

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

Thursday, 10 January 2019

6.30pm to 8.42pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Aldous, Fearn, Franklin, Gilry, Hall, Johnson, Joy, Kemp, Opara, Paterson, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), Saroy and Wicks (Vice-Chairman)

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

Fay Cordingley (Church of England Representative) and Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Thomas Baldock (Medway Youth Council), Craig Liddell (Medway Youth Council) and Nicola Forrest (Head Teacher Representative)

Substitutes:

Councillors:
Price (Substitute for Cooper)
Michelle Dewar (Substitute for Keith Clear – Medway Parent and Carer Forum)

In Attendance:

Kate Ako, Principal Lawyer - People
Ann Domeney, Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services
Clare Ebberson, Consultant in Public Health
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
Rachael Horner, Partnership Commissioning Programme Lead for Looked After Children
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Dr John Rodriguez, Consultant in Public Health, Kent and Medway Screening and Immunisation Lead
Hilary Sparling, Area Manager - Adoption and Fostering
Ian Sutherland, Director of People - Children and Adults Services
David Watkins, Head of Education
James Williams, Director of Public Health

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686 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cooper, David Lane (Parent Governor representative) and Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic diocese representative).

687 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 4 December 2018 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

688 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

689 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Opara declared an OSI in agenda item 11 (Annual Report – Fostering Service) as a social worker mentioned in the report was her daughter. However, no specific mention was made of her daughter and she was therefore able to remain present at the meeting during the discussion and decision on this item.

Other interests

There were none.

690 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress on the area within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, as set out below:

- Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Service

The Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services thanked the staff of the Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Service for their hard work and then responded to Member's questions and comments, which included:

- **Child Protection Conference (CPC) Chairs** – in response to a question about work being done to reduce workloads of CPC Chairs and increase

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their capacity, the Portfolio Holder explained that the service had been reorganised into two divisions with one dealing with children on a child protection plan (CPP) and one dealing with looked after children (LAC). He reported that this, along with more urgency of notifications for conference requests from colleagues in children services, had improved the overall quality of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service.

- **Staffing** – in response to questions about staffing, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that staffing remained an issue, one which was shared across the country. He explained that two agency staff had recently been recruited to permanent positions and a further member of staff would be commencing full time work in February 2019. There were some staff that were long term agency workers but this was avoided as much as possible and work was being done to continue to drive for permanent recruitment.
- **Mind Of My Own (MOMO) App** – In response to a question about the use of the MOMO app it was confirmed that the number of statements received via the app was 400, which was higher than other local authorities. The app enabled the views and wishes of children and young people to be captured and listened to and evidence of using and acting on the information was then demonstrated in LAC reviews.

Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services for his attendance.

691 Update on Child Immunisation Programme

Discussion:

The Director of Public Health and the Kent and Medway Screening and Immunisation Lead from NHS England introduced the report which provided an update on the NHS England Commissioned Childhood Immunisation Programme in Medway. Officers updated the Committee on more recent statistics to the annual figures provided within the report. They explained that for Quarter 2 of 2018/19, there were 13 measures relating to immunisations for children aged 1, 2 and 5 years old and all had improved from the Quarter 1 figures. This further improvement was very much welcomed but the Committee were reassured that officers were not complacent and that work to continue the improving performance was very much continuing.

The Kent and Medway Screening and Immunisation Lead also explained that targeted work and support with GP practices to improve data management had also contributed to the improvements, as had increased resourcing of the Kent and Medway Child Record Department and the procurement of the Community Immunisation Service, which was providing a 'catch-up' service.

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

- **Immunisation data for older children and young people** – in response to a question about immunisation data of children and young people of age groups beyond the age of 5, officers undertook to provide a briefing note on this information.
- **Information sharing between systems** – in response to a question about the issues of information sharing, officers explained that GPs are asked to transmit their immunisation recorded data but that this was not automatically transferred. Equally it was explained that the coding used to record data was incredibly complex and therefore errors sometimes occurred. This was not a problem unique to Medway and the possibility of commissioning a third party with experience in resolving this issue was being considered.
- **Social economic impact on immunisation uptake** – A Member asked if there was a link between families living in more deprived areas and a reduced uptake in immunisation. Officers confirmed that there was no ability to measure whether or not there was a link but that there was anecdotal evidence to suggest this could be the case.
- **Impact of the changes to children's centres** – A member raised concern that the change in Children Centre provision may have impacted on the ability for services to reach families for immunisation purposes. Officers explained that regardless of the infrastructure of the service, the performance in relation to immunisation rates had improved. It was added that there was awareness around inequalities issues and that GP practices and Health Visitors helped to promote immunisation information and target families.
- **Risks of outbreaks of disease** – in response to a question about the risks in Medway of disease outbreak, given that the target of 95% of the cohort being immunised had not been reached for almost all categories and year groups. Officers confirmed that no major outbreaks had occurred which suggested there were sufficient numbers being immunised to prevent the spread of disease outbreaks.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

692 Governor Services

Discussion:

The Head of Education introduced the report which updated Members on the provision of Governor Services in Medway, following a recommendation from the Audit Committee, who had received a similar update report at their meeting

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on 8 January 2019. The report explained the process which led to the provision of governor services being moved from Medway Commercial Group (MCG) to another provider (the Education People) and the current arrangements in place to ensure the Council met its statutory duties for maintained schools.

The Head of Education advised that MCG had communicated the change in the arrangements for the provision of governor services to all schools. In addition he had met with Headteachers of secondary and primary schools to explain the change and how to access the new service

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

- **Trading** – in response to a question about how trading worked in relation to the purchasing of Governor Services, the Head of Education explained that academies could purchase their service wherever they wished and the local authority or providers could charge academies for this provision. The local authority provided statutory governor services to maintained schools via statutory funding mechanism.
- **Options appraisal** – Officers confirmed this would take place in the Spring and in response to a question confirmed that MCG would not have a role in this. A suggestion was made that the National Governance Association should be considered as an option. Officers responded that this would be considered and confirmed that the key aspects of the options appraisal would be ensuring the local authority's statutory responsibilities were met and how that could be done in the most cost effective way. It was confirmed liaison would also take place with Medway Education Leaders Association (MELA).
- **Communication** – in response to a concern that Councillors were not more informed about the changes to the provision of Governor Services in Medway, officers apologised they had not been more proactive in informing Members and undertook to do so in the future. It was also acknowledged that the communication with schools by MCG, informing them of the change, had not been very effective and officers accepted they could have been more proactive to liaise with schools, although added that the timing of this issue being at the end of the academic year and over the summer break had brought limitations to communication with schools.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

693 Sufficiency Report 2018

Discussion:

The Partnership Commissioning Programme Lead for Looked After Children (LAC) introduced the annual refresh of the statutory Sufficiency Report, which

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was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. She provided some key highlights, which included:

- The increased number of children and young people coming into care;
- A slight increase in the numbers of children with a longer stay in care, particularly with young people aged 10-15 years where there are more enhanced levels of need;
- The reduction in the number of young people accommodated under Section 20 (voluntary), which indicated an improvement in permanency planning by the service;
- The increase in the average length of time in parent and child placements;
- The number of care leavers not in education, employment and training (NEET) remained high.

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

- **The increase in Looked After Children (LAC)** – in response to a concern raised about the rise in LAC, the Deputy Director, Children and Adults Services, explained that the number of LAC in Medway tended to fluctuate between 380 – 420 children. Medway was currently at the top end of this range but the increase was not considered so significant to cause concern. The local figures were in line with national figures which had also shown an increase.
- **Children and young people placed in Medway by other local authorities** – in response to a question relating to young people placed in Medway from out of area, officers confirmed that the Sufficiency Report related to Medway children only. It was also made clear that when officers are made aware of issues with children placed from other local authorities in supported accommodation within Medway, these are referred to the relevant local authority as quickly as possible and an existing multi-agency group also provided a forum to share issues of concern and work with local providers.
- **Supported accommodation** – in response to a question about the framework for supported accommodation provision and how that would ensure standards and support levels, officers explained that the framework was very detailed in its quality requirements for accommodation and support at various levels. Given the rise in LAC aged 10-15 years and with more complex needs, planning for high quality supported accommodation was a key priority for the Council.
- **Addressing NEETs** – in response to a question with regards to actions to reduce the number of NEETs amongst care leavers, officers explained that a small service did operate to provide advice, information and guidance to children with additional needs, children who have offended and LAC. Some supported accommodation providers also deliver packages of care to address NEET. In addition, youth workers also provide some advice around careers where they can.

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- **Mentoring** – it was suggested the officers liaise with Kent County Council to determine what, if any, mentoring support services they provide for their young people and to share with them information about the service used by Medway Council.
- **Foster Carers** – in response to a question about the retention rate of foster carers, given 114 had registered and 7 became foster carers, officers explained that the conversion rate from people expressing interest to becoming foster carers was usually 1 in 10. Officers explained advertising and recruitment was a key priority and a suggestion was made that schools could be used to advertise and share information to families.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the 2018 Sufficiency Report, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, to the Cabinet.

694 Update on Aut Even and the transfer of services to Parklands

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Children and Adult Services introduced the report which provided an update to Members on the transfer of services from Aut Even to Parklands. It was explained that the project was in its final stages and the Ofsted registration process would commence shortly, therefore services were envisaged to transfer to Parklands in the Spring.

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

- **Use of Aut Even** – in response to a question about the future use of the Aut Even building, officers confirmed that no plans on this had yet been decided but that options for the future use of the building were being considered. They added that Aut Even had a number of limitations and that Parklands would provide a far superior facility due to its space but officers were keen to find an alternative use for Aut Even if possible. The point was also made that although Aut Even had been unable to fulfil full Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements for its current use, it may be able to fulfil requirements for use of people with a reduced need.
- **Communication** – comment was made that communication, particularly with the Medway Parent and Carer Forum, could have been better and a request for this to be improved in the final stages of the project was made. Officers apologised that the communication could have been improved although they explained that they had been cautious in giving deadline dates earlier in case this raised expectations amongst families that were then unable to be met. Officers undertook to improve liaison with the Forum for the remainder of this project.

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Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

695 Annual Adoption Report

Discussion:

The Area Manager, Adoption and Fostering introduced the annual report of the Adoption Service. She explained that there were a number of older children with complex needs who were hard to find adoptive families for and therefore they often ended up with a change of plan to long term foster care. She added that recruitment of potential adoptive parents remained a challenge nationally but that Medway currently had ten families being assessed for adoption. It was also explained that there had been an increase in the support needs of adoptive families. Furthermore, Members were updated on progress with the Regional Adoption Agency, with confirmation given that work on this was continuing, with a target date of March 2020.

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

- **Thanks to staff** – The Committee thanked the staff in Adoption Services for their hard work and commitment.
- **Impact of changes to the benefits system** – A Member asked if the changes to the benefits system in relation to the ‘two child cap’ had had an impact on potential adoptive families coming forward, due to confusion around access to funding. The Area Manager confirmed that she did not believe this to be a significant factor. She added that it could be a factor for special guardianship families but additional financial support was provided to families where required and where need was demonstrated.
- **Information availability** – in response to a question about how people can find out about adoption services, the Area Manager explained that most people got in touch via internet searches or social media signposting. Other advertising did take place, such as on the local radio, but it was costly and the most cost effective way appeared to be through ensuring Medway Adoption Services featured high on internet search engines.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the Annual Adoption Report to the Cabinet.

696 Annual Report - Fostering Service

Discussion:

The Area Manager, Adoption and Fostering introduced the annual report of the fostering service. She explained that three new members of staff had been appointed to the service’s management team, one of which would be focusing

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on the recruitment of foster carers, which remained a key priority for the service. She added that the support from the Youth Service in supporting fostering families to reduce breakdowns in placements was a unique provision that was proving to be very effective. Furthermore, therapeutic parenting support was also being delivered which was also reducing placement breakdowns and achieving better outcomes for children and young people.

Decision:

The Committee recommended the Fostering Service Annual Report, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, to the Cabinet.

697 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report, which provided the Committee with suggested updates to its work programme. She referred to a previous request by Members for a briefing note providing more information in relation to Phonics and suggested that this instead be included as an appendix to the annual school performance report, which was scheduled to be considered at the March 2019 meeting of the Committee.

Decision:

- 1) The Committee agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1, subject to the Children and Young People Plan being deferred to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 7 March 2019.
- 2) The Committee agreed for the additional information on Phonics that it had previously requested to be presented via a briefing note, to instead be appended to the annual school performance report, scheduled for the 7 March 2019 meeting.

Chairman

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