

Medway Council
Meeting of Children and Young People Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 15 January 2013

6.35pm to 9.55pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Baker, Cooper, Craven, Gilry, Iles, Irvine, Kemp (Vice-Chairman), Price, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), Smith, Tolhurst and Turpin

Added members without voting rights:

Bryan Frost (Governor representative), Shirley Griffiths (LINK representative) and Jane Heyes (Headteacher representative)

Substitutes: Councillor Adrian Gulvin (substitute for Councillor Mackness)
Perdita Blinkhorn (substitute for Doyin Yayhi – Medway Youth Parliament representative)

In Attendance: Duncan Clark, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Hilary Gerhard, Senior Advisor, Inclusion and Diversity
Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Communications, Performance and Partnerships
Jan Guyler, Legal Adviser
Simon Harrington, Student Services Manager
Marilyn Hodges, Independent Chair, Medway Safeguarding Children Board
Sally Mortimore, Medway Safeguarding Children Board Manager
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Juliet Sevier, Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement
Councillor Les Wicks, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

711 Record of meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2012 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

712 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clarke and Mackness, Samantha Collins (Parent Governor representative), Jim Grogan (Roman Catholic Church representative), Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative) and Doyin Yayhi (Medway Youth Parliament representative).

713 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

714 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

715 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Wicks, addressed the committee outlining the main achievements and priorities within his portfolio. This included updates on the:

- Youth Service – this service was functioning well despite the difficult financial climate. A 'mobile resource' (an equipped minibus) had been invested in which provided support and advice for young people. The cyber scheme (a project working with young people in Suffolk, France and Belgium to train them for employment) was also under way.
- Duke of Edinburgh Award – this continued to be successful with 449 awards achieved this year.
- Youth Offending Team – this was a very successful service and visitors from Japan had visited the team to learn best practice.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service – this was improving and under a new provider.
- Early Years Service – the service was flourishing, with 60% of children now achieving the national benchmark. There were 19 Sure Start Centres, which were well used across Medway.
- Provision of free nursery places for 2 year olds – extra places were largely being provided by the voluntary and private sector. Students from Canterbury Christchurch University were working with the Early Years Service to develop activities for nurseries to promote young children's personal developments.
- University Technical College (UTC) – A bid was being submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in February for a UTC in Medway which he was hopeful would be successful.
- Music – The Council had been successful in a bid to the Arts Council to provide tuition with musical instruments.
- Completions of school buildings – Walderslade Primary and Strood Academy had both won design awards.
- Provision of school places – Members were advised that the Cabinet had earlier that day agreed to consult on expansions at Brompton Westbrook and Saxon Way Primary Schools. An additional class had also been put into Greenvale Infant School and a 3 form of entry school would be going into the building that previously hosted Chatham South School.

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- School challenge – there was concern relating to the Key Stage 2 and phonics results, both of which placed Medway at the bottom nationally. One factor was leadership and therefore partnership working across schools was being encouraged between successful and poorer performing schools. He also confirmed that the School Challenge and Improvement Team were risk assessing and tracking every school and targeting schools as necessary.
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) – the Council was continuing to work on bringing children and young people with SEN back into Medway provision. It was also noted that accommodation issues for Abbey Court were being considered and that a joint provision with Kent County Council may be considered.
- The Oaks at Silverbank – this would become Medway's first free school.
- Key Stage 2 – the 12 recommendations from the improving performance at Key Stage 2 Task Group had been implemented as fully as they could be and 1:1 tuition had been effective with pupils receiving the tuition improving their performance by an average of 9%. The tuition was provided to 200 students last year and would be extended to 600 students this year.

The Portfolio Holder then answered questions from the committee, which included: -

- The level of funding for 1:1 Tuition at Key Stage 2 was and where this would be funded from.
The funding for 200 pupils had been £68,000 and funding for 600 pupils was expected to be over £200,000. It would be funded from the Children's Services budget, which was under pressure so there would need to be an analysis of priorities but 1:1 tuition at Key Stage 2 would be a high priority.
- Had there been any consideration of other measures, such as meetings with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, the Portfolio Holder and Opposition Spokespersons after Ofsted's (good and bad) to share best practice.
Performance at Key Stage 2, particularly for boys, has been stubborn for some time. The task group recommendations were welcomed, as was the idea of a cross party group and work had been ongoing to develop a standard practice for Governors on how to challenge Headteachers.
- All schools should have phonics programmes, how had the Portfolio Holder had led on the implementation of this?
The Portfolio Holder confirmed that schools were checked by officers that they have the right phonics programmes in place and that they were used effectively and that he held officers to account on this.
- Had the Portfolio Holder visited other local authorities to learn from best practice?
He confirmed that he had visited Ealing Council to look at a computer system but had not visited anywhere regarding Key Stage 2.

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- A Member commented on the success of the partnership working with the Williamson Trust and The Hundred of Hoo Academy as the academy had recently received a good Ofsted inspection report and asked what lessons could be learned from this.
The Portfolio Holder advised that the Williamson Trust was a well directed academy system and it was working with other peninsula schools. He felt the success achieved by the Hundred of Hoo Academy demonstrated how strengthening senior management in schools could have a real benefit.
- What improvements were necessary at Key Stage 2 as Medway children perform better at other key stages?
The Portfolio Holder explained that something occurred during the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 but did not know exactly what and welcomed a cross-party group to look at the issues further. He undertook to visit other local authorities to learn about best practice at Key Stage 2 elsewhere. He also suggested that Members visit the schools in their ward a few times a year to find out how effectively they were performing.
- There are excellent young musicians in Medway, can a Medway Youth orchestra be developed?
The Portfolio Holder confirmed this was something that would be aspired to and orchestra group work was ongoing.
- Concern about resource in the School Challenge and Improvement Team was raised?
The Portfolio Holder explained that the School Challenge and Improvement Team worked very hard to collate full and helpful data. Resources were limited and he confirmed that the best outcomes needed to be achieved with resources available. He assured Members that Key Stage 2, phonics and children in care were priorities.
- Are there any other free schools, other than The Oaks, planned?
The Portfolio Holder advised that there were none planned at the moment. If agreed, the UTC would be an academy.

Decision:

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his attendance.

716 Medway Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan 2012/2013 - mid term progress report

Discussion:

The Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) Independent Chair presented the report to Members, highlighting the progress made against each priority, including:

- The quality assurance framework has been piloted with agencies, which are reporting that it is an effective tool;

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- The Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection action plan had been reported regularly to MSCB meetings. All actions had been reported as complete and work was being done to assess impact of the actions implemented;
- Work was continuing in encouraging and supporting agencies, other than schools, to initiate and lead on Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs). It was reported that there had been progress but it had been slow;
- The MSCB had carried out self assessments by being scrutinised by an independent person and the independent Chair had also carried out a self-assessment. An action plan had been developed to ensure continued improvement;
- There was more work for safeguarding boards following the Munro Review and the MSCB had therefore set up an Executive Group to meet between every MSCB meeting. The level of support staff was also being strengthened and grant funding accessed to develop further training;
- The MSCB had 3 lay members to hold the board to account and be a voice for the public;
- Police were working on reporting low level domestic violence incidents to schools and NHS and were also leading a sub group with Kent to develop toolkits and collecting data to help identify children at risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

A Member asked about the length of time to initiate a CAF and raised concerns about delays, suggesting that a policy be developed to ensure all CAFs were initiated within one month. The Independent Chair undertook to report that back to the MSCB's quality assurance group for monitoring.

Members also requested that future reports include a glossary of terms.

Decision:

The committee noted the report and recommended the MSCB to work with agencies to develop a policy to ensure CAFs were initiated within one month.

717 Announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children in Medway 2011 - progress update

Discussion:

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care introduced the report which provided an update on the progress against the action plan following the announced Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. He also highlighted the current interim and forthcoming Ofsted frameworks which differed from that in place at the time of the inspection.

The Interim Assistant Director confirmed that the Council was currently undergoing an unannounced Ofsted inspection and it was expected that the inspection report would be received by the Council in mid-late February 2013.

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He also confirmed that this superseded the peer review which had been planned for March.

Members then made comments and asked officers a number of questions, which included: -

- Confirmation of the Corporate Parenting Group's involvement in monitoring the action plan outcomes;
- Good examples of life story work had been identified through audits, which evidenced improvement in this area. In this context the Assistant Director commented that where action plans focussed on improvements to practice, he would prefer not to view the improvement area as complete.
- Officers undertook to obtain an update from Medway NHS Foundation Trust on safeguarding training and whether this had increased beyond 80%.

Decision

The committee noted the report and requested: -

- (1) A report back on the findings and relevant action plan following the current unannounced Ofsted inspection;
- (2) A briefing note on safeguarding training at the Medway NHS Foundation Trust.

718 Year 1 phonics check - outcomes from 2012 and actions to address key issues

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement and the Head of School Challenge and Improvement introduced the report, explaining to Members the authority's disappointment in ranking bottom nationally for the phonics test results. They explained that analysis of the results had been undertaken and an action plan drawn up to address the issues, which was summarised in the report.

The School Challenge and Improvement Team were working with schools to identify gaps, promote best practice and broker in additional support where appropriate, including classroom observation and learning walks. Schools were also being encouraged to use last year's test paper as a mock for this year 1 children to identify how children are performing and to help effectively target intervention.

Members then made a number of comments and asked officers questions which included:

- Officers had discovered that there was no correlation between the phonics results and the Key Stage 2 results because schools that performed particularly poorly at the phonics test were not the same schools that performed poorly at Key Stage 2.

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- In response to a question about improved engagement with parents officers explained that schools worked very hard to get parents involved in their children's education but some parent groups found engagement easier than others and therefore, for the children whose parents could not provide support in the same way, schools tried to find ways to support these families. One of the most important things parents can do for their children is read stories with them.
- In relation to Governing Bodies requiring regular items in Headteacher reports, officers confirmed that this had been raised at Challenge Progress and Review (CPR) meetings.
- Concern about how children with English as an additional language (EALs) would cope with phonics was raised. Officers explained that other local authorities with higher numbers of children with EAL had performed better. Equally, for those children, it could be argued that all words were pseudo words so the phonics skills were pertinent.
- The School Challenge and Improvement Team were hoping to recruit additional capacity with expertise in phonics and Key Stage 1.
- Concern was raised regarding allocation of teachers and support being strengthen for children at a lower level of performance, rather than across all children in the class. Officers confirmed that Ofsted inspections ensured that every pupil was making progress and that the funding provided for 1:1 tuition allowed the schools to use their existing funds elsewhere on other children within the class, thereby adding capacity to the system.
- It was suggested that Governors be invited to attend specific phonics training for teachers to help in holding to account. Officers undertook to discuss this with the Head of Governor Services and Headteachers.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

719 School admission arrangements 2014

Discussion:

The Student Services Manager introduced the report, which detailed the proposed school admission arrangements 2014 and tabled an update on consultation response received up to the consultation closing date of Friday 11 January 2013.

Members then made comments and asked officers questions, which included:-

- Confirmation that there was not a significant difference in cost implications between Option A (holding the Medway selection test over 2 days mid-week) and Option B (holding the test on one day mid-week). The biggest factor was that testing on one day would be more equitable with those children being tested at a Medway test centre on a Saturday;
- Confirmation that which ever option is agreed by Cabinet on 12 February 2013, schools will have to follow that option or opt out and refer their pupils who wish to sit the test to a Saturday morning test centre;

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- Confirmation that no formal complaints were received regarding the 2012 selection testing.
- Confirmation that the fair-banding scheme does not affect grammar schools.

Some Members also raised concern regarding the Supplementary Information Form that parents were required to complete if they were choosing a school on denominational preference and the impact this could have on disadvantaged children living locally to the school who were not members of the school's faith, for example, Church of England. Officers confirmed that the form had strengthened the previous tick box, which had required no proof of faith membership and had been abused in the past as a way of increasing a child's chance of being placed within Church of England Schools. It was therefore envisaged that less children would apply on denominational grounds, thereby allowing more children the opportunity of gaining a place on distance from the school, an oversubscription criteria lower than denominational preference. Equally, the Director of Children and Adult Services explained that all schools should be a good school and a school of choice in Medway. It was also noted that the Supplementary Information Form was agreed last year for 2013 school admission arrangements and was not a matter for decision by the Cabinet.

Concern was raised regarding the sibling over-subscription criteria and families whose children qualify for a place at a school under that criteria when they have moved further away from the school. It was suggested that officers look at the possibility of linking a maximum distance qualification to the sibling oversubscription criteria for 2015 admissions.

Decision:

The committee recommended the proposed school admission arrangements for 2014 to Cabinet for approval and recommended the Cabinet to choose Option A (Medway selection testing over two days).

720 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and asked Members to refer their ideas for the committee's next in-depth scrutiny review topic to the relevant spokespersons by 18 February 2013, as they were meeting with the Director of Children and Adult Services on 20 February 2013 to discuss ideas.

A Member requested that the monitoring of the implementation of the Improving performance at Key Stage 2 task group recommendations be added to the work programme. It was suggested that this be added to the provisional test and examination results reported to the committee every autumn.

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Decision:

The committee agreed: -

- (1) An update on the School Organisation Plan 2011-16 and a report on the adoption service be added to the committee's work programme;
- (2) To request a briefing note on the Child and Adolescent Mental health Service;
- (3) To refer any ideas for the next in-depth scrutiny review topic to the relevant spokesperson by 18 February 2013;
- (4) That an update on the implementation of the improving performance at Key Stage 2 Task Group recommendations be added to future provisional test and examination results reports.

Chairman

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