

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 DECEMBER 2015

SURE START CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES 2015

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Summary

The core purpose of Sure Start children's centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and to reduce inequalities experienced by families in greatest need. This report is a position statement on the role that children's centres play in delivering early help and securing good outcomes for children in Medway, and updates the previous position statement presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.

"The early years is a time of dramatic growth and development: a child's brain doubles in size in the first year and by age three it will have reached 80% of its adult volume. At age two or three, the brain has up to twice as many synapses than in adulthood. Because the early years are a time when children are learning rapidly, how well they are taught, whether that is at home or outside of the home, is very important."

Ofsted Annual Report 2015

"This outstanding centre is run extremely efficiently. Leaders manage the centre in an exemplary way and are continually improving services for local families most in need, helped by the excellent support from the local authority. The local authority has been instrumental in improving the quality of services at the children's centre and makes sure that resources are used very effectively."

Ofsted report of the 19th children's centre inspection in Medway – June 2015

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities, working with their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners to improve the wellbeing of young children. Specifically, there is a reciprocal duty to improve outcomes for children in their

early years and reduce inequalities between disadvantaged and other families with young children through the provision of integrated early childhood services, under the leadership of the local authority's Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services.

- 1.2 The 2015-16 Council Plan priority that "children and young people have the best start in Medway" includes recognition of the role of children's centres and early years services in ensuring that the most vulnerable children are safe, achieve high standards, and have healthy lifestyles.
- 1.3 This report provides a further update for the period since the Committee last received information in September 2014.

2. Early Childhood

- 2.1 Early childhood is a distinct phase, from pregnancy until the age of five years, inspected and measured in its own right, and with specific statutory duties and legislation. But in addition, the progress and attainment of children during the early childhood phase has a direct bearing on progress and attainment in later childhood and beyond.
- 2.2 The key objective of an early childhood strategy is to ensure that all children attain a good level of development, and that inequalities within the life chances of the population are reduced, such that children are ready for school, and are safe, healthy, and engaged. This is also the basis of the statutory duty in law – which rests with the local authority – and is the measure of success within the variety of inspection frameworks led by Ofsted.
- 2.3 Our overarching strategy is based upon an understanding of the pathways experienced by children and their families across the five years from conception through to commencing full time school. Whereas for most families a pathway of universal services and experiences will lead to good outcomes, for some families a pathway with additional targeted services and early help will be needed to ensure children do not fall behind, whilst for the most vulnerable children and families with complex needs, the early childhood pathway will involve specialist services and support.

3. Sure Start Children's Centres

- 3.1 Sure Start children's centres provide the core of the framework by which we have improved outcomes in Medway and reduced inequalities in child development and school readiness; parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and child and family health and life chances. Alongside high quality early years services in schools, pre-schools and nurseries, health provision, voluntary organisations, and a skilled and effective workforce, children's centres are at the heart of the pathways.
- 3.2 A children's centre is a physical building and dedicated staff team but, much more than that, it is also a network of targeted services across a wider local area, and a collaborative team of professionals employed by a variety of

statutory agencies and community organisations, working with local families and volunteers.

3.3 There are 19 Sure Start children's centres in Medway. Each locally managed centre is commissioned by the local authority via an annual service agreement and receives a devolved annual budget. The scale and focus of each individual centre reflects the community in which it is located. A differentiated funding regime based upon a formula means that each commissioned children's centre receives a budget that reflects the relative level of deprivation of the area it serves, the number of families and children under 5 years of age, and the concentration of families living in disadvantaged circumstances.

3.4 Core Purpose

Statutory guidanceⁱ prescribes what local authorities and statutory partners (particularly commissioners of health services) **must** do because it is required by legislation, and **should** do when fulfilling statutory responsibilities.

- **Child development and school readiness** - supporting personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language from pre-birth to age 5, so children develop as confident and curious learners and are able to take full advantage of the learning opportunities presented to them in school.
- **Parenting aspirations and parenting skills** - building on strengths and supporting aspirations, so that parents and carers are able to give their child the best start in life.
- **Child and family health and life chances** - promoting good physical and mental health for both children and their families; safeguarding; supporting parents to improve the skills that enable them to access education, training and employment; and addressing risk factors so that children and their families are safe, free from poverty and able to improve both their immediate wellbeing and their future life chances.

3.5 Medway's children's centres play a pivotal role in ensuring that appropriate pathways are in place for every young child and every family in Medway

- **Universal pathways** leading to positive child health outcomes and school readiness for the large majority of Medway's children
- **Targeted pathways** leading to reduced inequalities and improved child health outcomes and school readiness for children from disadvantaged households (pupil premium) and those in need of early help
- **Specific pathways** for vulnerable children and families, including those with high needs (complex SEND), those where social care support has been required (child protection and ChIN), and looked after young children.

4. Performance Outcomes in Medway in 2015

4.1 Medway’s children’s centres each provide services in accordance with an annual agreement and service specification, with the objective of contributing to an improvement in specific performance targets for children and families resident within its catchment area.

Key Performance Measure	2015 Performance	Direction
School Readiness: To increase the % of children who achieve a ‘Good Level of Development’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile	71% Medway 66% England	Improving
Healthy Weight: To decrease the % of children in reception year who are obese	9.0% Medway (2013/14) 9.5% England (2013/14)	Improving

NB These data are reported on a regular basis to the Health and Wellbeing Board, together with other performance measures such as breastfeeding initiation and smoking during pregnancy.

4.2 Detailed information and analysis of pupil performance at age 5 years will be brought to Members at the March 2016 Overview and Scrutiny Committee, alongside other school attainment data. For the third successive year, a higher proportion of children are commencing primary education in Medway with a good level of development than in England as a whole. This proportion has increased from 56% in 2013, to 71% in 2015.

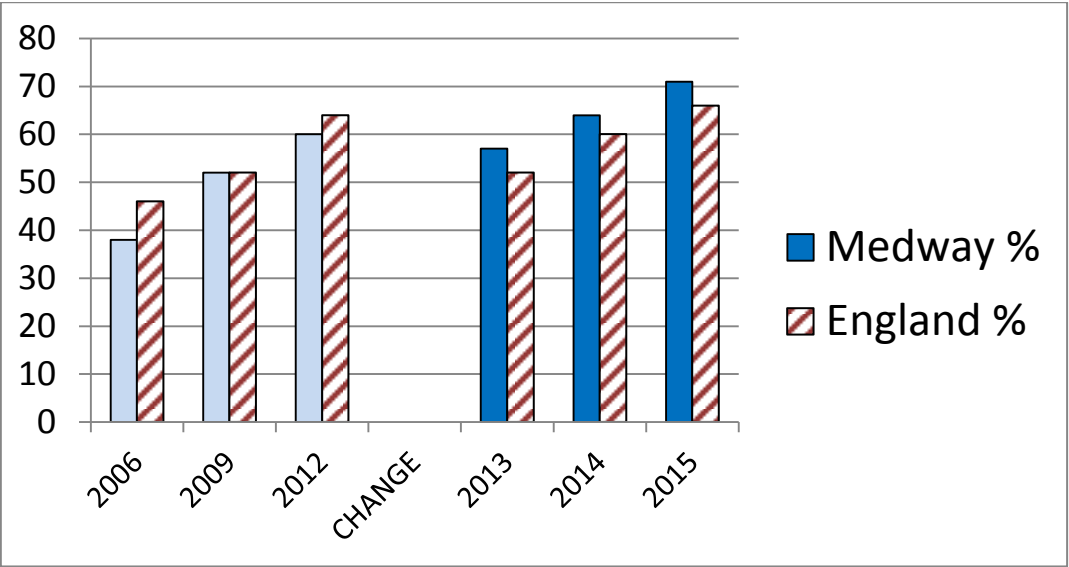
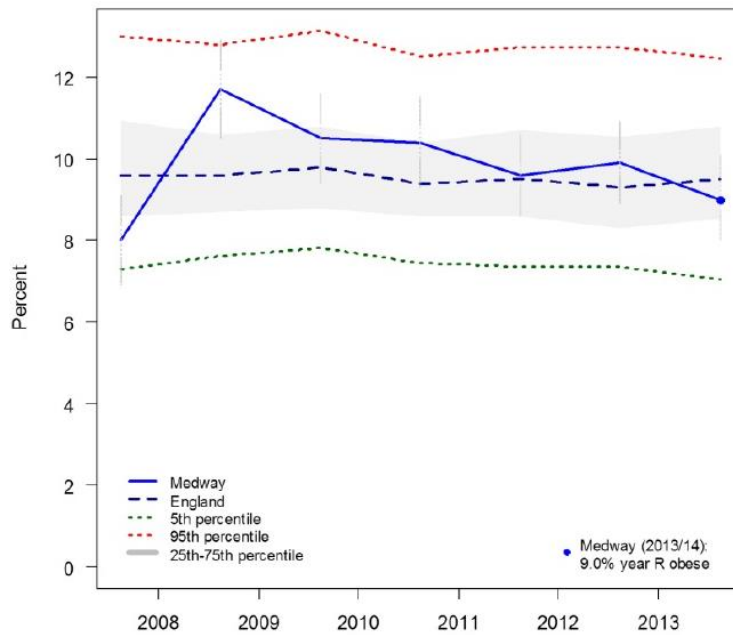


Chart A: School Readiness: Percentage of children achieving a “good level of development” at age 5

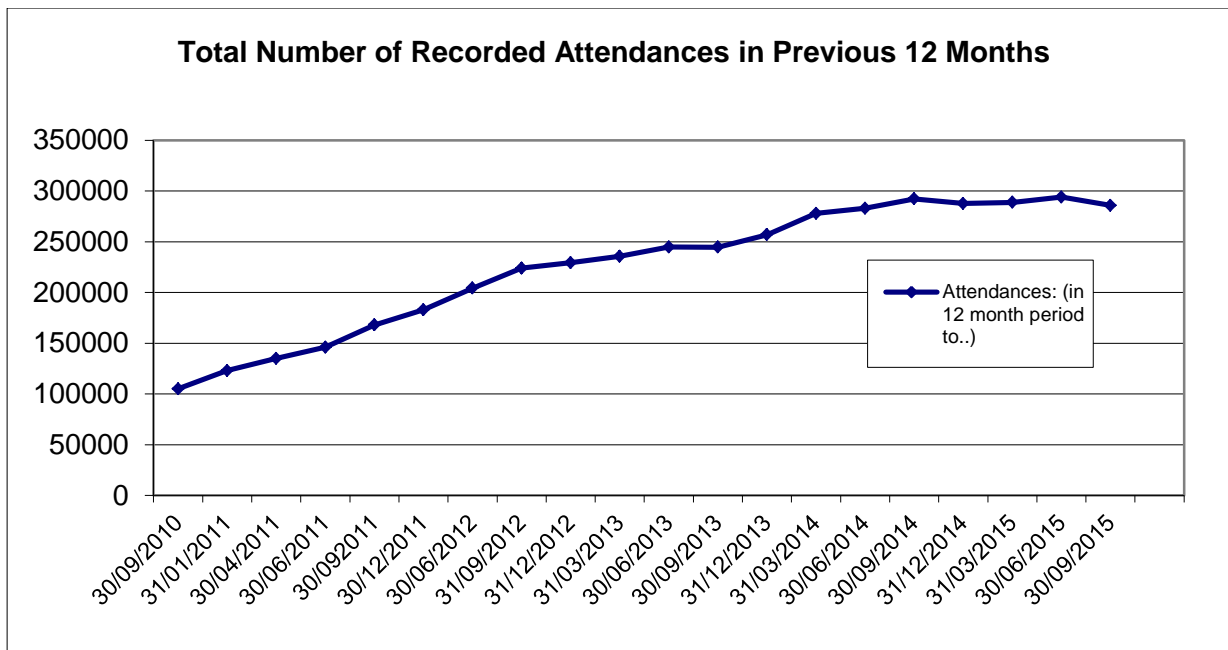
4.3 The percentage of children in Medway with excess weight at age 4-5 years decreased to below the England average in 2013/14 which has been reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board as a very positive outcome.



**Chart B: Healthy weight:
Percentage of children classified as obese at age 4 – 5 years**

Contact and Engagement Rates

4.4 The number of attendances by children (aged 0-4) and their families at Sure Start children’s centres in Medway increased every year over the past five years. In the 12 months from September 2009 to September 2010 there were 100,000 attendances. In the 12 months from September 2014 to September 2015, there were nearly 286,000 attendances.



**Chart C: Engagement with families:
Recorded attendances by families (children and parents/carers) at Medway Children’s Centres**

4.5 The total number of different children aged 0-4 years attending a Medway Sure Start children's centre in the twelve months of 2014-15 was 12,117. This compares with a figure of 11,191 the previous year, and 8,781 in 2011-12.

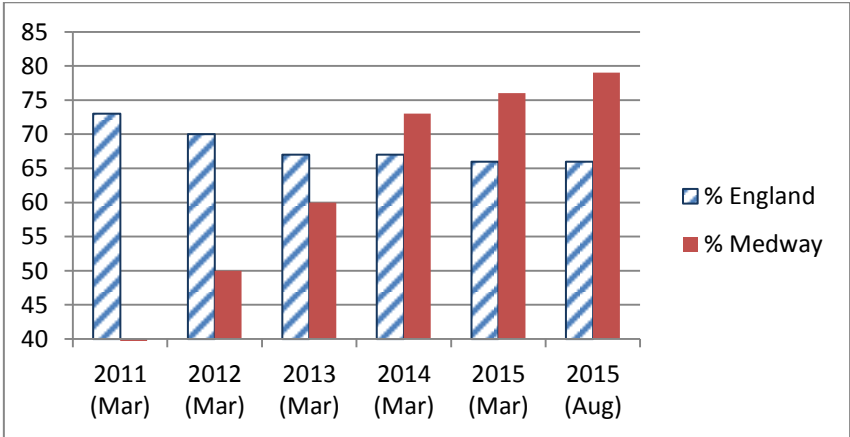
4.6 The increase over the past three years reflects the improved information and data sharing arrangements between key partners, particularly NHS agencies, enabling targeted engagement with a far higher proportion of vulnerable families. As a proportion of the population cohort as a whole, 68% of children aged 0-4 attended a Medway Sure Start children's centre in the past year. The majority of those children not attending a children's centre are already at school or pre-school, meaning the rate of attendance by 0-3 year-olds is far greater.

5. Ofsted Inspection of Medway Children’s Centres

5.1 Ofsted has been inspecting children’s centres since 2010, but made changes to the way it inspects in April 2013. It now places greater emphasis on the accountability of the local authority as the responsible body for children’s centres, irrespective of whether they have commissioned these services to other providers to run them on their behalf.

5.2 The inspection framework judges the effectiveness of integrated early childhood services (the statutory duty that resides with the local authority) across all delivery partners. The approach adopted by HMI, the evidence base, and impact data, extend way beyond the work of the individual centre and staff team. Instead the impact of early education, health, employment, adult learning and social care interventions are all subject to intense scrutiny, and the effectiveness of this matrix of services is the basis of the inspection grading.

5.3 In Medway all centres inspected under the new framework have been judged good or outstanding. Overall, Medway has 3 graded as outstanding (Bligh, Brompton, and St Margaret’s at Troy Town), 12 graded as good, and there are 4 that were graded under the old framework as satisfactory. The proportion of good or better children’s centres in Medway at 79% is now markedly better than the national figure of 66%.



**Chart D: Children’s Centres:
% Graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted**

6. Health Visitors and the Healthy Child Programme

6.1 At a crucial stage of life – from pregnancy to five - the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) offers every family a programme of screening tests, immunisations, developmental reviews, and information and guidance to support parenting and

healthy choices – all services that children and families need to receive if they are to achieve their optimum health and wellbeing.

- 6.2 The expansion and transformation of the health visiting service has been instrumental in extending and enhancing the impact of children's centres in Medway. Having negotiated an alignment of strategic and operational delivery with our colleagues in Medway Community Healthcare, health visitors are now at the heart of the "team around the children's centre" multi-agency approach to supporting families.
- 6.3 In October 2015, commissioning responsibility for children's public health services 0-5 was transferred from NHS England to Medway Council, providing further opportunities for integrating services across Medway.
- 6.4 Families say they want services under one local roof, and the "team around the children's centre" of health visitors, midwives, play and learning opportunities and family support and guidance is now a reality in Medway.

7. Early Help

- 7.1 A central, and increasingly important, function of children's centres is the delivery of short interventions of bespoke support for families. These "Early Help" pathways encompass a broad set of activities and services that build resilience and prevent children's and families' difficulties escalating. It is carried out by teams, services and individual practitioners working in and around our universal and specialist offers.
- 7.2 The nature and range of caseloads covers a spectrum of need that includes domestic abuse, perinatal mental health, financial and housing difficulties, substance misuse, social isolation, relationship breakdown and attachment difficulties. The use of CAF is widespread within children's centres, and the new streamlined arrangements within the integrated family support service of children's social care, means that targeted work with families of young children will be properly captured and recorded within a framework that is used consistently by professional agencies.

8. Early Education for Two Year-olds

- 8.1 A key development since the report to Members in 2014 has been the extension of free nursery education to disadvantaged and vulnerable children at the age of two. The objective is to address inequalities in children's earliest learning skills, evident in the under achievement of the poorest children when they commence school.
- 8.2 The new duty in September 2014 brought significant pressure on the capacity of the market to deliver places, particularly in the most disadvantaged localities in Medway such as central Chatham and north Gillingham – where the very large majority of families are eligible. A relatively modest DfE capital grant of £560k was deployed creatively to support the development of around 860 additional child places.

8.3 Now, early in the second year of operation, more than 1000 low-income families are benefiting from free early education, representing over 70% of the eligible cohort.

8.4 For the addition of free nursery education for children aged two years to have the desired positive impact, it is important that it is offered in high quality settings with skilled staff, and is accompanied by support for parents to provide the conditions for good early child development in the home. Children’s centres play a crucial role in both identifying and handholding eligible families into local early education provision, and supplementing the free 15 hours of group play and learning with targeted support for families.

9. Quality of services in Medway

9.1 Early years services are now inspected under a Common Inspection Framework which ensures that a coherent set of judgements are made across the different education, skills and early years settings. Inspectors make graded judgements on the following areas using the four-point scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement, inadequate) :

- effectiveness of leadership and management
- quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- personal development, behaviour and welfare
- outcomes for children and learners.

9.2 The quality of nursery education and childcare provision in Medway, as assessed by the regulator Ofsted, is at an all-time high.

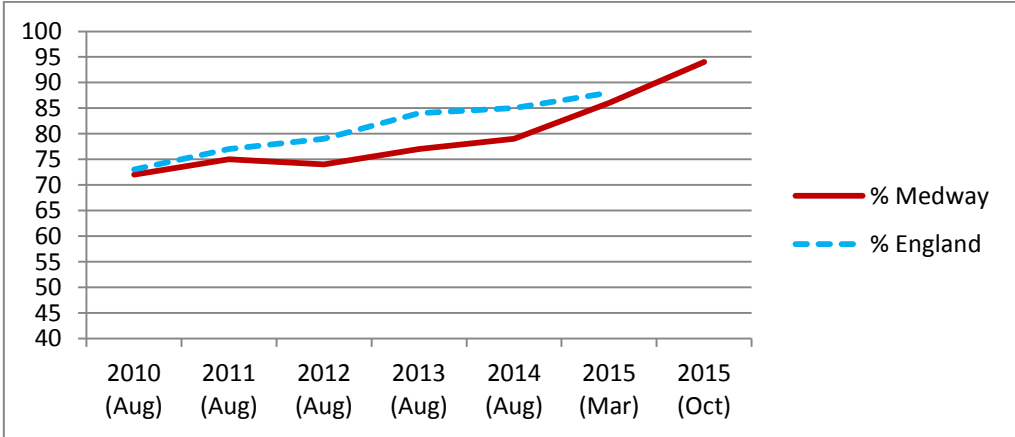
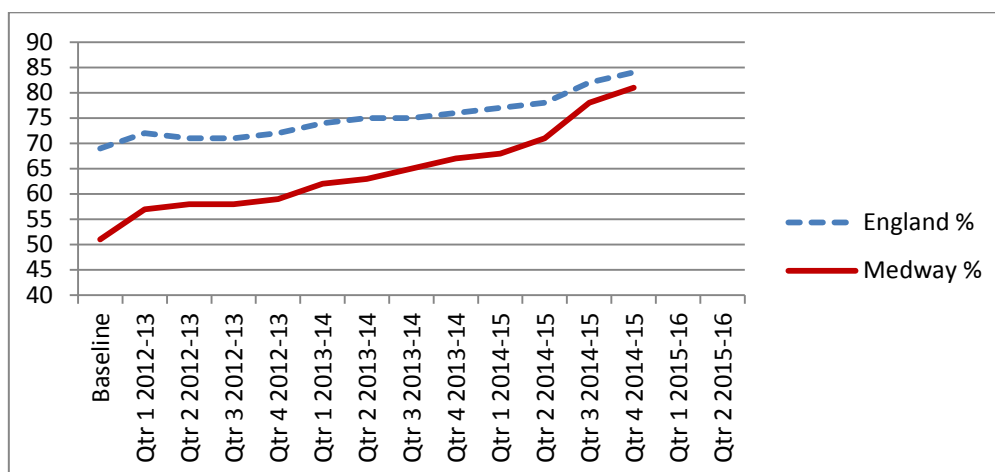


Chart E: Quality of Registered childcare groups: Proportion graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted (non domestic)



**Chart F: Quality of registered childminders
Proportion graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted**

10. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Insufficient early childhood services available; or failure in quality	Failure of market of private, voluntary and maintained nursery education and childcare to meet increased child population and parental demand; and/or meet quality standards	Encourage and incentivise market to expand; promote opportunities with high quality businesses	D2
Uncoordinated service provision	Health service and/or other key partners develop services independent of local partnership strategy.	Work with commissioners and providers to maximise benefit of integrated / coordinated delivery	D2
Inequitable service offer due to changes in Sure Start delivery	Conversion of schools to academies; or changes in key health services providers; leads to gaps in core service offer in some localities	Clear service specifications and funding agreements; secure property leases in place	D3
Budget pressures risk failure of statutory duties	Public sector funding – local or national – necessitates reduction of expenditure across local services	Maximise efficiencies; focus on statutory duties; work collaboratively across agencies to agree most effective model of services	C2

11. Implications for Looked After Children

11.1 The council's early years service works closely with the social care team and the Virtual Headteacher to ensure coordination of children's centres and early years settings in supporting pathways for looked after children

12. Financial Implications

12.1 Local authority expenditure on early childhood services comprises statutory funding for nursery education places in schools and pre-school settings, and funding for services that improve child and family outcomes including children's centres. Overall, the budget for early years in 2015-16 is £20.3million. This budget comprises £16.1million within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) early years block, and £4.2million from the council's General Fund.

12.2 Whilst frontline devolved budgets for each of the 19 children's centres have remained at 2012 levels (i.e.: there has been no budget reduction or increase), the impact of public sector financial restraint on other early years services continues to be felt. The General Fund budget for early years has reduced from £6.4m in 2012 to £4.2 million in 2015-16, representing a 34% saving. Widespread efficiency savings, and service changes including the reduction of support posts and local authority staff, have ensured that Members' commitment to front line services has been honoured.

12.3 The 38% increase in attendances over the past three years has been achieved in the context of no increase in budget, and is indicative of continually improving the effectiveness and impact of the work of each children's centre.

12.4 Front-line services have been aligned to ensure that expenditure explicitly will improve outcomes and reduce inequalities in child development and school readiness; parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and child and family health and life chances. This has meant that some areas of activity – such as offering subsidised full day childcare – have necessarily stopped, to be replaced by more impactful services for children and families.

13. Legal Implications

13.1 Legislation concerning early years services and children's centres is contained in the Childcare Act 2006 (as variously amended by subsequent Acts including the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCL) 2009, Education Act 2011, and Children and Families Act 2014).

13.2 The Act places a series of duties on local authorities, including to:

- improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them
- secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner
- that there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet local need
- secure sufficient childcare for working parents
- secure early years provision (nursery education) free of charge

13.3 The services and outcomes detailed in this report are in accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE):

- “*Statutory guidance on early childhood services and Sure Start children's centres*” (2013); and
- “*Statutory guidance for local authorities on the provision of early education and childcare*” (2014).

14. Conclusion

14.1 Medway’s children’s centres are a central part of the local authority’s strategy for giving children the best start in life. They play a key role in supporting children’s learning and development, in improving health and wellbeing, and in preventing the escalation of difficulties that would require more expensive interventions if left unchecked. They are the core building block around which all of the public agencies and organisations involved in early childhood and family support are organised in Medway.

14.2 In the five years since the development phase of programme was completed, contact and engagement with families has more than trebled. The large majority of young children born in Medway, or living in Medway, are users of their local children’s centre.

14.3 Children’s attainment at the age of five and school readiness in Medway are at an all time high, although the inequalities borne of poverty and disadvantage are still clearly evident. Ofsted are finding that Medway’s services for early childhood are overwhelmingly delivering good and outstanding outcomes.

14.4 Ministerial Task Groups are debating the future role of children’s centres, whilst Ofsted will be reintroducing inspections in 2016 using a new framework.

14.5 The task for the next five years is to make certain that the integrated strategic approach we have developed in Medway continues to deliver positive improvements, and to adapt to the changing statutory and financial landscape.

15. Recommendation:

15.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

Notes:

ⁱ Sure Start children’s centres statutory guidance. Department of Education (April 2013)
<https://www.gov.uk/sure-start-childrens-centres-local-authorities-duties>