

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

Thursday, 9 March 2017

6.30pm to 8.50pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Cooper, Fearn, Franklin, Johnson, Kemp, Price, Purdy, Saroy, Wicks (Vice-Chairman) and Williams

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Tina Lovey (Head Teacher Representative), Paddy Powell (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative), MYP Chairman (Medway Youth Parliament Chairman) and MYP Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Parliament)

Substitutes:

Councillors:
Bhutia (Substitute for Opara)
Griffin (Substitute for Royle)
Steve Iles (Substitute for Howard)
Joy (Substitute for Avey)

In Attendance:

Kate Ako, Principal Lawyer - People
Jackie Brown, Head of Business and Intelligence
Joseph Dance, Democratic Services Officer
Ann Domeney, Interim Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services
Simon Harrington, Programme Lead, School Services
Dominic Herrington, Regional Schools Commissioner
Michael Hood, Personalisation and Finance Lead
Helen Jones, Assistant Director – Commissioning, Business and Intelligence
Councillor Andrew Mackness, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services - Lead Member (statutory responsibility, including education)
Pauline Maddison, Assistant Director (Interim), School Effectiveness and Inclusion
Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Educational Attainment and Improvement

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Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Ian Sutherland, Director, Children and Adults Services
Angela Wellings, Interim Head of SEN and Inclusion

789 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Avey, Howard, Opara and Royle and from Alex Tear (Church of England representative)

790 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 19 January 2017 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

791 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

792 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced to the Committee that Medway Governors Association would not be continuing beyond 31 March 2017, and took the opportunity on behalf of the Committee to thank Peter Martin (Medway Governors Association representative) for his contributions to the work of the Committee.

793 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Tina Lovey (Head Teacher) informed the Committee that the school at which she worked was referred to in items 6 (Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Educational Attainment and Improvement), item 7 (Medway's Annual School Performance Report for 2016), and item 9 (Short Breaks Provision for Children with Disabilities and the Local Offer). In relation to item 9, as a current provider for short breaks services in Medway Tina Lovey confirmed that she would not take part in discussion on this item.

Councillor Joy confirmed that in relation to item 8 (Home to School Transport Policy for Mainstream Children and Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) his daughter would be transferring to Secondary School in September 2017 and may be applying for transport assistance, but would not be affected by any of the proposed changes outlined in the report.

794 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Children Services - Lead Member (Statutory Responsibility)

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Statutory Responsibility) which detailed an update on performance within Children's Services for the period from March 2016-17, and in the case of education services, covered results from the 2015/16 school year and activity during that year and the first half of the current school year.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Medway Secure Training Centre (MSTC) – in response to a question about the serious case review at MSTC the Portfolio Holder confirmed that review findings would be shared with Members of the Cabinet and this Committee in due course where data protection guidelines permitted.

Non-Statutory Youth Services – in response to a question about the 43% reduction in the Youth Services budget and criteria for commissioning future non-statutory services, the Portfolio Holder assured the Committee that new Youth Service provision would continue to be outcome focused and would be integrated with the Youth Offending Team, Early Years and other appropriate services where this made sense. The Portfolio Holder also commented that Youth Centre Management Committees had a beneficial role to play and conversations would continue with Management Committees regarding where they sit in the new structure.

Adoption Coffee Evening – the Portfolio Holder agreed that a recent event to encourage and recruit current and prospective adoptive parents had been very successful and welcomed more opportunities for Councillors to attend similar events in the future.

Aut Even – in response to a question about future service provision at Aut Even, the Portfolio Holder responded that the Committee would consider a report on proposed service changes later in the same meeting.

Supporting Care Leavers – in response to a question about activity to support care leavers, the Portfolio Holder noted that work continued across the Council and with partners to support care leaver's access to housing and employment and training opportunities.

Improving rates of adoption for a wider range of children – in response to a question about aspirations to improve adoption rates of 'hard to place' children, for instance those from a large sibling group, the Portfolio Holder noted that the Council's work in forming the Regional Adoption Agency would broaden the pool of prospective adopters.

Staffing Agency (Medway Commercial Group Ltd.) – the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the staffing agency would allow the Council to access a more

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stable agency workforce as well as reduce costs associated with recruitment through external agencies.

Looked-After Children placed outside Medway – in response to a question about how looked-after children could be supported to stay in the borough, the Portfolio Holder noted that the Council would continue to look at options for increasing residential care settings in Medway, especially for older looked-after children.

Budget constraints – in response to a concern raised by a Member about the impact of budget reductions on service provision, the Portfolio Holder commented that the Council would continue to engage with young people and their families to ensure services, both targeted and universal, met need and represented best value for money.

Decision:

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Statutory Responsibility) was thanked for his attendance.

795 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Educational Attainment and Improvement

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report from the Portfolio Holder for Educational Attainment and Improvement which covered the period from September 2016 – March 2017, and in the case of education services, covered results from the 2015/16 school year and activity during that year and the first half of the current school year.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Medway Governors Association (MGA) – in response to a question asking for clarification on why MGA had recently folded, the Portfolio Holder commented that he did not know the detail behind MGA's dissolution, but that governors play a vital role in driving school improvement and the Council was committed to supporting the engagement of existing and new governors wherever possible.

Moral purpose – in response to a question asking for clarification on the term 'moral purpose' within the context of Medway schools, the Portfolio Holder suggested that the term referred to schools fulfilling a broader role in the lives of children and local communities by providing holistic services including pastoral and educational support activities outside of the classroom such as breakfast clubs, after school activities, and additional support for parents where required. The Portfolio Holder gave the example of a Primary School in Gillingham which provided such support.

Impact of Spring 2017 Budget on educational attainment – in response to a question about the potential impact of the Government’s Budget announcements earlier that week, on educational attainment in Medway, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he welcomed new funding announced in the Budget for Free Schools and Grammar Schools which would help drive social mobility.

Support provided to schools wishing to become academies – in response to a question on the best route for schools to take who wished to convert to academy status, the Portfolio Holder commented that comprehensive training and support was available to schools who were looking to become academies, including advice on forming or joining an academy trust.

Key Stage 2 outcomes – in response to a question about action taken to ensure good results across Medway schools at Key Stage 2, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that much was being done in primary schools to develop core literacy and numeracy skills, with targeted support available to particular groups who had historically underperformed in certain areas, e.g. encouraging reading skills among boys.

Educational Safeguarding – in response to a question about educational safeguarding audits and the recruitment of an Educational Safeguarding Officer in Medway, the Portfolio Holder said he would provide the Committee with a written response.

Medway Test for non-Medway children - in response to a question about testing of non-Medway children, more specifically if there was a more cost-effective way of testing them opposed to setting up test centres on a Saturday, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would provide the Committee with a written response.

Free School Funding – in response to a question asking for clarification on provision of current free school funding, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that £500m funding was currently available in ‘Wave 12’ and that 13 organisations had applied for this funding in Medway. To his knowledge, 10 applicants had been successful and more information on the successful bids would be available in due course.

Decision:

The Portfolio Holder for Educational Attainment and Improvement was thanked for his attendance.

796 Medway’s Annual School Performance Report for 2016

Discussion:

The Interim Assistant Director. School Effectiveness and Inclusion introduced the report which provided the Committee with a comprehensive overview of schools’ performance in Medway for the school year 2015-16. The Interim

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Assistant Director noted that the Regional Schools Commissioner, Dominic Herrington was also present at the meeting to answer any questions the Committee might have about Medway's academies. The report provided results at each key stage for maintained schools and academies, in addition to information on attendance and exclusions for 2014-15 and provisional exclusion data for 2015-16.

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

Exclusions in academies – in response to a question about how academies were held to account for high levels of exclusions, the Regional Schools Commissioner confirmed that exclusion rates were regularly monitored and academies experiencing high levels of exclusions were written to and asked to outline how they planned to reduce exclusions.

'Coasting' academies – in response to a question about what action was being taken to support improvement in 'coasting' schools, the Regional Schools Commissioner confirmed that he worked very closely with the Council to provide support for coasting schools, of which there were currently 8 in Medway (6 primary and 2 secondary). In the first instance, a coasting school would be asked to provide an improvement plan which the Regional School Commissioner would assess before taking any follow-up action, which might include making a further offer of support or starting an intervention.

Impact of Universal Credit on Free School Meals (FSM) pupils – in response to a question about the impact of Universal Credit on the performance of FSM-entitled pupils, the Interim Assistant Director responded that results in Early Years were improving and there was no evidence to suggest the introduction of Universal Credit had negatively impacted FSM-entitled pupils.

Parents taking children out of school during term time – in response to a question asking how many parents had been fined for taking their children out of school during term time, the Interim Assistant Director noted that like many local authorities the Council had needed to step back from taking legal action against parents until the Supreme Court provided a clear steer on the Isle of Wight judgement. Prior to the judgement, she confirmed that the Council would only take a very small number of parents to court each year and that teachers were best placed to reduce term-time holiday absences by applying appropriate pressure.

Key Stage 5 transition to Higher Education – in response to a question about whether there was any identifiable impact of Key Stage 5 outcomes on young people progressing on to High Education, the Interim Assistant Director responded that this piece of analysis had not been carried out. She also added that because the majority of Medway schools had sixth forms, resulting in a diluted sixth form offer, the likelihood of very strong sixth form results was reduced, but that this wasn't necessarily an indication of how successfully schools prepared pupils for Higher Education.

Action to reduce exclusions – in response to concerns raised by several members about the level of exclusions in Medway schools and what could be done to address this, the Regional Schools Commissioner responded that exclusion rates were most effectively reduced in schools where staff were supported by management to implement exclusion policies consistently, but that this could often take years to achieve.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Annual Schools' Performance Report.

797 Home to School Transport Policy for Mainstream Children and Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning introduced the report which provided an overview of the changes to the existing Home to School Transport policies, as well as detailed feedback from the recent consultation with service users and providers.

Following an agreement at Cabinet on 20 December 2016 a consultation had taken place on proposed changes to both the mainstream Home to School Transport policy and that for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), with a decision taken to combine the two previously separate policies into a single policy document covering both areas. The Assistant Director noted that the changes proposed in the new policy would allow the Council to continue to meet its statutory duties in this area in a time of challenging budgets.

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

Service funding – in response to a concern raised by a Member whether the Council had underestimated the funding needed to provide the service, the Programme Lead for School Services noted that despite a reduction in extended rights grant funding from the Department of Education the new policy would see Medway continue to provide statutory services in line with provision across other local authorities in Kent. He also confirmed that changes resulting from the policy would not negatively impact children who had already chosen schools. In terms of the overspend projections for the current year, he explained that this was due to numbers of children eligible for transport increasing and due to upheld appeals.

SENCo Forum – in response to a question asking for clarification on the SEND Co-ordinators Forum, the Interim Head of SEN and Inclusion confirmed that there was a SEN Co in each school. In addition, Private, Voluntary and Independent nurseries also have a nominated SENCo. Bringing SEN Co-ordinators together in a forum facilitates sharing best practice and experiences with the aim of improving service provision.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the Home to School Transport Policy for Mainstream and SEND Children to Cabinet for approval.

798 Short Breaks Provision for Children with Disabilities and the Local Offer

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Partnership Commissioning introduced the report which provided the Committee with an overview of the results of the recent consultation concerning the move to Direct Payments, as well as proposed changes to enhance the overnight Short Breaks service provided at Aut Even.

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

Short Breaks Budget – in response to a questions asking for clarification on how the Short Breaks Budget would be spent, the Assistant Director confirmed that not all the Short Breaks budget would be committed to Direct Payments in 2017/18 as not all parents were ready to make the transition and there was still some work to do to develop the market.

Direct Payments – in response to a question on how much support was provided to parents transitioning to Direct Payments, the Personalisation and Finance Lead responded that there was a dedicated team within the Council which provided support on Direct Payments, in addition to independent agents/companies which could support parents to choose services and manage budgets. A member referred to the levels of Direct Payments outlined in the report and officers confirmed this was indicative only and would work with providers to explore the best way to deliver services and support families.

Consultation feedback –A Member highlighted from the report that of the 10 consultation respondents who did not agree that Direct Payments were a good idea, six were already in receipt of Direct Payments. In response, the Head of Business and Intelligence noted that officers would be working closely with the families in question to better understand any concerns, and undertook to feedback to Committee in due course.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and recommended Cabinet to:

- 1) Introduce Direct Payments for short breaks from April 2017;
- 2) Agree changes to the eligibility criteria, as outlined in section 6.13 of the report;
- 3) Agree to carry out a public consultation in respect of the proposed move of the overnight short break service at Aut Even to Parklands.

799 Council Plan Quarter 3 2016/17 Performance Monitoring Report

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Childrens and Adults introduced the report which provided Committee with a summary of the performance of the Council's key measures of success for 2016/17, as set out in the Council Plan that relate to the remit of this Committee.

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

Family Nurse Partnership – a member requested a report to update the Committee on the provision for families previously supported by the FNP programme that had been transferred to the Health Visiting Service.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

800 Work programme

Decision:

- 1) The Committee agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 of the report subject to adding the following to the June meeting:
 - Re-commissioning of Child Health services;
 - Medway Youth Parliament – outcome of the MYP Annual Conference 2016.
- 2) The Committee agreed that the membership of the task group set up to carry out the next scrutiny review into employment opportunities for 18-21 year olds (including apprenticeships), is set up as follows:
 - That the membership is drawn from members of both this committee and the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a political ratio of 3:2;
 - That the allocation of Members to the task group is made via the Group Whips, Chairmen and Opposition spokespersons of both committees.

Chairman:

Date:

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