

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 SEPTEMBER 2014

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (LEAD MEMBER)

Report from: Councillor Mike O'Brien – Portfolio Holder Children's Services

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Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. This report covers the period from January 2014.

1. Background

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Care, according to the Council's constitution are:

- Adoption
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Children with disabilities
- Children's Social Care
- Early years
- Further Education
- Inclusion
- Looked After Children (including fostering, care leavers and residential care)
- Partnership Commissioning (Children)
- Primary and secondary education
- Safeguarding
- School organisation and schools admissions
- School services
- Special educational needs
- Youth Services

1.2 This Portfolio Holder is the designated lead member for children's services (LMCS) under the Children Act 2004. The Portfolio Holder is responsible for leadership, strategy and the effectiveness of education and children's social care.

2. Overview

2.1 Adoption

Overview

- 2.1.1. Medway Council has responsibility for recruiting and supporting of adoptive parents, matching of children with permanent families, and supporting children and families after adoption orders have been made.

Achievements

- 2.1.2. I am pleased to report that Medway has a higher than national rate for the percentage of children leaving care who are adopted (22% last financial year and 40% so far this year compared to 22% national average). Of completed adoptions, we exceeded national averages with 7% of children adopted with a disability (compared to 3% nationally), 49% with siblings (compared to 38%) and 25% over the age of 5 (compared to 15%).
- 2.1.3. Due to the post adoption support we offer families, we have had no adoption placement breakdowns over the last 3 years.
- 2.1.4. We have introduced adoption activity days to support family finding for even more children with adoption as their care plan. We have also commissioned a pilot project which will work with birth parents whose children have been adopted to improve the experience of children moving into adoption e.g. Life Story work and to support birth parents to make positive life choices in the future.
- 2.1.5. I have been very happy to support our Permanence Policy which sets out our aspirations and ambition for securing permanence for all children looked after by us. This will be completed during September and will then be launched to all staff.

Challenges

- 2.1.6. The number of days to place children is a challenging indicator for all Local Authorities, partly due to a national shortage of adopters. A key challenge for us in Medway will be to maintain our current performance and to improve the length of time taken to conclude care proceedings. We are streamlining our services, for example, care proceedings work will now form part of the Looked After Children (LAC) service. This will support closer monitoring of court timescales and will also enable us to develop the skills of more staff across Children's Social Care (CSC) so that care proceedings can be allocated to suitably skilled and experienced staff.

2.2 Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Overview

- 2.2.1. Medway Council commissions a range of mental health services in partnership with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The largest provider is Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust that delivers the Tier 3 service.

Achievements

- 2.2.2. When I visit schools many headteachers tell me about their concerns that we do not have a single CAMHS. I also know that this is a concern amongst our GPs who do not have a single point of access to make referrals into. You will know from the Overview & Scrutiny meeting of 15 July that officers have been reviewing current arrangements to ensure that improvements are made. Officers will be reporting back to this Committee. I am pleased to report that we are finalising an agreement with Sussex Partnership to have management oversight of Tier 2 and establish a single point of access.

Challenges

- 2.2.3. This Committee is aware of the challenges that we face:
- There is not a single CAMH service
 - There needs to be urgent improvement to specialist CAMHS provision for Looked After Children
 - Improvements are needed in the transition arrangements for young people from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

2.3 Children with Disabilities

Overview

- 2.3.1. I am delighted to report that in response to feedback from service users and their families, Medway Council has made some significant changes to the services provided to children with learning disabilities and physical disabilities, and their families.

Achievements

- 2.3.2. A new all-age disability service has been established with three sub-teams offering assessment and support: a 0-25yr Team, a 25yr+ Team and a Children's and Adults Occupational Therapy Team. The 0-25yr Team incorporates the former Children and Disability Team and means that Social Workers can now continue to support young people through the often challenging times of transition, working to ensure that transition is as smooth and successful as possible.

Challenges

- 2.3.3. The new service arrangements, which came into effect 1 July 2014, will support the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014 and

in particular will benefit the development of personalisation in Children's Services from the experience and learning in Adults Services. Increasing personalisation will be a challenge as this will be a new way of working for parents and carers and providers alike.

2.4 Children's Social Care

Overview

- 2.4.1. Medway Children's Social Care is a service of circa 180 staff and an annual budget of £30m. It provides statutory social work services to children in need, children subject to a Child Protection Plan and children in care. It also provides fostering and adoption services, residential care, and services for care leavers.

Achievements

- 2.4.2. I am very supportive of all our staff who are working to an Improvement Plan, put in place following the two Ofsted inspections in 2013 which judged services to be 'inadequate'. I am a member of the External Improvement Board that oversees the plan. I am delighted that a Peer Review of children's safeguarding services in February 2014, and two 'deep dive' visits by the chair of the External Board, Jane Held, in January and June, noted significant progress in all areas, backed up by strong corporate and political support.
- 2.4.3. A permanent management team, comprising Assistant Director and Heads of Service is in place, and I am delighted that as a result of considerable investment to recruit competent social workers and managers, we have met targets for recruitment of social workers, including some from overseas, and the retention rate of team managers and frontline staff has improved.
- 2.4.4. I am delighted that the service has recently located to MHS Broadside and all social work teams are now co-located. The Early Help and Family Support Service has been co-located at Woodlands Centre, with a plan to join the social work teams at Broadside later this year.
- 2.4.5. Professor David Thorpe, from Lancaster University has worked with the Children's Advice and Duty Service to develop a more proactive response to professionals who have concerns about children and families, to make sure the response is appropriate and relevant to needs.

Challenges

- 2.4.6. Maintaining quality of practice, manageable workloads and improvement in service delivery is a constant challenge, in the context of significant increases in the number of children requiring assessments and who are subject to Child Protection Plans. This number has doubled in the last twelve months from 224 in July 2013 to 468 in July 2014. Through the Improvement Board, we have looked into this and I am confident that the rise is as a result of more robust

management oversight and rigour in decision making. However this has placed pressures on our social work teams to continue to offer a responsive service, which meets statutory requirements.

- 2.4.7. Recruitment of permanent staff of good quality at all levels remains a significant challenge, as it does nationally. I have been very supportive of Medway's initiatives including headline sponsorship at national recruitment fairs, work with universities to offer positions to newly qualified social workers, and overseas recruitment, all of which have helped to meet recruitment targets, although we are continuing to require a number of agency staff to fill available posts. I will be supporting our Organisational Change department to maintain a focus on increasing the number of permanent appointments.
- 2.4.8. Continuing to deliver an effective service which meets all statutory requirements within available budgetary resources will continue to challenge myself as Portfolio Holder as well as our staff and managers. Efficiency opportunities are being identified and will be actively pursued. Against this background, I want to support Children's Social Care to maintain the momentum of the improvement journey.

2.5 Early Help, including Medway Action for Families

Overview

- 2.5.1. I am pleased to report that a new Early Help Service has been established, building on the successful Medway Action for Families (MAFF) way of working. This service has brought together a number of teams (MAFF, Family Support Service, School Attendance, Children Missing Education, Missing Persons, Child Employment, Common Assessment) both in practice and location. I believe that this integration is key to ensuring better decision making and less duplication.

Achievements

- 2.5.2. There have been a wide range of achievements including:
- Supporting the Children's Advice and Duty Service to make sure families receive the most appropriate response to their needs. This includes offering in some urgent cases an emergency response supporting families over the weekend rather than respite care.
 - Moving from 6 locations across Medway to one base (Woodlands) for all service areas in Early Help.
 - New protocols for 'missing persons' in place and signed off after consultation with internal and external partners.
 - We have again seen an increase in the use of CAF with further partner agencies now using the assessment tool, including for the first time CAMHS.

Challenges

- 2.5.3. The number of referrals coming into the family support service is significant. I want to ensure that as a whole system our partners are engaged in early help and a team around the family approach. I have made this a key priority for Medway CAN in the coming year.

2.6 Early years

Overview

- 2.6.1. Medway Council has statutory responsibility to lead and coordinate services that result in good health and development of children in their first five years of life. It is measured on the “school readiness” of children at age five. This is delivered by securing nursery education for all children and through helping parents to give their children the best start in life via a network of Sure Start Children’s Centres, provided in partnership with the health services.

Achievements

- 2.6.2. Children starting school in Medway are attaining the highest ever recorded levels of learning and development. Provisional data for 2014 shows that the proportion of children attaining a “good level of development” as assessed by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile rose by 7 points to 64%, which is 4 percentage points above the national average. This success is due in part to the early help and targeted interventions provided by Sure Start Children’s Centres. Attendances at Medway’s 19 children’s centres have continued to grow, totalling over 280,000 in the 12 months to June 2014.
- 2.6.3. The proportion of pre-schools, nurseries and childminders graded good or better by Ofsted rose for the fourth successive year and now stands at 70%.
- 2.6.4. 98% of children aged three and four years are accessing a funded nursery education place, whilst the introduction of free early years places for 2 year-olds living in vulnerable or lowest income households resulted in more that 600 children benefiting from high quality provision.
- 2.6.5. I have personally visited a large number of Medway pre-schools and day nurseries to observe nursery education and childcare provision and to talk to proprietors, managers and staff. In February I also attended a briefing for all the leaders of Medway’s early years settings.

Challenges

- 2.6.6. In September 2014 the entitlement to nursery education for children aged two-years-old is extended to all lower income households, equating to over 1400 families. Significantly, more eligible families have been identified than original government forecasts, reflecting the growing birth rate in Medway, particularly in the most disadvantaged

areas. A key challenge is to stimulate the expansion of the commercial market for early years provision, particularly in the more disadvantaged areas of Medway where the greatest growth is required, whilst ensuring that the quality of provision remains high so that there is a positive impact on children's learning and development.

2.7 Further Education

Overview

- 2.7.1. Our 14-25 team is well established and continues to work proactively with key partners and stakeholders to embed the Raising Participation Age strategy. This document is currently being refreshed and the new version will be shared with the relevant agencies.
- 2.7.2. I am sure members of this Committee will join me in recording our condolences to the family of Sue McLeod. Sue will be a huge loss to MidKent College and our work in transforming further education in Medway.

Achievements

- 2.7.3. New opportunities for young people are being developed and rolled out across Medway. These include a programme of apprenticeship placements for the learning disabled, which will improve access to the workplace for this sector of the learning community.

Challenges

- 2.7.4. A key challenge is continuing to develop a range of sustainable and meaningful opportunities for SEN post-16 learners in Medway and ensuring that there is enough capacity in the local opportunities available to cope with increasing demand from 2015 onwards.

2.8 Inclusion

Overview

- 2.8.1. Medway Council is committed to ensuring that all children can access full time education that is of excellent quality and is suited to their aptitudes, interests and needs. However we recognise that sometimes a child needs a fresh start when a placement in school goes wrong. Where a pupil has been permanently excluded (or is at risk of so being), the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that their education can continue. This happens through a range of mechanisms which include managed transfers to other schools or placement in another provision. These options are managed by the Medway Inclusion team which also offers advice and guidance to schools and families involved in the exclusion process. There are also related services which help children and young people overcome problems such as emotional health or familial issues, which can prove to be a barrier to their learning, and the provision of specialist learning facilities such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Achievements

- 2.8.2. The Onside Therapy Team and the Health for Learning (emotional health practitioners) continue to expand their work in schools across Medway.
- 2.8.3. The Inspire Free School will open in the Autumn term and will offer places to young people who have statements of special educational needs relating to behavioural and social issues.
- 2.8.4. Permanent exclusions continue to be concentrated in secondary schools (75 out of 92 permanent exclusions throughout the academic year 2013—14). Whilst the exclusion rate is always a concern for local authorities, Medway continues to perform better than the national average with less exclusions overall.
- 2.8.5. We are looking at the provision in both Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to ensure sufficiency. Will Adams is set to expand and building work is underway. The potential for Rowens to expand has also been considered.
- 2.8.6. We are continuing to explore ways to offer appropriate, accessible packages of education and support for children who struggle to maintain a place in mainstream school but who do not have statements/Education and Health Care Plans. Packages may involve third sector providers, the Youth Service, FE Colleges as well as schools and PRUs.

Challenges

- 2.8.7. The need to accommodate an increasing age-range amongst permanently excluded pupils is becoming more pressing, as is the increase in the overall exclusion rate.

2.9 Looked After Children (including fostering, care leavers and residential care)

Overview

- 2.9.1. Medway Council's services for looked after children include:
 - Social workers who are responsible for supporting children in their placements, developing and overseeing their Care Plans and helping them to achieve their full potential,
 - The Leaving Care service who provide support for young people moving into independence or adult services, including supporting access to employment, education or training, accommodation and appropriate health services
 - The Fostering Service comprising social workers who assess and support Medway foster carers, including private and short break foster carers and the Connected Persons Service.

- The Independent Reviewing Officer team who chair reviews for looked after children and have a support and challenge role to make sure the children's interests are fully addressed

2.9.2. In addition Medway has one residential home The Old Vicarage, which is home to six children. I enjoy my regular visits to the Old Vicarage which is managed by Northern Care on behalf of Medway Council, meeting the young people, seeing the difference we are making to their lives, and ensuring we are exercising our Corporate Parenting functions well.

Achievements

2.9.3. There have been significant achievements in the Looked After Children Service:

- Numbers of children in our care are stable (currently 378) and at 62.1 per 10,000 under 18 population, is in line with national figures.
- I am very pleased to report that 90% of children this financial year have participated in their reviews, and 90% of reviews have been done on time.
- The Children in Care Council (CICC) is very active and representatives attend Corporate Parenting Board meetings. I attend their meetings by invitation and have been able to support young people to present their views to a wider group of elected members. CICC members have made a DVD about the stigma of being in care which was shown to the whole Council. The DVD was recently presented at the national Who Cares Trust event and was very positively received.
- The fostering service works closely with our Communications team to target recruitment of carers who can meet the needs of our children. Our recruitment strategy includes updating the internet site so we have carers and young people talking about how valuable and rewarding fostering is and we are also using information about the needs of our looked after children and young people to target the types of carers who most closely meet their needs.
- I am committed to supporting all our foster carers, who do a very challenging but rewarding job and I am pleased that they have been offered training with Professor David Shemmings, Professor of Child protection Research, School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, Chatham, on disorganised attachment to help them to understand better the needs of children in their care.
- I am delighted that a second football match has taken place between children in care and staff members – the young people won by one goal, and I was there to congratulate the winning team. Staff and young people enjoyed and valued the event and staff are now considering planning a basketball match with the CICC.
- The new Leaving Care service has been established with a team of workers who specialise in developing services for this group of young people. This team of Personal Advisors advise, assist and

befriend care leavers which, in addition to the current Staying Put Policy, will support the intended extension of Local Authorities' duties to provide placements to looked after young people to the age of 21. The Leaving Care Team is currently in discussion with the Medway Youth Trust to identify co-located premises with other agencies supporting care leavers to provide a hub to address their needs. The team are working closely with partners both within Medway Council and externally to secure good employment, education and training opportunities for young people leaving care. I am pleased to report that amongst our successes are the development of apprenticeships at Cookham Wood for care leavers, the establishment of a website (in partnership with Medway HR) to assist young people in finding employment and close work with the Virtual Headteacher and the 14-25 co-ordinator to establish a steering group which will address in detail those individual young people who are not engaging with efforts to secure employment, education or training opportunities for them. It is good that the service is establishing a care leavers steering group. I am very committed to supporting our young people who leave care and this group will help us develop our services and benchmark them against the national care leavers' charter.

- I continue to Chair the Corporate Parenting Board. I have championed young people themselves having a voice at meetings where appropriate.

Challenges

- 2.9.4. Finding the right placement at the right time for children in care continues to challenge. There is an increasingly competitive market for recruiting foster carers, and a limited supply in this area.
- 2.9.5. Work continues to increase the supply of suitable accommodation options for young people leaving care and the service is working with Partnership Commissioning to ensure that all provision meets minimum standards.
- 2.9.6. I want to support all our staff to make sure Care Plans are 'SMART' and focused, and that social workers spend time with children, ascertaining their views and wishes, and ensuring this is evidenced and recorded.

2.10 Partnership Commissioning (Children)

Overview

- 2.10.1. The Partnership Commissioning team was established in April 2013. The team is jointly funded between the Council and NHS Medway Clinical Commissioning Group and is one of the first truly integrated commissioning teams established in the country.

Achievements

Achievements include:

- Securing additional investment from the CCG into the Medway CAMHS
- Joining a Kent and Medway Framework for Independent Fostering Agencies to ensure that there are clear contracts and quality assurances in place
- Undertaking a major review of short break services which is being reported to the Committee
- Developing proposals for a CCG funded Children's Community Nursing Service for Medway, Swale and Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley.

Challenges

2.10.1. The team has recently been restructured as a result of a review to ensure that it is fit for purpose to achieve the transformation of services and value for money required by both the Council and CCG. Inevitably, as in any restructure, there are capacity issues as the recruitment process is undertaken.

2.11 Primary and secondary education

Overview

2.11.1. One of the highlights of the role of Lead member for Children's Services is the visits I make to Medway schools. Some of the highlights include:

- Presenting Summer School certificates for year 7 students at Rainham school for girls
- Celebrating GCSE results at The Thomas Aveling and St John Fisher Schools
- Joining students at The Howard School for Boys as they opened their envelopes to see their A Level results
- Having the honour of being appointed as an honorary member of Bradfields Academy Student Council
- Helping Featherby Infant School with their sponsored Bouncy castle (I only managed half a minute!) and celebrating their Good Ofsted
- Celebrating Good Ofsted judgements at Walderslade Girls' School and St William of Perth
- Attending the Medway Governor of the Year Awards at Brompton Academy and presenting the Award of Governor of the Year Award to David Mead from Strood Academy

2.11.2. The council continues to support effective practice in pre-school, primary and secondary schools. Our statutory responsibility is for all pupils' achievement, regardless of whether they attend an academy or an LA school. We work with Head Teachers and governing bodies and academy sponsors to raise aspiration and support their drive not only to raise standards but also to improve OFSTED judgements of schools when inspected. We intervene, where necessary, in LA schools when standards and pupil progress are not satisfactory and we challenge

academies and academy sponsors and ultimately report the position to the DFE where there are major concerns in academies.

Achievements

- 2.11.3. We have provisional results for all stages and national provisional comparisons for early years and key stage 2. Overall the picture is very positive with all key stages showing improvement and many examples of exceptional achievements in individual schools.
- 2.11.4. In early years, we have improved by 7% and are well above the national average. Phonics has again improved significantly and better than the national improvement rate, showing an increase of 25% over 2 years. Key stage 1 has improved on all measures.
- 2.11.5. At key stage 2, Level 4+ for reading, writing and mathematics increased by 3% from 71% to 74%. This tracked the national improvement rate of 3%. Of particular note this year is the achievement of boys. They have significantly exceeded the national improvement rate and Medway has risen above some of its statistical neighbours for boys' achievement at key stage 2.
- 2.11.6. In secondary, the percentage of students gaining 5A*-C (including English and Maths) has dipped slightly but in line with the national dip. On provisional figures, this should maintain Medway's position against the national average. At A level, we have had our best ever performance at the higher grades (AAB) with a 7% increase on 2013.
- 2.11.7. The percentage of schools with good leadership and management has increased and schools which are regularly monitored by OFSTED are overall showing improvement with LA support. The one secondary school which has been fully inspected in this period was judged to be outstanding.
- 2.11.8. Relationships with schools, governors and our academy chains have continued to be strong. We have appointed an independent chair of our Strategic School Effectiveness Board to accelerate our improvement, particularly in the primary sector.
- 2.11.9. I continue to attend the Schools Forum, meet governors and school councils, and discuss the wider education scene in Medway with our education partners. After visiting all schools in Medway, I am now revisiting schools and seeing the improvements which they are making. It has been a privilege to see some incredible outcomes for individual children and to celebrate their success

Challenges

- 2.11.10. The challenges continue to be:
- Raising standards at key stage 2
 - Narrowing the gap between the achievement of FSM (Free School Meals) and non FSM pupils

- Improving our OFSTED judgements on inspection in order to increase the number of schools which are good or better and thus the percentage of pupils attending good or better schools
- The recruitment and retention of good teachers

2.12 Safeguarding

Overview

2.12.1. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and all services and professionals have a role to play.

2.12.2. Within Medway Council we contribute to a number of services with specific responsibilities for safeguarding children;

- The Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) is the multi-agency forum for agreeing how local child protection services are planned, delivered and monitored in the borough. The Board has an independent chair and I sit on the Board as Lead Member.
- All our social work teams promote children's safety and welfare, and all social workers, including those in our Children's Advice and Duty team and Assessment teams, assess the complexity of needs, decide whether children are at risk of harm and take appropriate action.
- Our Children in Need service works intensively with children and their families to prevent the need for more intensive interventions, or to provide a 'step-down' service when there is no longer a need for a Child Protection Plan.
- Our Child Protection service works with children who are subject of plans, visits children and their families, convenes core groups and works with the family and other professional colleagues to reduce the level of risk.
- The IRO service is responsible for convening and chairing Child Protection Conferences which bring together professionals working with a child to make a decision as to whether there needs to be a Child Protection Plan in place. The service also has responsibility for chairing reviews of Looked After Children which provides an independent view of their placements and progress on care plans – another example of good safeguarding practice.
- All professionals should contribute to planning and oversight of CP Plans.

2.12.3. As of end of July 2014, there were 468 children subject of a Child Protection Plan in Medway, which equates to 68.4 per 10,000 children. This is more than double the number a year ago (224 in July 2014) and higher than the national average and other authorities in the south east which have an average of 37.3 per 10,000.

Achievements

- 2.12.4. I am pleased that the re-structuring within children's social work has enabled a close focus to be maintained on children who are subject of CP Plans and those who require protection using statutory orders.
- 2.12.5. A Strengthening Families model has been adopted in our Child Protection conference process, due to go live on 1st October, which will also be utilised in other assessment and planning processes. This engages children and families, helps everyone involved with child and family to consider why the child is not safe, what specifically needs to change to keep the child safe, and what is working well for the family which can be built on to help achieve positive change.
- 2.12.6. Training on this model has taken place for social workers, conference chairs and minute takers.
- 2.12.7. The IRO service is now operating from new premises, Eagle Court, which has conference room facilities appropriate for the Strengthening Families model.
- 2.12.8. A Legal Gateway Panel has been set up, which includes legal services colleagues, to consider all cases of children who meet the criteria for legal intervention, and oversee the process of pre-proceedings and proceedings to make sure all necessary steps are taken, and cases are dealt with in a timely manner by the courts. The time taken in proceedings has reduced but is still not yet meeting the government target of 26 weeks.
- 2.12.9. Key performance indicators for the current financial year;
- 65% of Initial CP conferences were held within 15 days of the decision to undertake a S47
 - 97% CP plans were reviewed on time, a rise from 93% in February.
 - 99% of children over the age of 12 years contributed to their CP conference
- 2.12.10. I have supported Medway Council to apply for an innovation grant from the DFE to support a different of working with children and families subject to child protection plans.
- 2.12.11. Our new Quality Assurance Framework has introduced a robust process for auditing cases and disseminating learning to all staff and managers.

Challenges

- 2.12.12. The rise in numbers of referrals and assessments has posed a challenge for the service, particularly achieving completion of assessments within 45 days. 64.4% of Children and Family Assessments were completed within 45 days, which is a fall from 87% in February. There is close management oversight of this and completion rates within timescales are now rising. I am very interested

in the new way of working in our Children's Advice and Duty Service which has slowed the number of referrals leading to assessments. This will help to manage demand and improve performance against this indicator.

- 2.12.13. Maintaining quality of practice and manageable workloads is a current challenge within the child protection service, as a result of the significant rise in numbers of children subject to CP Plans. I am pleased to report that the service has been able to respond positively to this by re-aligning our child protection and children in need services to facilitate more continuity for children and to enable social workers to have more balanced workloads.
- 2.12.14. Staffing in the IRO service continues to be a challenge and the service is reliant on agency staff. Ongoing efforts are made to recruit to these posts on a permanent basis.
- 2.12.15. Engaging all our partners in our improvement journey and particularly in carrying out their responsibilities to children and families is a constant challenge. I will continue to work as a member of our MSCB which has a clear role to challenge and hold its members to account.

2.13 School Organisation and Student Services

Overview

- 2.13.1. Student Services are responsible for the administration and co-ordination of school admissions, including delivery of the Medway Test. The team also administer applications for free home to school transport assistance and free school meals.
- 2.13.2. The School Organisation team plans school places and leads on school capital projects.

Achievements

- 2.13.3. 3,421 pupils have been offered secondary school places and 3,448 pupils have been offered primary school places to start in September 2014. I am delighted to report that 96% of applicants for secondary and primary school places were offered one of their preferences. Over 80% of all applications for places were made online.
- 2.13.4. I have continued to chair the Children and Adult Capital Programme Cabinet Advisory Group, which has driven forward a number of projects to provide additional capacity to meet increases in the demand for school places. Projects at Cuxton Infant and Junior Schools, Saxon Way Primary, Brompton Westbrook and a new three form entry primary school in Chatham (New Horizons Children's Academy) are all on track to complete by September 2014 and will provide over 865 additional primary school places in Medway.
- 2.13.5. With the Cabinet Advisory Group I am also overseeing plans to develop additional specialist places for pupils with special educational

needs. 96% of respondents to a recent consultation are in favour of our plans to expand and relocate Abbey Court Special School and 91% are supportive of our proposals to expand Danecourt Special School. We will start consultation in the autumn on proposals to expand Rivermead Special School onto the site that will be vacated by Abbey Court Special School.

- 2.13.6. I have approved the submission of bids for additional funding, which has resulted in the Council receiving over £11m for capital projects to provide additional places at Abbey Court, Danecourt and New Horizons Children's Academy.

Challenges

- 2.13.7. Forecasts of the future demand for pupil places indicate that additional capacity will be required over and above the places already planned.

2.14 School Services

Overview

- 2.14.1. The School Services, Quality & Commissioning Team coordinates trading of 26 services with schools and academies. Purchasing is done online, and includes booking for training programmes. I am delighted that buyback of services in April 2014 has seen an increase in income through this coordinated route of approximately 8% when compared with April 2013.
- 2.14.2. The team and I have worked closely with the Medway University Technology College (UTC) Trust to support preparations for the opening of the UTC in September 2015.

Achievements

- 2.14.3. The SLA Online purchasing system is now well embedded and provides an efficient buyback process enabling teams to focus on ensuring services are of high quality and are shaped to closely meet the needs of schools and academies.
- 2.14.4. 2014 has seen the completion of the procurement for a new corporate catering contract. Schools which are part of this contract will benefit from a reduction in the school meal price for primary children from £2.15 to £1.79.
- 2.14.5. Dynamics, the Medway Music Education Hub continues to be rated at the lowest risk rating by Arts Council England. In March I had the privilege of a fantastic evening on the opening night of the Annual Festival, which featured almost 2500 performers from Medway infant, primary, junior and secondary schools. This included 150 youngsters playing their recorders with not a note out of place! At Christmas 1100 children took part in Carol Festivals in Rochester Cathedral and the Easter and Summer Schools gave the opportunity for approximately

100 Medway children and young people to take part in an intensive musical experience.

- 2.14.6. The Medway University Technology College (UTC) is on track for opening in September 2015. The principal designate, Dr Karon Buck, has been appointed, planning permission for the building secured and funding agreed by the DfE. I am particularly pleased that Karon is determined to work all of our education partners and shares our philosophy of providing the very best education for our young people here in Medway.

Challenges

- 2.14.7. The Universal Infant Free School Meal Programme commences in September 2014. Under this programme all children in the infant phase will be entitled to receive a free school meal. This presents a challenge for all schools, in ensuring production of quality meals and planning the logistics to enable all children to enjoy a quality meal time. A number of projects are underway using DfE funding to ensure school kitchens are prepared to deliver the requirement.

2.15 Special educational needs

Overview

- 2.15.1. The SEN team is responsible for conducting and overseeing the statutory assessment process according to legal requirements and ensuring provision is put in place which meets pupils' needs. Educational and child psychologists, specialist teachers, parenting practitioners and functional family therapists offer targeted work to support children and families. Educational and child psychologists also have a statutory role in relation to those with SEN.
- 2.15.2. From 1st September new arrangements were introduced nationally, replacing Statements of Special Educational Needs with broader Education, Health and Care Plans and establishing a new framework of support and information to parents and carers to help them access services.

Achievements

- 2.15.3. Medway was a pathfinder for the new SEN arrangements and, as a result, has been well prepared for the new framework. Nevertheless, the changes are considerable and have required detailed project planning and cross council, health and third sector engagement, and particularly parents and carers and young people themselves. Indeed, It is to our credit that we have engaged with parents and carers so well and their support for the way in which we have managed the transition has been encouraging.
- 2.15.4. All providers were required to explain the provision which they made for the 'local offer' which was published on 1st September. In the first

instance this is being published through the Family Information Service portal.

All schools have been trained on the new arrangements and the impact for them, both via Head Teacher and Chairs of Governors' meetings, but particularly through the network of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs). As the framework covers 0-25 year olds, staff across the council and agencies have required information updates and training for implementation, as appropriate. Personal budgets are also fundamental to the changes and the gradual offer of personal budgets across the sectors is being developed.

- 2.15.5. In this calendar year to date, 119 new Education, Health and Care Plans have been completed. There have been 39 cases referred to the SEN tribunal. This is a significant increase pro rata on the previous year. The new arrangements include mediation in the hope that this will reduce the number of cases which are referred to the SEN tribunal. At this stage it is too early to predict whether this will be the outcome.

Challenges

- 2.15.6. The number of request for statutory assessment continues to increase alongside the demand for additional provision, particularly in relation to autism. Whilst it is hoped that the new education, Health and Care Plans will provide parents and carers with more confidence, there is no evidence to date that the pressure will subside. Embedding the new arrangements, including personal budgets, whilst ensuring the gradual transition from the previous system goes smoothly is a significant challenge for all agencies.

2.16 Specialist Youth Services

(a) Youth Offending Team

Overview

- 2.16.1. Medway Youth Offending Team (YOT) continues to deliver high quality services to vulnerable young people who are referred to the service by the courts or through a new liaison and diversion programme run in partnership with Medway Police.
- 2.16.2. Legal Aid and the Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) legislation has reduced caseloads, nationally. Medway Youth Offending Team is working with around 100 young people, both on statutory orders or through other prevention programmes. Medway YOT is performing well against its statistical neighbours and assessments from external inspectors confirm that the quality of the work is high.
- 2.16.3. I am championing work to develop a protocol across agencies in Kent and Medway to both reduce the criminalisation of LAC and work towards a target of no LAC entering the criminal justice system as a first time entrant. This will involve working closely with LAC support services and developing restorative justice processes. In January 2014

Medway Cabinet approved the YOT office move to the upper floor of Strood YC and greater alignment of work between the Youth Service and the YOT.

Achievements

2.16.4. All YOT performance targets were achieved and 'green' at the end of 2013-14. Of particular note was the reduction in custodial sentencing considering this high risk client group. I am delighted that the YOT/ Cookham Wood outreach team were again awarded a four star rating by HMIP for Cookham Wood's resettlement programme in a recent inspection.

Challenges

2.16.5. Future challenges include:

- Identifying alternative disposals to secure remand now that funding responsibility lies with the Local Authority
- Implementing a restorative justice process across all the YOT work with clients and their victims
- Reducing the costs associated with the Intensive Support and Surveillance programmes (alternatives to custody).

(b) Youth and Employment Services – Medway Youth Trust (MYT)

Overview

2.16.6. The 2013-17 YES contract almost exclusively focuses on support for vulnerable groups of young people and specifically, LAC, young people with special education needs (in line with new SEND legislation and guidance), young offenders and young people who are at a high risk of becoming NEET. Mainstream work is limited to supporting the September Guarantee, operating Access Points and keeping NEET levels as low as possible in support of the Raising Participation Age strategy, which is in its early stage of development in Medway.

Achievements

2.16.7. MYT who deliver the Youth Employment Service contract continue to provide an unbiased information, advice and guidance service for young people across Medway from their 'access points' in Chatham, Gillingham and Strood. Current NEET levels for Medway's 16 and 17 year olds in 2013-14 are on target at 16yrs = 5.24% (174 YP) and 17yrs = 7.14% (231 YP)

Challenges

2.16.8. Challenges include:

- Keeping NEET levels below Medway's combined 6% target for 16-18 year olds will require a 'whole Council and partners' approach'.
- Developing a Council strategy to achieve Raising Participation Age aspirations

- Meeting the new Special Education Needs and Disabilities legislation requirements and keeping track of young people's destinations (Unknown's data) and reducing the 18year old NEETs level, currently at 7.98% (257 YP)

(c) Medway Youth Service

Overview

- 2.16.9. In the last few years there has been a change in focus from providing a universal service to working with schools and other referral partners to identify and work with young people more intensively through targeted work.
- 2.16.10. The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) has seen the highest ever Gold participant completion. I had the privilege of attending the DofE Gold Award presentation at St James's Palace when I accompanied 24 of our Medway young people. Medway had the largest number of young people there so were awarded the honour of having the Gold Awards presented in the Throne Room. I was particularly proud of 6 young people from Abbey Court School who achieved their golds for the first time this year.
- 2.16.11. Cyber Youth Connection (CYC) workshops and events continue to be oversubscribed with positive outcomes for young people leading to interest in enrolling on specific Further Education courses and work opportunities. I thoroughly enjoyed attending and presenting the prizes at the Cozzie Summer Jam.

Achievements

- 2.16.12. The Youth Service has begun to successfully merge with YOT to provide joint use of buildings, resources and create better opportunities for YOT both during and post restorative orders.
- 2.16.13. I had the pleasure of meeting the 12 international volunteers from all over Europe who came to support summer activities, providing young people with an introduction to different cultures and some increased aspiration around social mobility and cross border opportunities.

Challenges

- 2.16.14. The service has experienced a lack of skilled or experienced part time workers in recent recruitment and redesigned contracts to attract people to more substantive posts – 16 hours.
- 2.16.15. I was delighted this year to present with Cllr Brake the staff recognition awards for staff in children and adult services. It is a credit to all the officers nominated that the awards were so hotly contested. I also attended Medway Youth Parliament's Try Angle awards ceremony and was amazed by the achievements of our young people. It was also fantastic to visit young people of the National Citizens Service and see all the work they were doing to improve our community. Working

with the Children in Care Council and our children in the Old Vicarage continues to be a highlight of my role as Portfolio Holder. I would like to thank our children young people and the hardworking staff in our schools and colleges for all their achievements this year.

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Background Papers:

None