our looked after children and young people and CSF department has a small team which undertakes publicity campaigns, recruits prospective foster carers and completes the statutory assessment process prior to applicants being approved. For 2016-17 we set an ambitious target to approve 15 new fostering families. To date we have approved 12 families since April 2016 and are expecting to meet this year's target.

From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member explain what services and support are being given to the children and families from Tower Hamlets currently living in Vantage House in Wimbledon Park?

Reply

Unfortunately due to this Government's amendment to planning policy, provision of such housing within a site like Vantage House is allowed through the government's new rules of permitted development. Consistent cuts to local authority funding and a lack of government investment or commitment to affordable housing means that local authorities are often forced into taking such steps to provide housing for families who need it the most. As a result, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets entered into a 5 year lease in Summer 2015 with the owner of Vantage House for it to house 71 homeless households from Tower Hamlets on a temporary basis. The arrival at the time of such a large number of families, including pregnant mothers and small children placed a significant burden on local health and children's services, but we worked in co-operation with Tower Hamlets and our then local community health provider to assess needs and provide relevant services. Our Community Health Provider provided a health visitor to support the pregnant mothers and children under 5. Early Years provided a weekly drop in play activity in a local building and supported families through outreach. Some school age children commuted to Tower Hamlets for their education, others were settled in Merton schools.

Whilst Tower Hamlets remains the authority which owes the residents a Housing duty the families are now eligible for local services from Merton. Since September 2015, 29 children from Vantage House have taken up places in Merton schools. With regard to Early Years, initially a stay and play group was set up close to Vantage House which was well attended. After approximately a year and once children centre staff had brokered most of the older ones into local 2 year provision the numbers were not enough to sustain the group. However, some families do now attend Abbey Children's Centre stay and play sessions and the targeted Young

Parents group at Church Road. In addition a Family Support Worker has been doing a monthly drop in meeting in reception at Vantage House where any residents can come to see her and get information, advice and guidance or referral for additional support. On average 6/7 families have attended the drop in each month. In addition the Family Support Worker attends Vantage House once a fortnight for specific work with families. The Family Support Worker works closely with our specialist health visitor and the locality health visitor to identify, refer and support the families in the block. Currently there are 49 parents and 52 children registered on Estart, and each of those would have had a children's centre contact.

In common with other residents some children from Vantage House may have special needs and some may be assessed as needing some of our specialist Education or Social Care services. Adults are also eligible for adult services if they meet the relevant criteria. Universal and specialist Health services are also provided locally.

From Councillor Jerome Neil to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

We talk a lot about young people but how much do we listen to them?

Reply

Listening to children and young people is absolutely at the heart of the work of the CSF department and is a value shared by our Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Board partnerships and we are keen to ensure *that the views and ambitions of children and young people have informed and improved our local service offer*. The partnership has also signed up to a 'Participation Promise' which means we will enable children to be listened to and to be involved in making choices and decisions in how we spend money for children's services. Our User Voice Strategy is implemented by an annually refreshed action plan and contains a number of commitments to ensuring that children, young people and families' voices are central to driving service and practice development across children's services. These are summarised below with some examples of how we have responded.

1. Delivering on our Participation Promise: Providing opportunities for all children and young people to influence the services which make Merton a great place to grow up. This includes:
 - Facilitating young people's forums and conferences - e.g. Merton Youth Parliament, specialist groups including Children In Care Council and school councils, events such as HealthFest and the recent LGBTQ Conference
 - Inviting young people to take part in service commissioning processes and quality review – e.g. the work of our Young Inspectors and Young Advisers.
 - Enabling young people to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments - e.g. Anti-Bullying Strategy; Annual Young Residents' Survey.
2. Enabling users of children's services to influence key decision makers and inform the continuous improvement of our service offer systems and processes. This includes:

- Facilitating user forums for vulnerable children who are in receipt of Children's Trust Services – e.g. Children in Care Council, and the Your Shout Group for learning disabled young people.
 - Enabling users to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments – e.g. LAC and Care Leavers survey; agreeing the LAC Pledge.
 - Supporting young service users to deliver training – e.g. looked after children involved in new foster carer information sessions and training.
 - Facilitating access to advocacy, and to complaints processes – e.g. Jigsaw 4u advocacy; and our internal IRO service.
 - Enabling feedback by users on their level of satisfaction, including access to feedback sessions with senior managers – e.g. young offenders satisfaction survey; Lead member, Merton's Director of Children's Services, and other senior managers and decision makers across the Children's Trust, regularly attend forums to hear directly about users' level of satisfaction with services.
3. Delivering on Merton's approach to social care practice: Putting children and young people's wishes and feelings at the centre of individual case work decision making and planning.
- Using child centred practice models for assessment, planning and review – e.g. Implementing a child centred approach through utilising Signs of Safety; Motivational Interviewing; and our Helping Families' Programme in TF.
 - Supporting children to participate in their reviews – e.g. Piloting a model of LAC reviews to ensure that the child is more clearly at the centre.
 - Ensuring that 'user voice' is included in case audit processes – e.g. Our Children's social care Quality Assurance (QA) Framework includes provisions to review and evaluation of how well children, young people, and families participate in decisions about their care.

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