

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

Tuesday, 1 December 2020

6.35pm to 10.26pm

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, Carr, Hackwell, Howcroft-Scott, Johnson, Purdy, Chrissy Stamp, Thorne and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin

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

Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church representative) and
Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

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

Substitutes: Lisa Scarrott (substitute for Michelle Dewer – Medway Parent and Carer Forum)

In Attendance: Lee-Anne Farach, Assistant Director - Children's Social Care
Chris Kiernan, Interim Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Victoria O'Neill, Legal Advisor
Rory Patterson, Independent Scrutineer, MSCP
Simon Plummer, MSCP Business Manager
Detective Supt. Andy Pritchard, Vice Chair, Medway
Safeguarding Children's Partnership
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Hilary Sparling, Area Manager - Adoption and Fostering
Ian Sutherland, Director of People - Children and Adults
Services
Sarah Vaux, Kent and Medway CCG
Karen Yusuf, Youth Development Worker

444 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 for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Barrett, Cooper, Sylvia Griffin and Osborne and from Fay Cordingley (Church of England Diocese representative), David Lane (Parent Governor representative and Geoff Matthews (Teacher).

445 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 1 October 2020 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct, subject to Akinola Edun (Parent Governor representative) being marked as present at the meeting and being removed from the list of apologies.

446 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

447 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

Councillor Opara declared a DPI in relation to item 8 (Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 2 of 2020/21) as she ran a business in Medway which provided provision for children who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) and considered that references within the report were closely aligned to her DPI. She therefore withdrew from the meeting for the discussion and decision on that item.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

448 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2019-20

Discussion:

The Committee considered the annual report of the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP), which was introduced by the current Chair, Detective Superintendent Andy Pritchard.

The Committee raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

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- **Agency response during pandemic** – the Chair of the MSCP explained that the partnership response had been co-ordinated, with a real concern around hidden harm due to the lack of natural surveillance caused by lockdown restrictions. Efforts were made to mitigate this as much as possible, with close liaison taking place with schools and social care to ensure contact was made with vulnerable children and families. The NHS Kent and Medway CCG representative also confirmed that unlike the first wave of the pandemic where some health visiting and school nursing staff were redeployed to covid-19 response related tasks, this was not the case for the second or any subsequent waves.
- **Independent Scrutineer** – in response to a question around the role of the independent scrutineer, the Chair of the MSCP explained that the independent role had a more productive use of time than previously, as it no longer included chairing responsibilities and it enabled effective challenge of the thinking and approach of the partnership.
- **Time lag of data** – comment was made that some of the data included in the report was quite out of date. The Business Manager undertook to investigate this further and confirmed that accessing more current data available was a focus of the Performance Management and Quality Assurance sub-group, although it was explained that there was some delay in regional and national comparative data.
- **Relocation of the family court** – officers confirmed their disappointment of the relocation of the family court out of Medway, into Kent, although it was not expected to have a significant impact on safeguarding functions and the use of virtual court arrangements was starting to reduce initial delays experienced at the start of the pandemic.
- **Child poverty** – in response to a question about how child poverty was defined and measured, officers explained that this was likely to be linked to measures of income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) for Medway, but this would be confirmed to the committee outside of the meeting.
- **Training opportunities** – in response to a question about how training was advertised, particularly to the community and voluntary sector, officers explained they worked with Medway Voluntary Association and the NSPCC to raise awareness of training opportunities and they did work to tailor training content and availability to suit particular groups, such as schools and taxi drivers, as examples.
- **Cyber bullying** – this was a concern that has been raised by young people and in response to a question about how the partnership was addressing this, the Chair of the MSCP confirmed it needed to have a greater focus within the partnership. It was added that engagement with schools was a priority and two school leaders would be joining the

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MSCP Executive to become more connected to the partnership, its priorities and approaches.

- **Vaccinations** – in response to a question around immunisation rates, the representative of the NHS Kent and Medway CCG confirmed that Medway's performance was slightly below the national average for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination take up, an issue which was often linked to deprivation but was also linked to factors such as publicity issues which were difficult to reverse in some communities. It was also reported that the flu vaccination uptake had been much higher this year than previous years. She also undertook to report back to the Committee on Medway's performance with other immunisation take up.
- **Children travelling by train** – a question was asked whether there was a link between out of area children travelling to Medway schools by train and county line and gang activity. In response the MSCP Chair explained that travelling by train was one possible way gangs may operate but it was one of many. Criminal exploitation of children manifested in a number of ways and was a focus of the Joint Exploitation Group to identify children involved or at risk of exploitation and to provide a wrap around service for those children.
- **Engagement children and families** – in response to a question about seeking views of children and families, the Independent Scrutineer explained there were good examples of listening to their views but there were issues about doing this consistently and how it impacted on service delivery. This was recognised as a challenge for all partnerships but was a priority for the MSCP to listen to concerns and use that to inform training, priorities and focus areas.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested a briefing note providing information and the definition and measures of child poverty.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

449 Children's Services Improvement Update

Discussion:

The Committee considered a report which provided a progress update on improvement activity in Children's Social Care, with a particular focus on assessment and quality assurance.

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

- **Improving audit quality** – in response to questions about progress on this, officers confirmed they were working on developing the workforce culture to create a supportive, learning space for people to see audit activity as a positive opportunity to learn and improve practice. It was also explained that improvement was now moving in a paced and sustainable way, with any delay at the outset being due to senior management changes and realignment of the service structures.
- **Reporting of ILACS7 (audit measure target)** – in response to a query about why this measure was not currently being reported on within council plan monitoring reports, officers undertook to investigate and report back on this issue.
- **Workforce** – officers confirmed that recruitment and retention was progressing with almost 75-80% of staff being permanent. Work was done to 'grown Medway's own' with Medway university campuses, open university courses and using in-house training schemes. Opportunities were also being sought to attract people who had previously left the profession and since the pandemic were looking to return. In addition, it was confirmed that all 10 overseas social workers that had been recruited ahead of the pandemic had now arrived and were settling into Medway. It was not anticipated that any more overseas social workers would be recruited at this stage.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

450 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2021/22

Discussion:

The Head of Finance Strategy introduced the report which set out initial budget proposals for 2020/21. She was able to update the Committee on the spending review which had been announced by the Chancellor since publication of the agenda, which confirmed the Government would fund covid-19 related pressures in the new year and announced flexibility for authorities to levy an adult social care precept on Council Tax of 3%. The chancellor had also announced new grant funding for children and adult social care totalling £300m, plus additional funding for homelessness and a £4bn levelling up fund, although mechanisms on how these grant streams would be distributed was yet to be provided. In addition, the Head of Finance Strategy also drew the Committee's attention to two additional appendices which had been provided; Appendix 2, which provided the minute from the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny

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Committee's discussion and Appendix 3, which provided additional information in relation to the funding formula for schools and academies.

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

- **Timing of decision making for funding formula** – in respond to a concern raised that decisions around the formula were routinely dealt with as urgent, with the facility for it to be called-in being waived, officers confirmed this would always be difficult due to the publication of census data, which was in mid December of each year and was used to test the affordability of funding formula proposals. The formula then needed to be tweaked as necessary, scrutinised by and agreed at the Schools Forum and then submitted to Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) by 21 January of each year.
- **High needs block budget** – officers confirmed that the budget was currently £9m overspent and was forecast to be approximately £13.5m overspent by the end of the current financial year. A recovery plan was now in place, but it would not see the deficit eradicated until 2028. The overspend was due to the large number of independent special schools currently being used to place Medway children, due to the lack of local provision. A programme was in place for 515 specialist places in Medway state schools by the mid 2020s, a mix of both special school provision and resourced placements within mainstream schools. It was also confirmed that Medway would be approaching the Department for Education for more money to support SEND provision and the Schools Forum were being requested later that week to agree some top slicing from the dedicated schools grant to fund a number of local authority education provision, such as school effectiveness support and other commissioned services.
- **Invest to save** – officers confirmed that this related to a transformation programme in adult services, which included the implementation of regular reviews to ensure timely identification of reduced level of need and therefore reduced support. It also related to placement sufficiency strategies to reduce placement costs. Demand for placements was very high and so tools were being used to reduce costs of placements as well as an ambition to strengthen in-house fostering to reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies, as well as a hope to reduce numbers of looked after children through improved social work practice and earlier intervention.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested that its comments be forwarded to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

451 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 2
of 2020/21

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which summarised how the Council had performed in quarter 2 of 2020/21 on the delivery of priorities relevant to the Committee.

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

- **Childhood obesity** – concern was raised about performance relating to childhood obesity and it was confirmed that a substantive report on this issue was being reported to the Committee at its next meeting. Officers undertook to try to address the lag of data available in that report.
- **Exclusion target** – a request was made that, in future, the detail on performance against this target be broken down by primary and secondary, academy and mainstream and where the child had a special education need or disability. Officers confirmed that performance was improving on this considerably and there had also been an improvement in placing children via fair access panels.
- **Persistent absence** – a suggestion was made that as this had been a target at red for some time, it should be addressed by the Committee, accepting that in the current situation with the pandemic and its impact on attendance this was not a particularly helpful time to scrutinise the issue. The point was made that in September, attendance in Medway schools was one of the highest in the country so until isolation issues emerged as the infection rate had increased within Medway, children and their families had been happy and confident in children attending school. Officers undertook to confirm how absences were recorded when children were forced to learn from home due to isolation requirements/bubble closures.
- **Smoking at time of delivery** – concern was raised in relating to performance on this which had declined. Officers explained that this related to the reconfiguration of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which merged Kent and Medway CCGs. The figure reported was a Kent and Medway wide figure and officers were working with the CCG and the Medway NHS Foundation Trust to disaggregate the figure. It was believed that Medway performance was still within target, although this was yet to be validated.
- **Children not in employment, education and training (NEET)** – concern was raised about the delay in supporting NEETs and finding alternative provision, given the reduction in providers which had been reported over the last few quarterly reports. In response, officers confirmed work was ongoing to support NEETs to find alternative

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provision and to contact young people. Doorstep contact with young people whose destination was unknown had been reinstated and the number of NEETs and unknowns was less than the same time in the previous year, so performance was improving although more work was needed. In addition, the college was increasing the number of level 1 courses from January 2021.

- **Digital poverty** – concern was raised about digital poverty and the impact this had had on some children and their ability to continue learning from home while in isolation. Officers confirmed that this had been followed up with the Department for Education as some equipment had been provided but not in the quantities expected or needed.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested greater detail by provision type for exclusion data and for information on the recording of school attendance during the pandemic to be sent to Members.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

452 Annual Adoption Report

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which provided details on the performance of the adoption service from September 2019-2020 and included information about the newly formed Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

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

- **RAA Statement of Purpose** – reference was made in the report of the RAA Statement of Purpose and it was requested that this be sent to Members.
- **Reporting to all Members** – it was suggested that all Members receive the report as part of their training in their role as corporate parents.
- **Male representation in the service** – concern was raised by the lack of male members of staff within the service. In response officers confirmed that traditionally the service, for adoption, fostering and across children's social care, was predominantly a female workforce but there were not considered to be any barriers to males accessing the profession. It was also confirmed that there were three males on the Adoption Panel.

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Decision:

The Committee noted the report, requested its comments be forwarded to the Cabinet and that all Members be provided with a copy of the report as part of their training in their role as Corporate Parents.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

453 Annual Fostering Report

Discussion:

The Committee considered a report on the performance of the Fostering Service for the period September 2019-2020. The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care confirmed to the Committee that current figures for in-house fostering was at 157 households

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

- **Impact of the pandemic on placements** – in response to a query about the impact of the pandemic on placements, particularly in relation to children not attending school during the initial lockdown, officers confirmed that some foster families had enjoyed the opportunity to bond and concentrate on family time; but for others it was challenging for them to have children at home 24/7 and to manage the change in routine. Support was offered to both foster carers and the children and there had been few disruptions, with those that did occur happening towards the end of the lockdown period or as the lockdown eased, with children experiencing anxiety at that stage. Officers undertook to provide details of the number of breakdowns and to provide a comparison with the previous year, as well as the number of looked after children attending school during the initial lockdown.
- **Payment of foster carers** – in response to a question about financial rewards given to foster carers who care for children with additional needs relating to disabilities, officers confirmed this was the case for those caring for children with complex disabilities. Officers confirmed they were reviewing this to ensure Medway remained competitive.
- **Recruitment of foster carers** – reference was made to the low conversion rate of recruited foster carers from initial application. In response officers confirmed that there were a number of reasons why those being recruited as foster carers was so low compared to the number expressing interest and that Medway needed to become more competitive. The service's vision was to train and support all carers to parent therapeutically to support young people with their trauma. For that reason the service would be robust about approving foster carers. The point was also made that the covid-19 pandemic had impacted recruitment considerably in the year of reporting.

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- **No of carers reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** – officers stated that this data reflected that Medway would not accept anything but the best for its children.
- **Demographics of children living with Medway carers** – it was requested to include at this table (at section 11.3 of the report) information around SEND and complex needs.
- **Recruiting carers from ethnic minority backgrounds** – a suggestion was made that the Medway Diversity Forum could help in raising awareness for recruitment of foster carers amongst families from ethnic minority groups.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and forwarded its comments to the Cabinet.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

454 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which updated Members on the Committee's work programme. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed she had sought the views from the Chairman and the Opposition Spokesperson who were content with the recommendation relating to the Headteacher position on the Committee, as outlined in section 6 of the report.

Decision:

The Committee:

- (1) agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to accepting the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1;
- (2) agreed to receive a briefing note relating to the Adolescent and Edge of Care Teams;
- (3) recommended the appointment of Carl Guerin-Hassett to the position of a non-voting Headteacher on this Committee to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Group Whips, for a two year term;
- (4) recommended the appointment of Nicola Forrest as a substitute non-voting Headteacher on this Committee to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Group Whips, for a two year term.

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In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Howcroft-Scott, Johnson and Chrissy Stamp requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

Chairman

Date:

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