

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

**Wednesday, 9 June 2021**

**6.30pm to 9.30pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

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

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

Fay Cordingley (Church of England Representative)

**Added members without voting rights:**

Archie Bean (Medway Youth Council Chairman), Carl Guerin-Hassett (Headteacher Representative) and Margaret Cane (Healthwatch Medway CIC Representative)

**In Attendance:** Mark Breathwick, Head of Strategic Housing  
Kelly Cogger, Head of First Response and Targeted Services  
Ingrid Crisan, Head of Service, Children's Social Work  
Ken Dance, Youth Offending Team Manager  
Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People - Children and Adults' Services  
Darryl Freeman, Interim AD for Children's Social Care  
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes  
Victoria O'Neill, Legal Advisor  
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer

**45 Election of Chairman**

Councillor Kemp was elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.

**46 Election of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor Opara was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.

**47 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Barrett, Carr, Howcroft-Scott, Chrissy Stamp and Tejan and from Akinola Edun (Parent Governor representative), Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Diocese representative) and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carer Forum).

**48 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 4 March was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

**49 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**50 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 Cooper declared an interest in item 10 (Medway Early Help Strategy) which mentioned Medway Voluntary Action (MVA) as she was a befriender of MVA.

**51 Findings from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**

**Discussion:**

The Director of People – Children and Adults Services introduced the report which set out the findings of a recent investigation undertaken by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman that related to both housing and children’s services. The Director confirmed that learning from the incident had occurred and it was an incident not to be repeated.

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

- **Hard to reach families** – the point was made that a number of families involved with both housing services and children’s social care had difficult and complex lives and were therefore hard to reach. Officers concurred with this and confirmed that the two services were now

working together much earlier when risk factors involving young people and homelessness were apparent.

- **Southwark judgement** – in response to a question about whether the Council had breached this, which obliges children’s services to provide accommodation and support for homeless 16 and 17 year olds, officers confirmed that the young person had declined support so this has not been breached.
- **Location of the family** – in response to a question about whether the location of the family was known in order to visit them, officers confirmed that visits were offered but the family did not provide their location.
- **Young people in temporary accommodation** – clarity was given that although some young people were living in temporary accommodation, there were no young people in bed and breakfast accommodation and the overall usage of bed and breakfast accommodation was very low.

### Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

## 52 Youth Justice Plan - Refresh 2021- 2022

### Discussion:

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) Manager introduced the report which refreshed the Youth Justice Partnership Strategic Plan 2020-2023. He explained that the priorities remained the same but that he had worked with the YOT staff to ensure the plan communicated better to staff what they should be doing in practice.

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

- **Increase in violent crime** – in response to a concern raised about the increase in violent crime the YOT Manager confirmed this was not local to Medway but a national area of concern. He explained that the Violence Reduction Unit was a Central Government initiative and ran locally across Kent and Medway as a Police led initiative. In addition, there was a Serious Youth Violence Project, which again operated across Kent and Medway and provided the YOT with greater capacity to work more intensely with young people.
- **Impact of COVID** – when asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth offending, it was confirmed that it had caused delays in the youth court system which had resulted in an increase in out of court disposals.

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- **Number of young people in custody** – it was explained that this had dropped in 2020/21, with one young person entering custody, who had since been released and was currently being supported by the YOT.
- **Representation of children in care** – it was explained that there was always an over-representation of children in care within the youth justice system, which was attributable to the disruptive and difficult lives children in care had often had. The YOT worked closely with the police so that when a child in care became known to the police, the YOT could work with that young person at the earliest opportunity possible, to prevent further progression into the justice system.
- **Support for girls** – following a concern raised about the support the YOT provided to girls, the YOT Manager confirmed that the Data and Analysis officer, who was now in post, had found that reoffending of girls was not significant compared to boys, demonstrating that their interactions with the YOT were generally successful.
- **YOT Budget** – in response to a query about the budget for the YOT, it was explained that the budget was made up of contributions from statutory partners who were accountable. It was added that an external review of the YOT, by Medway's Partner in Practice, Essex County Council, would be undertaken and would include a review of the YOT's resourcing.
- **Quality of data** – concern was raised about the lack of current data within the report. It was explained that national comparative data from the Youth Justice Board was provided two years out of date. In addition, the service now had a Data and Analysis officer for the first time since 2016 which would enable more current and rich local data going forward and it was requested that this be provided when available.
- **Police and Crime Evidence (PACE) Beds** – in response to a question regarding the commissioning of PACE beds, it was explained that these were needed around 12-16 times a year and that officers were currently liaising with a provider to deliver a dedicated resource in Medway.
- **Out of court disposals** – it was explained that the use of these had increased and these were now attributable to around 80% of the YOT workload. They provided flexibility to the system and enabled young people to be treated as such and they were welcomed by the YOT. In relation to disposals that resulted in no further action, concern was raised about the lack of information the YOT received regarding these thereby not enabling them to work with the relevant young person. It was confirmed that this was a concern raised by the YOT with Police to stop multiple 'no further actions' being made on a young person before they may then be referred to the YOT.
- **Community engagement** – in response to a question about community engagement by the YOT, it was acknowledged that this was an area in

which the YOT could do more. It had some links with community organisations working in partnership to provide volunteering placements in the community for young people which had been very successful and the YOT currently had a bid in to expand this further. It was added that once COVID restrictions were lifted, engagement with Councillors should also be reintroduced.

### **Decision:**

The Committee recommended the Cabinet to recommend Full Council to approve the refresh Youth Justice Partnership Strategy Plan 2020-23, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

## **53 Medway Parenting Support Strategy**

### **Discussion:**

The Head of Public Health Programmes introduced the Medway Parenting Support Strategy which set 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. It had been developed and co-produced with parents, carers and partner organisations across Medway.

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

- **Stop and search** – the report stated that 1230 10-17 year olds had been stopped and searched between Feb and July 2020 and it was asked if this could be broken down by ethnicity, which officers undertook to investigate.
- **Medway Oral Health Strategy** – officers undertook to ensure a copy of this was sent to Members of the Committee.
- **Target dates** – it was confirmed these would be inputted into the programme of work (appendix 3 to the report) and once these had been inputted, this would be shared with the Committee.
- **Persistent Absences** – officers confirmed that a child was recorded as persistently absent from school if their overall absence within a year was 10% or higher. It was added that one of the strategy's priorities was to make pathways of help and access to support clearer and easier.
- **Teenage pregnancy** – officers confirmed that this was on a continuum decline and now in line with the national average but still a focus for Medway.
- **Pregnancy and alcohol** – comment was made about the importance of this and how damaging it can be to very young foetus. Officers confirmed that it was difficult to measure this amongst pregnant women as it was reliant on self-reporting but a foetal alcohol syndrome disorder

partnership had been established which had developed businesses cases to improve clinical practice around diagnosis and also to do preventative and awareness raising.

- **Resourcing** – concern was raised about the resourcing needs for parent support. Officers explained that during consultation and preparatory work in drafting the strategy, they had found that there was a significant amount of support available but that it lacked co-ordination and an understanding of what was on offer by practitioners and families. Therefore, the first piece of work to be done would be mapping out all support available and developing a way to raise awareness and identify any possible gaps.
- **Medway wide strategy** – it was emphasised that this needed to be a Medway the place strategy, beyond Medway Council and was a ten year strategy in order to allow time for the cultural change needed.

### Decision:

The Committee recommended the Medway Parenting Support Strategy to the Cabinet for approval.

## 54 Medway Early Help Strategy

### Discussion:

The Head of First Response and Targeted Services introduced the draft Medway Early Help Strategy which set out Medway's early help offer and covered a period of three years.

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

- **Lead professionals** – in response to a question about how to ensure a family is designated with the right lead professional, it was explained that the aspiration was for all agencies to use the same information system to make the sharing of information seamless and the discussion around who the appropriate lead professional easier.
- **Sharing of data** – officers confirmed they would share the strategy dashboard data with the committee.
- **Proactive support** – comments were made about whether the early help offer could be highlighted to families who were vulnerable, for example, where a child has complex needs. Officers confirmed that early help support needed to be consensual and there was no statutory right to intervene unless a serious safeguarding concern arose. It was therefore key to ensure that the early help offer was well advertised across the partnership.

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- **Public awareness** – in response to a question about how the Council was to ensure parents and carers knew how to access support, officers confirmed that the single point of access (SPA) information was widely advertised across the Council website, social media, libraries, family hubs, schools, Citizens Advice Bureau and many other partner organisations.

### Decision:

The Committee recommended the Medway Early Help Strategy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, to the Cabinet for approval.

## 55 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 4 2020/21

### Discussion:

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services introduced the report which summarised the performance in Quarter 4 in relation to the priorities relevant to the committee's remit.

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

- **Underweight children** – officers undertook to provide a response regarding the level of underweight children in Medway.
- **Care Leaver accommodation** – in response to a question about care leavers who were placed in unregulated placements, officers confirmed that there were currently four young people in unregulated placements and this was generally due to the young person having particular needs making them difficult to place. These unregulated placements were regularly reviewed by the Director and Assistant Director and it was added that placements that were unregulated by Ofsted did not necessarily mean poor quality.
- **Access to technology** – in response to a question about the number of young people who did not have access to technology, officers confirmed that at the beginning of the first lockdown they tried to establish the percentage of young people without access to ICT, which was estimated to be about 35%. With Government support, all young people assigned to a social worker had been provided with equipment.
- **Budget overspend forecast** – in response to a concern raised about the directorate's budget overspend, officers confirmed that, as was the case for all top tier local authorities, placements caused a significant pressure to the directorate's budget and the commissioning team was working hard to stimulate the market to increase good quality, value for money placements. In addition, the workforce was another additional high cost and work was ongoing to reduce the reliance on more expensive agency staff. Reference was also made to the High Needs

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Block of the Designated Schools Grant, which was significantly overspent. However, there was an action plan which would see the overspend addressed entirely by 2029.

- **Number of children who are looked after (CLA)** – officers confirmed that as of 8 June 2021, there were 434 Medway CLA which was a broadly stable figure.
- **Persistent absence** – members requested a report regarding persistent absence from schools which had been a consistently red target for some time.
- **Smoking at the time of delivery** – officers undertook to investigate this measure and whether the target needed lowering and making more ambitious.
- **Percentage of good and better schools** – officers undertook to investigate the possibility of adding a table within the information for this measure to provide details of the number of schools converting to academies.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

## **56 Work programme**

### **Discussion:**

The Democratic Services officer introduced the report which set out the committee's work programme.

Suggestion was made to add an item about the Medway Secure School and scrutinise how it was operating. There was also a suggestion to set up a briefing for members on iThrive.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- 1) agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to the additions listed in italics being added and the addition of a report on the secure school.
- 2) Recommended that a member briefing be set to provide members with information about iThrive.

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**Chairman**

**Date:**

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