

**Committee:** Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date:** 24 July 2017

Wards: All

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

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

Lead members: Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children Services  
Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance

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**Recommendations:**

- A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report.
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**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments not covered elsewhere on the agenda and affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last meeting in March 2017.

**2 DETAILS**

**2.1 EDUCATION DIVISION**

- 2.2 **School Ofsted inspections**, Members were aware that William Morris and St Teresa's were inspected in February; both schools were judged to remain 'good'. During March Ofsted inspected Aragon, Hatfeild, Joseph Hood and Pelham. These coincided with a number of inspections in neighbouring boroughs as well, and it is thought that Ofsted were perhaps trying out their new 'hub' style inspection process, where a number of schools are inspected in a local area, coordinated by a senior HMI. These schools too were judged to remain good as was St Thomas of Canterbury which was inspected a few weeks later. Merton Abbey Primary was also inspected in the Spring Term and judged to 'require improvement'; a support and challenge group is in place working with the school to effect the improvements needed. At the beginning of the Summer term, Rutlish School was inspected and have been judged to be "Outstanding". This is a magnificent achievement and the Headteacher, governors and all the staff should be rightly proud of this achievement, as is the local authority. Over a quarter of Merton's schools are now judged to be outstanding.
- 2.3 In recent weeks our Pre-school at the Abbey Children Centre has been inspected and we eagerly await the report
- 2.4 **Merton's 'Local Offer'** has been updated with two new SEN Travel Assistance Policies, one for pupils of statutory school age and one for post-16 students These outline the local authority's duty to provide suitable travel arrangements for eligible children, the criteria to be considered for funding, and detail on how assistance will be provided. As part of the updated policy 'Travel Training' opportunities have been extended to all children with an Education Health and Care Plan, not just for those in receipt of travel assistance. An Annual Update Survey has been sent out to parents and carers to gain insight on the quality of SEN services including transport

arrangements, covering the internal aspect such as office backroom staff and external services such as taxi and private hire.

- 2.5 Harris Wimbledon Academy** - Officers have continued to work productively with the ESFA and Harris Federation and the school is still expected to open in September 2018, and be located in the former Adult Education Building at Whatley Avenue, SW20 for two years before the new building at High Path is ready. The council are managing the projects to ensure a clear site at High Path and a set-back was received in April when the Planning Application refused the council's application to move Elim Church to Merton Hall, on the grounds that the revised frontage of Merton Hall was out of keeping with the building. Officers have therefore developed a new design that addresses the concerns of the planning committee and a revised planning application is being submitted at the time of writing this report. The ESFA are appointing a contractor to design and build the new school at High Path and, subject to the Merton Hall Planning application being approved in September, are aiming to submit a planning application by the end of this calendar year.
- 2.6 SEN school expansion** – There continues to be a significant increase in demand for special school places, especially for ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulties) children, which continues to place pressure on budgets. The council is working on projects to increase provision in our special schools. The expansion of Perseid School is just commencing construction to ensure that the capacity of the upper school matches the previously expanded lower school, and detailed design has commenced to expand Cricket Green School.
- 2.7 Demand for mainstream school places** – In line with the rest of London there was a downturn in demand for reception places at Merton primary schools for September 2017 which was greater than previously forecast by the GLA. It is having an impact on some undersubscribed schools, and the council has agreed to reduce the intake by a multiple of 30 places at four schools to protect school budgets. However, demand is still far greater than pre-expansion levels. With regard to secondary schools, year 7 demand plateaued this year before next year's expected increase where the cohort of pupils leaving year 6 of Merton primary schools will be circa 250 higher.
- 2.8 School Attendance** - figures for 2016 have been published by the DFE and Merton school are performing better than national and outer London in primary, secondary, special and PRU. Persistent Absence is lower in Merton in all sectors. We are in line for attendance in reception
- 2.9 Children Centre's** - As part of the TOM for Early Years the reshaped Children's Centre programme was launched in April 2017, with a focus on supporting children's early learning and development and providing evidenced based early help services for families with children under the age of 5.
- 2.10 30 hours** - The summer term has seen extensive work across the EY service and early years providers including schools, to ensure that the policy for 30 hours of free early education can be delivered in timescale and ready for go live in September 2017.
- 2.11 Collaborative school improvement** – the School Improvement Steering Group (including representative headteachers from all clusters and some governors) has

continued to meet regularly, developing a strategic approach to collaborative school improvement in Merton. Meetings have included an event where members of the Steering Group met to identify the vision and values, and the possible structure, of a future model for collaborative school improvement in Merton. The Steering Group has consulted with all headteachers on three proposed actions to move the agenda forward, namely that:

- A board be set up with representatives from all clusters, co-chaired by JM and a headteacher, from September 2017.
- The board will agree a coordinated offer around recruitment, retention and CPD.
- The board will appoint someone to facilitate and drive key actions, as well as to draft a plan for the collaboration.

These actions have been agreed and the new board will have its first meeting in September.

### **3 CSC& YI DIVISION**

- 3.1 Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) has identified some key development priorities for 2016/17; these have now been extended to through to 2019. These also link with our business as usual work plan undertaken by the MSCB and its sub groups. The Board continues to seek to improve its links to practitioners and their managers as part of our quality assurance processes to inform service improvement and development as well as maintaining our strong focus on the Voice of the Child/Young person. Addressing the incidence and impact of neglect is a cross-cutting theme that runs across the work of the Board and each of our priorities;
- 3.2 **Think Family** – to support children and adults in our most vulnerable families to reduce risk and ensure improved outcomes. Evidence from local and national research tells us that our most vulnerable parents/families are those who; Experience poor mental health, Struggle with substance misuse, Are affected by domestic abuse and Parents with learning difficulties that may affect their ability to respond to the changing needs of their children. It is important that professionals understand the underlying causes of issues like neglect and other forms of abuse and offer effective support early before these problems get worse. In order to support our work on our Think Family priority we have appointed a Think Family Coordinator, jointly with the Mental health Trust. They will work with both organisations to strengthen the work that is being done across adult and children’s services in order to ensure that this work is joined-up and that family (children and adults) receive a seamless delivery of services. We will also be launching a suite of protocols (including Mental Health, Parental Substance Misuse, Parents with Learning Disabilities and Learning Difficulties); these protocols should give practitioners guidance and outline the joint multi-agency approach to supporting families in Merton.
- 3.3 **Supporting Vulnerable Adolescents** - We know that, for some young people, adolescence is a time of particular vulnerability. We are determined to support adolescents who are at risk of; Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Children who go missing from home/school/care, Children and young people who are at risk radicalisation and violent extremism, Children at risk of serious youth violence and gangs, Self-harm and poor mental health and Suicide.
- 3.4 **Early Help – To develop an early help system that is responsive and effectively prevents escalation of concerns.** With changes in local providers and agencies and with changing levels of resources available we need to ensure our approach to Early Help continues to be fit for purpose. We know that timely and purposeful help or

intervention at all stages of a child or young person's journey is the most effective way improving impact and outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families. As part of our review we are looking at our service offer at all levels of the model and engaging partners in discussion on thresholds, case work approaches and models of intervention. A broad multi-agency coalition of partners met to review the Merton Child and Young Person Well Being Model between October 2016 and March 2017. As part of this review it was agreed that the model will now be known as the Merton Child, Young Person and Family Well-being Model, clearly reflecting our commitment to Think Family.

- 3.5 **Innovation Fund** A £1m award from the Department for Education's innovation fund will help Merton and five other south London boroughs lead the way on meeting the needs of looked after children. The proposed scheme will improve access to high-quality residential care and fostering placements for children who are in the care of local councils. The successful bid was submitted a partnership of boroughs combining their buying power and developing shared systems to improve the supply of affordable, high-quality accommodation for looked after children that provides them with a safe and happy home life and helps them reach their full potential.
- 3.6 The award of funding will allow the boroughs to build expertise and develop systems that will significantly improve the ways that services and placements are commissioned. As the partnership's influence grows it is expected it will be able to help new businesses enter the market to deliver the services that are needed in the right places. The proposal also includes work with current looked after children and their carers to involve them more in designing the shape of future services so they best meet their needs. The partnership has already received widespread recognition for the work it has done to improve value for money in local government and has won accolades including the LGC Award for Efficiency. This was judged and awarded by the National Audit Office and was awarded for delivering enhanced services for children and young people with special educational needs across 10 boroughs – the first of its kind in the country.
- 3.7 **Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)** – an alternative form of care proceedings for parents and children in those cases where substance misuse is a key factor in the decision to bring proceedings. Merton are leading on the establishment of a 10-borough partnership for the commissioning and contract management of a local FDAC to secure better outcomes for vulnerable children at risk from harm caused by parental substance misuse, with cost savings to local authorities through children being enabled to remain with parents at the end of proceedings in a safe and secure way.
- 3.8 **Social Impact Bond (SIB)** – Merton is part of a 5-borough SIB Partnership, led by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, for the provision of specialist 'Edge of Care' services, namely Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy; interventions that Merton would not be able to afford alone. A SIB is a means to source the working capital for a project through an investor commitment to pay for improved social outcomes. Repayment of the investment is then made based on achievement of results (the agreed social outcomes) over time, resulting in some public sector savings.

#### **4. CSF DEPARTMENT WIDE**

- 4.1 This new financial year (April 2017) has resulted in the following configuration of council commissioned voluntary services for children and young people. During the preceding year the CSF commissioning team undertook a comprehensive procurement exercise to ensure the right services were commissioned to meet the needs of young people according to identified priority areas. The procurement process incorporated consultation and market warming events, benchmarking exercises, reviewing of existing specifications, development of tender documentation and the establishment of

an evaluation panel including Merton's Young Inspectors. Contracts were awarded in late February to a range of providers:

- 4.2 **Advocacy and Independent Visiting - Jigsaw 4U.** Advocacy and Independent Visiting is available for Looked After Children, children subject to child protection aged 10 upwards. The service aims to give children and young people a voice as they navigate the complexities of the social care system. The service is introduced by social workers to all children/families and referrals made directly to Jigsaw4U. Independent visiting is offered to children and young people with limited or no access to family support or where additional voluntary support is thought will benefit the child or young person.
- 4.3 **Short Breaks for Children with Disabilities - Merton Mencap** were successfully awarded a range of short break services providing Ofsted registered play schemes at weekends and during school holidays. The schemes offer various social and leisure activities and to enable their parents and carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities. The services are offered to young people who have a moderate or severe learning disability, complex needs, autism, and social communication disorders, and who may also have additional needs, such as: hearing impairment, learning disabilities, medical needs, mobility issues, speech / language disorders or visual impairment. Alongside the short breaks offer Merton Mencap also secured continued delivery of both the Independent Travel Training and a Parents' Membership Forum. Independent Travel Training supports young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities to start and sustain travelling independently, especially to their place of education which may be within Merton or 'out of borough'. The service aims to increase choice for young people with SEND regarding transport options and contributes to greater confidence and independence for the young person. The Parents Forum for parents/carers of children with disabilities and special needs offers support to parents to help them achieve improved outcomes for their children, and provides a means to meet other parents in the same or similar situation while giving them a voice to influence service provision and planning in the borough.
- 4.4 **CSE and Missing Services - Catch 22, Risk and Resilience Service** were awarded the tender to provide our new combined CSE and Missing Service. The service aims to prevent or reduce missing episodes and reduce vulnerability to CSE. It will be achieved through the provision of independent Return Home Interviews (RHIs) and packages of support for targeted young people aged under 19 years who are missing from home or care and/or young people at high risk of or experiencing child sexual exploitation. Catch22 will be notified of young people missing from home via the Missing Person Unit on a Police Merlin PAC (Pre Assessment Checklist). Referrals will be prioritised, through a weekly missing meeting and RHIs aimed to be conducted within 72 hours where the child or young person is from a vulnerable group. Referrals for CSE will come from Social Workers and /or may be identified through Return Home Interviews but will be agreed via the Children Services named lead for CSE.
- 4.5 **Young Carers Service - Carers Support Merton.** The Young Carers programme will continue to be provided by Carers Support Merton. The service offers a programme of assessment and support to meet the specific needs of young carers and their families. All young carers referred will be assessed to determine their needs and to agree an action plan, which may include limited key working, referral to clubs, linking them with other local services, connecting parents to other local services. The focus will be to support young people to understand and manage their caring role, ensure they do not take on inappropriate levels of care and help them move towards greater independence and access to mainstream services.

## **5. SINGLE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 Since the last meeting of the Panel the Council has been inspected under Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework which judges the Council's performance with regard to Safeguarding and Child Protection, our Adoption Service, Services for Looked after Children and Care Leavers and the leadership and management of children's services in the locality.
- 5.2 A nine strong team of inspectors visited the borough between 12th June and 7<sup>th</sup> July. Their programme over the four weeks was as follows:
- 5.3 WEEK 1 – Children in need of help or protection; Private Fostering ; Looked After Children; Children at Risk of Sexual Exploitation; Children Missing from Home or Care. Local Authority to audit 20 cases.
- 5.4 WEEK 2 – Inspectors review the 20 cases and track a further 6; review of 300+ required documents
- 5.5 WEEK 3 – Continue lines of enquiry from weeks one and two; identify further cases for review, plus inspections of Adoption, LAC and Care Leaves; partnership work and a separate review of the Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 5.6 WEEK 4 – Fostering; the Education of Care Leavers and continued lines of enquiry from previous weeks.
- 5.7 During the inspection the inspectors interviewed 206 individuals, including social workers, strategic officers and managers, the Lead Member, parents, carers, children and young people. Inspectors audited, tracked, reviewed and reported back on the quality of at least 162 cases and looked at others uncounted, we also provided Ofsted with 429 evidential/strategic documents in our portfolio.
- 5.8 Their inspection findings were positive but remain confidential until the moderation process has been completed with our report expected to be published in early September.

## **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

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1 None

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