

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

Wednesday, 8 June 2022

6.30pm to 10.20pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Kemp (Chairman), Barrett, Carr, Cooper, Sylvia Griffin, Howcroft-Scott, Johnson, Osborne, Purdy, Tejan, Thompson, Thorne, Tranter and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin

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

Georgina Bentaleb (Parent Governor representative) and Lenny Willams (C of E Diocese Representative, Rochester Diocesan Board of Education)

Added members without voting rights:

Victoria Aspin (Teacher Representative) and Carl Guerin-Hassett (Headteacher Representative)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Adeoye (Substitute for Van Dyke)
Ahmed (Substitute for Opara)

In Attendance: Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director Education and Send
Kelly Cogger, Head of First Response and Targeted Services
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People - Children and Adults' Services
Donna Marriott, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Vicky Nutley, Interim Head of Legal Services
Simon Plummer, MSCP Business Manager
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer
Julia Thomas, Senior Public Health Manager

30 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Opara and Van Dyke.

31 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 3 March 2022 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct, subject to Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, being added to the list of officers in attendance.

The record of the Joint Meeting of Committees held on 18 May 2022 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

32 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were no urgent matters but the Chairman suggested swapping the order on the agenda of items 7 (Council Plan Performance Monitoring & Risk Register Review Quarter 4 2021/22) and item 8 (Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Update Report), to which the Committee agreed.

33 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that dispensations were in place for the following:

Victoria Aspin (Teacher) had a DPI in item 5 (Annual Report on School Performance 2019 to 2020) due to her employment at Abbey Court School but relied on a dispensation that had been granted by the Councillor Conduct Committee, allowing her to participate in the item.

Carl Guerin-Hassett (Headteacher) had a DPI in item 5 (Annual Report on School Performance 2019 to 2020) due to his employment at The Hundred of Hoo Academy but relied on a dispensation that had been granted by the Councillor Conduct Committee, allowing him to participate in the item.

Lenny Williams (Church of England Diocese representative) had a DPI in item 5 (Annual Report on School Performance for Academic Year 2020 to 2021) due to his employment at St Margaret's Junior School but relied on a dispensation that had been granted by the Councillor Conduct Committee, allowing him to participate in the item.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that a dispensation was in place for Georgina Bentaleb (Parent Governor representative) as she had an OSI in item 5 (Annual Report on School Performance for Academic Year 2020 to 2021) due to her position as Parent Governor at New Road Primary School but relied on a dispensation that had been granted by the Monitoring Officer, allowing her to participate in the item.

Other interests

There were none.

34 Annual Report on Schools Performance for the Academic Year 2020 to 2021

Background:

The Assistant Director, Education and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) introduced the report which summarised the activity in Medway's schools to raise achievement during the academic year 2020-21.

Members expressed their disappointment that the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) had been unable to attend the meeting and the Chairman had written a letter on behalf of the Committee to confirm its disappointment. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to collate questions from the Committee to send to the RSC who would then respond formally.

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

- **Government's Schools White Paper** – reference was made to the Schools White Paper, particularly in relation to the possible forced academisation. In response officers confirmed that feedback from the RSC had been that academisation would not be forced and would only occur when schools underperform. She also referred to high quality teaching and aspirational targets and suggested the RSC be asked about how they would support schools on their journey to achieve them, confirming that the RSC had met with primary headteachers earlier that day about that very issue.
- **Government's SEND Green Paper** – reference was made to the SEND Green Paper and officers confirmed that they were consulting with schools on their views and as part of their SEND Strategy review considering its impact and the role of schools.
- **PRUs and children with EHCPs** – in response to a question about children with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being placed in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) officers confirmed this did not happen as a PRU was not the right place for children needing long term additional needs. However, there were occasions when children who had been excluded and placed in a PRU then secured an EHCP. Officers undertook to provide information in the SEND report, scheduled for later in the year, on the numbers of children that had previously been declined an EHCP while in mainstream school and had later been provided one while placed in a PRU.
- **Levels of mixed race young people in PRUs** – it was queried why there were high levels of mixed race ethnicity young people placed in

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PRUs. Officers confirmed this was the case and matched the national picture but were uncertain of the reasons why.

- **Persistent absence** – there were a number of questions asked regarding persistent absence and officers confirmed that a detailed report on this issue would be presented to the next meeting of the committee. It was confirmed that since the production of this report the latest data of absences had been published and Medway's rate of persistent absence for 2020-21 was 13.4%, compared to 12.8% nationally and that Medway's primary schools were performing much better than its secondary schools. In addition, officers confirmed they needed to assess the data to remove Covid related absences in order to enable meaningful comparisons with pre-pandemic data.
- **Interventions** – where schools had been identified as a cause for concern, officers confirmed that in relation to mainstream schools they were able to serve warning notices and force interventions, however, academies were the responsibility of the RSC. It was therefore suggested that the RSC be asked to provide, by way of examples, what action it had taken with academies causing concern over the last two-year period.
- **Report data** – it was requested that future reports provide more detail and granular data and that best practice examples be sought from other authorities.
- **Attendance and advisory service** – questions were asked about the service's caseload, referral rates and how many prosecutions it was undertaking. Officers undertook to include this information in the persistent absence report coming to the next meeting of the committee,
- **Secure estate** – concern was raised about the education provision and attainment of young people placed in secure estate. Officers suggested a report on the specific issue of secure estate to a later meeting of the committee.
- **High Needs Block deficit** – in response to a request for an update on this issue, officers confirmed that a detailed report would be provided later in the year and that the Council was working in partnership with the Department for Education to resolve the deficit within the next four to five years. Reference was made about the reduced support to children with complex medical need over the pandemic in relation to medical and therapy support which should also be taken into account and officers confirmed they were working with stakeholders on this.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

35 Missing Children

Discussion:

The Head of First Response and Targeted Services introduced the report which provided information and data about children who went missing during the period between April 2021 – March 2022.

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

- **Out of area children** – in response to a question about the monitoring of out of area children, officers referred to the data set out at 3.14 of the report and confirmed it was still an area of focus for improvement and that dialogue was ongoing with other authorities to develop joint working protocols to support each other. It was also confirmed that most children were not missing for more than 12 hours and therefore missing education was not a direct concern.
- **No record of return home interviews** – concern was raised that still 3% of incidents related to no record of return home interviews. Officers confirmed that this was an improved figure and that many of the incidents related to families not engaging. Where parents declined the offer, this was recorded as such but where families did not engage this was put down as not recorded. Officers reassured members that where return home interviews were closed down without the family engaging, management oversight occurred so that if there were causes for concern these were followed up.
- **Unaccompanied asylum seekers** – concern was raised about the increased vulnerability of this group of young people. Officers confirmed that this group were identified as potentially being at greater risk of going missing and were risk assessed to identify and mitigate against any increased risks.
- **Best practice** – in response to a question about learning from best practice officers confirmed that learning across the Southeast network was ongoing and encouraged.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

36 Medway Safeguarding Children Plan (MSCP) Update Report

Background:

The Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Business Manager introduced the report which updated the committee on the work of the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) during 2021-22 and provided members with an update on the MSCP Strategic Plan 2022-23 and Business

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Plan 2021-23. He also explained that the representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police and the Independent Scrutineer had given their apologies.

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

- **Violence against young women and girls** – reference was made to a survey conducted by some Councillors in Rochester, the findings of which had been provided to the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership. Officers confirmed that violence against women and girls would be added as a priority from September 2022 and welcomed the opportunity to consider the findings of the survey.
- **Structure of the partnership** – in response to a question about the structure of the partnership and how it had responded to the legislative changes, officers confirmed that the new arrangements had been implemented in September 2019 in response to the Wood Review. It was also acknowledged that the annual report, due at the November meeting of the Committee, would include more detail around the governance and structure.
- **Secure estate** – members expressed their concern about the rate of progress at Cookham Wood and suggested a separate report on the issue and the secure school.
- **Neglect** – acknowledgement was made about neglect and the challenge it presented. Officers confirmed it was a major focus of the improvement plan and of the wider partnership. It was added that the Department for Education had provided funding to support a multi-disciplinary team which would go live later in the month and would focus on research capacity to enable a better understanding of how to tackle neglect.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

37 Council Plan Performance Monitoring & Risk Register Review Quarter 4 2021/22

Background:

The Director of People – Children and Adult Services introduced the report and with the support of other members of the Directorate Management Team, gave updates relating to the indicators flagged as red within the report.

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

- **Staffing levels** – in response to a question about how much performance results were impacted by staffing levels, officers confirmed that staffing remained a challenge in some parts of the system and was

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inevitably impacting on some of the data. In addition, some of the issues were impacted by family availability or a measured decision to see a child in the right environment. In addition, it was reported that the service had recently recruited newly qualified social workers as part of the focus on growing our own qualified workforce in Medway.

- **ILACS7** – concern was raised about the distance from achieving this target. Officers confirmed that when the authority started hitting this target, Members would be confident in knowing that practice was good. At this time the organisation was still on its improvement journey
- **Breastfeeding** – in response to a question about peer support, officers confirmed that this had declined as a result of the pandemic and that the service was currently being reviewed which would hopefully see an increase in numbers.
- **Holiday Activity Fund** – it was requested that the information on this be circulated when available. Officers confirmed that the procurement of providers had recently been completed and that information on sessions would be circulated once available.
- **Free school build** – it was asked if these projects should be on the risk register. It was confirmed by officers that the cost of free schools were met by the Department for Education and therefore the only risk to the Council was regarding issues such as school transport budgetary impacts and place planning risks where projects were delayed.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

38 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which provided the latest work programme information for the Committee.

Members requested an update on the questions and subsequent responses to the school place planning report that was circulated for information. Officers undertook to update the committee.

A suggestion was also made that the Excess Weight report, due to be submitted at the next meeting of the Committee, could be provided as a briefing note.

Lastly it was suggested that the Committee receive a briefing note updating them on the Youth Service.

Decision:

The Committee agreed the work programme, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

39 Exclusion of the press and public

Discussion:

A query was raised about the necessity to conduct the next item in private. Officers confirmed that the relevant Cabinet report, on which the report was based, referred to legally professional privileged information which needed to remain private to protect the Council.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to exclude the press and public during consideration of the exempt report on the basis that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

40 Member's Item: Gillingham Football Club (GFC) School

Background:

Members considered an exempt report which responded to a Member's item, raised by Councillor Johnson, concerning the Gillingham Football Club School.

During the debate the following proposal was made and supported (it was explained that this proposal mirrored the recommendations made by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 May 2022 regarding a call-in (Queen Street development update):

"That the Committee:

1 – Calls on Cabinet to introduce a formalised, improved governance of significant (in terms of budgets over £100,000 or more than 3 years) projects in Medway.

2 – Calls on Cabinet to ensure all decision making is fully minuted to make sure that all the processes are transparent.

3 - Calls on Cabinet to enable appropriate monitoring of major projects using published milestones and a timeline.

4 – Recognises the requirement to not have any services or projects tendered which are contrary to council policy".

On being put to the vote the proposal was lost.

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In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Adeoye, Cooper, Johnson, Howcroft-Scott and Osborne requested that their votes in favour of the proposal be recorded.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note the report;
- b) support the recommendations made to the Cabinet by Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 May 2022 in relation to the call-in report of Queen Street development update (minute number 883/2022 refers);
- c) request a report back to the Committee explaining how and why the email records relating to the issue within the exempt report were unavailable.

Chairman

Date:

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