

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

Tuesday, 1 August 2017

6.30pm to 8.37pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Aldous, Cooper, Fearn, Franklin, Johnson, Joy, Opara, Price, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), 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), Fay Cordingley (Teacher Representative), MYP Chairman (Medway Youth Parliament Chairman) and MYP Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Parliament)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Hicks (Substitute for Kemp)
Steve Iles (Substitute for Saroy)

In Attendance: Jackie Brown, Head of Business and Intelligence
Joseph Dance, Democratic Services Officer
Ann Domeney, Interim Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services
Perry Holmes, Chief Legal Officer/Monitoring Officer
Helen Jones, Assistant Director – Commissioning, Business and Intelligence
Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services
Sandy Weaver, Complaints Manager for Social Care

190 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kemp and Saroy, and Paddy Powell and Dan Hill (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representatives).

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191 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 30 May 2017 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

192 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairman confirmed that he had accepted one report as urgent. Item 5 (Transformation of Early Help Services – Outcome of Consultation) was circulated separately to the agenda and was accepted as urgent to enable the Committee's comments to be submitted to the Cabinet before it makes any decisions on the future of Early Years provision on 8 August 2017.

193 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced that letters of resignation had been received from Alex Tear (Church of England representative) and Luke Morgan (Medway Youth Parliament representative). On behalf of the Committee he thanked Alex and Luke for their contribution to the work of the Committee. The Chairman noted that work was underway to find a replacement for Alex, and an update on this was included under Item 9 (Work Programme).

The Chairman also welcomed Keith Clear and other representatives from the Medway Parents and Carers Forum to the meeting. That chairman noted that a proposal had been put forward under Item 9 (Work Programme) to add representatives from the MCPF to the membership of the Committee subject to agreement at full Council.

194 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

195 Transformation of Early Help Services - Outcome of the Consultation

Discussion:

Members considered a report on the results of a public consultation carried out between 31 May and 12 July 2017 on the transformation of the Council's early help services. The consultation had sought views on the proposal to transform early help services for families of children and young people aged 0 to 19 years by providing a broader range of services through Children and Family Hubs (designated Children's Centres) and satellites, rather than the 0-5 year age range separately.

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The Director of Children and Adult Services praised the respondents to the consultation for the quality of their contributions and assured them that their feedback would inform the business case that would underpin the new service. A recommended way forward and the business case would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 8 August 2017 together with the views of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Director advised that, whilst comments from staff had been received in response to this consultation, a separate formal consultation had been conducted with staff that would be affected by the proposals.

The Assistant Director, Commissioning, Business and Intelligence, outlined the consultation process and identified the outcomes, as detailed in Appendix A to the report. Approximately a fifth of families who attended a Children's Centre during the consultation period responded to the consultation. Of these, 85% had disagreed with the proposed four hub model although many had appeared not to have understood that the proposal included the establishment of a number of additional satellite sites, believing that the existing 19 Children's Centres would reduce to just four. The majority cited the excellence of existing services and would wish them to remain the same. There was recognition of the need for budget reductions, but a strong message was given that these should be sought from elsewhere.

It was noted that a petition containing 1,274 signatures had been presented at the Full Council meeting on 20 July 2017 calling on 'Medway Council to stop the closure of 19 Sure Start Centres'. A response from the Director of Children and Adult Services had been sent to the lead petitioner who had subsequently asked that the petition be referred to this Committee for further review as she was not satisfied with the Director's response.

The lead petitioner, Katie Clifford, provided a written statement and addressed the Committee. She said that parents did not accept any alteration to the current model and were concerned that the proposed model would not enable the Council to fulfil its duty to secure sufficient Children's Centres accessible to all families with young children. One of the core principles of the Sure Start provision was school readiness such as basic academic knowledge and the social skills required by children to enable them to function in the classroom. Prior to Sure Start, many children who had joined school at age four were already two years behind in their development. Current demands on children were much greater and schools would not have the resources to pick up the slack if the current model was not maintained. Ms Clifford expressed concern that, through the proposed model, the Council would be experimenting with children's futures and she questioned whether this was a viable risk to take.

Ms Clifford also referred to improved child health and development and the development of parental aspirations and skills as core purposes of the Sure Start provision and gave examples of how the services and support available at Children's Centres fulfilled these needs by helping to ease social isolation and by identifying issues at an early stage. In addition, she highlighted the potential

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longer term negative impact of the proposals if they led to poorer life chances and education.

Ms Clifford concluded that, in her view, the consultation exercise had been flawed as the questionnaire had been challenging to complete and meetings had not always been held at convenient times. There was a lack of clarity about what the satellites would provide and when they would be available. The users of Children's Centres had therefore found it difficult to comment on proposals that were not fully explained. Ms Clifford requested that the consultation exercise be extended and that more research and analysis be conducted.

The Committee then heard from Lia Mandaracas, a parent and Children's Centre user. She questioned the validity of the consultation exercise and expressed the view that it had not engaged all relevant groups. She highlighted the Council's duties under the Childcare Act including the requirement to provide sufficient Children's Centres to meet the needs of the community. Ms Mandaracas questioned the ability of the hub model to fully address safeguarding concerns and also the capacity of social workers to maintain an increased caseload should the proposals lead to this outcome.

Finally, the Committee heard from Joanne Murray, co-ordinator of the Save Our Sure Start Children's Centres in Medway campaign. She circulated her statement in full together with a document detailing testimonials gathered from Sure Start users and said that these gave valid reasons of how the current model met the varied needs of users while the proposed hub model would not. Ms Murray also expressed concerns about the consultation document which she believed had not allowed respondents to answer in their own words. The views of health partners and of the Council's Public Health directorate had not been clarified and it was not clear whether transport providers such as Arriva buses had been consulted. Ms Murray expressed concern that Councillors had not had sufficient time to view the notes from the public consultation meetings and had not been sent the notes from the consultation meetings at Children's Centres. In addition they had not received feedback from the staff consultations. Ms Murray also said that the formal process for answering public questions at full Council had not been followed correctly by the Council. She advised the Committee that discussions with Children's Centre users had highlighted that there had been an insufficient explanation of what services would be provided at satellites.

Ms Murray gave the example of other Councils which had moved to the hub model and said that no evidence was available on the effectiveness of this model. Although there had been no Ofsted inspections, there had been failed inspections on the provision for Looked After Children. As Medway Sure Starts were performing at above the national average, there was an opportunity for them to attain "Beacon Status" and charge other authorities to shadow and learn from Medway's model.

Ms Murray concluded that she had only found evidence that the status quo should be maintained as the current model was effective and benefitted the people of Medway. She expressed concern that the Council was making a

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decision based on no evidence and requested that her campaign be given time to conduct its own consultation.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Maintaining the status quo – Some Members considered that the current model, developed over a number of years to meet the needs of Medway, should be retained. Local Children’s Centres were accessible for all users, including those with prams and buggies. This option would be consistent with the Council’s preventative health care agenda. It was questioned whether the risks of lower achievement at Key Stage 2 in future years had been assessed should the proposed hub model be adopted.

The Milton Keynes model – Members cited the example of Milton Keynes as an authority with many similarities to Medway which had achieved a reduction in expenditure of £1m while keeping all of its 17 Sure Start Centres open.

Consultation Exercise – Some Members requested that the consultation period be extended as it was considered that six weeks had been insufficient. The proposals set out in the consultation had not been sufficiently clear or specific to enable respondents to fully understand them. It was unclear whether advice had been sought from the Director of Public Health. The Director of Children and Adults Services confirmed that health colleagues had been fully engaged in the consultation process. It was suggested that more time was needed to fully assess the short and longer term risks associated with moving away from provision of a universal Children’s Centre service.

Access to Information – A Member expressed concern that he had not been given sufficient time to adequately review the consultation responses. Another Member questioned the Committee’s ability to scrutinise the proposals when the full details of the proposed future model of service delivery had not been provided. It was not clear where the hubs would be located and the provision of satellites had not initially been included in the proposals which had led to a lack of clarity about their intended function. The Director of Children and Adults Services advised Members that the satellites had been referred to in the last report to the Committee on 30 May 2017. Officers had been minded not to provide a level of detail on locations as this might have given the impression that these had been predetermined. The Council had been keen to hear from service users about what services they would wish to see provided at the satellites.

Other Members expressed the view that Cabinet should now consider all available information and consultation outcomes and reach a decision.

Location of Hubs – A Member stressed the need for there to be adequate provision in rural areas and another Member requested that one of the hubs be located on the Hoo peninsula.

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Charge for services – It was noted that some respondents had felt that a small voluntary donation or charge would be appropriate. Members were advised that funding options would be considered as part of the business case.

The Committee considered a proposal that the consultation be extended. On being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

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

Decision:

The Committee noted the outcome of the consultation and agreed that the key points made during the discussion be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

196 Complaints and Compliments Annual Report - April 2016 to March 2017

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) introduced the report which provided the Committee with information on children's social care complaints handled and compliments received during 2016-17.

The Social Care Complaints Manager then provided a broad overview of the data including the number of complaints, the types of complaint and outcomes. She noted that the complaints team had worked hard to clear a backlog of 24 complaints carried over from 2015-16, and that there had been an improvement in processing complaints in 2016-17 with only eight complaints having not received a response by year end (31 March 2017). Overall, 66% of complaints received in 2016-17 were answered within 20 days, compared with 50% in 2015-16.

- **Support for Looked After Children** – in response to a Member's question about a case in which a Looked After Child had complained about her social worker failing to support her application to the school of her choice, the Director of Children and Adult Services agreed that the issue should be reviewed.
- **Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institute** – in response to a Member request for an update on complaints received from young people at Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institute, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) confirmed that very few complaints had been received from Cookham Wood and agreed that a briefing on the issue, including an update on the Looked After Children Protocol, should be added to the Committee's work programme.
- **Foster Home accommodation checks** – in response to a Member's question regarding checks on Foster Home accommodation, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) confirmed that all Foster

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Home accommodation provision was checked regularly and had to meet very high standards.

- **Council Tax exemptions for Care Leavers** – in response to a Member's question about a case in which a care leaver had complained that Medway Council had deducted Council Tax from her Higher Education allowance, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) noted that a small number of care leavers living in their own properties were eligible for Council Tax.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

197 Medway Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan 2017-2020

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) introduced the report which provided the Committee with information on the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan 2017-2020 which had been co-produced with Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJPB) members and influenced by national best practice and research.

She noted that the Youth Offending Team (YOT) Management Board had been developed into a Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJPB) in June 2017. The new YJPB had a wider membership of senior representatives from key partner agencies which would ensure that young people involved in the youth justice system had appropriate access to services delivered by partners and key agencies. She noted that the YJPB would retain a focus on reducing offending and re-offending and maintain a strategic oversight of the delivery of the local youth justice system.

She added that the new three-year strategic plan would be reviewed on an annual basis and was aligned with four strategic priorities (prevent youth crime, reduce re-offending, safeguard young people from harm, protect the public from harm) to ensure the effective delivery of youth justice outcomes.

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

Looked After Children Protocol - in response to a Member's request for an update on the implementation of the Looked After Children Protocol, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) agreed to circulate an update to Committee Members outside of the meeting.

Power of Reading Programme – in response to a Member's question about the design, delivery and effectiveness of the Power of Reading Programme, the Director of Children and Adult Services noted that this programme was commissioned by the School Challenge and Improvement Team and agreed to

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circulate a briefing to Committee Members on the programme outside of the meeting.

Gang Culture – in response to a Member’s question about work currently being undertaken to address gang culture and violence, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) responded that available evidence showed limited gang activity in Medway, but that the Head of Early Years and Youth Services was working closely with the Police and other key partners to better understand the issue and develop an effective multi-agency response.

Looked After Children receiving custodial sentences – in response to a Member’s question about the high level of custodial sentences awarded to Medway Looked After Children, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services (interim) responded that Medway courts made very limited use of custodial sentences, and that the high rate was likely due to Looked After Children receiving custodial sentences from courts outside of Medway.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the report on the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan 2017-2020 to Cabinet as set out in Appendix A.

198 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report - End of Year: Quarter 4 (2016/17)

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Children and Adults (Interim) introduced the report which summarised the performance of the directorate in Quarter 4/end of year 2016-17 for the two Council Priorities, ‘Supporting Medway’s people to realise their potential’ and ‘Maximising regeneration and economic growth’ which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

- **Exclusions** – a Member requested that future reports included a more comprehensive breakdown of exclusion statistics across maintained schools and academies, and asked what the council was doing to reduce exclusion rates. The Director for Children and Adult Services responded that the majority of exclusions occurred within academies and that the council would continue to work closely with the Regional Schools Commissioner with the aim of reducing the number of exclusions across the borough. He also noted that the council had bid for funding from the Schools Improvement Fund to undertake some targeted work on reducing exclusions in schools and academies.
- **Key Stage 2 attainment** – in response to a Member’s question about the use of the Power of Reading Programme to improve literacy rates at Key Stage 2, the Director of Children and Adult Services responded that significant improvements had been made across Key Stage 2 in all

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subject areas, not just literacy, and that he would ensure a briefing on the Power of Reading Programme was circulated to Members outside of the meeting.

- **Persistent absence** – in response to a Member's question about action to tackle persistent absence in schools and academies, the Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services responded that the Head of Early Help and Youth Services would provide Members with an update outside of the meeting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

199 Work Programme

Decisions:

- 1) The Committee agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 of the report subject to adding the following items:

5 October 2017

- Tackling Racism in Medway
- Maternity Services Transformation
- Immunisation Services Update

5 December 2017

- Overnight Short Breaks
- Annual Fostering Report 2016/17
- Report on attainment at Key Stage 2

11 January 2018

- Annual Adoption Report 2016/17

8 March 2018

- Annual Report on School Performance 2017

Date: TBC

- Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institute – update report
- Young Asylum Seekers in Medway

- 2) The Committee agreed the request from Medway Parents and Carers Forum for a non-voting place on the Committee, and recommended full Council to increase the size of the Committee and appoint a representative of the Forum and a named substitute.
- 3) The Committee noted the Task Group topic suggestion at Appendix 2 to the report and supported this topic going forward for further discussion at the

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meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons in October 2017.

Chairman

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