

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

Tuesday, 8 December 2015

6.30pm to 9.10pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

Added members without voting rights:

James Peck, Cath Foad (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative) and Philip McCue (Medway Youth Parliament)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Bhutia (Substitute for Opara)
Hicks (Substitute for Fearn)

In Attendance: John Chance, Head of Finance Strategy
Jan Guylar, Head of Legal Services/Deputy Monitoring Officer
Simon Harrington, Student Services Manager
Mark Holmes, Strategy Manager
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services
Detective Supt. Andy Pritchard, Vice Chair, Medway Safeguarding Children's Board
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Phil Watson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care

537 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 22 September 2015 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

538 Apologies for absence

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Fearn, Hall and Opara and from Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church diocese) and Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative).

539 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

540 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

541 Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) Annual Report 2014-15

Discussion:

The Vice-Chairman of the Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB), Detective Superintendent Andy Pritchard, presented the MSCB's Annual Report 2014-15 on behalf of the MSCB Independent Chair who had been unable to attend the meeting.

The MSCB Vice-Chairman drew the Committee's attention to particular aspects of the report, in particular; the MSCB structure chart, the co-location of services, joint auditing across agencies, MSCB sub-group activity, development of a strategy relating to preventing child sexual exploitation and work to reduce the negative impact of children and young people living with domestic violence. He added that students at Robert Napier School had produced a piece of drama regarding female genital mutilation to raise awareness of the issue and this would be used as an educational tool throughout other schools and would be placed on the MSCB website. He further added the importance of the voice of the child and confirmed that the Board had now appointed young people to sit on the board.

Members then raised comments and questions which included:

- **Language barriers for children for whom English is not the first language** – concern was raised regarding children who do not speak English and how they access services, particularly as the voice of the child is recognised as so important. The MSCB Vice-Chairman agreed this was a priority for MSCB and had been a particular issue relating to the work on Child Sexual Exploitation. He explained that the availability of interpreting services was very good in Medway and was used when there were language difficulties.
- **Voice of the child** – in response to a question about why the young people now sitting on the MSCB were not listed in the membership list, the MSCB Vice-Chairman confirmed that the list in the report was dated 31 March 2015 and that the young people, now appointed to the Board, would be listed in the next annual report.

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- **Learning lessons** – A Member asked for more detail on the outcomes from the lessons learned sub group and the MSCB Vice-Chairman undertook to report this back to Members.
- **Safeguarding resources in Youth Offending Institutes** – in response to a question about the resourcing for safeguarding children placed in a Medway prison from outside of the area, the MSCB Vice-Chairman confirmed that any safeguarding allegations made by young people against staff were referred to Medway Council and these were managed appropriately and carefully.
- **Complexity of the MSCB** – concern was raised that the MSCB was a complex board with various sub-groups and therefore it was asked how the board safeguards against issues being missed. In response the MSCB Vice-Chairman explained that there was good contribution across agencies and the board employed staff to assist with administrative support. He added that senior board members sat on sub-groups to ensure cross-over and a joined up approach to the various strands of work.
- **Serious Case Reviews** – In response to a question about how the board safeguards against conflicts of interest by organisations involved in a Serious Case Review (SCR), the Vice-Chairman explained that the conduct of SCRs was prescriptive and were independently chaired. Reports were published and were subject to scrutiny by Ofsted. The Director of Children and Adult Services added that when a SCR occurs, this is reported to this Committee via MSCB reports and therefore would provide an opportunity for scrutiny by Members.
- **Vacancy rates of Social Workers** – in response to a question about the vacancy rates of social workers the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, confirmed that this did not compromise safeguarding practice, which had been commented on recently by Ofsted. Vacancies were not carried by the service so agency staff were used where required to ensure appropriate workloads across staff were maintained.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

542 School Admission Arrangements 2017

Discussion:

The Student Services Manager introduced the report which detailed the outcome of the consultation on the primary and secondary co-ordinated admission schemes for 2017. He explained that the consultation had run from 1 October – 13 November 2015 and had been widely publicised. There had been

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no responses received during the consultation, which had been expected as there were no major changes being proposed for 2017.

Members then raised a number of points and questions which included:

- **Clarification of the distance criteria** – The Student Services Manager confirmed that this was being amended from ‘shortest available walking route’ to ‘shortest available route by road and path’ to make the definition more transparent for parents and carers, as some routes used for admission purposes were routes that were not acknowledged as available walking routes.
- **Update on school statuses** – In response to a request for an updated list of Medway schools statuses, officers undertook to provide this via a briefing note. It was requested that the briefing note include details of the implications academy conversions have on the local authority.
- **School places** – In response to a question about whether all children can be assured of a place at a school within walking distance, the Student Services Manager explained that places were offered depending on parental preference and some families chose schools much further away from their home for a variety of reasons. The local authority was unable to guarantee an offer at a school from a family’s preference list but it could guarantee that every child is offered a place at a Medway school
- **Multiple births** – In response to a question about how many incidents there had been where twins or other multiple birth siblings had been placed in separate schools, the Student Services Manager explained that where this occurred the other sibling(s) were either placed within the school over its published admission number or offers were adjusted to ensure multiple birth siblings were offered the same school.

Decision:

The committee recommended the proposed admissions arrangements and schemes to the Cabinet for approval at its meeting on 15 December 2015.

543 Council Plan Q2 2015/16 Performance Monitoring Report

Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adults Services introduced the report which summarised performance in quarter 2 of 2015/16 against the priority relevant to the Committee and she drew the Committee’s attention to some key projects currently being undertaken which included work relating to school performance and attainment improvements, the development of the Integrated Family Support Service and the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection which had demonstrated Medway had made improvements in relation to children’s social care.

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Officers also drew the Committee's attention to particularly challenging targets, as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report, which included:

- The average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family;
- The percentage of child and family assessments completed within 45 days;
- The percentage of children social care substantive posts not filled by permanent social workers.

Members then raised comments and questions, including:

- **Adoption** – in response to a comment regarding the complexity of adoption processes, officers acknowledged this to be true but added that the timeliness of processes needed to be faster. National timescales were challenging but this was due to the fact that the younger a child is placed with its adoptive family, the better their outcomes.
- **Work with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)** – In response to a question regarding Medway's collaborative working with the RSC officers confirmed that the RSC was very engaged with Medway to assist in terms of improving performance at Medway academies.
- **Schools using beanstalk** – Officers confirmed that a number of schools were using beanstalk, which was a national charity providing one-to-one literacy support to children who struggle with their reading in terms of ability and confidence. Officers undertook to report back to the Committee on how many schools were buying in to this service.
- **Care Leavers in Prison** – In response to a question, officers confirmed that 15 care leavers were currently in prison and although they were in custody in accordance with their custodial sentence and were in receipt of training in the relevant Young Offenders Institute, these factors did not contribute to local authority statistics relating to care leavers being in appropriate accommodation or in receipt of education or training.
- **Retention of social work staff** – In response to a question about the retention rates of social workers, officers explained that Medway's retention rates were good and this had been commented on by Ofsted in their recent inspection report.
- **Permanent exclusions** – in response to a question about the breakdown of permanent exclusions from academies and non-academies, officers undertook to provide this information to Members.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

544 Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets 2016/17

Discussion:

The Head of Finance Strategy introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress towards setting the Council's draft capital and revenue budgets for 2016/17, which was underpinned by the Medium Term Financial Plan. He confirmed that a financial pressure remained for the current financial year, which particularly related to children and adults social care and that Government funding was continuing to reduce with the settlement on 25 November 2015 confirming a 53% cut to all local government funding (not including the Dedicated Schools Grant). He added that the Government had appeared to provide the ability for local authorities to increase Council Tax by an additional 2%, with the additional funding being used for adult social care purposes, but officers were awaiting firm confirmation on this.

Members then raised comments and questions which included:

- **Impact on children's social care** – concern was raised that budget cuts would jeopardise the improvements made in relation to children's social care. Officers confirmed that some of the investment that had been made had resulted in the positive outcomes and therefore this was a risk.
- **Funding per pupil** – in response to a request for clarification as to whether the formula for funding per pupil would be changing, officers confirmed that the Department for Education was currently developing new proposals to introduce a more equitable formula for price per pupil funding and consultation on this was anticipated around February/March 2016.
- **Social Impact Bonds** – in response to a question about the use of Social Impact Bonds, officers explained that Medway was currently exploring the possibility of using Social Impact Bonds to assist with edge of care services and undertook to provide a briefing note with more detail on this.
- **Reductions in youth service budgets** – in response to a question about the impact of the reductions in budget for youth services, officers confirmed that the specific plans underpinning this proposed reduction in funding were not yet finalised but it had been considered that the service could run more efficiently with a reduced budget. In relation to a question about the magnitude of the cut and how it compared to previous years, officers undertook to report back to the Medway Youth Parliament representatives.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and agreed to forward the above comments to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting on 2 February 2016.

545 Sure Start Children's Centres and Early Childhood Outcomes 2015

Discussion:

The Strategic Manager for Early Years Services introduced the report which updated the Committee on the role that children's centres play in delivering early help and securing good outcomes for children in Medway. He explained that there were almost 18,500 children under the age of 5 years in Medway and added that what happens in the early part of a child's life is the foundation for their future and had a long-lasting impact on later development.

Members then raised comments and questions which included:

- **Ofsted inspections of children's centres** – in response to a request for clarification on the outcome of Ofsted inspections, officers confirmed that the 4 centres that had been judged as satisfactory had been inspected under the old framework (pre 2013) and undertook to provide a list of outcomes for each children centre.
- **Department for Education consultation on children's centres** – in response to a question about when this Ministerial consultation was likely to commence, the Strategic Manager for Early Years Services confirmed he had recently met with the Department for Education and it was anticipated to be early 2016.
- **Performance of summer born children** – in response to a question regarding the performance of children who were born in summer months, officers confirmed that there was some correlation between age (i.e. depending on where their birthday falls) and performance in early years.
- **Increased hours of nursery education** – Officers confirmed that the plans to increase free nursery education to 30 hours was currently going through Parliament and was anticipated to go live for working families in September 2017.
- **Managing reductions in funding** – in response to a question about how the service has managed funding reductions, officers explained that the service was continually reflecting on the core purpose of services and how it relates to other services (for example, health visiting) to ensure they complement each other and do not duplicate. There had been a shift in the way families commission childcare through the availability of tax-free childcare payments. In addition building work had been finished and the need for publicising children's centres had reduced as this was now done automatically through the maternity and child health services. All these factors had contributed to savings.

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Decision:

The Committee noted the report and thanked the Early Years Service for its work and the impact it had made.

546 Committee Membership: Added and Co-opted Members

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which updated the committee on current issues relating to seats on the Committee for voting and non-voting co-opted members and suggested some changes to current arrangements. She reiterated the difficulty that had been experienced in recent years with regard to filling the two vacancies on the Committee for Parent Governor representatives and outlined the suggested changes to arrangements relating to the Teacher, Headteacher and Medway Youth Parliament positions, as outlined in the report.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the current Teacher and Headteacher representatives for their valued input to previous Committee discussions.

Members then raised comments and questions, which included:

- **Voting entitlements for co-optees** – in response to a question around voting entitlements for co-optees the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the Committee's membership had originally been set in 2001 when executive arrangements were introduced. The Parent Governor representatives and the two diocese representatives were entitled to vote on educational matters, which was a legal requirement and Members had wanted to include additional non-voting co-optees on the committee in order to benefit from their experience and expertise.
- **Criteria for selection of Headteacher and Teacher** – a request for clarification of the criteria, attached at Appendix C to the report, and how this had been formulated was made, as it was suggested that a teacher/headteacher from a lower performing school may be equally as valuable in terms of bringing their own experience. The Director of Children and Adults Services explained that one of the key projects under the Council Plan was accelerated school improvement and it was therefore considered perverse to ask a member of staff from a poor performing school, focusing on rapid improvement, to commit additional time to the Committee. She added that a minimum of two years teaching experience had been included as it was considered that a newly qualified teacher should concentrate their first two years on building their experience and knowledge of the core job.

Decision:

The Committee recommended:

- a) The Director of Children and Adult Services to make representations to the Department for Education and Department for Communities and

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Local Government in relation to reviewing and updating the legislation regarding parent governor representatives, as detailed in section 3 of the report.

- b) The Council to agree revised arrangements for the appointment of a headteacher and teacher to the Committee as detailed in paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10 of the report, along with the selection criteria, as attached at Appendix C to the report.
- c) The Council to agree that the Medway Youth Parliament representative positions on the Committee are designated to specific roles on the MYP, as follows:
 - The existing Chair of the Medway Youth Parliament
 - An existing member of the Medway Youth Parliament Cabinet
 - Substitute – an existing member of the Medway Youth Parliament Cabinet.

547 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which advised the Committee on its current work programme. She advised Members that the Chairman had also suggested that the outcome of the consultation period for the expansion of Bligh Infant and Junior Schools be added to the agenda for the January meeting as pre-decision scrutiny. She added that the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representatives had accepted the invitation to provide a report on the outcome of the MYP 2015 Annual Conference and confirmed that following the request made at the last meeting, the Regional Schools Commissioner had accepted the invitation to attend the Committee's meeting on 3 March 2016.

Members then raised comments and questions which included:

- **Procurement of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)** – in response to a question about whether this could be brought to this committee, officers explained that the item added to the March meeting, entitled “proposed delivery model for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing services” was likely to be about this issue but undertook to check and, if required would add this to the January meeting.
- **Adoption** – in response to a request that an item on adoption be added to the work programme the Director of Children and Adults Services suggested that this be scheduled for Autumn 2016
- **School Improvement Strategy** – a Member asked when this item, currently listed on the work programme, would be brought before the Committee. In response officers undertook to clarify and report back.

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Decision:

The Committee agreed the work programme, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to: -

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services being moved to 3 March 2016 meeting;
- The Annual Public Health Report being added to the agenda for 19 January 2016 meeting;
- The proposed delivery model for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing services in Medway being added to the 3 March 2016 meeting;
- The outcome of the Medway Youth Parliament 2015 annual conference being added to 3 March 2016 meeting;
- The outcome of the Ofsted inspection into Children's Social Care Services being added to 19 January 2016 meeting;
- The outcome of the consultation period for the expansion of Bligh Infant and Junior Schools being added to 19 January 2016 meeting.

Chairman

Date:

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