

**Medway Council**  
**MEETING OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS OVERVIEW AND**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 25 March 2010**

**6.34pm to 8.55pm**

**RECORD OF THE MEETING**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Avey, Kenneth Bamber, Brake (Chairman), Carr, Esterson, Gulvin, Kemp (Vice-Chairman), Maisey, Maple and Smith

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

Jim Grogan (Roman Catholic Church representative)

**Added members without voting rights on education issued only:**

Jane Heyes (Headteacher representative), Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative), Richard Odle (Medway Youth Parliament representative), Sam Tutt (Medway Youth Parliament representative) and Pat Wozencroft (Governor representative)

**LINK representative without voting rights:**

Clare Murray

**Substitutes:** Councillor Tashi Tamang Bhutia (Substitute for Councillor Richard Andrews)  
Councillor Sylvia Griffin (Substitute for Councillor Trevor Clarke)

**In Attendance:**

Rose Collinson	Director of Children and Adult Services
Helen Gulvin	Assistant Director, Children's Care
Sally-Ann Ironmonger	Senior Public Health Manager
Karen Kennedy	Performance Manager
Simon Trotter	Assistant Director Learning and Achievement
Richard Unsworth	Principal accountant
Councillor Les Wicks	Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Caroline Salisbury	Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinator

**683 RECORD OF THE MEETING**

The record of the meeting held on 11 February 2010 was signed by the Chairman as correct.

**684 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, Baker, Clarke and Val Goulden, Canon John Smith (Church of England representative) and Elaine Watson (non-elected, voting member).

**685 WORK PROGRAMME**

**Discussion:**

The Committee was advised that it had previously requested a meeting with health partners following a report to the January meeting on the Care Quality Commission and annual health check results in relation to children and young people. However, Members had recently received a detailed briefing note on this issue, so the Committee decided a further meeting was unnecessary.

Members were also advised that the proposed Child Health Strategy would now be progressed as a Child Health Action Plan as part of the Health and Well Being Strategy development. The action plan would be submitted to this committee for consideration and the Health and Well Being Strategy would be considered at the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2010.

**Decision:**

The Committee agreed:

- (a) that a meeting with health partners on the Care Quality Commission and annual health check results was no longer required;
- (b) to request a briefing note giving an update on progress with the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS);
- (c) that the Child Health Action Plan, as part of the Health and Well Being Strategy development, would be considered at the next meeting.

**686 FOSTER CARE CAPACITY PLANNING AUDIT**

**Discussion:**

The Assistant Director, Children's Care, introduced the report highlighting that Medway performed very well compared to similar authorities and had a good placement record. The Audit Committee had forwarded this matter to the Committee due to concerns for the high percentage of foster carers nationally being over 50. She explained that the reason older people were attracted to foster caring was that they had the spare room and necessary time, once their own children had grown up.

Members commented on the report and asked a variety of questions which included:

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- was there a list of children waiting to be fostered?

*Medway has secured placements for all children requiring them.*

- were children from other authorities fostered within Medway?

*Approximately 250 children were placed in Medway from other authorities, mostly from the London Boroughs.*

- what methods are used to recruit new foster carers?

*There were on-going advertisements and targeted campaigns, expressions of interest were also received but the most successful method was by word of mouth from existing foster carers themselves.*

- the time-line of responsibility for the authority to look after children and how many over 16's stay with their carers?

*the authority is responsible for some looked after children until the age of 24, if they had special needs or were in education. Over 16's staying with their carers was normal and not many moved out into the community at that age.*

- the foster care service was in a good position with in-house provision, could this good practice be used in special educational needs (SEN) provision?

*Members were advised that there had been slow but steady progress with SEN provision. The Council worked hard with schools on this matter and a number of schools had a really inclusive culture. The question asked of all schools was 'what would it take to keep this child in Medway provision?'*

- stability for looked after children in schools to complement the home stability

*The looked-after-care teachers in schools worked hard to match home stability. There were also follow-up educational plans. One area that Medway performed well in was early decision-making which was vital, as it had the greatest bearing on a child's long-term future.*

### **Decision:**

The Committee thanked officers for the report and requested a Briefing Note detailing what aspects of the good practice within the foster care service could be linked to special educational needs (SEN) provision.

**687 IMPLICATIONS OF COUNCIL DECISIONS ON SCHOOL BUDGETS**

**Discussion:**

The Director of Children and Adults introduced the report explaining that the report followed on from a Member's item at the previous meeting to include further details on the roles various bodies had for spending public money. She highlighted that paragraph 5 of the report gave an update on further outcomes since the committee last met.

Members asked what examples could be given on how the Council and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) were helping schools to develop more efficient ways of using their delegated resources? (as stated in paragraph 6.9 of the report). They stated that there was a greater realisation about the increased pressure on school budgets in the future and asked about financial qualifications for school governing bodies. Officers responded that procurement options were being explored. This could include services and supplies such as photocopiers ordered for a number of schools rather than individual orders being placed. Another example was shared staffing resources. The DCSF had on-line help available for schools to access.

Officers advised that there was a Financial Management Standards in Schools (FMSIS) national qualification which demonstrated a minimum standard in financial management. The majority of schools now met the standard required and schools were encouraged to use national benchmarking data as a comparison when setting their own budget. There was also on-going training available to all concerned.

The Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement, informed the Committee that the financial positions of schools was regularly monitored. Where risk of a deficit was identified, the financial team would provide support to manage the situation. He advised that all schools and local authorities would be facing difficult financial times over the next few years and he was keen for schools to anticipate this, rather than react to it. He was now considering the requirement of a three year financial plan from all schools.

Other areas covered during the discussion were:

- early intervention when risk of deficit budget was known
- regular budget monitoring information sent to school governors
- logistics of monitoring three year budget plans
- school's financial reserves.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

**688 COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING - THIRD QUARTER**

**Discussion:**

Members expressed continued concern that the data on teenage conception rates was over a year old. Officers advised that this was the latest accurate data that was compiled by the health service and was about conceptions, not births. The Teenage Pregnancy Board had developed proxy local indicators as far as it was possible to do so and considered local interim data but the published data needed to be validated and correct and the authority was required to publish it as shown in the report.

Members also raised concern over Key Stage 2 results and asked whether schools were giving value for money and where there had been increased investment in a school, was it being used effectively? Members requested that any discussions between the Director of Children and Adults and Headteachers on Key Stage 2 issues were fed back to governors.

**Decision:**

The Committee agreed to:

- (a) note the report, recognising the areas of success;
- (b) request a meeting between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and spokespersons of the Committee and the Teenage Pregnancy Board to discuss the work it carried out and the data it received.

**689 HOME EDUCATION**

**Discussion:**

The Assistant Director, Inclusion introduced the report setting out the legal background for home education and the resource in Medway to monitor children being educated at home. She explained that this had been an area of concern for a number of years, as parents did not have to register with the local authority and there was no right to enter a home to assess the child's work. However, the Department for Children, Schools and Families had carried out a review last year and a number of recommendations had been put forward. These had not yet been made legal but hopefully this would happen soon, as more regulation and structure would be put into place and there would be opportunities for the children to access some services provided by the local authority.

Members stated their disbelief at the current lack of monitoring and enforcement for children educated at home and welcomed any recommendations to strengthen the authority's powers to ensure the children were being adequately educated.

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The Committee considered that the majority of reasons detailed in the report for children being educated at home were because communication with the school had broken down and most of them could have stayed in mainstream education. Officers responded that they would be submitting a report to the Children's Trust to see whether the resources within the local authority for home education were sufficient and whether this matter would be more of a priority than another issue in financial terms.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

### **Chairman**

### **Date:**

### **Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator**

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