

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCURTINY COMMITTEE

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MEDWAY PARENTING SUPPORT STRATEGY

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Summary

The Medway Parenting Support Strategy sets out a clear vision to work in partnership with parents and carers to continue to improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families across Medway. The Strategy has been developed and co-produced with parents, carers and partner organisations across Medway. It gives a broad overview of what we aim to achieve in Medway over the next ten years, based on consultations, national and local policy and national directives.

This Strategy supports and will sit alongside the Medway Children's Services Action Plan, the proposed Medway Early Help Strategy and other key local strategy and policy documents.

The Strategy will run for a ten-year period, with regular points of review throughout that time, and contains outcomes that will be measured over the short, medium and long terms. The Strategy and ongoing engagement with stakeholders will form a basis from which we can improve the culture around supporting parents within Medway, by building on universal services and advice, and by strengthening systems of support when needs escalate.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. There are a number of services that are already in place to support parents in Medway.
- 1.2. The offer of support available to parents comprises services directly commissioned by Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway CCG, services directly provided by Medway Council, and services provided by other organisations such as, those in the voluntary sector.

- 1.3. Options of support for parents span a wide spectrum of subject areas and needs. Universal health services such as midwifery and health visiting play an important role in supporting parents with babies and young children, as do services provided by Medway Council's Early Help Service. There are a number of services commissioned by Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway CCG which scaffold onto this foundation of support, such as parent education, sleep and social prescribing services provided by Medway Community Healthcare.
- 1.4. Where additional help is required, the Early Help team within Medway Council provides support to parents, including delivery of structured parenting programmes, and there are many services that work alongside parents to provide support.
- 1.5. Some gaps in support for parents have been identified, and it is anticipated that throughout the implementation of the delivery plan (draft plan set out at Appendix 3 to the report), services will be fully mapped.
- 1.6. It is likely that some services that support families within Medway will be able to flex their support offer to better meet presenting needs, and that there will be little additional investment in parenting support services required.
- 1.7. Some elements of the delivery plan will require funding to enable projects to be launched and sustained. These funding requirements will be defined within the delivery / commissioning plans rather than within the Strategy, which aims to provide the overarching strategic direction and priorities for the development of parenting support within Medway.
- 1.8. This report supports the Council Strategy priority 'Supporting residents to realise their potential' in particular the priority areas: 'Resilient families' and 'All children achieving their potential in schools'.

2. Background

- 2.1. Most families within Medway are very able to provide the positive care that children need to thrive. However, parenting can be demanding and all parents require additional support from time to time. The Parenting Support Strategy will help to develop a sense of common purpose within Medway, to make sure that all parents and carers can access parenting support services that lead to positive experiences for them and their families.
- 2.2. It is the role of all agencies working with families to empower them to provide the best start for their children, building on the strengths that already exist within the family unit and their local communities. The Strategy details the approach that partners in Medway adopt to work in partnership with parents to best support them.
- 2.3. Prevention and early help is about enhancing the capabilities of every parent/carer to provide a positive and supportive environment for children to grow up in. Providing coordinated, consistent and multi-agency family and

parenting support is crucial in making sure that Medway families are safe, happy, secure, and can reach their full potential.

2.4. Some of the concerns that the Strategy aims to address are:

- Universal layers of support require strengthening
- Services are poorly coordinated with parents and professionals not always clear about service criteria, thresholds or access points
- Support is not always available at the right time and in the right places
- Parents often feel although there is stigma attached to reaching out and utilising support options
- There are some gaps in the support available for parents
- A high proportion of referrals into specialist children's community health services for suspected neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and autism are assessed without formal diagnosis being made as a result
- There are 'system delays' in accessing support, and in some cases a need for a neurodevelopmental diagnosis to access certain elements of the parental support offer.

2.5. The draft Medway Parenting Support Strategy (set out at Appendix 1 to the report) has been prepared in consultation with a wide range of parents and carers, as well as organisations in the public, private and community sectors and builds on the work and recommendations of the Early Help (Parenting) Task Group.

3. Options

- Option 1: No formalised strategy for parenting support across Medway
- Option 2: Develop a parenting action plan rather than a parenting support strategy
- Option 3: Develop a single system wide Medway Parenting Support Strategy underpinned with an action plan

4. Advice and analysis

4.1. Option 1 – there are very few benefits associated with this option, and it is unlikely that the majority key concerns outlined in Section 2.1 would be addressed without a strategy in place.

4.2. Option 2 – this option could be implemented more quickly without the development of a strategy to lead this work. It is less likely to generate cultural change within Medway, and will not be able to draw on the system-wide strategy to lead service changes.

4.3. Option 3 – Will help to embed a cultural change to parenting support throughout Medway for a sustained period of time, and to develop a whole system approach to parenting support that underpins the delivery of positive outcomes. This option links with other strategic developments such as the

Early Help Strategy. The option may require some additional investment in areas where gaps are identified, such as support for families where there are neurodevelopmental conditions. This is the recommended option.

- 4.4. This Strategy is for all parents and carers who live within Medway. A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed (set out at Appendix 2 to the report). It is expected that this Strategy will have a positive impact on all protected groups, and more widely across the population of Medway.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Finance	When mapping and needs analysis is completed to inform the Action Plan, some gaps in provision may be identified, requiring investment to address	The Strategy facilitates a discussion with all stakeholders/partners to ensure services are identified and meet the identified needs. This will enable a flexible approach to mitigating any gaps in provision, including changing the type of service delivery provided by some organisations	D3
Engagement	Partners and the voluntary and community Sector are not responsive to the changing needs of parents and carers	Establish a strong and proactive group of stakeholders who can influence change and ensure the delivery of the outcomes as identified within the Strategy	E3

6. Early Help (Parenting) Task Group

- 6.1. A Task Group, comprised of five Councillors, was set up to look in depth at parenting support. It carried out its review from September through to December 2020 and met virtually with a number of stakeholders to gather information to inform its findings and recommendations.
- 6.2. The Task Group agreed the following key lines of enquiry:
- To hear from Medway families in relation to what they need from parenting support and how they wish to receive messages about what is on offer and being developed.
 - To consider national context in relation to the parenting support element of Early Help and what a good strategy and good offer looks like.

- To review what exists already across the Medway landscape and whether the offer for parents in Medway is clear and joined up and meets the identified needs.
 - To review whether work around early help and parenting is joined up.
 - To review how unmet need can be addressed through parenting support.
 - To review whether wider partners are engaged in the vision for parenting, such as the education and health sectors
- 6.3. The Task Group made twelve recommendations which were approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 2 February 2021. The recommendations were aimed at developing parenting support in Medway from a universal offer that is easily accessible by all to more targeted support services where needed. Its vision was for parenting support to be delivered in a cohesive way, consistently applied by all agencies across Medway and to be accessed without stigma or difficulty in access. The Parenting Support Strategy has been built on the findings and recommendations of the Task Group.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 On 29 September 2020 a workshop was held and a wide range of parents/carers and partner organisations from the statutory and voluntary sector were invited to take part. This workshop provided the framework for this Strategy. Draft versions have been shared with this group of stakeholders for comment, and these comments have been incorporated into the attached draft Strategy (Appendix A).
- 7.2 The proposed Strategy has been coproduced with parents and carers, who will also be key in the development of the associated delivery plan which will underpin the Strategy. Parent groups for consultation include those from a diverse range of organisations, including but not limited to, Medway Parent Carer Forum, Homestart and Kent Autistic Trust.
- 7.3 The draft Strategy was circulated to schools via the school newsletter, and directly to schools via the Medway Education Leaders Association, although there was limited feedback from schools directly. There were consultation responses from Homestart Medway, departments within Medway Council, the Medway Parent Carer Forum, and eight parents who had completed the online survey.
- 7.4 Feedback has generally been positive and complimentary, and there are a number of individuals and organisations who have expressed an interest in working in partnership to further coproduce the delivery plan that will support the Strategy.
- 7.5 The Medway Parent Carer Forum have requested a summary version of the Strategy, to help improve accessibility. Once adopted, commissioners will publish a summary document, and a “strategy on a page”.

8. Climate change implications

- 8.1. One of the aims included in the Parenting Support Strategy is to ensure that services are accessible to parents and include the option of digital access. This should reduce excess travel and bring services closer to the communities who use them by supporting innovative digital approaches.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1. Should additional parenting support services be needed in Medway, in order to meet the outcomes of the Parenting Support Strategy, the costs of implementing these new services will be met from within existing Council and partner budgets wherever possible. Any additional expenditure above existing budgets would need to be on the basis of a business case and approved via appropriate governance processes.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. There is no legal framework for a Parenting Support Strategy. However, there is a broad spectrum of national research to outline the importance of parenting support services to deliver outcomes for children and families.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1. The Committee is asked to comment on the draft Medway Parenting Support Strategy set out at Appendix 1 to the report and recommend it to the Cabinet for approval.

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Appendices

[Appendix 1](#): Draft Medway Parenting Support Strategy

[Appendix 2](#): Medway Parenting Support Strategy Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)

[Appendix 3](#): Medway Parenting Support Strategy Draft Delivery Plan

Background papers

The Early Help (Parenting) Task Group report