

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

**Thursday, 23 July 2020**

**6.38pm to 11.23pm**

**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), Aldous, Barrett, Hackwell, Johnson, Osborne, Purdy, Chrissy Stamp, Thorne and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative), Fay Cordingley (Church of England Representative) and Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative)

**Added members without voting rights:**

Archie Bean (Medway Youth Council Chair), Oliver Branch (Medway Youth Council Vice-Chair), Nicola Forrest (Head Teacher Representative), Geoffrey Matthews (Teacher Representative) and Margaret Cane (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative)

**Substitutes:** Lisa Scarrott (Substitute for Michelle Dewar - Medway Parent and Carer Forum)

**In Attendance:** Lee-Anne Farach, Assistant Director - Children's Social Care  
Sameera Khan, Assistant Head of Legal Services  
Chris Kiernan, Interim Assistant Director, Education and SEND  
Rory Patterson, Independent Scrutineer, MSCP  
Simon Plummer, MSCP Business Manager  
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer  
Ian Sutherland, Director of People - Children and Adults Services  
Andrew Willetts, Head of Partnership Commissioning, Resources and Youth Justice  
James Williams, Director of Public Health  
Karen Yusuf, Youth Development Worker

**118 Apologies for absence**

During this period, it was informally agreed between the two political groups, due the Coronavirus pandemic, to run Medway Council meetings with a

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reduced number of participants. This was to reduce risk, comply with Government guidance and enable more efficient meetings. Therefore, the apologies given reflects that informal agreement of reduced participants.

Apologies were received from Councillors Ahmed, Carr, Cooper, Sylvia Griffin and Howcroft-Scott, Michelle Dewar (Medway Parent and Carer Forum) and David Lane (Parent Governor representative).

### **119 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 2 June 2020 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct, subject to the following wording being added to under apologies for absence (minute no. 13)

“During this period, it was informally agreed between the two political groups, due the Coronavirus pandemic, to run Medway Council meetings with a reduced number of participants. This was to reduce risk, comply with Government guidance and enable more efficient meetings. Therefore, the apologies given reflects that informal agreement of reduced participants.”

### **120 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

### **121 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

#### Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

#### Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

#### Other interests

Councillor Opara declared that Item 8 of the agenda (Council Plan Monitoring and Risk Register Q4/End of Year 2019/20) referred to children not in education, employment or training (NEETs). She explained that although she ran a training company in Medway that worked with NEETs, it did not make direct reference to her company and she was therefore able to remain in the room and participate in the discussion on that item.

### **122 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Update Report**

#### **Discussion:**

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services, the current Chair of the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) introduced the report, highlighting to the Committee the MSCP’s five priority areas. He then

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Introduced the Independent Scrutineer, who explained his role in relation to the partnership and the work he was doing to build evidence of the partnership's impact. He also highlighted the importance of each agency's strategic documents being joined up in approach and how messages should be communicated down the whole safeguarding system.

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

- **Staff development** – in response to a question about what staff development activities had taken place as a response to the serious case review relating to Faith, set out at paragraph 3.5 of the report, officers explained that wider development training opportunities had been explored and all agencies were asked to complete a self assessment audit in relation to their readiness to identify risks relating to child abuse.
- **Impact** – in response to a question about the impact on the experiences of children and families in Medway, it was explained that more evidence would be available in the MSCP's annual report, which would be presented to the Committee later in the year.
- **Domestic abuse** – officers welcomed the suggestion of an in-depth report in relation to domestic abuse, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, the impact this had on vulnerable children and how partner agencies were responding. Comment was also made that when domestic abuse issues were reported, they would not always meet the threshold for social care intervention and officers confirmed they were looking at how they could log such cases.
- **Partner contributions** – officers explained that the financial contributions of all the partner agencies listed at paragraph 1.3 of the report, would be included in the annual report. It was confirmed that the local authority contributed the largest amount of funding.
- **Separation of roles** – it was queried whether reporting directly from the chair and from the Independent Scrutineer should be kept separate rather than being incorporated in the same report. Officers undertook to explore this with the Partnership's Executive. The Independent Scrutineer confirmed he acted as a constructive critical friend, bringing challenge to the system.
- **Business Plan** – Officers undertook to provide the Committee with the MSCP Business Plan Including its RAG ratings every six months.
- **Engagement** – The Director of People undertook to include the Medway Parent and Carers Forum in its wider engagement events as a partnership and would ensure that foster carers were also included.
- **Work with schools** – In response to a question about the role of schools in relation to safeguarding, officers explained that PCSOs and

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police officers were working directly with schools and in addition, there had been a recent successful bid for the funding of mental health practitioners who would work directly in schools. Furthermore, communication between schools and Early Help had been improved, particularly as the community was beginning to come out of lockdown and potential safeguarding concerns were being raised by school staff.

- **Missing children** – officers explained that there had been much work in relation to missing children, with return home interviews now in place and a suite of leaflets that had been developed for young people at risk of going missing and their parents and carers, which would be available imminently. The point was made of the importance of regularly tracking missing children and reading across to other risks of vulnerability such as child sexual exploitation and gang activity.

### Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested that an in-depth report regarding domestic abuse be added to the Committee's work programme.

(Councillors Johnson, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour of the decision be recorded.)

## 123 HMIP Inspection of Youth Offending Team (YOT)

### Discussion:

The Head of Service for Partnership Commissioning, Resources and Youth Justice introduced the report which updated the Committee on the outcome of the HMIP inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT), which had rated the YOT as 'requires improvement'. He highlighted areas identified as strengths and weakness and referred Members to the Improvement Plan, set out at Appendix B to the report.

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

- **Inconsistency in quality of practice** – in response to a question about how this was being addressed, officers confirmed that a new reoffending toolkit had been introduced which was working well, together with an improved audit tool.
- **Supporting children in custody** – officers confirmed that children in custody were now being given more priority and additional support to address the concerns raised in the inspection. Children were now assessed at the very start of entering custody and their pathway or support mapped.
- **Resources** – in response to a question about resources, officers confirmed that the budget was a pooled budget between the Local Authority and strategic partners. Funding had also recently been

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awarded to work with young people at risk of offending, particularly those receiving education at alternative provision placements.

- **Staff recruitment and retention** – officers confirmed that performance in this area was good, with low turnover rates and progression opportunities available.
- **No further actions** – reference was made to the lack of signposting/ referring to the YOT by the Police when taking no further action, even after a number of incidents involving a young person. Officers confirmed that this had been raised and work was underway to improve this to ensure the YOT intervened at the earliest, appropriate moment.
- **YOT and girls** - in response to a question about girls involvement with the YOT, officers explained numbers hadn't particularly increased but the type of crime had significantly changed in recent years, with 50% now involved in crime of a serious nature (for example, violence against another person).
- **Children placed in Medway from out of area** – in response to a question it was confirmed that young people placed within Medway from out of area became the responsibility of Medway YOT.
- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups** – in response to a question officers confirmed that young people from BAME groups were not over represented within Medway YOT.
- **Children not in education, employment or training (NEETs)** – officers confirmed that children who were NEET were a real focus for the YOT as they accounted for over 50% of the YOT cohort. The team were working with the Youth Service, Department for Work and Pensions and the Princes Trust Programme, as well as a number of other community and voluntary organisations, to explore opportunities to engage NEETs.

### Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

(Councillors Johnson, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour of the decision be recorded).

## 124 Covid-19 Impact and Response

### Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services introduced the report which provided detail on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response by services within the directorate. He reassured the Committee that officers had continued to progress at pace with the Council's children's services

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improvement journey and highlighted the improved relationship with schools as a particular positive outcome.

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

- **Return to school in September** – in response to concerns raised about how the return of children and young people to school in September would be managed and what lessons had been learned from the period of school closures, officers explained that there was a sense the pandemic re-positioned the role of the local authority in areas such as Medway where there were a substantial number of academies, in that all schools had worked with the Council in partnership to work through Government advice together and co-produce plans and strategies in response. Officers reiterated that the risks relating to Covid-19 and children attending schools was very small but the risks to children who did not attend school was much greater and could have significant long term consequences. Officers commended colleagues within education for the commitment they had made to ensuring children had access to learning opportunities throughout this period and in particular, for the efforts they were making to prepare for the full return in September.
- **Mental wellbeing** – it was suggested that a report be considered at a future meeting with information about how Medway's children and young people have coped with the pandemic and the impact it and lockdown measures had had on their development and mental health.
- **Use of technology** – officers confirmed that adolescents in particular had welcomed the increase use of digital technology to communicate with social workers and the use of the Mind of My Own app would be strengthened going forward. Officers added that over 700 young people had been provided with devices to assist them in their studies. It was also recognised that some service users had missed their face to face interaction with practitioners and that going forward services would be delivered with a blend of digital and face to face contact.
- **Medway Test** – in response to questions about the Medway Test arrangements for 2020, officers explained that they had delayed the test dates to the full extent of the potential range within the overall timelines as the Department for Education had not been willing to delay admission deadlines.
- **School attendance** – in response to a question about how schools and the Local Authority would support parents and families to ensure pupil attendance was high, officers confirmed they would avoid fining families wherever possible and support families in building their confidence in sending children to school at the start of the new academic year. However, it was believed that attendance would be much improved in September across all year groups.

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- **School transport** – concern was raised about the difficulties of social distancing on buses as well as ensuring bus routes were maintained. Officers explained that the Assistant Director of Front Line Services was liaising directly with Arriva. The plan to currently limit capacity to 50% of seats available would impact access and therefore officers were working to lobby the Department for Transport in getting this lifted for commercial routes. In addition, Arriva had attended a recovery meeting with Headteachers to inform schools on an increase in routes and on the measures they were taking to help keep transmission rates to as close to zero as possible. In relation to transport for children with special educational needs, officers were in frequent liaison with providers and where possible, children were being transported within their school bubbles.
- **Second wave** – in response to a question about actions that would be taken if a second wave occurred, it was confirmed that unless there was a national policy decision to close schools, closures would be decided by schools but with input from the Local Authority. Officers added that they were working closely with teacher trade unions to work in partnership to support staff to return to work safely.
- **Short breaks** – reference was made to the impact of the pandemic on short breaks provision, which was leaving parents and carers of children with disabilities without that support. Officers confirmed that Parklands had been opened during lockdown but with reduced numbers of children using the facility to comply with Covid-19 related guidance. Officers were keen to increase intake to its full capacity, but this would only be done when safe to do so, particularly given the vulnerabilities of the children who use this service.
- **Child health referrals** – reference was also made about the decision to stop accepting referrals for children by Medway Community Healthcare, who had redeployed a number of its staff members to assist with other critical services. The impact of this on children and young people was acknowledged and was a priority in terms of the recovery planning for this important service area.
- **Support for students** – questions were asked about how students were supported, particularly those at transition points in Year 11 and 13, to ensure they were getting the right advice going forward and if library spaces could be used for children who were unable to study at home. Officers confirmed that one of the Council's top priorities was to address the issue around children who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and there was a concern that the risk of young people becoming NEET would be increased as an impact of the pandemic and lockdown measures. There had been a sharp fall in the number of training providers in Medway and the Council was exploring alternative options to establish new provision at pace.

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### Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested a report to a future meeting on the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on children and young people, particularly in relation to mental wellbeing, development and digital poverty.

(Councillors Johnson, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour of the decision be recorded).

### 125 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Risk Register Quarter 4 and End of Year 2019/20

### Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services introduced the report which updated the Committee on performance in the fourth quarter of 2019/20 against priorities within the Council Plan.

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

- **Childhood obesity** – concern was raised in relation to obesity and an example was given of the selling of fast food and vending machine food in leisure centres. Officers acknowledged that childhood obesity required a whole system approach and confirmed that a Whole Systems Obesity specialist was being appointed to take forward workstreams to address issues across the board. It was also asked how childhood weight was monitored to know how well strategies to address childhood obesity were working. Officers confirmed that the measures taken were national measures but the whole system approach would help address obesity in terms of generational impact, lifestyle choices for whole families and creating opportunities through regeneration for families to be active.
- **GCSE results for looked after** – it was requested that this information be reported to Members confidentially, as this was data that was not able to be published in the public domain because of the small numbers of young people it related to.
- **Unfilled social worker posts** – concern was raised as to this not being reported, the reason indicated in the report being that the information had not been supplied by Human Resources. Officers confirmed they were unsure of the reasons for this but suggested a report to a future meeting of the Committee on social worker recruitment and retention strategies, as part of the children's services improvement journey.
- **Children not in education, employment or training (NEETs)** – reference was made to NEETs and the impact of the loss in training providers and action needed. It was suggested that an update on this be provided to the Committee via a briefing note. Officers added that the number of children whose destination is unknown was currently too high and so extra resources were being put in to track their activity.



- **Risk register** – It was asked if the risk register would be updated in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers confirmed that this was being reviewed at a corporate level and additional Covid-19 elements would need to be addressed.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and requested a report on the workforce development strategies relating to social worker recruitment and retention and requested a briefing note updating Members on the action being taken to address children who were not in education, employment or training.

(Councillors Johnson, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour of the decision be recorded).

**126 Work programme**

**Discussion:**

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which updated the Committee on its work programme. She also informed Members that there would be a training event on Thursday 6 August for Members in relation to models of working, values and culture of practice, led by Medway's Principal Social Worker. She also confirmed that it was hoped the Early Help Task Group would commence in late August.

Comment was made in relation to the scrutiny of the dashboard data, which was provided to the Committee on a monthly basis and discussed in depth with Members at bi-monthly data workshops, and it was suggested this should perhaps be attached to main committee agendas, although accepting this would potentially need to be kept confidential as some of the information related to small cohorts of children. The Democratic Services Officer explained that the purpose of the provision of the dashboard data and the data workshops was to improve Members understanding of issues and risks to enable them to ask more informed questions when scrutinising council plan monitoring performance or other reports relevant to the data in main committee meetings. In addition, it would help the Committee to shape its work programme to scrutinise more deeply the issues causing them particular concern.

Reference was also made to the list of items on the work programme which were yet to be scheduled and officers undertook to identify dates for these items and also whether any could be converted into briefing notes, as opposed to reports at main Committee.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and the actions by officers to address the outstanding items on the work programme.

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(Councillors Johnson, Osborne and Chrissy Stamp requested their votes in favour of the decision be recorded).

**Chairman**

**Date:**

**Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer**

Telephone: 01634 332104

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