

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

**Thursday, 20 January 2011**

**6.30pm to 10.04pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

**Present:** Councillors: Andrews, Avey, Baker, Kenneth Bamber, Carr, Clarke, Val Goulden, Gulvin, Kemp (Vice-Chairman), Maple, Royle (Chairman), Smith and Sutton

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

Jim Grogan (Roman Catholic Church representative)

**Added members without voting rights on education issued only:**

Bryan Frost (Governor representative), Jane Heyes (Headteacher representative) and Richard Odle (Medway Youth Parliament representative)

**LINK representative without voting rights:**

Clare Murray

**Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Griffin (substitute for Councillor Maisey)  
Harriott (substitute for Councillor Gilry)

**In Attendance:** Rose Collinson, Director of Children and Adults  
Angela Drum, Head of Legal Services  
Simon Harrington, Student Services Manager  
Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer  
Chris McKenzie, Head of School Organisation and Student Services  
Teri Reynolds, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
Juliet Sevier, Assistant Director Inclusion  
Councillor Les Wicks, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

**706 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 14 December 2010 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

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### 707 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilry and Maisey and from Sam Tutt (Medway Youth Parliament representative).

### 708 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

The Chairman welcomed Bryan Frost (Governor representative) to his first meeting of the committee.

### 709 Declarations of interest

Councillor Smith declared a personal interest in relation to item 10 (School Admission Arrangements 2012) as she had recently become a Governor at The Robert Napier School.

### 710 Work programme

#### Discussion:

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator informed the committee that the Countering Bullying Task Group had met earlier in the week and had suggested that the next meeting of the committee begin at the earlier time of 5pm due to the large number of young people and external organisations being invited to attend.

#### Decision:

The Committee agreed to change the start time of the next meeting on 1 March 2011 to 5pm and hold the meeting in the Civic Room at Gun Wharf.

### 711 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

#### Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Children Services (lead member) informed Members of areas of development within his portfolio, which included: -

- the Government's Schools white paper;
- future curriculum;
- academies;
- special Educational Needs;
- children's Services Assessment and commended staff on the good result;
- participation with children and young people where possible;
- increase in online school admission arrangements;
- sure Start Children Centres;
- the authority's new responsibility for education of young offenders at Cookham Wood.

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The Committee then asked the Portfolio Holder various questions, which included the following issues: -

- the local authority's future role as advocate and commissioner, as more schools become academies;
- the future provision of services, such as school admissions and career advice for students in schools which are academies;
- concerns of loss of public confidence in decisions made about schools;
- concern of monitoring of projects due to overspends on school developments;
- possibility of piloting 'troops to train' programme in Medway;
- the ending of the Education Maintenance Allowance.

### **Decision:**

The committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (lead member) for his attendance.

## **712 Report from the SEN Monitoring Group**

### **Discussion:**

The Chairman and the Assistant Director for Inclusion introduced the report on behalf of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Monitoring Group, highlighting the findings of the group and explaining that the current Diversity Impact Assessment for SEN provision, referred to in the report, was tabled at the meeting for the committee's information.

The committee then debated the report and asked various questions which included: -

- clarity about the figures of children and young people in school and the proportion that have SEN;
- reasons for the high SEN diagnosis in Medway;
- the required spend on SEN provision to realise future savings in enabling children to receive provision in Medway, rather than at expensive out of area placements;
- importance of recognising when a child was under achieving, rather than requiring SEN.

Members suggested that the recommendation to Cabinet, detailed in paragraph 10.2 of the report, should be strengthened.

The Headteacher representative also referred to material that was provided to her Inclusion Leader who was currently undertaking an accredited course for SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs). She explained that she found the material useful in auditing the processes in place at her school and that it should be shared more widely.

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### Decision:

- (1) The committee acknowledged the findings of the SEN Monitoring Group and the progress in provision and increased capacity for Medway to accommodate children with SEN;
- (2) The committee recommended the Cabinet to acknowledge the urgent and dire need to invest in Medway's special schools, which require improvements to their accommodation, as identified in Medway's SEN Policy and Strategy and that where funding can be secured, this be used to improve the facilities for children with the highest needs of special education;
- (3) The committee recommended the Cabinet to delegate the Director of Children and Adults to review the findings against the outcomes of the forthcoming Green Paper on SEN;
- (4) The committee recommended officers to share with schools material provided to SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs) on the accredited course.

### 713 The White Paper - The Importance of Teaching

#### Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adults gave a presentation on the Schools white paper and then answered questions from Members, which included: -

- requesting a briefing after the local elections in May 2011, to provide Members with more information about the future role for Medway Council and Councillors and the relationship with schools that become academies or free schools;
- improving poor behaviour of pupils and the role of the Home School Worker;
- the role and responsibilities of governing bodies.

The director undertook to provide a briefing note on some of the work that had been done with regard to the future role of the Council as a commissioner for services to schools.

#### Decision:

The committee noted the report and presentation and requested: -

- (1) a briefing note on what work had been done so far in developing a commissioning role for the local authority in respect of school services;
- (2) a Member briefing providing more detail on this after the local elections in May 2011.

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### 714 Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets 2011-12

#### Discussion:

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report and explained to the committee that the final proposed budget would be published within the Cabinet agenda for its 15 February meeting. The draft budget within the report at the committee had been updated to reflect details of the settlement announcement, which had been received in December 2010. He added that the Cabinet had published a further report the previous day, which proposed some staff changes to further close the gap of £23.5 million.

The Chief Finance Officer also referred to a report that the committee considered earlier in its meeting with regard to special educational need (SEN) provision and the recommendations it had made. He explained that officers did consider plans, which required investment but would realise savings in the future, however he warned that this was increasingly difficult due to limited funding streams.

The Chief Finance Officer and the Director of Children and Adult Services also updated the committee on a Schools' Forum meeting, which had been held since the publishing of the report. They reported that the forum understood the scale of the challenges faced by the local authority and were supportive of proposals in this context. Officers had also given schools the tools to calculate an indicative budget to help with their planning processes.

Members then debated the draft budget and referred the following comments to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

- the recommendations made in relation to SEN provision should be highlighted in the budget report to Cabinet;
- the message be sent to Cabinet that when decisions are made with regard to cuts, the long term effect and cost to Medway also be analysed;
- the Cabinet be made aware of the implications for sixth form education in schools and of both the impact of the likely reduced funding from the Young People's Learning Agency and the removal of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA);
- the Cabinet be informed of the concern that all Members of the Council did not have an opportunity to consider possible options for a draft budget.

#### Decisions:

The committee recommended that the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee forward the comments detailed above to the Cabinet when it considers the draft capital and revenue budget 2011/12 on 15 February 2011.

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### 715 School Admission Arrangements 2012

#### Discussion:

The Student Services Manager updated the committee on consultation responses. The consultation had finished on 14 January 2011, after the despatch of the committee's agenda, and two further responses had been received in relation to primary admission arrangements. One was in support and one objected to the increased Published Admission Number for Barnsole Infants on the grounds of pupil placement impact. He confirmed however that officers did not feel there would be an impact.

Members then raised the following points: -

- increased communications to parents to ensure a clear understanding of the process and the reasons for the long time scale between applying for the test and receiving an offer of a school place;
- that a briefing be provided for Members, after the local elections in May 2011, to provide Members with information about the admissions process and for this to include information on school transport applications and appeals also;
- the details on booklets relating to providing information in different languages should explain further what an applicant should do.

In response, officers explained that the admission booklet was published every year, in June and added that this year, officers would be holding area based parent presentations to ensure all parents within an area are captured, rather than just providing presentations for parents at primary schools. There was also an intention to develop the booklet into a more questions and answers based document and to encourage more parents to use the website. Officers undertook to consider this for the 2012 booklets and to provide a briefing for Members as requested.

#### Decision:

The committee recommended the Cabinet to agree the proposed school admission schemes and arrangements for 2012 as detailed in the report.

#### Chairman

#### Date:

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