

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

Tuesday, 2 June 2020

6.30pm to 10.20pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Kemp (Chairman), Opara (Vice-Chairman), Cooper, Sylvia Griffin, Hackwell, Howcroft-Scott, Johnson, Purdy, Thorne and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative) and Fay Cordingley (Church of England Representative)

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), Michelle Dewar (Medway Parents and Carers Forum) and Margaret Cane (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative)

In Attendance: Eleanor Brazil, Commissioner for Children's Social Care in Medway
Lee-Anne Farach, Assistant Director - Children's Social Care
Sameera Khan, Assistant Head of Legal Services
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Ian Sutherland, Director of People - Children and Adults Services
Angela Taylor, Youth Participation Worker to Medway Youth Council
James Williams, Director of Public Health
Andrew Willetts, Head of Partnership Commissioning, Resources and Youth Justice

11 Election of Chairman

Discussion:

The Committee was invited to appoint a Chairman for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Decision:

Councillor Kemp was appointed as Chairman for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their abstention from the vote be recorded.

12 Election of Vice-Chairman

Discussion:

The Committee was invited to appoint a Vice-Chairman for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Decision:

Councillor Opara was appointed as Vice-Chairman for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their abstention from the vote be recorded.

13 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Aldous, Barrett, Carr, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp and from Akinola Edun and David Lane (Parent Governor representatives).

14 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 5 March was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their vote in favour of this decision be recorded.

15 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

16 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

17 Ofsted Update Report - Children's Services in Medway

Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress of improvement activity since Medway's Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. He highlighted the additional resource that had been provided to the directorate, the realignment of the service, the work of the Improvement Board, the work with partners in practice and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. He explained that the Council was beginning to move into the second phase of the improvement journey where progress needed to be firmer, go further and go faster, adding the improvement plan would be refreshed accordingly.

The Children's Commissioner then addressed the Committee, explaining that she had submitted an update report to the Minister, to provide some independent external assurance in light of the cancellation of the Ofsted monitoring visits due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commissioner added that she would submit her formal 6 month review report to the minister in July. She expressed her view that the Council had responded well to the challenges faced by Covid-19 and reflected on strengths that had been established as a result, such as the improved working relationship with schools. She added that there had been clear improvements in the service and in the priority given to it across the Council. As progress continued, she would be seeking, amongst other aspects, demonstrable change in all aspects of political and corporate leadership.

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

- **Thanks to staff** - a number of Members expressed their thanks and appreciation to staff for their hard work and maintained support to Medway's vulnerable children and families during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Evidence of progress** – comments were expressed of the need for clearer evidence to demonstrate progress and outcomes. In response the Director confirmed that measuring impact was a focus of the Improvement Board also and it was something officers were working on to develop the best way of demonstrating real impact. A scaling model was being developed to show the distance travelled in relation to progress which could be shared with Members. The refreshed Improvement Plan would also look substantially different and would update some of the progress measures which were still showing as outstanding within the appendix to the report, but had since been completed.

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- **Impact of Covid-19** – in response to a query about how the pandemic had impacted on the improvement journey, the Director commented that the pandemic had resulted in some impact to the trajectory of the progress but that continued momentum was being maintained, which had been recognised by Ofsted. He added that the referral rate of safeguarding concerns had dropped since schools had been closed but this was beginning to rise again as lockdown began to be eased. The phased return of schools would help in terms of possible spikes in referrals as would improved partnership working to manage the service post lockdown. He also stated that through the lockdown the Council had worked closely with schools and built a strengthened relationship with them that would be continued going forward. The Commissioner added that her role had been extended to oversee Medway's response to operating services during the pandemic and she considered Medway's response to be rigorous, robust and child focused.
- **Audits** – in response to a question about quality assurance and audits, officers confirmed that this was a critical area of focus going forward and would provide more detail on this in future reports.
- **Member training** – in relation to member training the Children's Commissioner stated that Medway needed to develop its Members to be able to provide good challenge in the long term and this Committee, along with the Corporate Parenting Board, were key forums for that. She explained that there were a number of different ways to undertake effective scrutiny which needed to be explored.
- **Workforce** – the Director explained that ten social workers had been recruited from South Africa, but the travel restrictions relating to Covid-19 had resulted in a delay of their arrival to Medway. This was now anticipated to be October and agency staff had been retained for the extended intervening period. It was added that some agency staff had recently converted to permanent staff due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the desire this had created for the security provided by permanent employment.
- **Engagement with families** – in response to questions about the impact of social distancing in relation to engagement with service users, officers confirmed that engagement had continued in a variety of ways. Video calling was being used where it was safe and appropriate to do so, doorstep visits were also taking place. Where social workers were required to carry out a Section 47 visit due to child protection concerns, they would attend using Personal Protection Equipment.
- **Edge of care and Adolescent Teams** – responding to requests, officers undertook to provide further information on these.

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- **Avoiding drift in Child Protection Cases** – assurances were sought that the progress made in addressing drift would continue. Officers explained that a number of checks and balancing measures had been implemented, along with improved working relationships with legal colleagues and the Family Group Conferencing service, which were both now more embedded into the Children's Social Work Service. This also meant families were better supported to keep children with their family where it was safe and appropriate to do so.
- **The 0-25 Disability Service** – concern was raised regarding extending the scope of the 0-25 Disability Service to include safeguarding and court work as it was felt some parents were reluctant to engage with the service and the inclusion of these functions could worsen that. The Director explained that this was planned in response to criticism by Ofsted of the service not providing these functions but that officers would work with the Medway Parent and Carer Forum to address these concerns.
- **Engagement with staff** – officers confirmed that the Staff Engagement Forum consisted of approximately 20 members of staff and two of those representatives were also members of the Improvement Board. The Director welcomed the suggestion of organising an updated staff survey and added that further opportunities for the Committee to engage with frontline staff would also be explored as social distancing eased.
- **Effective scrutiny** – in response to a question about how the committee could ensure effective scrutiny, the Children's Commissioner explained that there were many creative ways to conduct effective scrutiny, particularly reality checking and hearing directly from young people, families and front line staff, which can feed back to the Committee and form part of its core business.

Decision

The Committee noted the report and requested a report on the Edge of Care and Adolescent Services and that a staff survey for Children's Services staff be developed and delivered and reported back to the Committee in due course.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their votes in favour of the decision be recorded.

18 Medway Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan for 2020 - 2023

Discussion:

The Head of Partnership Commissioning, Resources and Youth Justice introduced the report which presented the draft Medway Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Plan for consideration. He highlighted the three aims of the plan, the successes of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and areas for improvement.

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He explained that the YOT had been inspected earlier in the year and the outcome of the inspection would be published on 4 June 2020.

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

- **Post 16 provision** – in response to a question about what was being done to mitigate the large reduction in post 16 provision, officers confirmed they were working closely with the Medway Skills Partnership Board and had been successful in some funding bids to develop alternative options. This remains a significant challenge.
- **Reducing young people entering custody** – in response to concerns raised around Medway's performance in this area, officers confirmed it was an area of focus. Improved working relationships with Police would assist by them referring young people earlier, for example when the Police take no further action support from YOT could then help prevent that young person from further involvement in crime. The YOT was also working with the Courts in delivering the Intensive Surveillance Support Programme which enabled Young People to be better supported in the community. The new Adolescent Service within Children's Services would also be working with complex young people who were not open to the YOT and it was hoped this, along with work by Medway Task Force, the Violence Reduction Unit and other interventions planned, would have a positive impact.
- **Data lag** – in response to a question about the lag of data, officers explained that this was a difficulty nationally due to the release of data from the Youth Justice Board.
- **Management of case step downs** – in response to a question, officers explained that the new Early Help and Adolescent services within Children's Social Care would help in terms of supporting a child and their family where they were no longer the responsibility of the YOT but still needed some level of intervention to work through any continuing vulnerabilities to avoid re-offending behaviours.
- **Visiting the YOT** – in response to a request officers were supportive of Members visiting YOT as well as observing the work done within communities once social distancing eased.
- **Gang activity** – in response to a comment regarding gang activity in Medway officers confirmed that this was a concern and work with partners was ongoing to reduce the ability of gangs to operate effectively in Medway. The YOT worked closely with the Community Safety Partnership on this issue and following a successful bid with North Kent (KCC), the service would be working in partnership with community and school settings to address this area.
- **Support for young people with ADHD and/or dyslexia** – given the high prevalence of these conditions amongst young offenders, it was

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asked if specific support would be provided to such young people working with Medway's YOT. In response officers explained that they believed there to be an under reporting or under diagnosis of conditions such as these within the Medway YOT cohort. Work was therefore underway with Medway Community Healthcare to better identify the needs of young people (including training) and the YOT had also been working with Educational Psychology to better understand the special education needs of the YOT cohort.

- **Violence against parents** – it was confirmed that the lockdown measures had seen an increase in violence by young people against their parents. The YOT delivered a programme called non-violent resistance and also a programme called Acorns which supported parental victims. It was added that other areas within Children's Services, such as Early Help, could also refer families into these programmes.
- **Parenting support** – the importance of supporting parents early on was emphasised. Getting adults into work, supporting them with drug and alcohol misuse where needed and supporting all families across all aspects and services would in turn reduce the risks of a child's involvement in criminality.

Decision:

- 1) The Committee recommended Cabinet to recommend Full Council to approve the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023, including its accompanying delivery plan (Appendix A to the Strategic Plan) all underpinned by the use of a public health approach.
- 2) The Committee recommended Cabinet to recommend Full Council to agree that reducing reoffending and custody rates should be a major priority for all Members as well as the Youth Justice Partnership Board.
- 3) The Committee agreed to receive a report on the outcome of the HMIP Inspection of the Medway Youth Offending Team at a later meeting.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their votes in favour of the decisions be recorded.

19 Medway Youth Council - Annual Conference Report

Discussion:

The Medway Youth Council (MYC) Chair introduced the report which provided the Committee with the findings of the MYC Annual Conference on Climate Change. It had highlighted that protecting the environment had been a key priority for young people and provided an effective platform for the young people of Medway to voice their views on issues affecting climate change. The conference had enabled Medway Youth Council to gather a reliable

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representative range of feedback from young people, enabling them to effectively represent and work on these issues.

In terms of outcomes, the MYC Chair explained that MYC would work with schools and community groups to conduct an annual audit of the waste they produced and recycling levels. Alongside the audit MYC would monitor progress in relation to improvements in recycling, reductions of non-recyclable waste and help promote classroom climate education.

A suggestion was made that the report should be shared with primary schools and this was welcomed by the MYC Chair who undertook to explore ways of doing this.

Decision:

The Committee thanked Medway Youth Council for the report and recommended that it be reported to full Council and the Climate Change Advisory Group.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their votes in favour of the decisions be recorded.

20 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which updated the Committee on its current work programme. She drew the Committee's attention to section 5 of the report, which updated the Committee on actions it would take to maximise its effectiveness in the scrutiny of Children's Services.

Officers confirmed that performance data workshops and member training events could be resumed now that Members had been provided with the relevant equipment to participate in remote meetings. Officers also undertook to explore ways of how outcomes of the workshop meetings could be reported to the main Committee in a public forum.

During discussion of the work programme the following suggestions were also made:

- to include a report to the July meeting on how the services relevant to this Committee had dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also suggested that other overview and scrutiny committees may wish to have similar reports relevant to their remits.
- Surge classes – reference was made to a possible Cabinet report on this issue and it was suggested that the opportunity to scrutinise this be considered at the next pre-agenda meeting.
- Grammar School Places – the Democratic Services Officer undertook to liaise with officers about when this issue would be ready to bring forward as it had been listed on the work programme for some time.

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- Maximising Committee time – a suggestion was made that the Committee should make better use of its time to scrutinise matters which could have the greatest impact and receive less information reports via main Committee meetings, which could instead be sent via briefing notes.

Decision:

The Committee:

- agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix A to the report, subject to the addition of a report on how services relevant to the remit of this Committee had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- noted the update in relation to additional scrutiny activity set out at section 5 of the report.
- requested officers to feedback to the Committee, via the next agenda-planning meeting, in relation to the scheduling of reports on surge classes and on grammar school places.

Councillors Cooper, Howcroft-Scott and Johnson requested that their votes in favour of the above decision be recorded.

Chairman

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