

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

Tuesday, 30 May 2017

6.30pm to 9.19pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Cooper, Franklin, Johnson, Joy, Kemp, Opara, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), Wicks (Vice-Chairman) and Williams

Added members without voting rights:

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

Substitutes: Councillors:
Carr (Substitute for Aldous)
Steve Iles (Substitute for Saroy)
Murray (Substitute for Price)
Tranter (Substitute for Fearn)

In Attendance: Joseph Dance, Democratic Services Officer
John Drew, Independent Chair of Medway Safeguarding Children Board
Aelish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
Michael Griffiths, Partnership Commissioning Lead, Children and Families
Mark Holmes, Head of Early Years Service
Helen Jones, Assistant Director – Commissioning, Business and Intelligence
Stephen Platt, Democratic Services Officer
Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services
James Williams, Director of Public Health

13 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aldous, Fearn, Price and Saroy and from Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative).

14 Record of meeting

The record of the meetings held on 9 March 2017 and the meeting of the Joint Meetings of Committees on 17 May 2017 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

15 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

16 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced that a letter of resignation had been received from Lauraine McManus who had served on the Committee for a number of years as a Teacher representative. On behalf of the Committee he thanked her for her contribution to the work of the Committee.

The Chairman said that he would be allowing time for public speaking on item 5, Call-in, Transformation of Early Help Services, with each person who had registered to speak having 5 minutes to address the Committee.

17 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

18 CALL-IN: Transformation of Early Help Services

Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding a call-in received from eight Members of the Council of a Cabinet decision (44/2017) to commence a six-week public consultation on the transformation of Early Help services, including Children's Centres, through the establishment of integrated hub buildings in each of the existing four Children's Services areas to target resources and improve the impact of support for children and families. The Committee was requested to consider the Cabinet decision and decide either to take no further action, refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration, or refer the matter to full Council.

Councillor Murray, the Lead Member for the call-in, explained the reasons for the call-in as outlined in paragraph 2.2 of the report. In particular, she made the following points to the Committee:

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- Concerns that the proposed model for four hubs was shortsighted and would not provide local and accessible services for families as they were currently delivered by Children's Centres, and that the role Children's Centres played in reducing isolation, supporting positive health outcomes, and enhancing school performance would not be replicated by a hub model;
- Concerns that the business case behind the proposals was inadequate and should be reviewed ahead of any proposed consultation;
- Retaining Children's Centres would enable the Council to meet both its Public Health and Council Plan objectives;
- Moving to the hub model would result in the loss of 50 jobs;
- Children's Centres had transformed the lives of families who would otherwise be isolated;
- The Sure Start initiative had helped recruit the Early Years workers of the future;
- Concerns that the proposals placed too much focus on providing outreach services in users' homes, and that this would make detection of safeguarding issues more difficult for staff.

The Director of Children and Adult Services then gave a presentation to the Committee on the proposals for the transformation of Early Help Services. He explained that the Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient access to early childhood services directly, either in the community, at home, in a Children's Centre or through supplying advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on gaining access to other services. He confirmed that current legislation provided flexibility on how Early Help Services could be delivered, but that the Council was required to consult with service users and stakeholders ahead of any major changes to service provision.

The Director explained that changes to central government funding and local budget pressures meant that the network of Children's Centres in its current configuration was unsustainable. The current model included 19 Children's Centres, 18 of which were located in primary schools. Services were jointly agreed and delivered with partner agencies and it was intended that this strategic integrated approach would continue.

He said that the proposed family hub model would provide a greater level of co-ordinated services to support vulnerable families. This would be an area-based service that brought together multi-agency Early Help teams with safeguarding services in partnership with schools and community provision. Each multi-agency team would serve one of four areas in Medway and these areas would reflect local need and demand for services. Early Help outreach and Public Health services would also be delivered from satellite sites, some of which may be existing Children Centre sites. The hub model including satellite sites would allow for more integrated working with families and ensure support could be provided more effectively to families and children across the age range with the greatest need.

The Director advised that 38 consultation events were planned to take place over a six week period with Children Centre staff, service users and other

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stakeholders across a number of venues to obtain feedback on the new proposals.

The Committee then heard representations from a number of speakers.

Dr Eleanor Jupp, Lecturer in Social Policy, University of Kent, said that any suggestion that the Children's Centre model had not proved its worth in delivering multi disciplinary services was inaccurate. Current research suggested that hubs should be used to deliver services alongside Children's Centres and not in place of them. She added that it had been reported that in Oxford, where the hub model had been introduced, Early Help staff were finding it harder to engage with vulnerable families where police and social services colleagues were located in the same setting.

Rachel Rodwell, a Domestic Violence and Vulnerable Families Advocate emphasised the important role Children's Centres played in supporting the developmental, and in particular, the mental health needs of young children. She added that she had observed an unprecedented escalation in children presenting with symptoms of traumatic experiences. Children's Centres provided parenting support and could help combat social isolation by providing parents with an opportunity to develop friendship groups and support networks. She did not consider that providing mental health training for Teachers and Teaching Assistants was the answer. Preventative services were only a pram walk away at Children's Centres where staff could get to know service users and build up trust.

Laura Everhurst, Pastoral Manager at The Pilgrim School, Rochester, read a statement on behalf of Janet Taylor, Headteacher at The Pilgrim School. Ms Taylor stressed the important role Children's Centres performed in serving communities with diverse needs and in helping families feel valued and supported. She feared that the new model would lead to a downward trend in educational standards. Ms Everhurst, in her own capacity, added that she believed the proposed locations of the new hubs would be a barrier to low-income families who could not afford to travel to access services. She also noted that a significant strength of local Children's Centres was that staff were in a position to build trust with local families making it easier to assess needs and effectively signpost services, and that this would be difficult to replicate within a hub model where staff would be expected to work with larger numbers of families over a wider geographical area.

The Committee also heard representations from two service users who shared their personal experiences and emphasised the range of benefits they had gained from using Children's Centre services at a local level and the difficulties they would face if these were no longer available. In particular, they emphasised that Children's Centres provided a convenient, welcoming venue through which to access a number of services, including midwives, health visitors, and counselling services. They also highlighted the role Children's Centres played in providing parents with opportunities to volunteer and gain experience in a children's health and welfare setting which could lead to further study and employment.

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Copies of testimonials submitted by service users were also circulated.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Definition of vulnerable – in response to the point that the new hub model would target services to vulnerable families who needed them most, a Member commented that it was important that ‘vulnerable’ wasn’t defined solely in terms of a family’s financial status.

Health outcomes – Members highlighted the important role that Early Help services played in supporting positive health outcomes around antenatal care, smoking cessation, management of diabetes, and mental health.

Key Stage 2 attainment – a Member noted that there was evidence to suggest that the parenting support and early development services provided at Children’s Centres had a positive impact on children’s academic attainment at KS2.

Satellite sites – in response to a question about the location of the proposed satellite sites and whether these would be subject to Ofsted inspections, the Director for Children and Adult Services noted that a number of sites were being considered and services provided from satellite sites would be subject to inspection. He also emphasised that the satellite sites would be best placed to provide services to those families who might have problems travelling to one of the four hubs.

Accessibility of services – Members stressed the importance of the new hubs being accessible by public transport, and that services should be available outside of school hours so that working parents could access them.

Delivery models – a Member noted that he had contacted other local authorities who had experienced a similar cut in Early Years funding and they had all confirmed they were implementing or looking to implement a hub-based model.

The Committee considered a proposal that Cabinet be asked to review its decision before any consultation took place to allow sufficient time, resources and research for a proper business case to be developed, and for a fourth option, retention of the 19 Children’s Centres to be included.

On being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

Councillors Murray, Cooper and Johnson requested that their votes for the proposal should be recorded in the minutes as provided for in Council Rule 12.6.

Decision:

The Committee accepted the Cabinet decision 44/2017, as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report, and agreed to take no further action.

Councillors Murray, Cooper and Johnson requested that their votes against this proposal should be recorded in the minutes as provided for in Council Rule 12.6.

19 Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) - Update Report

Discussion:

The Independent Chair of the Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) introduced the report, which updated the Committee on the work of the board prior to the presentation of the Annual Report to the Committee later in the year. He drew Members' attention to particular sections in the report such as: delivery of multi-agency training, child sexual exploitation (CSE), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), safeguarding in schools, and the status of current Serious Case Reviews (SCR). Of the three SCR's currently underway, two were due to be completed by October this year while the third, on the Medway Secure Training Centre, would be completed around the end of the year.

The Independent Chair also drew the Committee's attention to the MSCB Strategic Plan 2017-2020 and explained that the MSCB would focus on delivering two key themes over the next 3 years.

The Independent Chair then answered questions from Members, which included:

Operation Willow – in response to a request for information on how many taxi firms were engaged with Operation Willow, the Independent Chair said he would forward the information to Members outside of the meeting.

Medway Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Group – in response to a Member's question about strategies developed by the MASE to tackle sexual exploitation, the Independent Chair explained that a key objective of the MASE was to review processes and activities supporting CSE with a view to improving them. He also noted that the MASE was led by Medway Police which provided a strong link between the work of the MASE and the wider Police Service.

FGM training – in response to a Member's question about training on FGM in schools, the Independent Chair noted that the safeguarding leads within schools had been provided with access to information and training materials, including the materials included at Appendix 2 to the report.

Medway Secure Training Centre (STC) - in response to a Member's question as to whether appropriate safeguards had been put in place at the STC following the initiation of the serious case review, the Independent Chair noted that significant improvements needed to be made, but that the centre had

recently appointed a very experienced director who he hoped would look to improve guidance and training available to staff. He added that the MSCB would carry out an annual review of safeguarding at the centre, which would involve meeting children at the centre and speaking to all agencies involved in providing the service. He noted that a report from Ofsted would be published soon and would provide more information on the improvements needed.

The Director, Children and Adult Services, reported that, as part of the SCR of the centre, policies and protocols had been reviewed in conjunction with two other local authorities, Milton Keynes and Northampton. He also reported that the new Director of the centre was committed to working closely with the Council and Police and that the Council had been congratulated on its review of how it conducted its Designated Officer role.

Effectiveness of Prevent - in response to a Member's question about the effectiveness of Prevent as an anti-radicalisation approach, the Independent Chair explained that it was important that agencies had a way of identifying children most at risk of radicalisation and were in a position to tackle extremism head on, including on social media.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

20 Medway Youth Parliament - Annual Conference Findings

Discussion:

The Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representatives introduced the report which provided the Committee with the findings and outcomes from the MYP Annual Conference held in November 2016, which was entitled, 'Race, Religion and You(th): United in Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination'.

Members then raised the following points and questions, which included:

Experiences of racism – Many Members of the committee had attended the conference and thanked MYP representatives for a very thought-provoking conference and indicated that they were particularly interested to learn about racism experienced by children and young people in Medway. The MYP Chair noted that many personal experiences of racism were shared by attendees and some of these were summarised in the conference report. The Director of Children and Adult Services suggested a follow-up report was required on the ways in which racism could be tackled more actively across Medway.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and thanked the Medway Youth Parliament for their submission.

21 Re-commissioning of Medway Child Health Services - Consultation Feedback

Discussion:

The Chairman welcomed the Director of Public Health to his first meeting of the Committee. The Director introduced the report which provided members with an update on the progress that had been made to re-commission Medway's paediatric health services, which included the 0-19 Healthy Child Programme (HCP) and NHS Medway commissioned community paediatric health services.

It also set out some of the key issues that had emerged from the stakeholder engagement exercises and possible themes that would be prioritised throughout the competitive dialogue phase of the procurement.

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

Children affected by parental substance misuse – in response to a Member's question about how the needs of children affected by substance misuse were being considered as part of the re-commissioning process, the Head of Public Health Programmes explained that the new service specification would require the service to actively work with both adult and children's social care in order to support the needs of the client and their families.

Independent foster care agencies – in response to a Member's question as to whether independent foster care agencies had been engaged as part of the consultation process, the Commissioning Programme Lead for Children and Families said that he would provide a written response.

Decision:

The Committee noted the approach taken to consult the public and practitioners as set out in section 3 of the report, as well as some of the emerging themes of services improvement and how they will inform future service modelling. The Committee also noted the initial views of parents, young people and practitioners as to the type of children's health services they wish to see provided in Medway as set out in section 4 of the report.

22 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 August meeting:
 - Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments Annual Report
 - Transformation of Early Help Services – Outcome of Consultation
- 2) The Committee agreed the recommendation to appoint Fay Cordingley to the Teacher position on the Committee.
- 3) The Committee noted the process for selection of topics for the next round of Scrutiny Task Groups in 2018/19 and the invitation to all Members of the

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Committee to submit ideas based on the criteria set out in paragraph 7.2 of the report to the Democratic Services Officer ahead of the next agenda planning meeting for this Committee.

Chairman

Date:

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