

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

Tuesday, 22 September 2015

6.37pm to 9.43pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Avey, Cooper, Fearn, Franklin, Hall, Johnson, Opara, Price, Potter, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), Tranter and Wicks (Vice-Chairman)

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Alan Street (Healthwatch Medway CIC representative), James Peck (Medway Youth Parliament representative) and Karen White (Substitute - Headteacher representative)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Hicks (Substitute for Williams)

In Attendance: David Dowie, Integrated Youth Support Services Manager
Hilary Gerhard, Senior Advisor, Inclusion and Diversity
Jan Guylar, Head of Legal Services/Deputy Monitoring Officer
Pauline Maddison, Assistant Director (Interim), Schools Effectiveness and Inclusion
Councillor Tristan Osborne (in attendance for Members Item)
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Phil Watson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Andrew Willetts, Action for Families Programme Coordinator
Angela Wellings, Interim Head of SEN and Inclusion

335 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 21 July 2015 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

336 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Williams, Adrian Cole (Governor representative), Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative),

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George Perfect (Medway Youth Parliament representative) and Alex Tear (Church of England diocese representative).

337 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairman confirmed that he had accepted two reports as urgent. Item 8 (Member Item – Exclusions in Medway Schools) was accepted as urgent to enable timely discussion on this issue following recent media coverage. The report could not be despatched with the agenda as officers needed time to prepare the report, which was requested by Councillor Osborne on Wednesday 9 September 2015. Item 9 (Interim report on unvalidated Key Stage 2 Performance) was also accepted by the Chairman as urgent to enable timely discussion of the issue following the recent publication of statistical first release of provisional data from the Department for Education. The report could not be despatched with the agenda as officers needed time to prepare the report which was requested by Members at the pre-agenda meeting on Wednesday 9 September 2015.

338 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

339 Council Plan Quarter 1 2015/16 Performance Monitoring Report

Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adult Services introduced the report which summarised the Council's performance in Quarter 1 2015/16, against the key measures of success and key projects relating to the priority relevant to this committee, 'Children and young people have the start in life in Medway'. The Director referred the Committee to paragraph 4.2.4 of the report which referred to OFSTED inspections in schools and explained that the 20th school's inspection report had since been published and the judgement of this Local Authority school was 'good'. She highlighted the upward trajectory of schools in Medway being judged as at least 'good' by OFSTED. She also drew the Committee's attention to; the recruitment to the Specialist Multi-Agency Response Team (SMART), sufficiency of school places and the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

Members then raised a number of points and questions including:

- **NEETs** – in response to a concern raised with regards to the number of young people whose status is 'unknown' officers confirmed that this figure, together with the figure of known NEETs, was too high and a concern. The

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Youth and Employment Services (YES) contract with Medway Youth Trust would be under consideration in the coming months and it would be ensured that any new contract focusses on reducing this overall figure. Work with schools to ensure they work with Medway Youth Trust more effectively was being undertaken. Members added that more work should be done with schools to enable potential employers to have access to speak with students. A comment was also made that the change in the YES contract to be more focussed on targeted work rather than providing mainstream advice and guidance services, as a result of budget reductions, could also be a contributory factor to the increase in NEETs.

- **Recruitment of Social Workers** – in response to a question in relation to the 62% increase in staffing establishment and whether this would offset spend on agency staff, officers explained that the rise in recruitment related largely to the increased investment made to the service that enabled an increase in the workforce baseline. However, vacant posts could not be left as such and so there was still a reliance on agency staff at present until more recruitment was made. Vacancy rates were expected to continue to fall and Medway was making good progress in recruitment into Children's Social Care.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

340 Annual report from Children's Social Care Service

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress and developments being made within Children's Social Care Service and in specific relation to the wider service Improvement Plan. The Assistant Director commented on the developments in multi-agency approaches to the service, the co-location of Children's Social Care Staff and other agencies and new systems that have improved decision making and the effective operation and delivery of the service. He also confirmed that the Council was currently undergoing an inspection by OFSTED into services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, as well as reviewing the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Members then raised a number of points and questions including:

- **Voice of children, young people and their families** – in response to a question as to what evidence there was to demonstrate that these views and experiences were gathered and used to inform improvements, officers confirmed that themed audits into case work demonstrated that the views of children and young people were being captured on a more frequent basis and there was a strong advocacy service and good representation from young people on the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Board. In addition, the Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) had

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a routine item at its meetings relating to the voice of the child and this was achieved by attendance of children where appropriate but also video clips and other methods were used to capture the views of children who were less confident to share their views directly in meetings. A shadow Children's Board to the MSCB had also recently been set up. There were therefore a number of mechanisms to hear views and experiences at an individual and strategic level.

- **Proactive work** – in response to a question about how pro-active the service is, officers explained that the service was becoming very pro-active in relation to the targeted early intervention work being undertaken by the Integrated Family Support Service.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – in relation to a concern raised about long waiting lists officers confirmed that members of the Children and Adults Directorate Management Team attended regular performance meetings with the provider of CAMHS and waiting lists and response times were improving. There was also ongoing engagement with a wide group of providers offering emotional wellbeing support whom social care staff could access through the single point of access. Work was also ongoing with colleagues in Public Health to investigate the possibility of School Nurses having a wider brief in relation to emotional health and wellbeing.
- **Numbers of children on Child Protection Plans** – in response to a question as to why Medway had such a high number of children on Child Protection Plans officers explained that there had been a sharp rise in this number following the notice to improve due to more rigorous management oversight. It was considered that staff were now making much better decisions and managing risk more appropriately and this had been validated by independent reviews that had taken place. Additional investment had been made into the service to manage capacity and workloads. With more early intervention services in place it was anticipated that the number of children on a Child Protection Plan in Medway would reduce over time.
- **Specialist co-located Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Investigation Unit** – in response to a question as to whether this new multi-agency unit was now up and running officers confirmed it was and Medway had appointed two new members of staff to work directly in this unit but they were not due to start in these posts until October/November 2015.
- **Children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers, forced into marriage or subject to female genital mutation (FGM)** – in response to concern raised about what Medway can do to prevent these issues and support those affected officers explained that because Medway was not a main port of entry it was not anticipated to receive many, if any, unaccompanied asylum seeking children. In relation to the latter two issues, officers explained that challenges relating to CSE, missing children and risk

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of radicalisation needed to be looked at collectively. There was a multi-agency approach to these issues and specific targeted work was being undertaken within the early intervention part of the service. Schools were also being trained in providing support and prevention. There was also a role for Councillors in raising awareness of these issues.

- **Your Future Your Choice booklet** – in response to a question as to how available this was officers confirmed that the Virtual School ensured that young people received this booklet along with support as they reach the appropriate age, as do social workers. Officers also undertook to confirm the number of looked after children who attended the ‘Steps to Success’ event, which was run for those that are not in employment, education and training.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report, the progress made and the continued implementation of the Improvement Plan.

341 Integrated Family Support Service

Discussion:

The Head of Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) introduced the report which updated the Committee on the work being undertaken to ensure the Medway targeted Early Help offer is effective and designed to meet the needs of children, families and young people. He explained that the Early Help provision had been developed through the learning and highly successful Medway Action for Families (MAfF) initiative (part of the Government’s Troubled Families programme) which had recently been extended. The IFSS would be working with at least 6000 children in Medway, with a target of 1000 by the end of the year. Medway was currently working with 752 families.

Members then raised a number of points and questions including: -

- **Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs)** – in response to a question about the effective use of CAFs officers explained that there had been some success with CAFs and there had been an increase in resource with the previous one CAF Co-ordinator being replaced with four Early Help Co-ordinators. CAFs were an essential mechanism for better assessment of need and therefore appropriately targeted action. Early Help Co-ordinators would be championing CAFs and providing support and training to all partners to ensure they are used more effectively.
- **Mental Health** – in response to a question about support for families with mental health issues, officers explained that mental health was a particular issue screened for and there were dedicated staff to support this work with some Tier 2 mental health services becoming area-based to align with the area-based Early Help teams, enabling improved collaborative working.

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- **Area based data sets** – in response to a request for information relating to the four areas identified in the IFSS, detailed at paragraph 3.3 of the report, officers undertook to provide a strategic summary for these areas for Ward Members where requested.
- **Partnership working with community and voluntary sector organisations** – in response to a question about the extent to which organisations from the community and voluntary sector were used to help support families, officers explained that there was a wide range of organisations that Early Help works in partnership with in supporting families, depending on need and specialisms.
- **Impact on individual services** – in response to a question about the impact on individual services whose resources have been pooled to establish the single IFSS, officers explained that there had previously been some duplication and differing practices where as now these services were benefitting from a strengthened collaborative approach.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and congratulated the Head of Integrated Family Support Services for being awarded Medway Council's Manager of the Year.

342 Member Item - Exclusions in Medway Schools

Discussion:

Councillor Osborne introduced his Member Item to the Committee, explaining that this followed a Freedom of Information request which demonstrated a rise in exclusions across all key stages and a television documentary which, nationally, suggested a correlation between high exclusion rates and poor performance in SATs.

The Interim Head of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion confirmed that both fixed period and permanent exclusions had risen since 2009 and added that unvalidated data for 2014-15 demonstrated an improved performance:

- In 2013-14 – there were 16 primary permanent exclusions in Medway
In 2014-15 – there were 9 primary permanent exclusions in Medway
- In 2013-14 – there were 62 secondary permanent exclusions in Medway
In 2014-15 – there were 32 secondary permanent exclusions in Medway

It was explained that there had been a rise in exclusion rates nationally and some of this was potentially due to the increase in academies and could also be related to reductions in funding resulting in Local Authorities providing less support on early interventions unless schools opted to buy in these services.

Officers explained the action being taken, which included the setting up of a multi-agency Early Help Panel and the development of a Schools Support

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Group which would operate as a weekly clinic for schools to obtain advice, support and discuss concerns and issues about pupil behaviour.

Members then raised a number of points and questions including:

- **Exclusion rates and OFSTED inspections** – in response to a question about whether OFSTED consider a school's use and rates of exclusions during an inspection, officers confirmed that because inspections of schools were carried out over two days only, exclusion rates and data was not always investigated during an inspection.
- **Reporting of fixed period exclusions to Members** – in response to a question about whether fixed period exclusion data would be reported to Members in addition to the data relating to permanently excluded children, which is reported to Members on a quarterly basis, officers confirmed that this Committee would be receiving a very detailed report in March about all aspects of school performance, including exclusion data and this would be in the public arena and enable Members to challenge this data.
- **Recording of data** – in response to a question raised about whether the increase from 2009 also related to an improved recording of all types of exclusion, officers responded that there was some variance between authorities about what was recorded as a fixed period exclusion and Medway was particularly robust in its recording of all exclusions. Equally, different schools managed respite for pupils with behaviour difficulties in different ways. Therefore clear comparisons are less easy than the attainment results which are fully standardised.
- **Schools Support Group Clinic** – in response to a question about how well this would be attended by academies, officers confirmed that academy schools had fully used the predecessor panel and were expected to embrace this new group also. It was added that where there was deep concern about exclusions at a school and engagement with the school was not successful then concerns would be raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner, who the Director and relevant Assistant Director met with regularly.
- **Managed moves** – in response to a question about whether these were still being carried out, officers confirmed that these continued to happen. Exclusions were very much final resorts as they did not result in a good outcome for the excluded child. Managed moves enabled a dialogue between schools to understand the needs of the child and what support was needed to be put in place and to give the pupil a fresh start.
- **Governing Bodies** – a comment was made about the key role of governing bodies in exclusion and that an effective governing body should take responsibility of exclusions very seriously. When considering the proposed exclusion of a child, it was important to be clear about what

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actually happened, whether procedures were correctly followed and whether the sanction was appropriate.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

343 Interim Report on Unvalidated Key Stage 2 Performance

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, School Effectiveness and Inclusion (Interim) introduced the report which provided the Committee with information about the performance of Medway schools at the end of Key Stage 2 based on the provisional release of data. It was emphasised to the Committee that this data was based on provisional figures and would not be the final result, although Medway's position in the national league table was unlikely to change. Officers described the action that was being taken to address the poor performance, which included; intervention funding being used for targeted work, production of data profiles and direct support from the School Challenge and Improvement Team with, for example, specific classroom strategies, targeted Y2 and Y6 programmes and intensive reading support.

Members then raised a number of points and questions including:

- **Relationship between the LA and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)** – in response to a question relating to the relationship between the local authority (LA) and the RSC and how this functions, it was explained that although the LA had no right of access to academies in relation to attainment, strong relationships were maintained in Medway. However, where concerns arose, the LA raised these informally with the RSC. Concerns were raised formally with the RSC only when all opportunities of engagement with the academy had been exhausted.
- **Governors** – in response to a comment regarding the hard work Governors put in at Medway schools, officers shared this view and added that the work carried out by the LA's Governor Services had been recognised by the recent OFSTED inspection as an area of strength.
- **Support for Parents** – in response to a question about how much intervention work was targeted at encouraging parents to support their children in reading and writing, officers explained that the Council worked with Beanstalk, a charity that trained volunteers to support children outside of lessons and in turn, provided young people with another adult to inspire and motivate them. In addition, parents were continually being encouraged to listen to their children read and the Council was about to launch a 'Get Medway Learning' campaign to help recruit good teachers to Medway but also to encourage the community and the media to be involved positively in children's learning.

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- **Persistent barriers** – in response to a question regarding what the persistent barriers were to improving performance in Key stage 2, officers explained that there was a need for a cultural change within Medway schools, parents and communities to be ambitious and raise expectations for all children.
- **Medway Test** – in response to a question as to whether the selection process in Medway had an impact on attainment at Key Stage 2, officers responded that the area closest to Medway comparably with the selection system in place was Bexley and the Key Stage 2 results in Bexley were considerably higher than Medway's. Close work would take place with colleagues at Bexley to learn from their experiences but there was very little being done differently than in Medway, however, generally there was a difference in the attitude and aspirations of the school leaders.
- **Role of academy sponsors** – in response to a question about the role of academy sponsors and whether they were effective, officers explained that in some cases the capacity and capability of local sponsors of academies to drive up performance at pace was an issue. Therefore dialogue continued to take place with the Department for Education to be signposted to national sponsors, with particular expertise in driving up performance in Key Stage 2 at pace, as accelerated progress was key.
- **Attendance by the RSC** – in response to a query about inviting the RSC to a future meeting of the Committee, officers undertook to invite the RSC to the March meeting of the Committee but explained that the RSC was responsible for 19 LAs and had a relatively small team to support this work.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested officers to invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to the March meeting of the Committee, where a full detailed report on school performance would be presented.

344 Youth Offending Team Strategic Plan 2014-2016 Refresh

Discussion:

The Integrated Youth Support Service Manager introduced the report which outlined the Medway Youth Justice Plan Refresh 2014-16 and he directed the Committee to Appendix C which summarised the significant changes that had been made. He highlighted to the Committee, the full implementation of recommendations to the Youth Offending Team (YOT) following a Serious Case Review, the preventative work being undertaken in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation, work being undertaken in partnership with the Police in relation to risks of urban gangs in the Medway area and managing reductions in funding. He also explained that the YOT had been nominated for a national award in relation to the apprenticeship scheme being run at Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institute.

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Members then raised a number of points and questions, including: -

- **YOT's protocol with Police to reduce looked after children's involvement in the criminal justice system** – in response to a question on how effective and useful this protocol had been, officers explained that this was due to be reviewed imminently by officers from the YOT and Children's Social Care and the outcome of this would be reported back to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- **Urban gangs** – in response to a question about the extent of this problem, officers explained that there was a multi-agency approach in monitoring this issue as there was concern that influential gang members were settling in Medway from London and developing their own gangs locally.
- **Reduction of funding** – in response to a question about the impact of reduced funding, officers explained that the YOT had received reductions in funding over the last four year period and one of the strategies in managing this reduced budget was to develop closer partnership working with the youth service to have flexibility in its service delivery, with a focus on targeted work.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the Cabinet to recommend Council to approve the Youth Justice Plan Refresh 2014-16, as set out at Appendix A to the report.

345 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which advised the Committee on its current work programme. She drew the Committee's attention to section 5 of the report which detailed the discussion that had taken place in relation to selecting a topic for in-depth scrutiny. She explained that the Director of Children and Adults had suggested looking at employment opportunities for 18 year olds, as this was an area where Medway's performance was poor. This had been reported to the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee pre-agenda meeting as it was a cross-cutting issue and it was suggested there that it also include 21 year old graduates. Then at the pre-agenda for this Committee, a further addition was made around apprenticeships. The topic being suggested was therefore 'employment opportunities for 18-21 year olds'.

Decision:

The Committee agreed:

- (a) the work programme as set out at Appendix 1;

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- (b) the inclusion of a section on the Funding Formula for Mainstream Schools and Academies 2016/17 in the draft budget report scheduled for the December meeting;
- (c) that 'employment opportunities for 18-21 year olds (including apprenticeships), as detailed at Appendix 2 to the report, be put forward as a suggested topic for inclusion in the programme for the next round of in-depth reviews.

Chairman

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