

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 MARCH 2021

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (LEAD MEMBER)

Report from: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member)

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Lead Member for Children's Services as identified in the Department for Education Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) (DfE 2012). This report details the areas covered by the Lead Member for Children's Services and covers the period from April 2020 until February 2021.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. The Statutory Guidance was originally published in 2005, reviewed in 2009 and again in 2012. This report reflects the most recent guidance of 2013.
- 1.2. The Statutory Guidance was published under section 18(7) (Director of Children's Services) and 19(2) (Lead Member for Children's Services) of the Children Act 2004. This means that local authorities must have regard to it and, if they decide to depart from it, they will need to have clear reasons for doing so.
- 1.3. The Children Act 2004 requires every upper tier local authority to designate a Lead Member for Children's Services. The Lead Member is responsible for leadership, strategy and the effectiveness of education and children's social care. The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Lead Member for Children's Services according to the Council's constitution are:
 - Children's Partnership Commissioning (0-25)
 - Children's Provider Services (including Adoption, Fostering, Supported Accommodation and Residential Care)
 - Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services

- including Safeguarding Board
- Early Help (including Medway Action for Families,

- Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Youth Services)
- Inclusion
- SEND
- SEND Transport

2. Background

- 2.1. This year has been a very difficult and challenging year because of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Council Services for children and young people have continued to work with our children and families providing support and assistance. We have worked closely with partners, continuing to ensure that together we do everything we can to keep children and young people safe and free from risk of harm. I would like to thank all our staff and partners for their hard work and commitment in these challenging times.
- 2.2. I would also like to thank Children's Services staff and leaders in Medway for our continued improvement journey following the Ofsted decision in July 2019. Despite the pressure of the pandemic, I am pleased and proud of the progress that has been made.
- 2.3. Throughout the year we have worked with our Improvement Board, our DFE Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil, and Essex as our Partner in Practice, to support implementation of our Improvement Plan.
- 2.4. We are very pleased that our DFE Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil, has submitted her final report to the Minister and has advised that there is no longer a need for a Commissioner in Medway, or to consider an alternative delivery model, as Medway now has the capacity and capability to deliver the changes needed. This recommendation has been accepted by the DFE which is an important outcome and a demonstration of the progress made to improve children's services by the Council.
- 2.5. The DFE have now appointed an Improvement Adviser, Gladys Rhodes White, whose role over the coming year is to support the service to continue to make sustainable improvements.
- 2.6. Ofsted carried out their first Monitoring Visit in August 2020, and their report recognised the progress which is being made. I am pleased to say that they found no child at risk of harm.
- 2.7. The inspectors noted the following improvements:
 - the council has put in place the foundations for practice to improve including a new team structure and a permanent senior management team
 - the introduction of a new model of social work practice, Signs of Safety, and a reduction in caseloads
 - at the 'front door', families receiving the right service to match their needs and effective management oversight now ensures there is rarely any delay in offering a service to families.

- partners working well together to share information and plan effectively;
- assessments are completed promptly and children are seen and their views considered and social workers know the children well.

- 2.8 The Council is yet to be notified of any subsequent Ofsted visit as these have been put on hold as a result of Covid-19
- 2.9 Our main focus now is ensuring these improvements are sustained so Medway's children in need of our help and protection receive the service they deserve. We are continuing to support the implementation of our improvement plan which will deliver positive changes in the lives of Medway's vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.10 Colleagues from our leading partner agencies, including education, health and police, are central to the effectiveness of the board and this is helping us all to work better together for Medway's children. Partners have agreed a revised threshold document this year, which will help everyone to understand their role in supporting Medway's families.
- 2.11 Elected members have been supported to actively respond to their statutory responsibilities and to improve the effectiveness of their leadership and scrutiny function. Monthly performance data following the child's journey is provided to scrutiny Members, which is accompanied by regular data workshops for scrutiny Members to promote better understanding of performance and service delivery. As chair of Corporate Parenting Board, I have also been pleased to support a training programme for members which has helped to clarify our roles and responsibilities in relation to being an effective corporate parent.
- 2.12 Internally, we have created a Staff Reference Group to give colleagues working in Children's Services the opportunity to have their input to our improvement journey, and this group, which is also represented on the Improvement Board, is working well.
- 2.13 Over the coming year we will continue to make sustainable improvements to improve the services we provide for Medway's children.

3. Children's Partnership Commissioning (0-25)

- 3.1 There are services that, as a Council, we cannot always provide directly and the Children's Partnership Commissioning Team, a joint team with the NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, commission providers to deliver such services. These are across several areas including Emotional Health and Wellbeing Services, Advocacy, Placements, and finally support for Schools.
- 3.2 Our aim is to ensure all of Medway's children thrive, remain healthy and learn well and we have seen achievements in these contracts over the last year. This has been in spite of the pandemic, which has had a significant impact on children's health services both with staff sickness and isolation as well as staff redeployment.

- 3.3 We have seen a significant reduction in waiting times for services delivered by NELFT. Waiting times have improved from 48% to 92% where children are now accessing treatment within 18 weeks. We have also seen more than 500 children access emotional health and wellbeing services than in previous years and we expect this will to improve further this year, with the development of Kooth (online counselling support service for young people) and Mental Health Support Teams in Schools.
- 3.4 The first lockdown created a backlog especially for children on neurodevelopmental pathways. Assessments in this pathway require face to face appointments, which were not possible. Services developed an assessment tool that could be delivered virtually in line with best practice enabling the backlog for MCH (children aged under 11) being addressed by December 2020. We recognise that there is still more work to do with waiting times to access Neurodevelopmental services for children aged 11 and over, we are seeing a continued decreasing trend and work continues to bring these back into line with national levels.
- 3.5 Whilst the pandemic has been and continues to be extremely challenging, there have been some positives emerge: The digital offer across services is more robust now. NELFT are now positioned to offer virtual sessions as appropriate, which better meets the needs of some families. Kooth has been a real success offering a digital forum to tackle low level emotional health and wellbeing needs by providing access to advice, guidance, counselling and therapy support. We have seen access to the service increase each month with positive repeated use.
- 3.6 Commissioners have been working to improve joint working across NELFT and MCH and have begun to see an improvement with multi-agency discussions taking place around cases and better management of transition.
- 3.7 There has been improved partnership working between NELFT, MCH, MFT and the Council to ease waiting times. Also, there has been increased engagement and support for schools. NELFT and MCH have delivered webinars to schools to improve understanding of pathways and services. Public Health and Education Psychologists delivered a range of Education Wellbeing and Recovery sessions offering support for both staff and pupils' wellbeing as well as mapping out mental health support provision.
- 3.8 The recent sufficiency work has been robust and has given a clear direction for planning. The plan and arrangements have recently been signed off through Cabinet and Full Council. The focus of this work includes:
- Children's Assessment Unit
 - Edge of care and reunification programme
 - Repeat removals project (supporting parents)
 - Foster care offer (internal)
- 3.9 Work around placements has been positive and the improvement in Children's Services is having an impact on crisis and emergency placements. This has led

to better planning through identifying the right placement for the children. The number of Children in Care has also reduced from 468 to 437 again increasing the volume and capacity of placements choice.

- 3.10 There remains a number of challenges to achieving reductions in the cost of placements; the increased complexity of children coming into care and the number of children in care is creating pressure on the specialist provider market leading to a shortage of those very specialist placements that can take children with the highest level of behavioural needs. The developments of Medway Assessment Unit will be a critical piece of work this year.
- 3.11 Our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) programme is also delivering optimistic impact and results within our Youth Offending Team and Education settings.
- 3.12 Health Visitors worked much more closely with Children's Services – sharing information from visits and reducing the number of contacts required in home.
- 3.13 The priorities in these contracts for the next year remain to ensure good and ultimately outstanding outcomes for our children and young people in Medway.
4. Corporate Parenting and Children in Care (including Adoption, Fostering, Supported Accommodation and Residential Care)
 - 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Service includes four children in care teams, two 16 plus teams, the 0-25 Disabled Children's Team, the Leaving Care Team, a fostering service and an adoption team, and a short break residential home for children with a disability, which was relocated to Parklands in 2020.
 - 4.2 The number of children in Medway's care reached a peak of 468 in the October/November period of 2020. Since this peak the numbers have steadily reduced to below 440. This is a result of the work done in the Assessment and Children's Social Work Teams to seek to prevent children coming into care, and work progressing through the Courts to allow children to exit the care system.
 - 4.3 Increased scrutiny is in place to ensure permanence planning is considered when any child is accommodated and throughout legal proceedings. Weekly tracking meetings are led by the Group Manager (Children in Care) and supported by the Adoption and Fostering Group Manager who reviews all children in Pre-Proceedings, in Court Proceedings, and those who are in care subject to s20 of the Children Act, so that the plan for each child is considered until the child returns home or an order is made. Once an order has been made, permanence is monitored through Children Looked After (CLA) reviews and supervision to ensure plans are progressed in a timely way.
 - 4.4 A key priority for this last year was to increase the number of in-house Parent and Child foster placements. It is pleasing to report that the number of these placements in-house has increased from 3 to 13 with 5 further families being trained ready to take these placements.

4.5 In October 2020, the Council agreed a three year programme of investment in the Fostering Service with the aim of increasing the number of Foster Carers in the local authority, but importantly, increasing this supply of capacity sufficiently to ensure more placement choice when matching children with fostering families. This is an 'Invest to Save' initiative which will achieve savings on external placements over three years. The objective is to recruit an additional twelve foster carers a year.

4.6 Kent County Council have agreed to host the new Regionalised Adoption Agency (RAA) on behalf of Medway and Bexley. A Head of RAA was successfully appointed and the RAA was launched in November 2020. The RAA will be responsible for delivering the core adoption functions - recruitment, matching and support, underpinned with a pooled budget, with a clear single line of accountability to enable prompt decision-making.

4.7 The leaving care service has been expanded to include provision for young people aged 16 plus. This will enhance pathway and transition planning so young people are better and more consistently supported into adulthood.

4.8 Priorities for 2021-22

- Improving quality of our practice, including evidencing direct work, life story work, direct work with children and use of tools including genograms and chronology
- Quality of supervision
- Fully embedding Signs of Safety as our practice model
- Focus on reunification work so that children can safely return to the care of their own families
- Building relationship with key internal partners including IROs and fostering service

5. Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services (including Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit)

5.1 The Children's Social Work service comprises five Assessment Teams, eight Children Social Work teams and the Family Group Conference Service. The Assessment Teams complete assessments of children where there are concerns for their safety or welfare in accordance with Section 17 or Section 47 of the Children Act. Upon completion of the assessment a decision is made whether the children and parents require support and if so, which service is best placed to offer this support i.e. universal or specialist service (i.e. nurseries, health visitors, etc), Early Help or statutory intervention from Children's Social Work teams.

5.2 The Children's Social Work teams provide support to children subject to Child in Need plans and Child Protection Plans. The aim of the intervention is to address the concerns that cause the children to suffer or be at risk of harm. Where the concerns can't be addressed with the family and the children are at

imminent risk of significant harm, legal advice is sought and court proceedings are initiated.

- 5.3 The Children Social Work service have had the benefit of support from our Partners in Practice, Essex County Council. Essex reviewed the Assessment Teams in January 2020 and the Children Social Work teams in July and August 2020 and provided valuable feedback on how to strengthen the practice in these teams.
- 5.4 The Children's Social Work service has implemented the new practice framework, Signs of Safety, at pace. Practitioners from the service have attended training and have received support from their managers to implement the new way of working which puts families at the centre of addressing concerns about their children.
- 5.5 With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic we have seen a decrease in demand for service in Children's Social Work teams. The Assessment teams have seen fewer referrals compared with the same period 12 months ago and the number of children subject to child protection plans has decreased from a high of 475 in April 2020 to 182 in December 2020.
- 5.6. The decrease in demand has allowed practitioners and front-line managers to work on improving the quality of practice and to improve outcomes for children: we have been able to consistently meet the targets for completing assessments in 25 and 45 working days and we have continued to visit children (whether subject to Child in Need or Child Protection plan) in person in line with our targets.
- 5.7. Key priorities in 2021-22 include:
 - Continue with the implementation of practice model Signs of Safety, and support staff to provide positive interventions to families which achieve change.
 - Improve the quality of assessments to avoid repeat referrals, and support assessment workers to undertake brief interventions to support families to make required changes or step down to Early Help support.
 - Continue to focus on quality assurance, including positive use of data, audit and attention to quality of practice as well as compliance with performance indicators.
 - Review and provide additional support to staff to address the challenges of Covid 19 and the impact that the pandemic has had on them.
- 5.8 Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Unit

- 5.8.1. The Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) was set up on 2 September 2019 to replace the Medway Safeguarding Children Board in accordance with the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Medway Council, Kent Police and Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are the three safeguarding partners that make up the MSCP. The purpose of the MSCP is to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:
- Children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted
 - Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
 - Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
 - There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
 - Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
 - Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.
- 5.8.2. The MSCP agreed five new priorities for 2020-22 set out in the MSCP Strategic Plan. The MSCP has a Business Plan which sets out the detailed actions under each of the five priority areas. The five priorities for 2020-22 are:
- Effective Partnerships
 - Contextual Safeguarding and trauma informed practice
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Neglect
 - Effective Early Help
- 5.8.3. During 2020-21 the MSCP has set up networks of champions for neglect and child exploitation. Partner agencies have nominated representatives to act as champions, receive specialist training and support good practice in their organisations by disseminating learning and supporting training events.
- 5.8.4. In response to the global pandemic, the MSCP has replaced its face to face training for professionals with virtual training and has continued to promote the Kent and Medway e-learning training. Short video recordings focusing on learning from case reviews are also being developed.
- 5.8.5. The MSCP held its second Leadership Event on 16 October 2020. The MSCP Leadership Group are run as twice yearly Safeguarding Conferences, with attendance from all safeguarding partners and relevant agencies. The Leadership event was attended by over 75 professionals.

- 5.8.6. The MSCP published its last Serious Case Review (SCR) George in March 2020 and the findings of the Williams Family Learning Lessons Review in October 2020. The action plans that have been developed as a result of the recommendations from these reviews are monitored by the MSCP Learning Lesson Subgroup.
- 5.8.7. Rory Patterson, MSCP Independent Scrutineer has been meeting with partners and attending various partnership sub group meetings during 2020-21. Rory presented his first report to the MSCP Executive in November. One of the findings was that there is not a prominent role for headteachers in the partnership arrangements. The MSCP Executive has already ensured that there is a headteacher voice represented on the Executive and now has both a primary and secondary school headteacher representative.

6. Early Help (including Troubled Families (previous MAFF), Youth Justice and Youth Services)

- 6.1. Medway Troubled Families programme finished as top performing area nationally and achieved 100% supporting significant and sustained progress for 345 families. We have also recently received confirmation that the programme will now be extended into 2021/2022. The programme focus will be on intensive family work and data maturity. The Transformation team continue to oversee the governance arrangements for this programme.
- 6.2. Medway Youth Offending Team has been successful with 2 pathfinder bids: 1. To develop their Child First practice and 2. Resettlement. This is a very exciting development working with Loughborough University to develop best practice nationally. Medway is at the front in its delivery of Child First practice.
- 6.3. Medway Youth Offending Team has also updated its strategic plan and HMIP improvement plan reflecting the positive journey over the past 12 months. Our strategic partners each lead on one of the target areas set earlier last year. Medway has also been able to recruit and appoint to a Data/ Performance analyst and a Mental Health post in the team.
- 6.4. Medway has met its National Standards and has been able to evidence the work and impact of the Board and the Youth Offending Team over the last 12 months resulting in no further action from the Youth Justice Board. We are keen to work with our partners in practice (Essex) in six month's time to ensure progress has been sustained.
- 6.5. Early Help encompasses a wide range of services and activities that build resilience and prevent children's and families' difficulties escalating and requiring statutory intervention. Early Help is carried out by individual practitioners, teams and services working in and around our universal and specialist offers. The Early Help Service aims to prioritise families whose circumstances indicate that without targeted intervention, their difficulties could escalate where the children or young person would be 'in need' or at 'risk of significant harm'. The Early Help Service also support families who

have received statutory intervention and continue to need targeted support to sustain changes before being supported by community services.

- 6.6. From March 2020, Early Help's offer of support adapted to ensure creative ways of working with families during the global pandemic. Early Help and wider partners have continued to offer services throughout the pandemic from the 4 main Children and Family Hubs and 10 wellbeing sites in Medway; service delivery has included midwifery; health visiting; virtual group offers; counselling and meetings/ contacts with families. The hubs have remained open to ensure families have access to a 'place of safety', as a base for staff to meet with families, and to assist in the distribution of over 700 resource packs to families and the collection of food hampers and parcels.
- 6.7. During a challenging year it is evident that Early Help have built stronger working relationships with Children's Statutory Services; Schools and Health Partners. Early Help have also worked to produce and manage performance data which has been helpful in addressing waiting lists and managing performance issues.
- 6.8. Areas of improvement have been identified by staff, through audits, Ofsted inspections, and Partners in Practice (PiP) diagnostics; as such the service is currently in a period of consultation relating to a service realignment. Early Help staff are also undertaking Signs of Safety training to embed and improve consistency and proportionality of services and resources to support children and their families. The proposed realignment will also ensure opportunity for improved career progression for staff across the service. It is hoped that this as well as the transition from Synergy (Early Help recording system) to Mosaic (Children's Service recording system) will be live from 1 April 2021.

7. Inclusion

- 7.1. 2018/19 marked a significant milestone in the improvement journey of inclusion across Medway's schools and academies.
- 7.2. Primary permanent exclusions were in line with the national rate for the first time and secondary permanent exclusions, which had also been in excess of the national profile, were reduced to below the national rate. Special schools in Medway performed consistently with their historical pattern and were zero for permanent exclusion.
- 7.3. The 2018/19 permanent exclusion data evidenced widescale improvement across the education sector. Strategic, organisational and operational attitudes underwent a seismic shift towards higher quality inclusion provision and understanding in schools and academies since the exclusion excesses of 2015. It is a significant achievement in just three years, from when Medway was the highest permanently excluding local authority nationally.
- 7.4. As a consequence of less permanent exclusions, headteachers have tended to use short, fixed term exclusions more. Though the rate at which fixed term exclusions exceeded the national rate in 2018/19, it did continue to reduce

from 2015, compared to a national trend that increased. Exclusion data is taken from the most recent DfE data base; the Medway annual schools' performance report draws from this resource.

- 7.5. Although Medway's primary and special schools were still above the national rate of fixed term exclusions, for the first-time secondary schools were under the national. This marks a significant shift in the reliance upon exclusion to resolve challenging behaviours and continues the improving trend across all phases since 2015 regarding fixed term *and* permanent exclusion.
- 7.6. Local authority internal data evidences-that this rate of improvement in inclusion provision across primary and secondary schools continues into 2019/20. Though this data is yet to be released in line with government publication.
- 7.7. The improvement journey in inclusive provision continues to support schools and academies so that the council's key priority for people, enabling all children and young people to 'achieve their potential in schools' is realised. A clear set of inclusion principles underpin the strategic understanding of inclusion between schools and the inclusion team are organised to deliver support and guidance to all education settings. A set of protocols have been co-produced between the council and schools that underpin the operational inclusion arrangements between and within schools. These protocols include operational arrangements for fair access, reintegration and managed moves when individual pupils require careful consideration.
- 7.8. Services for those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have been delivered in the council by the information advice and guidance team (IAG) which was established to support NEETs and meet statutory duties. IAG is responsible for working with 16 and 17 year olds, offering support to positive progression and reduce NEET figures.
- 7.9. The reduction of NEETs and young people unknown remain a council priority. Consequently, council resources have been realigned and as such are impacting positively in reducing the number of unknown young people. There is more to achieve however in relation to those identified as NEETs as the table below illustrates. Note: it is likely the number and percentage of young people who are NEET has reduced, as most of the 'unknowns' were almost certainly NEET. The reduction in unknowns is a real achievement, especially during the pandemic which has made home visits more challenging.

	03/06/20	31/08/20	Difference
NEETS	184 (3.0%)	257 (4.1%)	+73
UNKNOWNNS	626 (10.0%)	250 (4.0%)	-376

- 7.10. The funding stream for NEETs is no longer available due to being withdrawn from European social funding. Mid-Kent and Nacro are the current main NEET providers, in contrast to previous years when there were 13 providers and an estimated 180 learning opportunities.

7.11. Work is ongoing to make the most of government initiatives such as Kickstart. NEETs will also be an area of priority in the newly formed Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce.

8. SEND

8.1. The Integrated 0-25 Disability Team provides a statutory service and support in accordance with the Children and Family Act 2014. This team includes:-

- Early Years SEND Team
- Sensory Support Team
- Educational Psychology Team
- SEN Statutory Assessment Team
- Matrix link with 0-25 Social Work Team

8.2. The team is responsible for conducting and overseeing the Education, Health and Care Plan statutory assessment process, meeting legal requirements, timelines and ensuring special educational provision is in place to meet pupils' needs. Educational psychologists also have a statutory role in relation to those pupils with SEND.

8.3. Ofsted and CQC completed a local area SEND Inspection in December 2017. This inspection looked at how effectively health, education providers and the local authority had introduced the 2014 SEND reforms. A Written Statement of Action outlining the areas of weakness was developed jointly between Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Medway Council and formed the basis of a plan to address the weaknesses identified.

8.4. In December 2019, Ofsted and the CQC returned to complete a SEND Revisit inspection. They found that the local area had made good progress in improving the 8 areas of weakness but that there were still some additional improvements required in

- The quality of the social care advice contained in EHCPs
- The strategic SEND Leadership in secondary schools.
- The communication of the Joint SEND Strategy 2019-22

8.5. An Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) was published in February 2020 describing the actions the Council and CCG would complete to address the remaining areas of weakness. This "APP" was monitored by DfE and NHS England in August 2020 and a further monitoring meeting took place on 10 February 2021. Formal feedback from this monitoring meeting is awaited.

8.6. Key achievements in 2020-2021 include:

8.6.1. The Medway Local Area SEND Inspection identified that parents and carers of children who have special educational needs were not confident in the support being offered to their children in mainstream schools in Medway. This lack of confidence resulted in a high number of EHCP requests being

made by parents. We have been working with schools and parents to increase parental confidence and have seen a drop in the number of EHCP requests from parents. When an assessment request is received but not agreed by the council, a “Way-Forward” meeting is arranged with the school and parent/carer(s) to ensure that they have an opportunity to be reassured that their child’s needs can be met without an EHCP. This has resulted in the growth in the number of Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) maintained by Medway reducing from 11.6% to 8.3%. The council currently maintains 2505 EHCP’s.

- 8.6.2. A programme of multi-agency EHCP audits has continued using an audit tool to assess what a “good” plan is. This takes place bi-monthly and a report on the findings and key learning points for improvement is produced and reported to the SEND Partnership Board. Each agency represented on the audit group – health, schools, social care and education is tasked with implementing improvements within their own organisations and reporting back. Providers are expected to have their own internal quality assurance processes in place to ensure compliance with the requirements. This audit process is demonstrating an improvement in the quality of EHCPs being issued with 100% of the plans’ audits being rated as meeting “Good” in the last 4 audits.
- 8.6.3. The format of the Education Health and Care Plan has been revised and a new one is now in use. Other associated documentation such as requests for reports have also been revised. This has been done in partnership with parents/carers and children and young people. We now have 1805 EHCP’s on the new template with the remaining 700 due to be converted by December 2021. Guidance for parents/carers is also being produced to support them through the EHCP process.
- 8.6.4. A new timeline for the 20-week assessment process has been produced and ensures that a co-production meeting with parents/carers takes place to jointly develop the EHC Plan. We are now issuing 80% of EHCPs within the statutory 20 weeks. The national average is 63%. Close working with the CCG Designated Clinical Officer has continued resulting in better partnership working with health services.
- 8.6.5. Continued training for staff in Health providers has taken place on the requirements for writing EHCP advice and reports. This will improve the quality of advice received for EHCPs.
- 8.6.6. A feedback form is included with every EHCP issued asking parents/carers for the views about the EHC assessment process and about the Plan itself. This feedback informs service improvements. Currently 88% of parents/carers say the EHCP process is helpful and that they were involved in the production of their child’s EHCP.
- 8.6.7. Increasing the number of Supported Internship Providers in Medway offering over 45 Supported Internship places through to young people with EHCPs. This provision has proved very successful for young people with special

educational needs being offered employment after the internship. Places will be increased again in September 2021. This is being facilitated by a Supported Internship Network.

- 8.6.8. We have appointed a full time Local Offer Officer who will continue to work on the Local Offer to ensure it is updated and becomes a useful source of information and advice for parents/carers and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities.
- 8.6.9. Our co-production practice with parents/carers and young people in Medway has developed further. Medway parents/carers now have a voice on most strategic boards across the local authority and health service and the Young Person Disability Group is actively influencing commissioning and service development decisions.
- 8.6.10. The High Needs SEND Budget remains under significant pressure with a further £4.9m overspend forecast for 2020-21. This will increase the cumulative deficit to £14.2m. A robust High Needs Budget Recovery Plan is in place which includes:-
- To define and apply the graduated approach
 - Increase the number of special school and resource provision places within Medway to meet demand and prevent out of area placements
 - Review value for money in Independent School placements
 - Review the funding of outreach services
 - Review the use of High Needs Funding for children who do not have an EHCP
- 8.6.11. Key priorities in 2020-21 include:
- Implement the DSG Deficit recovery plan aiming to reduce the overspend on the high need budget whilst ensuring we are meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities.
 - Continue to work at pace to develop more special school and resource provision places in Medway
 - Completing the actions in the Joint SEND Strategy
 - Work with Adult Social Care Service establish clear SEND Preparing for Adulthood Procedures which ensures that all partners work together with young people to assist them to plan for and achieve an individual and inclusive adult life.
 - Continuing to work in partnership with mainstream schools to ensure that more children who have SEND are included in mainstream education.
 - Continue to work at pace to complete the Accelerated Progress Plan and achieve the required improvements identified at the SEND Revisit

9. SEND Transport

- 9.1. The cost of transport has seen a significant increase over the past few years and the transport team undertook a revised procurement review last summer

to ensure we remain cost effective and have sufficient providers to meet the need of those families who are eligible for school transport. As a consequence of the procurement exercise, we have put in place a procurement framework which allows for increased flexibility when arranging transport. Overall, this has resulted in significant savings and has increased the number of providers.

- 9.2. SEND transport is overseen by the School Admissions and Transport team within the Schools Services department. The team are responsible for procuring the transport from various providers and ensuring the smooth operation on a day-to-day basis.
- 9.3. The team provide a coordinated and cohesive approach, working closely with providers and schools, ensuring that each pupil's needs are met. Currently 1360 pupils are eligible for SEND transport.
- 9.4. Since March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic started, we have continued to provide SEND transport, working in partnership with schools, parents/carers and providers to ensure a safe environment for all those travelling, which has included reducing numbers on vehicles, transporting pupils within their bubbles, keeping vehicles ventilated with robust hygiene regimes; the use of face coverings where appropriate and hand sanitiser, as well as social distancing when queuing and careful planning on the order in which pupils are boarded onto the minibuses and taxis.
- 9.5. This process has worked well during lockdown periods with schools praising the manner in which the transport has been organised and undertaken.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None