

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

Tuesday, 25 March 2014

6.30pm to 9.40pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative) and Alex Tear (Church of England Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Adrian Cole (Governor representative), Beth Peal (Substitute - Healthwatch Medway CIC representative) and Karen White (Substitute - Headteacher representative)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Pat Gulvin (substitute for Griffin)

In Attendance: Councillor Kelly Tolhurst, Portfolio Holder for Educational Improvement
Councillor David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adult Services
Helen Jones, Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning
David Quirke-Thornton, Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services
Chris McKenzie, Performance Intelligence and Strategic Manager
Nicola Smith, Democratic Services Officer
Clive Rushworth, Service Manager Child Protection and Proceedings

939 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 14 January 2014 were agreed and signed by the chairman as correct.

940 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Griffin, Jane Heyes, Lauraine McManus and Alan Street.

941 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

942 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

During agenda item 10, Outcomes of Consultation for the proposed Prescribed Alterations at Abbey Court Special School, Councillor Smith declared that she is a member of the governing body for Abbey Court Special School.

943 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Educational Improvement

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Educational Improvement attended for this item and presented a report on the actions, outcomes and challenges relating to the areas of her portfolio, which has a particular focus on educational settings and governor services. Members welcomed the Portfolio Holder, asked questions and commented on her report. The Portfolio Holder answered as follows:

- **Visits to schools:** The Portfolio Holder confirmed that during her first 10 months in the new role she had visited schools in relation to educational improvement and focused on those where she felt that she would have most impact. She has met with 30-40 schools and governing body representatives to date, and advised the Committee that the discussions involved gaining a better understanding of the issues facing the schools, requests for brokering support and feedback on training for governors.
- **Support to schools:** In response to questions regarding the level of support provided to schools by the local authority and the work of the school improvement team, the Portfolio Holder reported that support is tailored to the individual and specific needs of each school and that the number of hours and days varies according to specific needs.
- **Teaching Assistants:** In response to a number of questions regarding teaching assistants, the Portfolio Holder reported that they play a valuable role in schools who decide how they can best support the work in classrooms. She stated that she felt that support should be in place to help those that wish to study to become teachers.

- **School effectiveness and school improvement action plans:** Members asked if school improvement action plans were fit for purpose, whether positive trends in improvement identified are sustainable and how success will be measured. The Portfolio Holder reported that school improvement action plans were checked by the local authority (LA) and LA action plans are now signed off by HMI; schools in special measures have targeted intervention based on Ofsted findings: this has included putting Interim Executive Boards in place where a governing body has been deemed to be ineffective. The Portfolio Holder stressed the importance of strong leadership and focus on specific school issues to ensure continued improvement in the key areas identified; She stated success will be evidenced through future Ofsted reports and by measuring the rate of improvement.
- **Key Stage 2 results:** The Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that the biggest challenge within her portfolio remit is the floor threshold for primary schools (end of key stage 2). She also said that she had valued being on the Member task group which had delivered the Effective Challenge of Under Performance In Schools Review and would be able to provide an update to the Committee on progress made against the recommendations of the review.
- **Governor support, training and governor vacancies:** The Portfolio Holder commended the work of school governors who voluntarily give their time to Medway schools and make an impact on school leadership. She reported that the vacancy rate was around 10% with 27 LEA vacancies. 17 potential new governors were recently recruited through a training event. The Portfolio Holder advised that there is currently one National Leader of Governance (NLG) in place although there are four applications in for Local Leaders of Governance (LLG).
- **Headteacher and teacher recruitment:** In response to a question on headteacher and teacher recruitment, the Portfolio Holder advised that teacher recruitment can be a challenge for some Medway schools and the LA is working with schools to try to attract more applicants.
- **School alliances:** The Portfolio Holder reported that partnership working is evolving in Medway and there will be more change with more schools becoming academies. She spoke of the two teaching schools and support for teacher and senior leadership development.
- **Medway Youth Parliament:** The Portfolio Holder is working with the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) to develop ways in which they can be more engaged. There have been positive suggestions from the MYP regarding choices and careers advice in schools and she would like to see more involvement in the areas within her portfolio.
- **Support for children with Special Educational Needs:** The Portfolio Holder has visited local special schools and outlined her admiration for

the strong leadership and drive in place, and the impact that it is having on the pupils. She also stressed the importance of pupil referral units and early intervention.

- **Data Sharing:** The Portfolio Holder concurred that sharing schools' data was crucial to identifying any issues in relation to educational performance.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

944 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Services attended for this item and presented a report on the actions, outcomes and challenges relating to the key area of his portfolio relevant to this Committee, the Independent Safeguarding and Review Service. Members welcomed the Portfolio Holder, asked questions and commented on his report. The Portfolio Holder answered as follows:

- **Permanence panel:** The Portfolio Holder confirmed the Principal IRO now chairs the permanence panel to ensure all looked after children under 12 have robust permanence plans and are actively seeking adoption for them wherever possible.
- **Recruitment to permanent Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) posts:** The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there is one Service Manager, 1 Principal IRO and 10 staff. Although agency staff have been used, there has been little staff turnover, and the standard of work is closely monitored. The team has recently recruited 2 permanent staff from temporary staff, with the use of incentivised salaries as appropriate, which is more cost-effective than using agency staff.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

945 Adoption Performance in Medway

Discussion:

The Service Manager Child Protection and Proceedings attended for this item and responded to Member's questions on the following:

- **Disruptions with adoptive families:** the report did not contain any information relating to disruptions (Where an adoption arrangement breaks down) and it was requested that this information should be

included in a future report for consideration by the corporate parenting group.

- **Activity days:** the Service Manager confirmed that activity days do take place and that some London authorities have been involved.
- **Timeframes:** It was confirmed that the 26 week target for the completion of Care Proceedings has historically been difficult to achieve given the various processes and procedures followed by multiple agencies including courts, CAFCAS, and adoption services amongst others. We are working hard during the pre-proceedings stage to ameliorate these potential difficulties and are showing steadily improved performance. It was noted that Ofsted inspections would identify if a local authority and its partners were not meeting the 26 week target. Members raised concern regarding the balance of reaching targets against the needs of individual children and their prospective families; and stressed the need for ensuring that the adoption placement works, is handled with care, and is right for the child, rather than rushed. It was explained that Care Proceedings were only a part of the families' safeguarding journey and much preparatory and pre-emptive work preceded this stage, other than in exceptional circumstances, where a case example was provided for information.
- **Engagement with service users:** The Service Manager, Child Protection and Proceedings, noted that engagement with service users was vital to service development.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

946 Progress on Moving on Medway, the Improvement Plan for Children's Services

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning presented the report which sets out how Medway Council will work with its partners to improve its service to children, young people and their families. She advised the Committee that the report addresses Ofsted requirements, following inspections of safeguarding services and services for looked after children in 2013, and aims to support the delivery of good and continually improving services.

The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning highlighted key elements from the report including progress against the five key themes, and stated that the Peer Review which took place in February 2014 had acknowledged the progress made. The plan is not a static plan and will be reviewed and revised to reflect progress and incorporate the Peer Review findings and new Ofsted Framework. This will be taken to the Improvement Board for sign off in April.

The Committee raised a number of points and asked questions about the report.

Use of reserves: Officers confirmed that the one-off contribution of £350,000 from reserves in 2013-14 had funded the improvement plan and included the restructuring of the Triage and Assessment Services, some consultancy support, audit and testing out local processes. The additional funding has enabled the authority to ensure impact is being made, at a significant pace.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS): Members asked whether the service provider is delivering to targets and stressed the need for effective contract management. Officers advised that a review of the service is underway and that a whole systems approach was being taken which included a focus on continuity of support between Tiers 2 and 3, the transition from children's to adult services. Officers advised that there had been a significant increase in mental health referrals and that, as contract managers, flexibility is required to address changes in service demand, and assured members that the contractor would be held to account if they do not deliver effective services. Members also questioned whether monitoring is in place to capture information on incidents when schools attempt to refer into the CAMHS service but are being turned down. Officers advised that they would look into this.

Electronic communications: In response to Member concern that procedures were not keeping pace with current technology with a heavy reliance on letters, the Deputy Director, Adult Social Care advised that he had tasked colleagues to review current practice and was working with the Assistant Director, Legal and Corporate Services to ensure legal compliancy and secure data management systems.

Decision:

- (a) The committee noted the report and requested:
 - i) that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee, updating Members on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS);
 - ii) that the Corporate Parenting Group be provided with an update on the progress against the Moving on Medway Improvement Plan and on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

947 Sufficiency Report 2013-2015

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning presented the Medway Sufficiency Report 2013-2015 which sets out how Medway Council will meet the placement needs of current and future children in care and care leavers, and improve outcomes. She advised that the Sufficiency Report would be

refreshed annually in light of the Council's understanding of needs and current provision. The strategy takes into consideration the co-ordination of a range of services, and includes a clear focus on supporting families to stay together, minimising the need for children to come into care, or supporting their timely return to their families, where it is safe to do so.

The Committee then asked a number of questions and commented on the report:

Definition of 'unsuitable accommodation,' (page 11 of the Sufficiency Report 2013-15, footnote 2.) The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning advised that there are few occasions when older young people may have to be placed in short term 'unsuitable accommodation' such as bed and breakfast or an out of area placement, if, for example a crisis occurred late in the day and no other suitable placements were available.

Target of increasing foster placements from 218 to 240, (page 17, paragraph 6.1.) The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning confirmed that this was an in-house recruitment target.

Decisions:

The Committee noted the report and recommended that it be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

948 Outcomes of Consultation for the Proposed Prescribed Alterations at Abbey Court Special School

Discussion:

The Performance, Intelligence and Strategic Planning Manager presented the outcomes of the informal consultation on the Council's proposals to 'increase pupil numbers' and 'transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School and advised the Committee that of 150 written responses, 144 had supported the proposal, 5 objected and 1 ticked neither box but raised concerns around parking, access and traffic management. The Committee made a number of comments regarding the report and proposals, and paid tribute to the work of the Headteacher, the school, and also local authority staff who had been involved in the development of the proposals.

Size and use of the site: Officers confirmed that the proposed site can accommodate all of the required educational accommodation and that design work was progressing with initial agreement on classroom sizes and shared space areas. Further work is underway, in consultation with the school, to develop a design that meets the needs of the school and also allows some flexibility for future development taking into account the work of the school, as a Beacon school. This would include careful consideration of the aspirations of the school to provide continued education and support for young people aged 19-25.

Training facilities on the new site: Members expressed concern that the current funding for the proposed development does not include provision for a training facility on site that can be used for training Medway school-based staff and people from other authorities. A member also explained that one of the reasons why the Schools Forum had been supportive of the proposals was because of the commitment of Abbey Court School to provide outreach and training support. Officers advised that the school could provide training and outreach support without the need for a dedicated facility, but that the design of the school would allow for training facilities to be included at a later date, subject to the identification of an appropriate source of funding. Funding for the first phase of the project has been prioritised on delivering core educational provision for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Phase 2 of the project will focus on the provision for Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils.

Operating services across two sites: A Member pointed out that the revenue costs of continuing to operate across two sites, even if only 1 mile apart, would be a drain on the operational budget of the school and questioned whether there would be any redirection of any capital funds generated through the site disposal. Officers advised that this would be unlikely, because of need to use the site to support the development of additional provision for other SEN needs but assured the Committee that they would be doing all they could to generate additional sources of funding for the future phases of development.

Decision:

- (a) The Committee endorsed the on-going efforts of officers to get extra funding for the future phases of development.
- (b) The Committee noted the report and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

949 Council Plan 2013/14 Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring

Discussion:

The Performance, Intelligence and Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and, in answer to a specific question relating to 'Frameworki', Officers confirmed that all documents have been transferred into the new system and RAISE has been switched off.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

950 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report.

Decision:

The Committee noted:

- (a) the work programme as set out at the attached Appendix 1 of the report;
- (b) that a Briefing Note on Young Carers in Medway will be circulated to the members of this Committee for information;
- (c) that any suitable nominations for Parent/Governor Representatives will be forwarded to Full Council for approval.

Chairman

Date:

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