

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 MARCH 2017

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

Report from: Councillor Andrew Mackness – Portfolio Holder Children's Services – Lead Member

Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Lead Member and covers the period from March 2016-2017. In the case of education services, it covers the results of the school year 2015-16 and activity during that year and the first half of the current school year.

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 – Lead member (statutory responsibility), according to the Council's constitution are:

- Adoption
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Children with disabilities
- Children's Social Care
- Early Help
- Early years
- Inclusion
- Looked After Children (including fostering, care leavers and residential care)
- Partnership Commissioning (Children)
- Safeguarding
- 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 Lead Member is responsible for leadership, strategy and the effectiveness of education and children's social care.

1.3 As Portfolio Holder, I sit on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), Medway Children's Safeguarding Board, the YOT Board and Health and Wellbeing Board. Additionally, I am Chair of the Corporate Parenting

Board, thus ensuring a strategic golden thread for children's services throughout the Council.

- 1.4 I want to begin my report by paying tribute to my predecessor, Cllr Mike O'Brien and recording my thanks for all his hard work as Portfolio Holder.

2. Overview

2.1 Adoption

Overview

- 2.1.1 Medway Council has responsibility for recruiting, training and assessing prospective adoptive parents, matching of children with permanent families, and providing ongoing support to adopters, Special Guardians, and their families.

Achievements

- 2.1.2 In 2016, Medway approved 25 adoptive households, a significant increase from the 15 in 2015. This success has enabled 24 of our LAC to be provided with a new home in 2016.
- 2.1.3 A total of 41 Medway LAC were placed for adoption in 2016, up from 25 in 2015. Children placed include traditionally 'hard to place' groups including eleven over the age of 5, 24 siblings and 6 from minority ethnic groups.
- 2.1.4 A very successful evening was held in September with Medway Adopters and representatives from the Corporate Parenting Board. Adopters were able to share their very positive experiences of working with the Medway Adoption Team.
- 2.1.5 The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their prospective adopted family has decreased from 700 days to 610 days; bringing Medway closer to the national average of 593 days.

Key Priorities

- 2.1.6 A priority for this year is to improve rates of adoption for a wider range of children including large sibling groups and children born with foetal alcohol and drug syndrome disorders.
- 2.1.7 We also want to increase the use of fostering to adopt regulations to enable more children to be placed under these regulations at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.1.8 Medway will continue to develop plans for a Regional Adoption Agency with Kent and Bexley. Key areas of work include developing the vision, statement of principles and values as well as the intended outcomes.

2.2 Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Overview

- 2.2.1 Medway Council and CCG are currently in the process of jointly commissioning a Medway only Children's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service including CAMHS, having historically managed a service with Kent.

Achievements

- 2.2.2 This year, there have been significant improvements in access and waiting times for Tier 3 CAMHS, with a reduction from 63 children waiting for an assessment and 51 for treatment in May 2015 to 30 for assessment and 6 for treatment in December 2016.

Key Priorities

- 2.2.3 Despite service improvements, I still hear too often from headteachers, children and young people and their families that we must improve the responsiveness and flexibility of CAMHS. Key to this will be our new local service focused on the needs of Medway children. A priority must be to improve the credibility of the service as well as the buy in of our key stakeholders, especially schools and universal services to ensure that children and their families have the right support at the right time.
- 2.2.4 The new service must also support skills and competencies within the wider children's workforce and build capacity across the system so that emotional health and wellbeing becomes part of everyone's core business.

2.3 Children with Disabilities

Overview

- 2.3.1 The 0-25 Disability Team provides a statutory service and support in regard of the Children Act 1989, section 17, and for children who have a permanent or long lasting severe disability diagnosed by a doctor or consultant, and their families. Transition to adult services and support is provided to young people with a diagnosed disability aged from 18-25 who meet assessment eligibility criteria in relation to the 2014 Care Act to receive statutory support as an adult. At this time, 547 cases are open to the team consisting of 306 children and 241 young adults.

Achievements

- 2.3.2 On average 97% of all statutory children and family assessments are completed within timescale. There has been improved flow for open cases with those cases not needing social work input being signposted to the most appropriate mainstream service or to short breaks. Again, we want the right service at the right time for children and their families.
- 2.3.3 I am delighted that Aut Even received an extremely positive Ofsted judgement of good. Significant improvements have been made in

relation to the quality of care and improving the environment. The staff team is stabilising and we are getting positive feedback from parents about the support they receive as a family from the service.

- 2.3.4 The Self Directed Support Team is working with families to promote personalisation of short breaks. Currently 213 direct payments are paid for children and young people up to the age of 17.

Key Priorities

- 2.3.5 In 2017-18, all teams for 0-25 Special Education Needs and Disabilities will be brought together as a fully integrated service in Children's Services. This will bring together a range of professionals to provide holistic support for children and young people with additional needs and their families.
- 2.3.6 A key area of work will be around improving transitions into adulthood and promoting training and employment opportunities for disabled young people.
- 2.3.7 Despite the significant improvements made to the provision at Aut Even, the building is not fit for purpose, especially to meet the needs of children and young people with the most complex disabilities. I have asked officers to look at the opportunities to bring together Aut Even and Parklands as a joint service, which would improve the environment for respite care, as well as expand opportunities for short breaks and after school care at Parklands.

2.4 Children's Social Care

Overview

- 2.4.1 Children's Social Care provides the statutory social work services to children between the ages of 0-18 and the Leaving Care provision. This encompasses children in need and those in need of protection under the Children Act 1989. There is an annual budget of £21.5M. Children's needs are assessed through the Children's Advice and Duty Service based in Broadside.

Achievements

- 2.4.2 In the past year, the service has made significant changes to its structure in order to provide an Area Based service to children through social work pods i.e. small teams. Four areas have been created with a balanced level of demand. The four areas are:

- Area 1 – Gillingham and Twydall
- Area 2 – Luton and Rainham
- Area 3 – Strood, Peninsula and Rochester West
- Area 4 – Rochester East, Chatham and Walderslade

Aligning the social work pods to areas has enabled better joint working with partners responsible for the safeguarding of Medway's children. The changes in service structure are intended to provide consistency of

social work throughout the intervention with the family. The changes have increased the numbers of first line managers (Practice Managers) and decreased the ratio of manager to practitioner in order to improve the quality of practice with children. The service has also commenced an ambitious training plan with the Institute of Family Therapy to support quality interventions with families and retain valuable staff.

- 2.4.3 The 'front door' to Children's Services is achieving excellent results in providing a prompt response to new cases. 95% of assessments are completed within the 45 working day target timescale against the national average of 83%. Where child protection concerns are identified, 87% reach the initial children protection conference within the 15 working day target timescale against the 77% achieved nationally.
- 2.4.4 In the past year, we have seen a reduction in legal action with families as cases in care proceedings have reduced by over 50% from January 2016. As of January 2017, there were 41 cases in proceedings.
- 2.4.5 The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has reduced from 515 to 316 between December 2015 and December 2016. Our current rate of 50 plans per 10,000 children sits between the 43 plans per 10,000 seen nationally and the average rate of 52 plans per 10,000 seen in our statistical neighbours.
- 2.4.6 As of December 2016, our children in care population has also reduced from 437 in December 2015 to 295 in December 2016. This is a rate of 62 per 10,000 children and sits between the national average of 60 per 10,000 and the rate of 70 seen in our statistical neighbours.
- 2.4.7 The above demonstrates the impact of our new approach to working, which has resulted in a more confident workforce moving away from risk averse process driven practice.
- 2.4.8 I am delighted that in January, Cabinet agreed the establishment of a Staffing Agency as a subsidiary of Medway Commercial Limited. This will both provide a stable agency workforce and reduce the financial waste of meeting expensive agency costs.

Key Priorities

- 2.4.9 The recruitment and retention of skilled social work staff in Medway is representative of the national landscape currently sitting at a 40% vacancy rate in December 2016. We plan to continue to improve the tangible benefits on offer through the Social Work Academy and remuneration package available. The Council will strive to be an employer of choice for social work staff, thereby maximising the outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families by ensuring continuity of staff and sustainable relationships between staff and service user.
- 2.4.10 In line with ensuring that we support families and children earlier, we continue to implement a more robust service to Medway's children in need. 80% of children on a child in need plan at the end of December were visited by a social worker at least once every 3 weeks, and 71% of these plans were reviewed with our partner agencies every 8 weeks. Our challenging targets are 95% for visits and 90% for reviews.

- 2.4.11 We are streamlining our processes for pathway planning for our older Looked After Children to make sure that a plan is in place from their 16th birthday to ensure that they are as prepared as possible for their upcoming independence as “care leavers”. Although we have ensured that 92% of our “care leavers” are accessing suitable accommodation against the 84% national rate, we have not been able to achieve the same success in ensuring they are in employment, education or training. Our performance for the year ending December 2016 has been 51% marginally ahead of the national average of 49%.
- 2.4.12 Building on the successful joint work with police staff based at Broadside, we will be developing our ‘front door’ to include a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which will also bring together other key agencies such as health, housing, education and probation.

2.5 Early Help

Overview

- 2.5.1 Medway Council continues to lead and develop multi-agency strategies for early help in order to identify problems early and to ensure effective intervention when required, with easy access and information routes for children and families. The aim is to prevent an escalation of needs so children and their families require the support of acute services
- 2.5.2 Early help is outlined in the new “Working Together” guidance on safeguarding, and is a key area for assessment in Ofsted inspections.

Achievements

- 2.5.3 Early Help Assessments completion rates have increased by 57.4% compared to last year. The transition of cases held in safeguarding ‘stepping down’ to a more appropriate care plan is up 112% on last year.
- 2.5.4 A key area of work has been to increase the engagement of partners.. We have held 3 successful partnership events this year with over 70-100 partners at each.
- 2.5.5 The Youth Justice Board and internal YOT Management Boards have welcomed Medway Council’s decision to keep the YOT in-house and enhance it by integrating it with the youth and early help services. We are already seeing the impact of a more integrated, multi-agency approach to children through early help assessments showing, not only, improvements around offending behaviour, but also improved outcomes for a range of vulnerabilities such as attendance at school, employment and training.

Key Priorities

- 2.5.6 In 2017-18, we will continue to work with partners to develop their capacity and skills to deliver early help support to families. This will include training, support and providing a single point of contact for providers.
- 2.5.7 The work to integrate the Youth Offending Team and Youth Services into Early Help will ensure that we are providing more joined up services and

are inspection ready in our statutory work with the Home Office and Youth Justice Board.

- 2.5.8 As government grants decrease, we will seek innovative ways of managing our resources, including trading services to ensure sustainability and growth.

2.6 Early Years

Overview

- 2.6.1 The Local Authority has statutory responsibility to lead and coordinate services that result in good health and development of children in their first five years of life. This is delivered by securing nursery education for all children and through helping parents to give their children the best start in life through our Early Help services including Children's Centres.
- 2.6.2 The comprehensive reorganisation of council early years services, including staffing of children's centres, to address severe financial challenges during 2016 has been delivered on time and on budget.

Achievements

- 2.6.3 I am able to report to this Committee that children starting school in Medway in September 2016 did so with improved levels of learning and development. The proportion of children attaining a "good level of development" as assessed by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile increased from 70.7% in 2015 to 73.3% in 2016, which is four percentage points above that for England, placing Medway in the top quartile of all local authorities in the country.
- 2.6.4 Ofsted inspection grades of the 100 private and independent pre-schools and nurseries in Medway have markedly improved, and at the last published figures in August 2016, 97% of places were in settings judged as good or better – up from 75% in 2013.
- 2.6.5 97% of children in Medway access a free nursery place at the age of three. Since 2013, there is an entitlement to free nursery education for younger children from low income households – with nearly 1000 Medway children improving their readiness for school. In the past three years, the number of children eligible for free school meals (FSM) who do not achieve a good level of development has been halved.

Key Priorities

- 2.6.6 In 2017-18, we will continue to encourage sufficient good quality free nursery places for the large number of two-year-olds who live in Chatham and Gillingham, and to prepare for the Government's expansion of childcare for thousands of working families in September 2017.
- 2.6.7 The new Early Years National Funding Formula brings additional money to nursery settings, but a consequent reduction in grants to local government means that we must look at how services can better target the most vulnerable children and families.

2.7 Inclusion

Overview

2.7.1 The Inclusion Team is responsible for dealing with both permanent and fixed term exclusions in schools and ensuring legal procedures are followed. Support is offered to schools to ensure children are kept on roll wherever possible. The team works collaboratively across services to offer schools a coordinated response. The team also supports families who choose to withdraw their children from school to educate them at home (Elective Home Education).

Achievements

2.7.2 Throughout 2015/16, 79 pupils were discussed at the School Support Group (SSG). Through the work the team does with this newly established group, 70 of these pupils remained in their schools.

Key Priorities

2.7.3 A key priority remains working with schools to reduce both permanent (0.19% in 2015/16) and fixed term (2.93%) exclusions.

2.7.4 We will continue to seek to reduce the number (498 registered as home educated at some point in 2015/16) of children withdrawn from Medway schools to be educated at home. In 2015/16, 111 pupils returned to school following a period of home education.

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

Overview

2.8.1 Services for Medway's Looked After Children include fostering, supported accommodation for care leavers and residential provision. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses, trains and supports Medway Foster Carers as well as assesses Connected Carer applicants and prospective Special Guardianship Orders, Private Foster carers and Supported Lodgings providers. The Council also runs its own Children's Residential Home, the Old Vicarage. The home provides care for up to eight young people between the ages of 12-18 displaying challenging behaviours.

Achievements

2.8.2 46% of our LAC are in our own fostering provision against a national average of 37%. In 2016, the number of Medway fostering households was increased by 7.

2.8.3 Following the Council assuming management responsibility for the home in 2016, we are anticipating an excellent outcome following its latest Ofsted judgement.

- 2.8.4 The Fostering Service has been undertaking innovative work with the Digital Transformation Team to develop the Medway Fostering Service website and improve services to existing and prospective foster carers.

Key Priorities

- 2.8.5 The Children in Care Council continue to be key members of the Corporate Parenting Board. I am looking forward to our joint BBQ with them in July.
- 2.8.6 The Fostering Service will be redesigned with a key focus on increasing the recruitment of foster carers which is an increasingly competitive market. We are looking at creative approaches to work with the market and developing a recruitment strategy to meet our ambitious targets for next year.
- 2.8.7 The two semi-independent units at the Old Vicarage are now taking referrals. I have asked officers to look at how capacity might be extended at the site, thus reducing the number of LAC placed out of borough.

2.9 Partnership Commissioning (Children)

Overview

- 2.9.1 A range of services for children, young people and their families are commissioned in partnership with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group. The Children's Partnership Commissioning Team is responsible for carrying this commissioning out as well as external placements of vulnerable children and young people.

Achievements

- 2.9.2 Significant work has taken place to lower the cost of external care placements and improve quality. Weekly average costs have reduced from £979.80 in 2014/15 to £905.59 in 2015/16.
- 2.9.3 Following the commissioning of Oakfield Psychology Service to provide rapid response emotional, behavioural and mental health support to our LAC children and young people, there are no waiting lists for LAC who are assessed within two weeks of referral.
- 2.9.4 Work has started on the development of a new Child Development Centre in Strood, which will co-locate health services for disabled children and their families
- 2.9.5 I am pleased to report that children and young people are increasingly involved in the commissioning process. They have been involved in the evaluation of recent tenders for advocacy, CAMHS and supported accommodation.

Key Priorities

- 2.9.6 The mobilisation of the new Emotional Health and Well-Being Service will be a priority for the team. In addition, officers will be commissioning new frameworks for Independent Fostering Agencies and Supported Accommodation providers to improve sufficiency, quality and value.

Another key workstream is the commissioning of a children's health service across social care, public health and the CCG.

2.10 Safeguarding

Overview

- 2.10.1 The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team consists of the IRO service, LADO, Quality Assurance and the Medway Safeguarding Children's Board Business Unit. Within the Children's Services Portfolio is the MSCB Business Unit and associated board activity. The independently chaired Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) is set up under the Children Act 2004 and is the multi-agency partnership of agencies working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Medway.

Achievements

- 2.10.2 The Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Group has been set up as a sub group of the Board to drive forward the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) strategy for Medway.
- 2.10.3 The MSCB has set up a Young Persons' Safeguarding Panel to embed the engagement of young people further into the work of the Board.
- 2.10.4 The MSCB delivered training to over 1200 professionals during 2015-16. The number of people attending MSCB training has increased by over 50% since 2013-14.

Key Priorities

- 2.10.5 We plan to scope what future safeguarding partnership arrangements in Medway will be following the debate and outcomes of the Children and Social Work Bill, which includes the abolition of Local Safeguarding Children Boards and replacement with local arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children to include (a) the local authority; (b) the clinical commissioning group; (c) Police; and any relevant agencies that they consider appropriate.
- 2.10.6 The Board will be conducting a Serious Case Review (SCR) concerning the abuse of children at the Medway Secure Training Centre (STC). I look forward to the outcome of the review which will identify where there are lessons that can be learned about the way that organisations worked, both individually and together.

2.11 Special educational needs

Overview

- 2.11.1 The SEN team is responsible for conducting and overseeing the statutory assessment process, meeting legal requirements and ensuring special educational provision is in place to meet pupils' needs. Educational psychologists also have a statutory role in relation to those pupils with SEN

Achievements

- 2.11.2 The number of Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Statements maintained by Medway as at December 2016 was 1857, an increase from 1718 last year. This represents around 3.1% of the 2-25 aged population. This figure is in excess of the national picture, which stands at 2.9%.
- 2.11.3 We have published and disseminated our SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020 to key stakeholders.
- 2.11.4 As of December 2016, we have converted 82% of statements to EHCPs, ahead of national average.

Key Priorities

- 2.11.5 There is an increase in the number of requests for EHCPs from 83 in Quarter 3 2015-16 to 97 in Quarter 3 2016-17. Much of this is as a result of the statutory duty to make provision for young people aged over 16 and in some cases, up to age 25. We are confident that 100% will be converted by the government deadline of 31 March 2018.
- 2.11.6 A priority remains improving transitions to adulthood with the aim to continue to reduce the number of young people placed in out of area specialist college provision.

2.12 Youth Services

Overview

- 2.12.1 Cabinet decided not to outsource the Youth Service and the Youth Offending Team but to locate the services into Early Help. This will offer more opportunities to support young people in an integrated model of provision and make best use of resources.
- 2.12.2 The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is popular in Medway and we have considered how best to preserve the scheme so it is sustainable in the future. We have decided to fund the third sector National Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme for two years to run the programme and develop thereafter a self funding sustainable model.

Achievements

- 2.12.3 In November, Medway Youth Parliament ran a conference, which was attended by 108 young people, on the theme of tackling racism. The Youth Parliament has also run the Medway heat of the Tryangle Awards, recognising young people's achievements and contributions to the community. The Youth Service has continued to run participation days and this quarter the subject was Relationships Education, with the MSCB and Public Health contributing to the day and taking feedback from young people.
- 2.12.4 At the end of December 2016, 5.4% (662) of 16-18 year olds were NEET. This compares to 6.6% nationally and 7.6% (745) in December 2015. 3% (97) of 16 year olds are NEET against a target of 3.1. 6.5% (225) of 17 year olds are NEET, against a target of 6.17%.

- 2.12.5 Medway Youth Trust (MYT) has achieved its target of 240 Medway 16-17 year olds completing the National Citizen Service programme in the summer of 2016, up from 135 young people in 2015.

Key Priorities

- 2.12.6 A priority is to target support at our most vulnerable groups of young people e.g. LAC or SEN to reduce the number who are NEET or not known.
- 2.12.7 The redesign of the service alongside the area-based model in Children's Services will see more focus on intervening early to reduce the number of children and young people requiring specialist services.

Appendices

None

Background Papers:

None