

Medway Council
CHILDREN AND ADULTS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

11 February 2010
6:30 pm to 8:45 pm

RECORD OF THE MEETING

PRESENT:

- Committee members:** Councillors Andrews, Avey, Baker, Kenneth Bamber, Brake (Chairman), Carr, Val Goulden, Gulvin, Kemp, Maisey, Smith and Sutton
- Co-opted members:** Jim Grogan - Roman Catholic Church representative
- Additional members:** Jane Heyes - Headteacher representative
Richard Odle - Medway Youth Parliament
Clare Murray - LINK representative
Pat Wozencroft - Governor representative
- Substitute members:** Councillor Shaw (for Councillor Maple)
- In attendance:** Rose Collinson - Director of Children and Adults
Bryan Frost - Medway Governors' Association
Helen Gulvin - Assistant Director, Children's Care
Teri Hemmings - Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Peter Martin - Medway Governors' Association
Chris McKenzie - Head of School Organisation and Student Services
Jenny Robinson - Legal Advisor
Matt Stutely - Medway Governors' Association
Councillor Wildey - Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care
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597 RECORD OF THE MEETING

The record of the meeting held on 19 January 2010 was signed by the Chairman as correct.

598 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clarke, Esterson and Maple, Canon John Smith (Church of England representative) and Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative).

599 WORK PROGRAMME

Discussion:

The Committee considered the work programme and suggested that a session on the Common Assessment Framework be held for Members of the Committee and details on recent data of teenage conception rates be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman also expressed his thanks to the Headteacher of Chatham Grammar School for Boys for hosting a visit by some of the Committee Members regarding education at 14-19, with particular focus on the diploma programmes which had been interesting and informative.

Decision:

The Committee:

- (a) noted that reports on LAA performance monitoring and quarter three Council Plan Monitoring would be brought to the March meeting of the Committee;
- (b) agreed to hold a 45 minute interactive session on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) before the start of a future meeting;
- (c) noted that detail on recent teenage conception data would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

600 MEMBER ITEM - SCHOOL GOVERNORS AND SCHOOL BUDGETS

Discussion:

Councillor Smith explained that she had requested the Medway Governors' Association (MGA) to explain the implications for all pupils of Council decisions and school deficit budgets.

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Representatives from the MGA updated Members on a meeting of the Schools' Forum, which had taken place earlier that day. The Schools Forum had taken decisions on whether the Council could or could not increase its central expenditure limit. The Schools Forum had agreed to fund some of the budget pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), but not all. They also raised concern that the problem in Medway of too many surplus places had not been fully addressed, which would add pressure to schools and could cause problems, particularly with regard to school budgets.

Members then asked a number of questions relating to schools with deficit budgets, how they were supported and where responsibility lay if a school closed with a deficit. In response the Director of Children and Adults confirmed that in this instance the responsibility did fall to the local authority. She also explained that schools that were due to close were often having to do so due to a fall in roll numbers which was problematic for schools as their funding was dependent on the number of pupils. Despite surplus places, schools still had to provide heating and lighting and deliver a minimum standard curriculum for students, but with less funding, so this often caused schools to end up in a deficit situation. When a school had a deficit budget, the Council provided support and challenge to that school. The Director also informed the Committee that Medway, compared to its statistical neighbours, funded schools with a higher percentage of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

It was then suggested that this item be deferred, in order for the Committee to be fully informed of the decisions made at the Schools' Forum meeting.

Decision:

The Committee:

- (a) requested that the report and decisions of the Schools' Forum meeting on 11 February 2010 be circulated to the Committee;
- (b) requested that a broader report on the issues be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

601 PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S CARE IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Wildey, Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care addressed the Committee outlining the main achievements within areas of his portfolio:

- Increased capacity within the Children's Social Care team to manage increased referrals following the tragic death of baby Peter and recommendations from Lord Laming's report;
- The Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) which had recently completed its first Serious Case Review;
- Increases in the number of looked after children which was due to the increase in referrals and the change in legislation which meant that any person under the age of 18 who was homeless should become a looked after child;
- The Old Vicarage and its renovations to accommodate an extra two beds.

Members then asked the Portfolio Holder a number of questions which included:

- Developments and improvements to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service;
- The Foster Plus programme;
- The role of Family Liaison Officers within schools;
- Common Assessment Frameworks – their success but concern was raised on the time burden they had on staff;
- Numbers of Health Visitors within Medway and information on their home visits;
- The work of the outreach teams.

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The Committee paid tribute to the staff within the Children's Social Care team and welcomed the suggestion that Members visit a school to learn more about the role and work of Family Liaison Officers.

602 2011 SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

Discussion:

The Head of School Organisation and Student Services updated Members on additional responses, which had been received since the report had been published. In relation to the Primary School arrangements an additional response had been received, supporting the proposals and suggesting that each school have a nominated member of the admissions team as a point of contact through the process, which he was happy to include. In relation to secondary school arrangements an additional response had been received which requested that the sharing of pupil lists be brought forward. The officer explained that this could be difficult in practical terms but was committed to providing the information to schools as soon as possible, even if before the deadline. In relation to in-year admission arrangements, two additional responses had been received which requested further information on what happens if there is no agreement between a school and a parent and suggested the use of electronic forms, which the officer was happy to consider.

Officers then answered questions from the Committee, which included:

- Processes for schools to receive application requests when they are full;
- Timescales for considering admission applications;
- How multiple birth children are prioritised for admission.

In response the officer stated that the idea of applying the criteria in relation to multiple birth children above other criteria only when those children are at risk of being separated was a sensible suggestion and he would investigate this as an alternative to report to Cabinet.

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Decision:

The Committee recommended the proposed arrangements to Cabinet, as outlined in the report but with consideration of applying the criteria relating to multiple birth children above other criteria only when the children were at risk of being separated.

Chairman

Date

Teri Hemmings

Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

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