

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

Tuesday, 29 November 2022

6.30pm to 10.55pm

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), Ahmed, Barrett, Cooper, Sylvia Griffin, Howcroft-Scott, Johnson, Osborne, Purdy, Tejan and Thorne

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

None

Added members without voting rights:

Victoria Aspin (Teacher Representative), MYC Cabinet Member (Medway Youth Council) and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum)

Substitutes: Councillors: Murray (Substitute for Mahil)

In Attendance: Sue Brunton-Reed, Improvement Programme Manager
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Rebecca Cooper, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Medway Council
John Drew, Independent Scrutineer for the Secure Estates
Katey Durkin, Chief Finance Officer
Scott Elliott, Head of Health and Wellbeing Services
Donna Marriott, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Rory Patterson, Independent Scrutineer
Stephen Platt, Democratic Services Officer
Simon Plummer, MSCP Business Manager
Daniel Ratcliff, Skills and Employment Programme Manager
Andrew Willetts, Principal Director Oasis Restore

409 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mahil, Akin Edun (Parent Governor Representative) and Clive Mailing (Roman Catholic Church Representative).

410 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 was agreed and signed as correct by the Chairman.

411 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

412 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Opara declared an OSI on Item 5 (The Current State of the Custodial Estate for Children in Medway) due to being a business partner with CXK and also Item 9 (Not in Education, Employment of Training (NEET)) and would leave the room during discussion of the item due to core business dealings.

Councillor Tejan declared an OSI on item 7 (Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2023/2024) as the report mentions Kyndi and he a Director of Kyndi Ltd.

Other interests

Councillor Osborne declared an interest on Item 10 (Update of Safety Valve Intervention Programme) as the report mentioned his employer.

413 The Current State of The Custodial Estate For Children in Medway

Discussion:

The Independent Scrutineer for Secure Estates and the Principal Director of Oasis Restore introduced the report which advised the Committee on the current state of the custodial estate for young people in Medway and added the following:

A point was made in the report regarding the failure by the youth custody service to publish information about safeguarding reviews when things went wrong in their establishments and following lobbying, Government reversed this decision two weeks ago and details of safeguarding would now be published going forward. This was a positive step in the right direction.

In relation to Oasis Restore, the Secure School would be the fourth option for children to be placed though youth custody. Other options remained, such as secure children's homes, youth offending institutes (YOI) and secure training

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centres would remain in place. The Oasis Restore Secure School would not fall under the same arrangements as His Majesty's Prisons (HMP) YOI but accountability arrangements would fall under the inspection of Ofsted (for secure children's homes), Ofsted (in relation to Education) as well as the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for its health arrangements. The Secure School would look after 49 children across 3 homes with 12 flats ranging between two and six bedrooms. Senior Leadership posts (Directors) had been recruited to, with a recruitment campaign due to commence for approximately 200 staff next year.

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

Apprenticeships - it was asked if the young people would be given the opportunity for apprenticeship training and the Principal Director of Oasis Restore said that there were vocational pathways in place that would form part of the curriculum and part of the transition arrangements had a real focus on Education, Training and of Employment.

Accountability - it was commented that Cookham Wood YOI, following its most recent analysis, it was apparent that the situation had deteriorated and there was a real concern about the lives on the young people impacted by the core circumstances that resulted in them being detained. This was a national problem and not limited to Medway. It was vital that an independent mechanism be put in place to hold the prison service to account. The Independent Scrutineer informed the Committee that there was a process in place where the Chief Inspector of Prisons could, if a level of deterioration was reached, for urgent notification to the Secretary of State for Justice be made to request for specified improvements to be made. It had never been used in relation to children's prisons but had, at least once, in respect of secure training centres and this would be the ultimate sanction on poor performance.

In the past, the Director of Children's Services had called together a meeting of all responsible Local Authorities to discuss the care of children in a previous secure centre and this produced an action plan that was needed at the time.

It was further suggested that the Governor and Head of Safeguarding be requested to attend a future meeting to provide accountability of the care of the young people in the institution.

Oasis Restore as a school rather than an institution - in response to a question of how Oasis Restore would create an atmosphere of a school and not an institution, the Officer said that the building design was not that of an institution. The Secure School would operate the school hours from the hours of 9am to 3pm with enrichment in the evenings between 6pm and 9pm.

They would employ teachers as well as higher learning teaching assistants to form part of the workforce and deliver their work through a therapeutic community with the objectives and culture more in line with a school.

Use of restraint – concern was raised regarding the use of pain induced restraints in YOI and the Independent Scrutineer said that the correct

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government approved term was 'pain distraction' which was to be used as a last resort. This method should only be used in situations whereby a young person was trying to harm themselves, others or staff. The use of the 'pain distraction' method was not used lightly and whilst it would be ideal to eliminate its use, it was still required in certain circumstances. The techniques used had been reviewed by an independent medical panel and approved as being acceptable. Institutions were required to record usage which was then scrutinised as part of safeguarding audit.

Oasis restore were working with safety providers and would not be using 'pain induced restraints'.

Young peoples' journey following release from detention – in response to a question on what happened to young people upon release from Cookham Wood, the Independent Scrutineer said that it was difficult to provide a definite answer as young people placed there came from various Local Authorities in England and Wales. Most children upon leaving the institution would say they were determined to change their lives, but many faced continued pressures upon release which could result back in reoffending.

Oasis Restore were working with the Association with Directors of Children's Services, the association of YOT Managers and others in relation to setting a new benchmark for transition (resettlement) planning.

Recruitment – it was asked how Oasis Restore would recruit the specialist skilled staff that was required for this challenging and difficult work, amidst a social care crisis that was being experienced in Medway as well as nationally. The officer acknowledged that this was the next and most challenging stage of the journey and was looking at various recruitment campaigns on the best approach. There had been a very positive response to the adverts to date and Oasis had also seen an increase in the number of people registering interest for future roles.

Safeguarding and Transitions – it was asked how young people would be safeguarded in the establishment and when out in the community. The Principal Director of Oasis Restore said that the Head of Safeguarding and Transition would be tasked with development of resettlement pathways through work with other organisations across the country although they were not funded for this piece of work. It was acknowledged that the system did not prepare early enough for the transition of young people and as a result, detailed discussions were taking place to explore ways of effective transition arrangements for young people in youth custody back into the community.

It was further asked what arrangements were made for young people that would not transition to the community but to another part of the justice system and what support was in place to understand their experiences and adequately manage their expectations. The officers said that young people placed at Oasis Restore came through various routes including the court system and work would be done to align with the placement service to gain a better understanding of the process. There was increased awareness of the different

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challenges in working with young people that would transition into care or moving to adult secure estate with the biggest challenge not necessarily with young people serving life sentences but more those on remand who did not know how long their sentences would be and it would be vital to manage their expectation. Education would be a crucial tool in upskilling of young people transitioning to adult pathways to enable them to work in an adult estate.

Families – holding families together was important and it was questioned what provision was in place to support families. The officer said that families were at the heart of delivery. The family contact rooms were designed in a family focused way to make them resemble a home and the reception designed to look like a school reception. Family functional therapy/systemic family therapy was being designed as part of the offer and work was underway to explore different ways to support families.

Board of Trustees – in response to a question on whether the Board of Trustees had been appointed, the officer said that appointments had now been made and the website would be updated to reflect this. It was further asked if a Medway representative was on the Board and the officer said no but this suggestion would be taken back to the Board for consideration.

G4S – it was pointed out that the report showed that G4S was the only provider performing well and it was asked what they were doing differently. The Independent Scrutineer said that G4S had a poor track record when they were in secure training centres but for the past 10 years, Park, which was a small unit within an adult prison in South Wales run by G4S, had been seen by inspectors as the best performing YOI in the country. This could be due to the fact that it was the smallest of all YOIs with under 40 children and had always been the case. This was an added benefit in terms of striking personal relationships and had a better track record in retention of staff which was a big challenge with such a difficult job.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care added that her service looked forward to collaborative working as the programme progressed but voiced her concern that the challenge of recruitment would pull into the pool Medway Social Care resources which was already under significant recruitment pressure. It was also important for dialogue to take place on the impact of young people that may relocate into Medway as part of their transition.

Oasis Restore were already aware of these impacts and met with the CEO and Corporate Management Team 12 months ago to look and consider these arrangements.

The Chairman thanked invited guests for their engagement and participation with the Committee.

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Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report.
- b) The Committee recommended to Oasis Restore that consideration be given to the appointment of a Medway representative on the Board of Governors.

414 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2021-22

Discussion:

The Business Manager for Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership introduced the third annual report which detailed the work undertaken by the Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership over the last year.

The multiagency training offer which influenced the effectiveness of safeguarding children in Medway for professionals and volunteers working with children continued to receive high uptake. In the last year, virtual training sessions had taken place which was attended by over 550 delegates and over 360 delegates had attended conferences and learning events. The E-learning platform continued to be accessed by an increasing number of delegates with over 45,000 courses completed over the year.

Neglect remained a key area of focus and priority for the partnership with the importance of a whole multiagency approach at the forefront of its objective. The Neglect Strategy was published last year, and a conference was held. A champions network was launched to share good practice and learning.

The Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children's Partnerships added that Medway was ahead of other Local Authorities by including accountable officers in regular meetings and this had been important in providing line of sight and understanding of where and with whom accountability of safeguarding laid. While resources were tight, the partnership and the small business unit continued to be efficiently run by officers and partners who were passionate about sharing learning and improvement of practice. The quality of reports on serious incidents provided to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review panel was commended. There were, however, challenges on how to evidence impact and what metrics would be used to judge the impact in areas of safeguarding, this was a national challenge that was not limited to Medway. Recruitment and retention remained an area of risk for Medway as well as nationally across the country and was a systemic challenge to safeguarding.

Members then raised comments and questions including the following:

Issues within the partnership - in response to questions on whether there had been any recognisable issues within the partnership or any challenge with transparency, the Independent Scrutineer said that the partnership was generally open and transparent, he had not found any resistance and was given access to explore all areas. The Independent Scrutineer had found that he was welcomed by all the agencies and when he experienced any instances

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of defensiveness, this usually dissipated quickly once entered into dialogue as to what they were trying to achieve. Medway Leadership Team was also very open and transparent.

Engagement of school leaders – it was asked how, as stated in the report, what more could be done to enable headteachers to influence strategic direction of the partnership. The Independent Scrutineer said that the headteacher voice should influence the agenda as they worked with children every day in a way that strategic leaders did not. It was valuable to have that thinking to shape the safeguarding agenda in Medway, capture their views and enable them to influence the priorities set. It was vital to support headteachers to share views on how they think things could work differently.

Voice of Child - in response to a question on how the voice of the child was captured, the officer said that this was an important area of work and one that other partnerships had struggled with including at what level to get the engagements of children and young people. The main way the voice of the child was captured was through the learning reviews, in particular family views. There were some implications to this in that it could often delay the process, but it was vital to be included in the audit. The different agencies had their own means of engagement and performance management and the quality assurance subgroup asked agencies to provide a report to the MSCP detailing how they captured the voice of the child.

Expenditure/Budget – it was asked how the partnership knew they were cost effective. The officer said that the budget included in the report was scrutinised by the partnership. Over the last few years, they had looked at ways to make savings, with other local authorities, Medway was not over funded.

The Independent Scrutineer said that Medway was very lean in terms of support staff to run a big system and was getting a lot of positive work out of a well-formed business unit.

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care added that the partnership group was very efficient. The volume of learning that was provided was extensive, with significant benefits from the resources despite the small budget which had a positive impact on the workforce. In order to prevent duplication of work, interface took place with the MSCP on how to use resources well to improve practice across the whole system, and also by looking at the programmes and not running sessions on the same topics.

Audits – it was commented that there appeared to be a delay in audits and the Officer said that as they were multiagency, they had to look at records of all the different partners that had an involvement in a case. The audits were completed on a quarterly basis and with each completed audit, a learning report as well as action plan was produced and shared.

Child Death reviews remained an issue on the risk register with the delays only in the final process, which was the audit. Each child death had its own individual review undertaken and completed to time. There were several factors

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that delayed completion of the audit, such as changes made at national level which resulted in Medway merging its process with Kent, as well as the impact of the Covid pandemic. There was now a plan in place to work through the backlog and the MSCP was monitoring this.

Increase in Child Protection (CP) Plans – it was asked how effectively the department was able to accommodate the increase in children with CP Plans. The Assistant Director Children’s Social Care said that it was expected that the improvement journey would impact on child protection plans as a lot of work had been done to address issues with drift of children on plans. The current figures were still below national average but if numbers increased there would be an impact on capacity and resources. The department was mindful of being purposeful with all its actions and moving work through whilst ensuring best outcomes for children.

The Head of Safeguarding added that nationally there was an increase in S47, and CP Plans, with this increase monitored and reviewed on a weekly basis in Medway. There were enough staff in place to review the plans and ensure that independent oversight was retained.

The Committee was informed that the Director of People, Children and Adults had requested a review of the partnership as an assurance function to ensure that the partnership was looking into what needed to be addressed.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting of 17 December 2022.

415 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2023/2024

Discussion:

The Committee considered a report setting out the Council’s draft capital and revenue budget for 2023/24. The Chief Finance Officer advised that it had been prepared prior to the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement so did not reflect the impact of the announcements made.

When the financial outlook was prepared, it assumed that ringfenced education grants would increase by £5 million. In terms of costs of services, the draft budget reflected additional pressures in children’s social care and education of net £16 million increased budget requirement.

The core schools’ budget in England would increase following the Chancellor’s announcement, £2.3 billion in 23/24 and £2.3 billion in 23/25

Members then raised comments and questions which included:

Safety Valve Intervention Programme - it was asked how the financial issues and impact from the high needs block deficit would affect the general budget, what was charged to the account that the Education Skills Funding Agency

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(ESFA) say should not have been charged and given that the DfE required yearly reporting why was the charge not picked up earlier.

The Chief Finance Officer said that the high need deficit had been a matter of concern for a long time and was grateful for statutory override as once confirmed, it was highly likely that the government would follow with another form of support. There had been a difference of opinion between the Council and the DfE as to whether the services which had been charged to the DSG (Education Psychology and SEND Social Work Teams) were appropriate charges to that grant, totalling £2.9 million of annual spend. The latest budget monitoring for the current year already reflected the impact of putting this sum back in to the general fund. Medway produced a return to government of the spend on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) every year and so it was not clear how this was not identified by the government following previous years' returns. Officers were working to further understand the circumstances regarding this.

The Assistant Director Education and SEND added that internally, officers were working to review historic decisions of HNB spend in certain areas, which had increased Medway's deficit at a greater rate than it otherwise would have, which was done at the time to prevent taking vital funding away from schools and children. Officers undertook to share with Members any findings from that. The safety valve intervention had been submitted to the Secretary of State for approval and it was expected to be signed off in December 2022.

It was clarified that there were two strands of work taking place, one was on the safety valve and the other was a paper that was being taken to the Schools Forum on high needs funding. It was requested that the Schools Forum paper be shared with Committee Members and that an update on the safety valve also be provided, once a final decision from the Secretary of State had been made.

The Finance Business Partner added that the statutory override was expected to come to an end at the end of this financial year. The safety valve programme was important because if Medway was successful in its negotiations with the ESFA, it would allow Medway to continue with the statutory override until the end of the recovery plan.

Aut Even – in response to a question on how Aut Even featured in the new sufficiency plans, the officer said that scoping work was underway to explore whether Aut Even could be reinstated, though it would need refurbishment work to do so. Sufficiency was a big challenge for children's social care, in particular for children with disabilities and how best to meet their needs. A bid had been submitted to the DfE for funding for the refurbishment which had unfortunately been unsuccessful and once feedback was received, a challenge or further application may be submitted. Members asked for a briefing to be provided to the Committee on this work and officers agreed to provide an update at a later stage when the way forward was clear.

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Efficiencies – it was commented that there were increasing budget demands year on year, and in prior years efficiencies had been identified but had not prevented the service from exceeding its budget. It was asked what was being done to manage spend.

The Chief Finance Officer said it was important to note that the budget was not set in isolation by any one department and was also not set centrally by the finance teams. Setting the budget involved meeting on a regular basis with services to discuss opportunities and to identify solutions in delivery of demand led services which was extremely difficult.

The comments on it being unusual for a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) not to have been produced was acknowledged and the Chief Finance Officer agreed that projections needed to be made as it assisted organisations over a long term period. A commitment had been made for publication of the MTFS in February 2023 and the only reason one had not been produced to date was due to the position the Council found itself in as a result of the Covid pandemic and trying to set budgets during a period of uncertainty. The publication of a Capital Strategy was envisaged for December 2023 which would look at a longer time frame of up to a 10-year period. This set of estimates would assist with the ability to make sensible projections.

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care added that part of the improvement journey had been about putting tangible systems in place in order to ensure efficiencies. This was a difficult task that was being done in a changing landscape, in a market driven by extremely high placement costs, with national workforce challenges and pressures on LA finances. The service was working as best as it could to reduce costs of placements where possible and improve commissioning practices through re-negotiation of commissioned placements. Work was also being done to claw back money from the health service as part of health funding for child placements as this would deliver savings. A multitude of work streams were in progress to manage sufficiency and efficiency.

Long term aspirations – it was commented that there was a distinct lack of longer-term projections in the budget and how each decision affected another was not made evident. This did not provide a reflection of the work being done, what the gaps represented, why they occurred and how long they would continue. The Chief Finance Officer agreed that investment in long term solutions was an aspiration of all staff, and work was underway to develop a tool to assist officers to appropriately articulate the investment business case for such projects. A set of projections for the coming five years would be published alongside the proposed 2023/24 budget going to Cabinet in February, with thought being given to how the gaps in the budget would be presented going forward which may include ranges.

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care advised that modelling over five years had been completed on placements as well as forecasting the care

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leavers service based on the next three years. There was a multitude of collaborative working across the directorate.

Decision:

The Committee noted the contents of the report and requested:

- I. A briefing update on Aut Even (when the way forward was clear);
- II. An update report to the Committee on the Safety Valve Intervention Programme;
- III. A copy of the High Needs Block Funding report submitted to the Schools Forum to be shared with Committee Members; and
- IV. The outcome of the work officers were undertaking in relation to the High Needs Block historic spend, be shared with Committee Members.

416 Children and Young People's Plan

Discussion:

The Head of Improvement introduced the report which provided the draft Children and Young People's Plan, which set out the partnership vision and priorities to support and help young people in Medway over the next three years.

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

- **Measuring progress** – the view was expressed that Health and Wellbeing Board should not be the only body to monitor progress in delivering the plan, given its children and young people focus and that progress should also be scrutinised by this Committee. Officers were supportive of the Committee wanting to monitor progress of the Plan but explained that the Health and Wellbeing Board was also appropriate because of the partnership role in delivering the plan. It was also explained that the Improvement Board was multi-agency, but at a time when the Improvement Board was no longer needed, it was suggested that Medway may want to set up a Children and Young People Partnership Board to ensure cross partnerships.
- **Children's voice** – in response to a question about how officers would ensure that the voice of young people would be heard, Officers confirmed it was a focus. Child Friendly events had been successful in bringing together groups of young people and their families, in seeking their views and it was important to continue and expand on those opportunities.
- **The voice of SEND children** – concern was raised about how effectively the voice of children with Special Educational Needs and

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Disabilities (SEND) would be heard and disappointment was raised in the Medway Parent and Carer Forum not being consulted on the CYPP. Officers confirmed that consultation was done through partners via the Improvement Board and through the Child Friendly Medway work which had captured the views of a broad range of Medway's children and young people, which they were confident had included children with SEND. Officers confirmed they would welcome the opportunity to look at anything that may have been missed and undertook to liaise with the MPCF to ensure their views were reflected the plan.

- **Wider partner detail** – suggestion was made that the plan should include an explanation of school governors and it was also raised that dentistry and the difficulty for some young people in gaining appointments should be covered. Officers explained that the CYPP was an overarching high level plan for more focussed partner plans to sit underneath and, therefore, such detail might be better picked up within service plans which feed through.
- **Partnership working** – reference was made to the risk identified in the report regarding the failure to align priorities with partners. In response to a question about ensuring the plan was robust enough to work through transitional arrangements and also highlighted financial risk. Officers explained that a partnership forum was important and confirmed that finance was a risk for all. The strategic objectives were kept at a high level so partners could sign up to them, while recognising that resources may be limited and therefore partnership working that was developing would provide synergy and support the focus on bringing together resources etc to maximise delivery.
- **Disadvantaged young people** – concern was expressed about the levels of young people who were disadvantaged and whether a lack of early identification of need was a factor and with that in mind, felt the section of the plan relating to the best start in life, was not aspirational enough. Officers explained that it had been important to know the base line in order to evaluate progress and added that the strategic objectives enabled partners to be aspirational in their own delivery and how they contribute to the plan's objectives. Officers also confirmed that the policies and plans that sat underneath the CYPP went much further in setting out how the Council, and its partners, worked to support different groups of young people, including those with SEND.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and recommended that in addition to the Health and Wellbeing Board having a role in monitoring progress of the CYPP at a partnership level, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee also be provided with the opportunity to scrutinise the Plan's progress.

417 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Discussion

The Skills and Employment Programme Manager introduced the report which focused on tracking destination of 16/17 year olds not in education or training and gaining an understanding of not knowns. Part of the challenge was tracking at the right pace and speed. In September, in any school year, there was usually a spike of unknowns and time was spent trying to resolve these. The NEET figure was always rolling and never static.

Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) – in response to a question on what was being done to support young people with SEND who had difficulties getting placements, the officer said that they worked with three providers in the area and there were good outcomes achieved for young people. There was also supported employment offers in place for young people from 16 plus with learning disabilities and autism.

The Assistant Director Education and SEND added that for children with SEND and with EHCP plans, the numbers fluctuated as if the option was made for them not to be in education, the EHCP ended. A post 16 review took place by an independent person for all NEETS to make sure that they could start to fill gaps due to the loss of the European Social Fund. Funding for the service was transient and if providers could be identified, then work could be done on securing funding.

Aspiration Officer – it was commented that the Aspiration Officer post which was temporary should be permanent. The officer said that the Aspiration Officer was in place to support care leavers into education and training, seven care leavers had joined apprenticeships in the last month. This post was funded from an external pot and a business case was being developed for the position to be made permanent.

Identification of NEETs – in response to a question on what could be done to identify young people in danger of becoming NEET prior to age 16. The officer said that a pilot with different schools on preventative measures was taking place through Medway and Kent careers hub which helped schools improve their careers pathways. As this work grows and develops, it was anticipated that the number of NEETs would come down. It was an aspiration for increased NEET preventative work, and they were looking at ways this could be achieved. Funding of programmes to support this work remained the biggest challenge.

Identification of children with needs was on the department's work plans to do the work over the summer before they leave school, so they do not become NEET.

Gaps in comparative scorecards – it was asked what work was being done to identify what was being done across the region that Medway was not doing that affected the achievement of 19-year-olds. The officer said that the data from

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the Department for Education (DfE) scorecard was historic as this year's data had yet to be published. There had been a large proportion of red and ambers on the registers due to a lack of cleansing of the tracking system which had now been rectified following extensive work. The figures from this would not be reflected in the DfE scorecard for another year. The planned Post 16 review would include outcomes for level 3 and 4 and there would be more information in the annual performance scorecard that would be presented at a future meeting of the Committee.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

418 Update on the Safety Valve Intervention Programme

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Education and SEND introduced the report which outlined plans submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) to recover the Council's budget deficit on the High Needs Block (HNB).

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

Level of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) – clarification was sought on the position in Medway compared to the national average and how the demand for EHCPs could be appropriately managed. Officers said that the only provisions that an EHCP was needed for were special schools and resource provisions. The forecasted figures showed a diminishing growth which took account of a dip in the population and the considerable work that was being undertaken with mainstream schools to support them in taking children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This would result in earlier intervention and reduced demand for EHCPs as parents' confidence in the system grew. It would also result in fewer children in special schools where this was not necessarily the best provision for them as they could be catered for in mainstream schools.

Lessons to be learnt from Kent's SEND provision – officers advised that the situation in Kent would be considered, and Medway would review and evaluate its own system in light of the new SEND inspection framework which placed a greater emphasis on the views of parents and young people.

Risk implications – further clarification was sought as a number of the risks identified in the report were not in the Council's control. Officers said that there was a much more detailed risks and assumptions paper which could be shared confidentially with Members.

Parents' right to a named school for a child with an EHCP – Officers advised that, where a school was chosen by parents, they would consult with the school in question, and it would only be named if it was an appropriate school for the child or young person.

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Hospital provision – more information was asked for on the provision of education for children in hospital, officers advised that a number of places were available. The situation with regard to alternative provision was under review, including outreach and reintegration. This would address the needs of those children and young people who were anxious about going into school following the Covid pandemic.

Additional capital funding for the delivery of the Safety Valve plan – asked for an update, Officers advised that a bid for £7.2 million had been submitted to the DfE.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

419 Council Plan Performance Monitoring & Risk Register Review Quarter 2 2022/23

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care 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:

It was important to acknowledge the improvements made with ILACS 7 which had been red for a long period of time and social workers were to be commended for the hard work done.

Raising Aspirations - in response to a question on what was being done to improve outcomes and raise aspirations of young people, in particular, the 25% that were missing targets as indicated in the report, the Assistant Director Education and SEND said that any issues identified within a LA maintained school, the School Effectiveness Team would provide support. If the school was an Academy, the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) would be notified of any concerns.

Ofsted Inspections - it was asked if any work was being done with schools which had not been inspected for a long time that held good or outstanding gradings, in light of the fact of the recent Ofsted inspections which had resulted in down grading of 3 Kent Grammar schools. The officer said that the School Effectiveness Team worked with all Medway maintained schools, highlighted any concerns, areas of improvement, and provided support as necessary.

Data – it was asked why data for this year's absence level had not been used in the report. The officer said that this was the most recent complete published data set.

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Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

420 OFSTED Monitoring Visit Children's Services

Discussion:

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care introduced the report which summarised the feedback from the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit which took place on the 21st and 22nd September 2022, with a focus on disabled children.

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

Unregistered Placements – concern was raised regarding the children living in registered placements until more suitable provisions were identified. The Officers acknowledged the concern and agreed that there were consistently a small number of children living in unregistered placements, these were children with the most complex needs and due to shortfalls in the foster care and residential market, it was difficult to find placements for children. The Committee was assured that children in these placements were given greater oversight including regular visiting by social workers, strengthened risk assessments and commissioning oversight of providers completed. Ofsted was notified of the placements.

Inconsistencies with quality of assessments - the officer agreed that this was an issue as highlighted in the improvement journey. One of the factors was due to the Mosaic forms which were time consuming and over complicated and created a barrier for social workers. The form was currently being rebuilt with input from staff and it was hoped this would assist in managing some of the inconsistencies.

Transitions – it was asked why transitions in all parts of the service were an issue. The officer acknowledged the issues with transitions, which was attributed to having complex systems, with different services, all with a different focus and work was underway to align the services. There were still many barriers to overcome.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

421 Work Programme

Discussion:

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

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 29 November 2022

It was requested and agreed for a briefing note be requested from the Youth Service on an update on the Raising Youth Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) service.

Decision:

- a) The Committee agreed the work programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) That a briefing note update be requested from youth service on the Raising Youth CIO.

Chairman

Date:

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