

Agenda Item 3

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

10 OCTOBER 2017

(7.17 pm - 9.16 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Linda Taylor OBE, Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Pauline Cowper, Charlie Chirico, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, Brenda Fraser and Sally Kenny

Co-opted Member Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Katy Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Paul Angeli (Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer) and Kathy Bundred (Children's Improvement Adviser, Local Government Association).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Brunt and Neil with Cllrs Kenny and Fraser substituting. Additionally, apologies were received from Cllr Holmes and Colin Powell.

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 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

Matters arising

Further scrutiny of accommodation for care leavers was undertaken by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in September with members from the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in attendance. The resulting reference is going to Cabinet on 16 October 2017. It is anticipated that if accepted by Cabinet, a departmental action plan will be presented to the Panel at a forthcoming meeting (most likely in January 2018). In the meantime, the Children Social Care team continues to work with colleagues in Housing, exploring the potential of setting up a small House of Multiple Occupation for care leavers in addition to other options.

4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, provided members with an update, highlighting the following:

1. Merton's exam results: despite changes to the content and expression of grades for English and Maths GCSEs, the Merton family of schools has done well. Overall, 72% of Merton's students achieved a grade 4 to 9 for English and Maths. This is a 2% increase on last year and higher than the national average for 2016. Similarly, there have been reforms to A Levels. However, 99% of Merton's students still received an A* to E which is 1% higher than the national average. Thanks were expressed to heads, teachers, students and officers for this performance;
2. Ofsted school inspections: the outcome of the Ofsted inspections of two Merton primary schools was reported. Park Primary School received a good judgement and Harris Primary was judged outstanding; and
3. New Harris Wimbledon Academy: planning permission for the development of Merton Hall has been granted meaning that progress can now be made on assembling the site for the new school (Merton Hall will be modified for use by one of the current residents of the site which will be used for the new school development). Officers have worked hard on the new design for Merton Hall, responding to initial criticisms and allowing the authority to progress with provision of new school places.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified,

- Heads are trying to understand all the changes currently ongoing to the exam system and not just the new approach to expressing grades at GCSE. All schools will be working with students and their parents to explain these changes. (Councillor Neep added that the British Chamber of Commerce has produced a video clip for businesses on the new expression of GCSE grades. This might be appropriate for use by the Merton Chamber of Commerce and LoveWimbledon with local businesses and employers. It may be possible to engage with both through the *Economic Wellbeing Group*.); and
- The nodal points for the Wimbledon Harris catchment area are determined by the Academy chain to reflect the results of its consultation process and following expressions of interest/demand.

Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, provided an update to members. The Cabinet Member noted the good judgement of the recent Ofsted inspection but also highlighted that the Council cannot rest and that Merton needs to remain dynamic, ambitious and successful:

1. Autism Spectrum and Emotional Social and Mental Health Disorders: there is a growing need to provide for these conditions. As a result, the Council is just about to relaunch its strategy covering this area. The Cabinet Member highlighted the need to focus on transition points such as Early Years. Work is therefore on-going with private nurseries to ensure they are able to identify and provide appropriate support. There is a focus on pathways enabling access to services all the way through to 19 years plus;

2. Think Family: this requires a joint approach with support coming from across Council Departments. The soon to be established Family Drug and Alcohol Court was highlighted as demonstrating the Think Family approach as it focuses on families staying together with support and treatment being provided. Currently, the Cabinet Member is working with other Departments to ensure that this approach is reflected when recommissioning services for adults;
3. Recruitment and retention: whilst this has already been highlighted as an issue for teachers, heads and social workers, it is also an issue for other specialist services such as occupational therapists, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists etc, potentially impacting on commissioning of new services. The Cabinet Member highlighted that this means there is an even greater need to promote Merton as a place to work; and
4. National Adoption Week: noted that Merton's adoption service was judged as outstanding as part of the recent Ofsted inspection. The Cabinet Member thanked officers for this achievement and encouraged all members to celebrate this service as part of National Adoption Week that is happening from 16 October 2017.

5 OFSTED UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children's, Schools and Families, gave a presentation outlining the outcomes of the recent Ofsted Single Inspection and LSCB review. The following points were highlighted:

- This was a forensic inspection of Merton's services which even included a visit from the new Minister;
- Over 206 staff and partners were interviewed;
- Additionally, members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel were interviewed. Ofsted complimented the Panel for its cross party working for the benefit of vulnerable children in Merton. Additionally, the Panel was credited for receiving a full suite of performance monitoring indicators at every meeting;
- The inspection has confirmed that Merton is in the top 10 local authorities nationally for its provision of children's services;
- Ofsted found that managers and social workers know their children well. This reflects the approach of having small teams within the Department allowing clear line of sight and understanding of all cases;
- The important role of schools and settings in helping to deliver services was also highlighted by Ofsted;
- Merton's systemic model and approach to safeguarding was found to be robust by Ofsted; this works to ensure children are heard and where possible child in need, protection and care plans are focussed on making children safer and improving their outcomes as a result;
- Merton's good multiagency working was highlighted;
- The Council had just started a new contract for return home interviews with missing children. This will as it is embedded be providing high quality interviews. The process has been shortened meaning interviews are happening quicker.

However, this was too newly established to be able to influence the outcome of the inspection; and

- The weekly Missing meetings hosted in the MASH and The Children Missing from Education Board were both developed based on Ofsted best practice and therefore were also praised as part of the inspection.

Looked after children

- The approach of the Corporate Parenting Board with the involvement of opposition members and the Chief Executive as chair, was praised by Ofsted;
- Merton's approach to care proceedings was credited with being the best out of boroughs using the South West London courts;
- Care planning was seen to be effective in a significant majority of cases;
- All out of borough placements have to be reviewed and approved with a review undertaken of potential risks;
- The Virtual School was seen to be supporting children in achieving the right targets which are expressed through personal education plans;
- Merton was again complimented for its multidisciplinary working;
- Placements for children were shown to be stable resulting in positive outcomes; and
- Services for young unaccompanied asylum seekers impressed Ofsted.

Adoption

- The service gained a rare outstanding judgement. This is against a backdrop of all services having been challenged by Government to improve;
- At the time of the inspection, all children had been placed with their adoptive families with none waiting placements. The service was praised for the timely and careful way in which it approaches placements;
- The quality of the assessment of adoptive parents and life story work was regarded as impressive;
- Care leavers were seen to be known well with the service working hard to achieve good outcomes on their behalf; and
- The fact that the service remains in touch with 97% of care leavers demonstrates the quality of the relationship and the effective approach being taken to case load management.

Leadership, management and governance

- The longevity of the service of the Director and commitment made to Children's Services from the top of the Council (notably the Chief Executive and members) were noted along with cross-party support; and
- Merton's practice model (Signs of Safety) was noted for placing children at its centre and allowing support for families without losing sight of the risks. Partners increasingly understand the practice model.

Recommendations

- 65% of case work was judged good or outstanding with most of the rest requires improvement;
- The Staying Put policy has a financial cost which needs to be recognised. However, two more young people in foster care have taken up the opportunity for Staying Put since the Ofsted inspection and we now have five young people in Staying Put placements;
- Work is ongoing with the service provider to improve provision of health histories; and
- The recommendations are challenging but not complex. The Department is putting together an action plan which has to be sent off to Ofsted in the next few weeks.

Merton Safeguarding Children Board

- This has gone through a period of change with a focus on quality assurance. It was judged outstanding by Ofsted. There are no recommendations that relate to the board.

In response to member questions, the Director clarified:

- Future aims: the service is constantly thinking what it can do better for children. This is against a background of declining funding and changing demographics; there are now 4,000 additional children in Merton's primary schools with a growing number needing specialist services; and
- Families from other boroughs: once placed in the borough the duty for support passes to Merton. This applies equally to families that Merton places out of borough. This situation has arisen because of the pressure on housing in London. As a result, councils are having to come up with increasingly creative ways in which to house their residents.

RESOLVED: all Panel members wanted to express their thanks to the Director and her officers for all their hard work that has achieved this Ofsted judgement. The members agreed to write to partners to thank them for their contribution to the Ofsted judgement.

6 OFSTED SINGLE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES IN LONDON (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel received a presentation from Kathy Bundred, Children's Improvement Adviser for the Local Government Association, providing members with context on the outcome of the recent Ofsted Single Inspection and LSCB review.

Kathy noted it was a pleasure to read Merton's Ofsted report and that it is one of a small number of authorities that are doing well in the provision of their children's services; currently there are more authorities in London that are inadequate or requirement improvement than are good and outstanding.

The deteriorating performance in children's services in London has been a shock: there has never before been six authorities in London that have been judged inadequate. There has been a resulting debate about funding. Certainly it is easier to be successful with more funding. However, it was noted that in Kensington & Chelsea, which has a similar range of judgements to Merton, social workers only have seven cases to hold whereas Merton social workers will have 15. For Merton to be funded at the same level as Kensington & Chelsea would require an additional £4m per annum.

There are only three outstanding authorities in England: Lincolnshire, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster and across England only a third are judged good or outstanding. In London, this is a little better with 47% achieving at this level. However, there are proportionately more judged inadequate in London compared to England as a whole, showing that the capital is more polarised in the provision of children's services compared to the rest of the country.

Merton is one of just a handful of authorities that are currently judged outstanding for the quality of its leadership, management and government. The others are the Triborough, Hampshire, Leeds and Cheshire West.

The shared features of authorities with children's services judged good or higher were noted:

- Relentless in their pursuit of the best for their children;
- Stability in their services and their management;
- No playing politics with children's services. Rather members are interested in services and are keen to learn;
- Focus on what's happening for children and drill down into individual cases;
- Good self knowledge often built on a self audit which is challenging;
- Workforce strategy in place to lessen the effect of workforce turnover. This means there is a continual focus on training, performance and support. Spans of control are not extended and allow managers to have sight of individual cases; and
- Partner engagement is effective in helping to deliver services.

Merton's Ofsted judgement has been compared with those of authorities judged outstanding and it's hard to point out the differences. It was specifically asked if not receiving an outstanding judgement is linked to the recommendation on health histories. However, Kathy was able to clarify that this has also been featured in the inspection reports of authorities judged outstanding.

In response to member questions it was clarified that authorities where the Ofsted judgement has been surprising, have often made a key decision that has adversely impacted on services. For example, removing a whole management layer, negatively impacting on caseloads and undermining spans of control and lines of sight.

Yvette Stanley, the Director for Children, Schools and Families, explained to members that a new social care case management system, called Mosaic, has been implemented and the Department is in the process of building the reports needed to extract data from the system. As a result, whilst it is possible to review data in the system, this isn't presented as needed and can't be extracted for review by the Panel.

Work is currently ongoing to refine the system and to get it working as needed which is the first priority. This is why the performance management data isn't currently available. It is anticipated that this work will take until the end of December 2017 to complete with data not becoming available for the Panel to review until its meeting in January 2018 at the earliest. Members noted that they would be concerned if the data wasn't available in January 2018.

Two changes in performance data were reported:

- an increase in referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. These have increased from around 400 a month up to around 620 in June. This is to be anticipated as a result of the recent Ofsted inspection but means a significant increase in activity that has to be resourced including leading to a rise in numbers of children on child protection plans; and
- care proceeding times have lengthened recently reflecting a more challenging case.

RESOLVED: members requested that they be proactively informed by the Department of any significant changes that occur during the period for which performance monitoring data isn't available.

8 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Yvette Stanley, Director Children, Schools and Families, highlighted the development of the new pan London adoption agency. This will provide a different delivery model comprising a hub and four spokes with Merton part of the South London spoke. Whilst this has been to the Panel previously, it will need to return to the Panel in the near future for pre-decision scrutiny. The Department will liaise with the scrutiny officer about timing.

In response to member questions the Director in addition to Paul Angeli, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion and Jane McSherry, Assistant Director for Education, provided the following clarification:

- Quality of early years provision: the Council is working with early years providers including those that are privately owned. This is because the Council funds these settings. All are subject to quality assurance visits and safeguarding checks;
- Collaborative school improvement: the formation of the new partnership has resulted from the Council working with schools to develop a preferred model and then consulting with heads;

- Whatley Avenue: there is confidence that the interim site for the new Harris Wimbledon school will be ready in time for opening of provision in September 2018;
- 30 hours free of early education: this is being implemented through existing providers and currently there is no concern about its implementation although the process appears complex. The Department will continue to monitor this going forward;
- Contextualised safeguarding: this is a new approach which recognises the risks to young people caused by what they are exposed to in their everyday lives. This necessitates joint working across the Council to try and remove some of these risks. For example, environmental services would be responsible for tackling the sale of drugs in a particular location in the borough. Central Bedfordshire Council is about to conduct a pilot around the approach and Merton will participate;
- Increase in those with SEN: schools mainly provided assistance for children and young people through the SEN Support programme; and
- Neglect: the Merton Children Safeguarding Board is looking at neglect and how this can be addressed through *Think Family*. Whilst it might not be possible to eradicate this entirely, the focus is on early intervention.

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

Members were reminded that the first round of the budget process will come to the Panel at its next meeting on 8 November. Additionally, there will be a public health briefing on health and wellbeing outcomes before the next meeting (from 6pm in the committee rooms on 8 November 2017).