

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

Thursday, 4 October 2018

6.30pm to 9.28pm

Record of the meeting

Present: Councillors: Aldous, Cooper, Franklin, Gilry, Hall, Johnson, Joy, Kemp, Opara, Paterson, Purdy and Royle (Chairman)

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

Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

MYC Chairman (Medway Youth Council), MYC Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Council), Fay Cordingley (Teacher Representative) and David Laming (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative) and Alexander Orlov-Holmes (Medway Youth Council).

Substitutes: Councillor Bhutia (for Councillor Saroy)
Michelle Dewar (for Keith Clear – Medway Parent and Carers Forum)

In Attendance: Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services
Ann Domeney, Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services
John Drew, Independent Chair of Medway Safeguarding Children Board
Caroline Friday, Senior Commissioning Officer Children in Care
Sameera Khan, Assistant Head of Legal Services
Daniel Ratcliff, Skills and Employment Programme Manager
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
David Watkins, Head of Education
Andrew Willetts, Head of Service – Early Help and Targeted Services

391 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absences were received from Councillors Fearn, Saroy and Wicks, Keith Clear (Medway Parent and Carer Forum), David Lane (Parent Governor representative) and Clive Mailing (church representative)

392 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 31 July was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

393 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

394 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

A short reference was made to Home-Start Medway during the discussion of item 9 (Early Help and Targeted Services). Councillor Johnson and Councillor Purdy declared they were Trustees of Home-Start Medway when this reference was raised but it was then not discussed any further and they therefore were not required to leave the room.

Other interests

There were none.

395 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report advising of a petition received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee and had been referred to this Committee by the lead petitioner as she had been dissatisfied with the response received from the Director.

The Committee welcomed Mrs Hoskins to the meeting and invited her to address the Committee on the concerns of the petitioners.

Mrs Hoskins, who spoke on behalf of the lead petitioner, outlined the basis of the petition which requested the Council to build the secondary education building for Abbey Court (a special school for children with the most complex Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – SEND) on the Cliffe Road, Strood site. She explained how concerned the parents of children at Abbey Court School were about the limited secondary school provision given that the pupils were children with the most severe and profound disabilities and learning difficulties. She described the difficulties the children and their families experienced every day and explained how Abbey Court School provided an

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invaluable safe place for the children to benefit from social inclusion and schooling therapies, which was close to home and highly commended the provision at the new primary site of the school. She added that the petitioners would like clarity on what the findings of the ongoing SEN review had been to date and when the completion of the review was likely to be.

The Director of Children and Adult Services responded, confirming that the Council shared the aspirations of the petitioners with regard to fewer children with SEND being educated out of Medway. He advised the Committee that new funding had been made available through the Department for Education (DfE) and the Council was now actively working on a bid for the funding to build a free school and added that the SEND review was an essential part of the submission. He added that he was meeting with the Headteacher of Abbey Court School the following week to strengthen communication lines with the school moving forward.

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

- **Bid for free school funding** – Members were very supportive of the bid for funding and welcomed the opportunity to secure the capital to fund secondary school provision for children with the most severe and profound medical and learning needs. It was confirmed that officers were working actively on the bid, which had to be submitted in October 2018.
- **'Plan B'** – a number of Members asked what the plan for additional provision was if the bid for funding a free school was unsuccessful. Officers explained that the local authority had no capital available itself for the build but was working extensively on interim arrangements to put in place as well as securing funding and planning for provision in the longer term and hoped to report to the Cabinet on the issue later in the month.
- **Communications** – a Member requested that the parents of Abbey Court School be kept informed of significant Committee meetings, such as Cabinet, Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committees, where relevant discussions and decisions would take place. The Director of Children and Adult Services confirmed that he was keen to establish the best forms of communicating information and would cover this issue in his forthcoming meeting with the Headteacher of Abbey Court School.
- **SEND Review** – Members requested that the SEND review (needs analysis) be completed as soon as possible and that the review be published when completed.
- **Timescales** – in response to a question about timescales in relation to the bid, it was confirmed that the bid must be submitted in October 2018, the outcome of which should be known in early 2019. If successful, proposer groups would need to make submissions to the DfE in Spring 2019 with announcements expected in Summer 2019.

- **Planning permission** –the need for planning permission was raised, in relation to its potential impact on timescales. Reference was made to existing planning permission which had been granted for the secondary school building at the Cliffe Road site.

Decision:

The Committee:

- 1) thanked the petitioners for presenting the petition;
- 2) noted the report, and;
- 3) recommended the Cabinet to indicate when the SEND review was likely to be completed, for this to be completed as soon as possible and for the review outcomes to be published when completed.

396 Member's Item: Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport

Discussion:

Councillor Johnson introduced the report, explaining his reasons for requesting the item. He noted the difficulties being experienced nationally in relation to funding for Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, demand for which was increasing. He commented on the implementation of the Education Travel Assistance Policy which had made some changes to SEND transport provision and the implementation of these changes had resulted in a number of issues being experienced by families, including poor communication, uncertainty of arrangements, pick up point information being incorrect and new arrangements being unsuitable. He recognised the hard work and commitment of staff to resolve the issues and considered that the limited time between Cabinet agreeing the new policy and implementation was the cause of the problems.

The representative from the Medway Parent and Carers Forum explained that there had been a number of families who had experienced difficulties over the summer months and she had summarised these in a document tabled at the meeting. She also commented on how the Council had worked with the Forum and families to get as many children to school in time for the new academic year and thanked officers for their hard work.

The Director of Children and Adult Services then expressed his regret that some families had experienced worry and concern during the summer in relation to the reapplication process and the delay in confirming new arrangements. He explained that the policy changes had been borne from a challenging financial situation to streamline routes and deliver a more cost effective service and to create a service that provided flexibility for families and promoted independence where appropriate. He explained that the timeframe for implementation was difficult and that early communication with parents,

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such as language in letters, could have been better but that this was rectified early on and that additional staff were deployed when the problems began to emerge. He confirmed that the majority of children had their arrangements resolved and in place for the start of the new academic year and thanked the Medway Parent and Carers Forum for their support.

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

- **Reassessment process** – in relation to some concerns raised about the reassessment process in the future, the Director explained that previously there was no reassessment and a child could have the same travel arrangements in place from the age of 3 to 19 when in fact it could be quite possible that their needs would change during that period. Therefore reassessment of need was important but in future it was envisaged this would be linked to annual reviews, such as Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) reviews, to make the process more straightforward for families.
- **Communication methods** – in response to a question about using other communication methods such as phone calls, instead of relying on letters sent through schools, officers confirmed they would be looking at communicating in various ways in the future such as social media, forums, contact through schools and phone calls.
- **Appeals** – in response to a questions about the number of appeals outstanding, officers confirmed there were five children for whom travel arrangements were still being finalised due to their specific complex needs but it was confirmed there were no outstanding stage 2 appeals.
- **Travel training and the involvement of transport providers** – in response to a question about the involvement of transport providers in relation to supporting those with physical and learning disabilities to travel on public transport, it was confirmed providers would be involved in travel training provision.
- **Use of jargon** – A Member raised the issue of using acronyms and jargon language in communications and suggested that this be avoided in future. Officers confirmed they were working with the Medway Parent and Carers Forum to help quality assure communication and language and would also work with organisations who could support the Council in providing communication through the use of pictorial images and video blogs.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

397 Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) Annual Report 2017-18

Discussion:

The Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) Independent Chair introduced the MSCB's Annual Report 2017-18 which included details about how agencies in Medway had worked collectively through the year and how effective safeguarding arrangements were for children and young people in Medway.

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

- **Future arrangements** – in response to a question about the Board's membership, the Independent Chair explained that following new legislation, the requirement for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) was being removed, allowing the Council, Police and Clinical Commissioning Groups to develop their own arrangements, which would need to be developed and set by summer 2019. Those arrangements could enable involvement from Special Educational Need providers and businesses, which were both suggested by Members.
- **Non attendance** – in response to a question about non attendance by two agencies detailed in the report, the Independent Chair explained that in both cases attendance had improved in the current year.
- **Recruitment and retention of social workers** – in response to a question about this issue, which had been an ongoing problem for Medway, the Independent Chair confirmed that Medway's proximity to London was a large factor in this issue and one shared by other authorities in similar locations from London. He added that Medway had put in place some innovative ideas to encourage recruitment and retention and the Deputy Director, Children and Adults confirmed that retention and recruitment rates were improving.
- **Education Safeguarding Audit** – concern was raised about the response rate of schools to the audit, which had been 55%. The Independent Chair explained that the response rate for 2018/19 was much improved due to the development of stronger relationships with schools, established by the Education Safeguarding Officer. It was reported that this post had recently become vacant but was being recruited to in order to continue the great progress the previous post holder had made.
- **Gangs** – in response to an update request on strategies for addressing gangs, officers explained that there was a great deal of partnership work on this rising issue and best practice was being shared from Islington's Youth Offending Team. It was suggested that the Committee consider having a full report on gangs in the future.

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- **Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Sub Group** – a Member asked for detail around the MASE Sub-Group's action plan which sought to reduce risk and harm caused by sexual exploitation to children and young people across Medway. The Independent Chair undertook to circulate the action plan and to also attach it to the next MSCB report.
- **Use of social media** – A Medway Youth Council representative advised that young people were more likely to use social platforms such as snapchat and YouTube rather than Twitter. He also informed the Committee that the MYC conference later in the year would be focussing on community safety.
- **Early Help case recording** – The Committee's Teacher representative commented on the amount of time early help case recording took, which was a capacity issue for schools. In response, the Independent Chair stated that work was being done to streamline the system and reduce the amount of paperwork required.
- **Access to Children and Family hubs** – in response to a comment about the hubs being difficult to access for some areas, such as Rainham, officers confirmed that satellite provision was provided in areas, for Rainham this was at Miers Court Primary School. Where needs were identified, short term specific programmes could be run at satellite sites to meet such need.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

398 Employment Opportunities for 18-25 Year Olds (including apprenticeships) - Progress Report

Discussion:

The Skills and Employment Programme Manager introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the progress made against the recommendations of the Employment Opportunities for 18-25 Year Olds (including apprenticeships) Task Group, which were agreed by Cabinet in February 2018. He explained that the recommendations would be reflected in the Skills and Employment Plan, which was currently being drafted.

The Head of Early Help and Targeted Services updated the Committee on performance in relation to reducing the number of children and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), including unknowns. He explained that this time last year there had been 2118 NEETs, whereas on the day of the Committee the number was 764, which demonstrated the impact that targeted work and support was having on this cohort. This also demonstrated the impact of the ability to report on data and track and monitor young people's progress.

A Member asked about the Gatsby benchmarking and how schools accessed the resource. In response the Skills and Employment Programme Manager explained that these were eight benchmarks in relation to best practice career guidance. Schools could access a tool which helped evaluate careers activity against the eight benchmarks. Schools were being directed to this and it was hoped funding could be sought to enable the recruitment of a co-ordinator to work in Medway to support schools further with this.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

399 Early Help and Targeted Services

Discussion:

The Head of Early Help and Targeted Services introduced the report which updated the Committee on the work and progress in relation to the whole system early help offer in Medway. He also referred to the Early Help Strategy which was currently being drafted and undertook to share it with the Committee when it was at the final draft stage.

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

- **School absences** – in relation to a question about unauthorised school absences, the Head of Early Help and Targeted Services explained that the rules around absence from school were clear and that families did receive penalties where appropriate.
- **Domestic Abuse support for hard to reach communities** – in response to a question about how this could be improved, officers explained that the provision of domestic abuse support was currently out to tender and one of the key specifications in that process was for providers to demonstrate how they could improve engagement with such communities as it was an area that needed improvement.
- **Levels of contact** – clarification was sought around the data relating to levels of contact. In response, officers confirmed that further analysis was needed. For example, where the prevalence of particular issues was recorded to be low, was this a true reflection of prevalence or did it relate to under reporting?
- **Exclusion rates** – in response to a concern raised about exclusion rates, officers confirmed that there was a great deal of partnership support to address the issues around exclusions, between schools and the Council, looking at transitions between schools and sharing of information and Headteachers providing constructive challenge to each other. Rates were reducing but more improvement was needed.

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- **Child on parent abuse** – in response to a question about whether there had been an increase in reported incidents of children being violent to their parents or carers, officers confirmed that there had been an increase in incidents reported. He explained that families were being supported to use “nonviolence resistance” methods and undertook to circulate further information on this to the Committee. The Medway Parent and Carer Forum added that they had also seen an increase in reports of this and it was recognised that different strategies would be needed to tackle intentional harm and that caused due to a clinical condition.
- **Attendance data** – in response to a question about the provision of attendance figures at the Children and Family Hubs and Wellbeing Centres, it was explained that this data had previously been collected for SureStart Children Centres due to a Government requirement. This requirement had since been removed and therefore this data was no longer collected so resource could be focused elsewhere. The Head of Early Help and Targeted Services did, however, undertake to consider further how such information could be provided to the Committee for scrutiny purposes, for example, taking a snapshot of one week. The Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services added that one measure of the value of early help was no increase in referrals to social care statutory help.
- **Youth Service** – in response to comments made about Medway’s Youth Service, officers explained how well the service was supporting vulnerable children and young people, for example, participation from looked after children had increased from 3-4% to approximately 25%. Development of the service was ongoing and different possibilities were being explored, such as added support from businesses and it was confirmed communication with youth centre management committees was ongoing. The Chair of Medway Youth Council shared his own perspective of the Youth Service, commenting on how improved he felt it was and how well valued the service was by young people.

Decision:

The Committee:

- 1) noted the report and;
- 2) agreed that a further report be presented to the Committee regarding the Early Help Strategy, a review of progress against next steps, evidence of impact and effectiveness (particularly around new arrangements in the hubs) and scrutiny of future programme arrangements.

400 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2018/19

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services introduced the report which provided a summary of the Council's performance in quarter 1 2018/19 on the delivery of priorities that fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

- **Percentage of looked after children (LAC) who achieve the required standard in GCSE English and maths** – in response to a question about why the data was so lagged for this measure, with the latest available data being for 2015/16, the Deputy Director explained that there was a lag in relation to the Department for Education publishing validated data.
- **Number of LAC per 10,000 children** – The Deputy Director confirmed that this was a very static figure that sat within the usual range for Medway. The number did vary due to large sibling groups etc and the number of LACs had recently risen to 405 but was still in line with comparative neighbours.
- **Children persistently absent from school** – in response to a concern raised about only 50% of schools providing the Council with information about absences, she explained that schools were not required to provide this data and did so on a voluntary basis. Relationships with schools were being strengthened which it was hoped would encourage the sharing of such information.
- **Attainment for Early Years** – A Member asked about performance in relation to Early Years, which had dipped although it remained above the national average and about performance in phonics which had recently been overtaken by the national average. The teacher representative of the Committee explained that the data had not taken into account progress at this stage, which may have exceeded the performance statistics depending on the entry level of the cohort of children concerned. The Deputy Director undertook to provide a briefing note on what was being done in relation to phonics to improve performance.
- **External review of exclusions** – in response to a question about the external review of exclusions, officers undertook to provide the Committee with the key headlines of the review outcomes when the review had concluded, which was estimated to be early 2019.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

401 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which advised Members of the current work programme and some suggested additions and amendments. She informed the Committee that the item listed on the Forward Plan, entitled “Funding for future SEND provision” had been replaced by the following two items, both scheduled for Cabinet on 23 October 2018:

- Proposal to meet demand for SEND children, including residential and respite care provision;
- Submission of a free school bid for children with complex SEND.

She also informed the Committee of a recommendation from the Audit Committee meeting held on 27 September 2018, which suggested that the provision of Governor Services in Medway be raised with the Committee and it was recommended that this be picked up in the next agenda planning meeting.

It was also confirmed that the Democratic Services Officer was trying to secure a demonstration of the Mind of My Own (MoMO) app before the start of the January meeting.

Decision:

- 1) The Committee agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1, subject to the following changes:
 - a. To schedule the progress update of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Improvement Plan to the December meeting;
 - b. To reschedule the update on Aut Even and the transfer of services to Parklands to the January meeting;
 - c. To schedule the attendance of Medway UTC’s Principal to the December meeting of the Committee;
 - d. To schedule the Sufficiency Statement 2018 for the December meeting of the Committee as pre-decision scrutiny;
 - e. To schedule the Fostering Annual Report and the Adoption Annual Report for the January meeting of the Committee as pre-decision scrutiny.

- 2) The Committee agreed to receive briefing notes on the following:
 - a. Update on transformation for Children Services;
 - b. The Youth Police Advisory group.

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Chairman

Date:

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