

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

Thursday, 31 August 2017

6.30pm to 9.40pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative)

Added members without voting rights:

MYP Chairman (Medway Youth Parliament Chairman) and MYP Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Parliament)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Hicks (Substitute for Williams)
Tejan (Substitute for Fearn)

In Attendance: Joseph Dance, Democratic Services Officer
James Harman, Senior Public Health Manager
Mark Holmes, Head of Early Years Service
Perry Holmes, Chief Legal Officer/Monitoring Officer
Linda Jackson, Interim Assistant Director, Adult Social Care
Helen Jones, Assistant Director – Commissioning, Business and Intelligence
Jon Pitt, Democratic Services Officer
Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services

278 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn and Williams and Tina Lovey (Headteacher Representative).

279 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 1 August 2017 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

280 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairman confirmed that he had accepted one report as urgent. Item 6 'Aut Even Ofsted Inspection' was circulated separately to the agenda and was accepted as urgent to enable the Committee to consider a report of an unannounced Ofsted Inspection of Aut Even at the end of July and the associated action plan to address the Ofsted findings.

281 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

282 Call-in: Transformation of Early Help Services - Outcome of the Consultation and Business Case

Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding two call-ins received from six and eight Members of the Council respectively of Cabinet decisions 79 and 80/2017 to:

- Approve the option to establish four integrated Family and Children Hubs (Designated Children's Centres) and nine Children and Family Wellbeing Centres as set out in the Business Case (Appendix 1 to the report); and,
- Delegate authority to the Director of Children and Adults Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member), to decide the final location of the Children and Family Hubs and Children and Family Wellbeing Centres within the agreed capital budget.

The Committee was requested to consider the Cabinet decisions and decide either to take no further action, refer the decisions back to Cabinet for reconsideration, or refer the matter to full Council.

Councillor Kemp, the Lead Member for the Conservative Group call-in, explained the reasons for the call-in as outlined in paragraph 2.2 of the report. Councillor Price, the Lead Member for the Labour Group call-in, then explained the reason for the call-in as outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

The Chair then invited the Director of Children and Adult Services to respond to the points raised by Members. The Director explained that an express aim of the consultation which ran from 31 May to 12 July 2017 was to seek views on alternative options for service delivery and, as a consequence of the quality and volume of responses during the consultation period, a number of additional

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options, listed as options D to G, were included in the final business case and report which was considered by Cabinet on 8 August 2017.

The Director noted that the preferred option recommended by officers to Cabinet was Option G, the details of which were set out in section 3.7 of the business case. In summary, Option G would see the Council moving from 19 to 13 Centres broken down as 4 Children and Family Hubs and 9 Children and Family Wellbeing Centres, in addition to a wide range of outreach support. Children's Centre permanent provision would be withdrawn from the current 19 sites and staff located in the four Hubs, which would be designated as Children's Centres and would additionally host and provide a range of staff and services for families with children of all ages. Each Hub would serve a wider area and operate as a base for satellite and outreach work, taking services to where families lived and to accessible locations.

The Director of Children and Adult Services and the Assistant Director for Commissioning, Business and Intelligence then gave a presentation to the Committee on the outcomes of the consultation, the rationale for the proposed locations of the Children and Family Hubs, Wellbeing Centres and outreach services, and the range of services to be provided under the proposed model.

The Director advised that overall expenditure on Early Years provision would be £16.7 million in 2017-18. Only £2 million of this funding would be available to the Council to spend on other Early Years provision including children's centres after the mandatory payments to nursery settings had been made. Funding for private nursery settings would increase to £17.2 million in 2018-19 with the full introduction of the Government's '30 hour' childcare policy which would provide families working more than 16 hours per week with 5 days of childcare provision. The Director noted that, at the time of writing the business case, all independent providers eligible to receive funding in Medway to provide an extended childcare service had an Ofsted rating of either 'good' or 'outstanding'.

The Assistant Director then provided an overview of the outcomes from the public consultation. She highlighted that 42 engagement events with service users, staff and partners had been held during the consultation period, in addition to the distribution of questionnaires, plus adverts and notices in the local press and on social media. She noted that the public consultation had received 866 responses, the majority of which had come from service users (673) based in Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. She noted that 78% of service users during the consultation did not respond and therefore it was not known whether they supported the proposal or not. Of those who did respond, 85% disagreed with the proposal. The Assistant Director said that it was important that this feedback was seen in the context that many respondents misunderstood the model, thinking all 19 Children's Centres were to be closed and replaced by four Hubs only. She then highlighted a number of key themes from the consultation feedback, including concerns about the impact of the new model on maternal mental health and social isolation, the cost of travelling to the new Hubs and Wellbeing Centres, as well as access to services more generally.

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The Assistant Director reported that the selection of locations for Hubs and Wellbeing Centres had been determined through a mix of criteria including accessibility and catchment area, usage statistics, quality of accommodation and facilities, and community support and any other relevant local factors. She noted that the proposed final locations had been selected to provide a Hub in each Children's Services area with a geographical spread of Wellbeing Centres in premises suitable for continued delivery of early childhood services. In addition, 20-30 sites were proposed as outreach locations from which services would be provided. The Assistant Director confirmed that for each of the six former Children's Centres not designated as a Hub or Wellbeing Centre, the Council would be in discussion with partners in schools, health, and the voluntary and community sector to ensure that the Centres would still be used appropriately, which might include use of the Centres for some Early Years outreach services.

The Director of Children and Adult Services then provided an overview of the services which would be provided in the Hubs. He confirmed that Early Years and Youth Team staff would be based in the Hubs with complimentary services provided by these teams in Wellbeing Centres. Visiting partnership staff would attend Hubs as required and occasionally use hot desks, but would not be based at the Hubs. In addition to the services currently available at Children's Centres, the Hubs would provide additional 5 years plus services, including access to Family and Youth Workers, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Specialists, Parenting Support Officers and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Officers. The Director said that as part of the transformation, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) would also be co-located or available from Hubs. Voluntary and Community Sector partners would also be commissioned to develop sustainable peer support networks to provide additional support to families using the Hubs and Wellbeing Centres.

In conclusion, the Director confirmed that the revised proposal as set out in Option G would deliver a broader range of local services to families and children in Medway within a reduced Early Years budget available.

The Committee then heard representations from a number of speakers as summarised below.

Councillor Murray, speaking in her capacity as Ward Member for Rochester East, suggested that the proposals should be put on hold until impact assessments had been carried out on the Children's Centres earmarked for closure and officers had had sufficient time to develop a robust implementation plan setting out a fuller timeline for the transformation process. Councillor Murray voiced her concerns about the impact the new model was likely to have on families in the Borstal area of Rochester, many of whom were on low incomes and would find the cost of travel to their nearest Hub prohibitive once St Margaret's Children's Centre had closed. She noted that the new model would depend on support from schools and private nursery settings, but that neither currently had the resources or expertise to provide the types of services currently available at Children's Centres. Councillor Murray also expressed the

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view that there was an inherent contradiction between the proposed reduction in service provision for children and families and the Council's policy of significantly increasing the number of new homes in Rochester and across Medway.

Lia Mandaracas, a service user, said she was concerned about references in the report to untrained volunteers delivering services in the new model, noting that Children's Centre staff were trained professionals, often with degree-level qualifications who had significant experience of identifying a host of client concerns ranging from domestic violence and child abuse to post-natal depression. She questioned the effectiveness of the Hub model, citing Nottingham, Wakefield, Dudley, and Kirklees as examples of local authorities who had implemented a similar model and had gone on to fail their most recent Looked After Children (LAC) inspections. Additionally, she argued that sufficient work had not been carried out to understand how alternative funding systems could be developed to fund the network of Children's Centres in the current configuration.

Alexandra Chatfield, a service user from Rainham and a Breast Feeding Network Volunteer, suggested that Miers Court was a popular Children's Centre with families in Rainham, but had lost a number of its services when it was clustered with Deanwood and Riverside Children's Centres at the beginning of 2016. She argued that Miers Court had good facilities and should be retained as a Children's Centre to meet the needs of Rainham families who were unlikely to be able to afford to travel to Children's Centres further afield.

Georgina Aplin, a service user and previously the Chair of the Medway Maternity Committee, stated that Children's Centres played a critical role in supporting the socialisation of children and promoting healthy attachment which could help to reduce mental health problems in adolescence and in later life. She said that Children's Centres delivered a personal, not a transactional service to families and that this would be hard to replicate under the new model. She also said she felt the public consultation had been a tick-box exercise and the business case was insufficient for such a large-scale change to service delivery and suggested that the process be reviewed by a cross-party and people working group.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Kingfisher Children's Centre – in response to a Member's concerns about the closure of Kingfisher Children's Centre, the Assistant Director responded that 61.5% of Kingfishers' service cohort already attended other Children's Centres to access services, but that officers would be looking at what outreach services could be delivered in the local area.

Re-location of Youth Offending Team – in response to Members' questions about whether the cost of relocating the Youth Offending Team from Strood Youth Centre had been factored into the cost analysis for Option G, the Assistant Director responded that this information would be provided to Members outside of the meeting.

Armed Forces Covenant – in response to a Member’s question about whether military personnel would still be able to access services following the closure of Brompton Children’s Centre, the Director noted that the Armed Forces Covenant required the Council to ensure ‘fair access’ to services and that military personnel and their families would still be able to access services from nearby Centres.

Staff redundancies – in response to Members’ questions about the number of staff redundancies proposed under Option G, the Head of Early Years Services noted that the number of potential redundancies had been higher at the beginning of the process, but had been reduced as the new model was developed and opportunities for redeployment had been identified.

Walking distance – in response to a Member question about the methodology used to calculate walking distance, the Assistant Director stated that an answer would be provided outside of the meeting.

Sustainability of new model – in response to a Member question about the sustainability of the proposed model, the Assistant Director reported that the upfront costs to deliver the new model would not be repeated in future years and that officers would be looking into potential revenue generation options.

Service provision in Hoo – in response to a Member’s point that a hub should be located at Hoo to meet significant service demand, the Assistant Director responded that officers were looking to ensure sufficient outreach services were made available in Hoo to meet the needs of families.

Timeline for partner negotiations – in response to a Member’s question regarding proposed timelines for negotiations with partners, the Assistant Director confirmed that an Implementation Plan was being developed which would provide further logistical detail on negotiations and other aspects of the transformation process.

Burnt Oak Children’s Centre – in response to a Member’s concerns regarding the proposed closure of the Children’s Centre at Burnt Oak, the Assistant Director noted that it would be difficult to provide key health services from the Centre because it lacked the appropriate facilities such as a health examination room.

Detail of proposed provision – in response to a suggestion that implementation of any change should be delayed because there was insufficient detail about the final locations and level of service provision to be made at hubs, satellites and outreach centres the Director clarified that the date for implementation was 1 January 2018 and that whilst there would be more work during the intervening period to work up the detail of provision at each location the key elements had been highlighted in the officer presentation.

Diversity Impact Assessment – in response to a Member’s question as to whether Diversity Impact Assessments (DIA) had been carried out on each of the six centres earmarked for closure, the Assistant Director confirmed that

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DIA's had been completed and would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting.

The Committee considered a proposal that the decision be referred to full Council. On being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

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

The Committee then considered a proposal that the decision be referred to Cabinet. On being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

Councillors Price, 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 Cabinet decisions 79 and 80/2017, as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report, and agreed to take no further action.

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

283 Aut Even Ofsted Inspection

Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adult Services introduced the report which provided Members with an overview of the inspection findings from the unannounced inspection of Aut Even – Short Breaks Service which was carried out on 25 and 26 July 2017. The Director noted that Ofsted had given the service a rating of 'inadequate' and that the Council had been given until 25 September 2017 to respond to and take action in accordance with compliance notice and inspection judgements set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Director noted that an Interim Registered Manager had been appointed and an action plan included at Appendix 2 to the report was being implemented to ensure service improvements. As part of the improvement plan for the service he confirmed that Medway HR had undertaken an audit of vetting procedures at Aut Even, and across other areas in Children's Services, to ensure appropriate safeguarding and recruitment arrangements were in place. This had confirmed full compliance in settings other than Aut Even.

Members then raised the following comments and questions:

Previous Ofsted judgements – in response to a Member's question as to how it was the case that Aut Even had received a rating of 'good' only a few months

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previously, but had now received a rating of 'inadequate', the Director confirmed that the recent rating was adversely affected by the failure to address a concern regarding the reporting of a particular safeguarding incident.

Ongoing improvement – in response to a Member's question as to whether the senior management team were aware of service issues ahead of the Ofsted inspection, the Interim Assistant Director for Social Care noted that issues within the leadership team at Aut Even had been raised previously and as a result a service manager had been suspended and recruitment processes reviewed. The Interim Registered Manager had been appointed prior to the Ofsted inspection.

Pressure on existing service – in response to a Member's question about existing service pressures, the Interim Service Manager noted that a number of staff had been removed from Aut Even due to vetting and referencing concerns, and that this had put pressure on the remaining staff; however, he was confident that the existing staff could continue to effectively meet the needs of young people accessing the service.

Future of the service – in response to a Member's question about the future of the service, the Director noted that Parklands was being looked at as a potential alternative location for the service. He also confirmed that responsibility for Aut Even would be moving from Adult Service to Children Services, and would be overseen by the Head of Provider Services.

Decision:

The Committee noted the work to date on the service improvements and noted that an update report would be provided to the Committee in October 2017.

Chairman

Date:

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