

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

Tuesday, 26 March 2013

6.30pm to 8.50pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

Co-opted Members with voting rights on educational issues only:

Kwashie Anang (Parent Governor representative), Samantha Collins (Parent Governor representative) and Alex Tear (Church of England Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Adrian Cole (Governor representative), Jane Heyes (Headteacher representative), Sam Tutt (Medway Youth Parliament representative) and Doyin Yahyi (Medway Youth Parliament representative)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Avey (Substitute for Tolhurst)
Griffin (Substitute for Clarke)

In Attendance: Graham Clewes, Chief Executive, Medway Youth Trust
Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Communications, Performance and Partnerships
Councillor Tom Mason, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Chris McKenzie, Performance Intelligence and Strategic Manager
Sally Mortimore, Medway Safeguarding Children Board Manager
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Jenny Robinson, Legal Advisor
Councillor David Wildey, Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care

946 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

947 Apologies for absence

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Clarke, Craven and Tolhurst and Shirley Griffiths (LINK representative).

948 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

949 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

950 Raising the age of participation in learning

Discussion:

The Chief Executive of Medway Youth Trust (MYT) introduced the report, outlining the policy context of raising the age of participation in learning. From the summer of 2013 young people will be required to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17. From 2015 they will be required to continue until their 18th birthday.

The Chief Executive of MYT explained that the strategy in preparing for and delivering the raising participation age (RPA) needed to be a whole system approach, requiring the local authority, contractors, schools, families, employers, post 16 providers and young people to understand and embrace what RPA means and the impact of it. He also drew the committee's attention to Medway's performance in relation to 16-18 year olds participating in full-time learning, which was higher than the South East and England averages.

The Chief Executive of MYT then answered questions from Members, which related to: -

- Variable provision of independent advice and guidance (IAG) in schools;
- Best practice was shared via workshops led by the Department for Education which allowed learning nationally but he also undertook to contact those authorities whose performance was exceptional compared to others to learn any best practice from those areas specifically;
- All schools have a legal duty to provide IAG;
- The budget reduction of £290,000 from the Council's contract with MYT would require a need to prioritise the most vulnerable young people and those furthest from engagement being targeted;
- There was a commitment that no ward in Medway would exceed a level of 10% of young people not being in employment, education or training (NEET) by 2014 (currently three wards exceeded this figure);
- Confirmation that partnership working to address RPA and reduce the number of NEETs in Medway was strong and an example of this being demonstrated was the success of the 100/100 apprenticeship scheme;

- RPA Strategies were most successful in areas where they were owned and held account for at the most senior level in local authorities;
- Undertook to provide the committee with data regarding NEETs in a gender and ethnic breakdown.

The Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representative then provided the committee with an update on the work they had been doing in relation to careers advice, since it had been the topic of MYP's 2011 conference. She explained that there was some concern that IAG needed to be pitched right to ensure that the right doors were opened for young people, rather than them following a path that they may not have chosen. There was also still some concern among MYP members regarding the 'Your choice in Medway' website, particularly around its lack of popularity with usage being recorded at 32% as most schools were still helping to fund the website and there was concern about the spend if it was a tool that was not effectively used.

In response the Chief Executive of MYT explained that the 'Your choice in Medway' website could look very different in the future and schools would need to decide whether or not they wish to continue contributing to it. He also commented on the commissioning toolkit, developed by MYT to help schools in choosing the right provider of IAG for its students and the toolkit was now used in other parts of the country.

Decision:

The committee noted the report and in particular the advice that a successful raising participation age strategy needed support amongst all stakeholders across Medway and should be owned by senior leaders at the local authority.

951 Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services in attendance

Discussion:

Councillor Mason attended the meeting to be held to account for the area of his portfolio that fell within the remit of this committee. A number of Members asked questions and commented and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services responded with following: -

- **Vacancy of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** – The Council was currently trying to recruit to the post but the vacancy had been advertised four times demonstrating the difficulty to recruit to this field due to its specialism.
- **Participation of children and young people (CYP) in Child Protection Conferences (CPCs)** – The inspectors of the recent Ofsted made some positive observations when observing child protection conferences (CPCs) but participation of CYP in these meetings did need to be improved. The Portfolio Holder felt CYP should be able to be interviewed by IROs without their parents being present and the use of advocates were being introduced to support CYP at CPCs.

- **Relationship with the IRO service** – The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he meets regularly with the IRO Service Manager who reports on the service, its performance and progress. He emphasised that the team was highly qualified and added that, due to the sensitivities involved, he needed to maintain some distance from the service delivery. He added that the service had been removed from within the Children and Adults directorate to maintain a level of independence.
- **Identifying issues** – IROs may have been better informed if CYP were able to speak without their parents being present.
- **Support for staff and impact of the vacancy** – Regular 1:1 meetings were provided for staff and they were able to pass on any concerns they had to management.
- **Use of volunteers** – Volunteers were very important and could be used if they were assessed as appropriate to be involved.
- **Confidence in improvement** – The Portfolio Holder confirmed he was confident improvements required by Ofsted would be achieved. Good progress was being made and in addition the Council had begun to use a new system for recording data, which would help improvement further.

Decision:

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his attendance.

952 Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care in attendance

Discussion:

Councillor Wildey attended the meeting to be held to account for the area of his portfolio that fell within the remit of this committee. A number of Members asked questions and commented and the Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care responded with following: -

- **Improving the Corporate Parenting Group (CPG)** – The Portfolio Holder explained that he had recently attended a conference which was attended by representatives of south eastern Corporate Parenting Groups (CPGs) and some examples of best practice and differences of approach were shared. Early discussions regarding improving the CPGs functionality were also taking place with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (lead member). He added that he would like to see each Member of CPG to have an area of responsibility.
- **Performance of the looked after children service** – A forthcoming inspection of looked after children (LAC) was likely to be later this year and there was a lot of good work going on in the service and caseloads were still high but were reducing. In addition, an appointment had been made to the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care post and an interim was in place to cover the vacancy until the new appointed member of staff arrived.
- **Member support and leadership** – The Portfolio Holder explained that comments in the Ofsted report were not negative about political leadership and he hoped that some continuity of senior staff would help improvements.

He added that officers had been supported and additional funding had been provided by Members.

- **Confidence in improvement** – The Portfolio Holder expressed confidence in the team and policies in place to achieve a positive Ofsted outcome for the LAC inspection.

Decision:

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his attendance.

953 Outcome of unannounced inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adults introduced the report and acknowledged and shared the disappointment amongst Members with the inadequate judgement. She explained that the authority had been previously inspected under a multi-agency framework and that this inspection had been under a single agency framework, as part of a one year transitional period. The bar had been raised in between the two frameworks and many more authorities inspected under the new framework had been found as inadequate. She added that the new framework focused on the journey of the child and improvements to service must have the same focus. The Director confirmed that the authority was now required to set up an Improvement Board, which would meet monthly. An Independent Chair for the Improvement Board had been appointed and would oversee the work of the board and sub groups for the two year improvement period.

The Director of Children and Adults then answered questions from Members, which included: -

- Confirmation of the membership of the Improvement Board, which would include: -
 - An Independent Chair of the Improvement Board
 - The Medway Safeguarding Children Board Independent Chair;
 - The Chief Executive
 - The Director of Children and Adults
 - The Portfolio Holder for Children Services (lead member)
 - The Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care
 - A senior representative from the Police
 - A senior representative from the Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
 - A senior representative from the NHS National Commissioning Board
 - A representative from schools
- Confirmation that the new children and adult electronic management system would go live on 2 April 2013 and that all preparations were on track. Transition of data from the current system would take place over the coming weekend. The challenge was ensuring staff used the system correctly and input all data required to be able to make the most potential of one of its good features, data recording systems and added that staff that had used the system already were now advocates.

- In relation to the level of re-referrals, the Director explained that some referrals did not meet the thresholds (Ofsted were clear that the threshold documents and supporting procedure documents were sound) and were therefore sent back to the referee. However, that person/agency can then continue to be concerned and re-refer and this contributed to part of the higher rate of re-referrals. Development of a triage service was therefore being considered to help signpost such cases and work needed to be done to help the understanding of what multi-agency threshold means.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

954 Quarter 3 Council Plan Monitoring

Discussion:

The Performance, Intelligence and Strategic Manager introduced the report, drawing Members attention to the outcome of the Citizens' Panel and some specific projects that have supported the Council's priority, "children and young people having the best start in life".

Officers then answered Members questions, which included: -

- Concern with regard to the impact welfare reform would have on the reliance of bed and breakfast accommodation and that this was something that would need to be monitored;
- Acknowledgement of the increased attendance figures at Sure Start Children Centres in Medway and successes of Key Stage 1 results;
- Concern with regard to attendance of governors at training although there was awareness that Governors can ask for more in-school training;
- Suggestion that reflection of the recent Ofsted inspection in the performance indicators should be included within the Council Plan.

In relation to Governor training the Medway Governors Association (MGA) representative explained that the MGA do promote and encourage attendance but in-school training can often be more favourable for some Governors. There was a closer relationship with the Council's governor services and the MGA and it was hoped that there would soon be an increase in attendance.

In relation to the inclusion of performance indicators (PIs) in the Council Plan in relation to the recent Ofsted the Performance, Intelligence and Strategic Manager explained that he was the manager of a new team established within the Children and Adult directorate and that a number of things were being done around this, including improved benchmarking. In addition, the Council Plan 2013-14 was to have a more balanced approach to PIs so that they were more measurable and meaningful, rather than simply measuring timeliness for example.

Decision:

The committee noted the report.

955 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and in response to queries confirmed that an update against improvements following the recent Ofsted inspection and provisional and test examination results, including an update on the Key Stage Two task group actions would be reported to the September meeting of the committee.

In response to a question about the closure of Preston Screens and the review of overnight short breaks the Director of Children and Adults confirmed that the formal consultation was now open and undertook to circulate the document to the committee. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to programme consideration of this in to the work programme.

Decision:

The committee noted the additions to the work programme as detailed in the report and requested officers to circulate the consultation on the review of overnight short breaks and programme consideration of this at a future meeting of the committee.

Chairman

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