

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

**Thursday, 3 October 2019**

**6.30pm to 10.35pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

**Present:** Councillors: Opara (Vice-Chairman), Ahmed, Aldous, Barrett, Cooper, Hackwell, Howcroft-Scott, Hubbard, Steve Iles, Johnson, Mahil, Purdy, Thorne and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin

**Added members without voting rights:**

MYC Chairman (Medway Youth Council), MYC Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Council), Nicola Forrest (Head Teacher Representative), Geoffrey Matthews (Teacher Representative) and Margaret Cane (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative)

**Substitutes:** Councillor Bhutia (Substitute for Sylvia Griffin)  
Michelle Dewar (for Keith Clear – Medway Parent and Carer Forum)

**In Attendance:** Jackie Brown, Head of Business Change (People) and ICT  
Paul Clarke, Programme Lead - School Organisation and Capital Services,  
Sandip Grewal, Childcare Solicitor  
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer  
Ian Sutherland, Director of People - Children and Adults Services  
Wendy Vincent, Head of Integrated 0-25 Disability Services  
David Watkins, Interim Assistant Director, Education and SEND  
Sandy Weaver, Complaints Manager for Social Care  
Paula Wilkins, Chief Nurse for Medway, DGS, Swale and West Kent CCGs

**320 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sylvia Griffin and Kemp, Fay Cordingley (Church of England Diocese representative) and Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative).

The Chairman also explained that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member), who had been invited to attend the meeting, sent her apologies as she was attending an Local Government Association course for Lead Members for Children's Services.

**321 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 25 July 2019 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

**322 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**323 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

Disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs)

Geoff Matthews declared a DPI in any references made to the Leigh Academy Trust within the agenda at item 10 (Annual Review of the School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22) as he worked for the trust at Strood Academy.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Cooper declared a non-pecuniary interest in 6 (Joint Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy) by virtue of her position as governor at Rivermead School.

Councillor Howcroft-Scott declared a non-pecuniary interest in any references to Victory Academy and New Horizons Primary Academy by virtue of her position as governor at both schools.

Councillor Hubbard explained that he lived nearby to one the Gordon Schools referenced in item 9 (Outcome of Statutory Consultation for the Proposed Prescribed Alterations at St Nicholas CE VC Infant School) and he also confirmed he was one of the respondents to the consultation.

Councillor Johnson explained that reference was made to the Leigh Academy Free School in Rainham within the agenda at item 10 (Annual Review of the School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22). Although this was in relatively close proximity to his house (within half a mile), he would only make comments from an educational perspective, not on planning issues.

**324 Ofsted's Inspection of Medway's Children's Services**

**Discussion:**

The Director of People – Children and Adults introduced the report which set out information about the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) that took place in Medway from 15 to 26 July 2019. The

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

Director explained that the outcome of the inspection had been a judgement of inadequate for the overall effectiveness of the service. He explained the key findings of the inspection, as set out at section 3 of the report, and that the Department for Education (DfE) had issued a statutory direction to Medway Council which led to their appointment of an Independent Children's Services Commissioner. He also highlighted immediate action that had been taken and explained the improvement journey planned going forward.

In addition, the Director referred to the work the Council was doing with the London Borough of Ealing, who had been identified by the DfE as a Partner in Practice for the Council to work with and this collaboration had started before the inspection and was hugely beneficial in learning from best practice there.

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

- **Improving audits** – in response to a question about how the quality, accuracy and reliability of audits could be improved the Director explained that this had been an area that officers had worked on with Ealing LBC. As a result, a new audit profile had been rolled out and it was believed this would significantly strengthen this area. In addition, a Moderation Panel was in place to benchmark against, which Ofsted had commented positively about during the inspection, but had found that the existence of the Panel was still in its infancy and therefore too early to assess its impact.
- **Future reporting to Committee** – in response to comments raised about future reporting and scrutiny of improvement by the Committee, officers undertook to work with Members through the agenda planning process to ensure Members are provided with relevant and regular information on progress. It was suggested that the Committee would require more specific information, such as more detail on caseload levels and recruitment and retention detail. The importance of Members being more active and robust when scrutinising issues was emphasised. The Director explained that there would be substantial reporting to Ofsted and to the Improvement Board and that this information could also be shared with Committee Members. It was confirmed that an update on progress had been scheduled for the January and March meetings of this Committee. The Director also added that the quarterly monitoring information with Ofsted would be published on the Ofsted website, meaning a transparent and significantly scrutinised approach to the improvement journey.
- **Additional social workers and future structures** – in response to queries about the additional eight social workers who had been added to the work force, the Director explained that this was an initial figure to quickly reduce caseloads which had been found to be too high. It was confirmed they were agency staff to enable their swift integration to the service and that they were brought in as a group to enable them to be deployed flexibly. He added that the Commissioner had been clear that more work on workforce levels and how the service should be organised was needed and changes may need to be made in order to build more resilience to the service. It

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

was also explained that officers were working closely with HR colleagues to help maximise recruitment and retention.

- **Medway Virtual School (MVS)** – in response to a question about findings by Ofsted in relation to the MVS the Director explained that verbal feedback from Ofsted, which had been more detailed than that contained in the report, was positive about the new Virtual Headteacher, the revised and enhanced structure of the MVS and its plans for improvement but again found it too early to be able to demonstrate its impact and the outcomes on children and young people.
- **Delays in statutory assessments** – in response to a question about how the delays in statutory assessments for vulnerable children can be addressed, the Director explained that the management arrangements had been changed to create a single Head of Service for Early Help and First Response so there was clearer oversight when cases were stepped up or down. There had also been an additional Area Manager post created, increasing the capacity and resource of the service which would also help to remedy this issue.
- **Capacity of the Directorate’s Management Team** – concern was raised about the capacity of the Children and Adult Services Management Team and Members welcomed the creation of an Interim Assistant Director, Education and Special Educational Needs and Disability post to help improve capacity.
- **Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (Lead Member) and the Independent Chair of the Improvement Board** – the Chairman had confirmed that the Portfolio Holder had been unable to attend the meeting as she was in Coventry attending a course. It was suggested that where possible, as the statutory member, she should be invited to be present at the Committee when it considered updates on Ofsted progress. In addition, it was acknowledged that the Council was in the process of recruiting an Independent Chair for the Improvement Board (which was being chaired by the Independent Commissioner in the interim) and there would be invitations for the Independent Chair to attend future meetings of the Committee where appropriate.
- **National context of reduced funding** – comment was made about the national reduction of funding for local authorities and the impact this was having on the effectiveness of children’s services. The Director confirmed that the Association of Directors of Children’s Services lobbied Government regularly about funding for social care and had been pleased that there had been some additional funding made available by the Government for this.
- **Voice of young people** – in response to comments raised about ensuring the voice of young people was heard during the improvement journey the Director confirmed that one of the first groups to be informed of the Ofsted outcome was the Medway Children and Young People Council and added

that the voice of children would be paramount going forward as the system needed to be able to demonstrate more what outcomes mean for children.

- **Mental Health Services** – comment was made about the quality and timeliness of mental health services for vulnerable children and young people, stating that it needed to be improved. The Director responded that when the current providers took over the contract they inherited a substantial backlog which was difficult to address. However, recent intelligence suggested a more positive experience for new service users entering the system.
- **Use of Children and Family Hubs** – comment was made that the Children and Family Hubs could be used more effectively to support families who did not meet the threshold for intervention but needed additional support. The Director confirmed that a finding from the inspection was that the Council was not utilising the resources at the hubs effectively enough and this was therefore a strand of the improvement being looked at.
- **Network meetings for School Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs)** – a suggestion was made that there should be networking opportunities for School DSLs and officers undertook to look into the possibilities of setting this up.
- **Corporate responsibility** – in response to a question about there being a responsibility of all Members as corporate parents and across the Council, not just in Children’s Services, the Director confirmed that the service was being supported across the Council. For example, HR Services were working closely with Children’s Services in relation to retention and recruitment strategies. In addition, officers were looking at further Member training opportunities for all Councillors and were working with Ealing LBC on this to gain best practice ideas.
- **Staff morale** – in response to a question about staff morale following the inspection, the Director confirmed that morale amongst staff had been sustained and positive feedback about the motivation and commitment of staff both in the inspection report and from Members had been greatly received. Discussions were ongoing to see if staff surveys could be made available more regularly to social workers and to look at ways in which management can better engage with staff.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

## **325 Joint Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy**

### **Discussion:**

The Head of Integrated 0-25 Disability Services introduced the report, explaining that the strategy was a joint strategy between the Council and

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and had been co-produced with young people, parents and carers. It had been developed following the SEND Local Area Inspection in December 2017 which had recommended the creation of a local area joint strategy.

A representative from the Medway Parent and Carer Forum explained that the local authority and CCG had worked well with parents and carers to produce the strategy which was very much welcomed by young people with SEND and their families.

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

- **Designated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit** – in response to a question about the recovery plan that had been submitted in relation to the Council's DSG deficit, officers undertook to circulate the plan to Members. They explained that demand in Medway was growing and was growing at a faster rate than some other local authorities and this was causing concern that it would be difficult to completely close the deficit gap. However, additional Government funding had been announced that would assist with reducing the deficit. It was also explained that the Department for Education (DfE) had delayed their feedback on the recovery plan submission until firm announcements of Medway's allocation of the additional Government funding were made.
- **Voice of Young People** – in response to a question about how involved young people had been in the development of the strategy, officers confirmed that young people had been greatly involved. It was explained that there were two consultation groups of young people with SEND, one for 13-18 year olds and another for over 18 year olds and officers undertook to provide a breakdown of how they had commented on and input into the strategy. It was added that Healthwatch Medway were setting up a specific group of young people to ensure the voice of young people was heard and officers welcomed this and the opportunity to join up with this group once it is established.
- **Capacity to deliver** – concern was raised about the local authority's ability to deliver the aspirations of the strategy, particularly given the funding difficulties. Officers confirmed this was a partnership strategy which would be implemented across partnerships.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Support Service (SENDIAS)** – a question was raised about the role of SENDIAS and how well families were informed of the service. Officers confirmed that the current SENDIAS contract was coming to an end and re-tendering would include the requirement for more rigorous marketing and re-branding.
- **Written Statement of Action** – in response to a question about where Medway was in relation to its Written Statement of Action following the SEND inspection in December 2017, officers confirmed that the monitoring

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

of progress was now coming to an end and a re-inspection was anticipated by the end of 2019. It was added that updates on the inspection and progress with SEND would also include updates on the progress made against the Strategy's action plan.

- **Rivermead School**– a question was asked about the commissioning of places at the specialist provision at Rivermead School for children with serious emotional and mental health issues, called Enhanced Triple R. Officers confirmed that they had met with the school recently and had agreed the number of places to be commissioned and the funding for these places.
- **Transition** – in response to concerns raised about transitional arrangements for young people, officers confirmed this was an area of focus by the Department for Education and NHS England and officers were working to start transitional conversations with young people when they were in Year 9. Reference was also made to supported internships which were proving successful in getting young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities into employment.

### Decision:

The Committee recommended the draft Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, to the Cabinet for approval.

## 326 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2019/20

### Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adults introduced the report which set out how the Council had performed in the first quarter of 2019/20 on the delivery of the two priorities relevant to this Committee and also brought the first quarter review of the strategic risks pertaining to this Committee.

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

- **Persistent absence** – comment was made that this issue could be tackled with a more multi-agency approach using the Children and Family Hubs. Officers welcomed this suggestion and agreed that more collaborative working would be beneficial and undertook to consider the suggestion further.
- **Achievement gap at Early Years Foundation Stage** – in response to a question about why performance against this target had deteriorated, officers explained that work was ongoing to address this, including collaborative working with the Regional Schools Commissioner and parenting skills support. Officers undertook to provide more analysis on this issue in the quarter 2 performance monitoring report. Members asked if the decline in performance could be attributed to the changes made to

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

Children's centres and officers responded that the changes were likely to be one of a number of factors and also cited the increase of inward migration, as a number of children moving into Medway from out of area joint school performing below age expected levels for a variety of reasons.

- **Rate of Young People whose activity was not known** – In response to a concern about the number of young people whose activity was unknown, which was 3.4% or 213 young people, the Director confirmed that this was a much improved position, since the service returned back in house in 2017. He added that a 0% rate would be unachievable but that officers would continue to drive the rate down and undertook to provide more analysis on this issue in the quarter 2 performance monitoring report.

### Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

## 327 Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019

The Manager for Social Care Complaints introduced the report which provided information on children's services social care complaints handled during 2018-19, including service improvements made as a result of learning from complaints and highlights of compliments received.

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

- **Mind of My Own app** – in response to a question about the planned demonstration of the app the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that this would be provided immediately before the start of the next Committee meeting, scheduled for 3 December 2019.
- **Complaints relating to the 0-25 Disability Team** – in response to a question about the rise in complaints relating to this service, officers explained that 3 complaints were from one family and two from another so the 11 complaints related to 8 families. It was added that this number had still seemed relatively low given the number of families using the service.
- **Complaints relating to the first response team** – in response to a question about why so many of the complaints related to this team, officers explained that the team had processed approximately 10,500 referrals during the period and therefore dealt with a much larger proportion of service users than other parts of Children's Services. In addition, its interaction with service users was often a family's first experience with social services which in itself could be difficult for families and could therefore contribute to more complaints.
- **Delays providing service** – a member asked why the proportion of upheld complaints related to delays in providing service was so high (6 out of 7 complaints about this issue). In response officers explained that in part it demonstrated a need to improve the management of service users'



expectations, however, confirmed they would be looking at this in more detail to find ways of addressing this issue.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

**328 Outcome of Statutory Consultation for the Proposed Prescribed Alterations at St Nicholas CE VC Infant School**

**Discussion:**

The Programme Lead, School Organisation and Capital Services, introduced the report which provided the outcome of the formal consultation in relation to the Council's proposal to change St Nicholas CE VC Infant School to a primary school, by way of statutory prescribed alteration. The consultation resulted in four responses, three in support of the proposal and one opposed. It was explained that if the proposals were agreed and implemented, then Gordon Junior School would consult on lowering its (Published Admission Number (PAN) to 90 and Gordon Infant School would consult on increasing its PAN to 90, due to the knock on effect of children no longer transferring from St Nicholas CE VC Infant School to Gordon Junior School.

It was then confirmed by Councillor Hubbard that the objection recorded was submitted by him, however, he clarified that he did not object to the proposals being consulted on. His objection related to the process as he felt there should have been a parallel consultation carried out by Gordon Infant and Junior Schools at the same time rather than after the consultation about St Nicholas CE VC Infant School. Councillor Hubbard also raised concern about the possible intention of the Gordon Schools to build on its detached playing field.

In response it was explained that Gordon Infant School had been fully engaged and kept up to speed with developments and options around the consultation process. It was important to note that as an academy, Gordon Infant and Junior Schools were not obliged to consult on the changes because it resulted in an increase in capacity at the school. However, the school would be consulting once the outcome of the proposed changes at St Nicholas CE VC Infant School had been approved and it had been the academy's choice to consult after the decision on St Nicholas CE VC Infant School was made.

In relation to the concern about the possible intention of the Gordon Schools to build on their detached playing field, officers confirmed that although it was an issue for the Trust to answer it considered it likely that the costs would be prohibitive in the current education financial climate, any proposals would need full consultation for both planning and education purposes and there had been no mention of this intention from the Trust with officers.

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019

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

- **Challenging the process for future similar situations** – A Member asked whether there were any avenues of communication that could be used to suggest any future similar scenarios could be consulted on simultaneously. Officers confirmed that strong working relationships did exist with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) but they had not considered that on this occasion it warranted escalation to the RSC for intervention.
- **Consultation response rate** – Concern was also raised about the low level of responses to the statutory consultation. Officers explained that as this was the second stage of consultation, following an informal stage which received more responses, this was expected and normal. This was also a proposal generally supported by all and therefore responses were anticipated to be low.
- **Over allocation of faith school places** – A query was raised as to whether too many school places were being provided at faith based schools. Officers confirmed that school places were being provided at locations across Medway where there was need and that these places were being provided at both faith and non-faith schools.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and the clarification that the objection had related to the consultation process and not the proposals itself and recommended that its comments be forwarded to the Cabinet.

## **329 Annual Review of the School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22**

### **Discussion:**

The Programme Lead, School Organisation and Capital Services, introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made against the School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22, highlighted areas of emerging demand for school places and made recommendations to ensure that a sufficient supply of good quality school places was maintained.

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

- **Grammar school places** – A Member raised concern about the pressure on grammar school places and how this was contributed to by children out of Medway taking up places at Medway grammar schools. Officers confirmed that there were children crossing the border both out of Medway and into Medway to attend grammar schools. It was explained that all but one Medway grammar school had amended their oversubscription criteria to ensure Medway children gained higher priority (i.e. they removed admission by test score and therefore more admissions were based on distance) and the last grammar school to do this would be removing the

test score from its oversubscription criteria for the September 2020 intake. This would, overtime, reduce the amount of children from out of Medway gaining admission over Medway children.

- **School places on the Peninsula** – In response to a question about how the number of children over and above the school places available on the Peninsula were being accommodated, officers explained that at the moment the numbers of children were not large enough to justify extra classes at Peninsula schools and therefore some children were being accommodated at schools in Strood, which was closer and potentially more accessible than schools with capacity in the East of the Peninsula.
- **Shortfall of secondary non-selective places for September 2020** – A Member asked about the plan to accommodate the increase demand of secondary non-selective places in September 2020, before the opening of two free schools which were anticipated to be ready in the subsequent two years. Officers explained that they were still in discussion with the DfE and were working hard to determine a resolution for this issue as soon as possible. Comment was made that depending on the status at the time of the Cabinet report publication, the report may need adjusting to reflect this issue.
- **Supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in mainstream schools** – a question was asked about whether school staff would be provided with Continuous Professional Development in order to appropriately support and accommodate children with SEND in mainstream schools. Officers confirmed that was part of the planning in ensuring this was a viable plan for the right children.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and recommended its comments to the Cabinet for consideration.

## **330 Work programme**

### **Discussion:**

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which advised Members of the current work programme and proposed additions and also the response to an e-petition regarding Wainscott Primary School. She referred to the Member briefing relating to the NHS Local Five Year Plan, referenced at section 5 of the report and recommended the Committee to agree that a summary of comments made by Members at the briefing be sent to the Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) in order for comments to be considered before the STP submitted the plan to NHS England, the deadline for which was 1 November 2019.

A Member also asked when the Medway Youth Justice Plan would be due to be updated and brought to the Committee. The Democratic Services Officer

## **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 October 2019**

confirmed she was currently liaising with officers on this issue and that it was likely to be presented to the March 2020 meeting.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- 1) Noted the e-petition received and its response, as set out in Section 5 of the report.
- 2) Noted the invitation to attend the Member Briefing on the Kent and Medway Five Year Plan, which was to be held on 29 October 2019 at 6:30pm in Meeting Room 9 and that comments raised by Members at the briefing be summarised and forwarded to the Medway STP for consideration ahead of its submission to NHS England.
- 3) Agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1, and the addition of the Medway Youth Justice Plan to the March 2020 meeting.

**Chairman**

**Date:**

**Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer**

Telephone: 01634 332104

Email: [democratic.services@medway.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@medway.gov.uk)