

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

Thursday, 11 January 2024

6.30pm to 9.32pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Howcroft-Scott (Chairperson), Mandaracas (Vice-Chairperson), Animashaun, Barrett, Campbell, Gulvin, Hamilton, Jackson, Jones, Perfect, Shokar and Mrs Turpin

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

Lenny Williams (C of E Diocese Representative, Rochester Diocesan Board of Education) and Sharon Docherty (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark)

Added members without voting rights:

Victoria Aspin (Teacher Representative) and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Crozer (Substitute for Pearce)

In Attendance: Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Cassandra Chapman, Deputy Governor HMP YOI Cookham Wood, HMP YOI Cookham Wood
Esther Cook, Director, The Leigh Institute, The Leigh Institute
Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East, Adoption Partnership South East
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning
Donna Marriott, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Rebecca Smith, Head of Service, Education

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501 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Pearce, Spring and Medway Youth Council.

502 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting of 5 December 2023 was signed as correct subject to the following amendment:

Councillor Animashaun be marked as absent as she was not in attendance at the meeting.

503 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

504 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

Victoria Aspin disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) due to her employment at Abbey Court School and on the Board of Governors and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the school was made.

Sharon Docherty disclosed an interest on item 5 Annual School Performance Report) due to her employment at St Mary's School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the school was made.

Lenny Williams disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School performance Report) due to his employment at St Margaret's Church of England Junior School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the school was made.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Animashaun disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) as she was a Governor at New Road Primary School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the school was made.

Councillor Perfect disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) as he was member of the Beyond Academy Trust and the Inspire Academy Trust and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the trusts were made.

Councillor Mrs Turpin disclosed an interest on item 5(Annual School performance Report) as she was a Governor at Balfour Junior Academy and a

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member of the Fortis Trust and would leave the meeting if any reference to the school and trust was made.

Councillor Shokar disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School performance Report) as he was a governor at Robert Napier School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference to the school was made.

505 Meeting Theme: Education

Discussion:

The Assistant Director of Education introduced the report with a presentation, supported by the Director of the Leigh Institute.

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

Members were concerned and disappointed that the Regional Schools Director had not attended this scrutiny meeting despite being invited and it was suggested that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee expressing this, considering the high number of academy schools in Medway for which they were responsible.

Areas of Deprivation - in response to comments on what support was offered to pupils in high areas of deprivation, officers said that there was targeted work to support inclusion and provision of wrap around support for schools. A review of alternative provision which were both good and outstanding has been undertaken. There was a focus on quality and an 8-12 week integration programme to get pupils back in and settled into schools. Risk assessments were conducted which looked at 12 performance measures, including levels of suspension and inclusion, this written information was shared with school leaders and governors and formed the basis of thorough conversation on journeys of improvement that needed to be taken.

Early Years - Children on Education Health and Care Plans did not perform as well as their peers and it was asked what was being done to address issues. Officers said that data on performance was shared with schools to enable them to make an analysis and explore ways to address gaps. Schools were offered training in improvements to SEND performance and making a difference to disadvantaged pupils. Schools were also able to access support through behaviour hubs. For all children in early years in general, analysis was undertaken regularly to assess performance in comparison to other key phases and that information is used to appropriately tailor the curriculum. The latest Ofsted framework, which was due to be updated, had a greater focus on quality of curriculum and how to tailor to meet needs in particular subject areas.

Key Stage 1 and holding to account – in response to a query on how schools would be held to account, officers said that Key Stage 1 SATS were no longer a statutory requirement, but the offer would continue to be made to schools in terms of working together. Any data would be shared with the Headteachers Association to enable schools to share best practice and work collaboratively.

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Transition in Key Stage 3 – it was questioned how well schools managed the transition to KS3 and what discussions took place with headteachers at KS2 regarding concerns. The officer responded that Medway's performance at KS3 were below national level and there were differences in performance in schools. During lockdown there were high prevalence of absence and persistent absence and recovery post lockdown had taken longer than anticipated but was improving. Improving performance for this cohort remained a priority and there was a strong focus on collaboration with partners to identify and address barriers to improvement.

Funding for training through the Leigh Institute – in response to what steps would be taken should funding cease to continue, the Director of the Leigh Institute said that the way their work was funded had changed and that as an organisation, they always explored innovative ways to ensure they could continue with their work with schools. They remained committed to making the course for national professional qualifications available at a low cost. Medway was a priority area that had always had its courses for national professional qualification funded, and they were awaiting announcement as to whether funding would be continued for future cohorts.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Data - it was commented that due to the complexity and needs of SEN pupils, many of whom would not take final exams, it may be more appropriate for their performance data to be excluded in order that an accurate reflection of performance could be gathered. Additionally, many of the performance measures used were not accessible to SEN schools and a formalisation of processes could be worth consideration in order to make more use of information on their progress over time as a measure of performance. The officer said that data for all children were included but would explore ways on how information for SEND pupils could be aggregated and presented.

Elective home education - it was asked what support was provided to parents and carers who chose home education. Officers said that all parents had the right to elective home education and the Local Authority had a duty to monitor that process. Time was spent explaining the implications of this to parents and to drive through the understanding that when this choice was made, children not on a school roll could not be entered for exams and exam support was not provided. Parents with children not on the school roll were supported and encouraged to get their children back on the school roll for this purpose. There was a stream of work in place to target groups including those electively home educated with an offer from Mid Kent College.

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive thanked schools for their hard work and noted that the relationship with the Local Authority had improved. The aspiration was to continue to strengthen Medway's education community and strong examples of that was evident through the presentation given. It was important to note that the responsibility of educational achievement and attainments belong to the school and that must be taken into consideration when scrutinising performance data. The Local Authority recognised its responsibilities in holding schools to account and those in depth

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conversations took place on a regular basis to ensure that there was not a decline in performance.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee recommended that a letter be sent to the Regional Schools Director requesting a commitment to attend a future meeting.
3. The Committee recommended that officers develop a reporting mechanism specifically for SEND performance.
4. The Committee recommended that all Councillors explore being governors at their local schools and for current governors to utilise training opportunities offered.

a Annual Report on School Performance for the Academic Year 2022 to 2023

Discussion:

Discussion of this Item can be found at minute number 505.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee recommended that a letter be sent to the Regional Schools Director requesting a commitment to attend a future meeting.
3. The Committee suggested that officers develop a reporting mechanism for SEND performance.
4. The Committee recommended that all Councillors explore being governors at their local schools and for current governors to utilise training offered.

506 HMP YOI Cookham Wood Update

Discussion:

The Deputy Governor of HMP YOI Cookham Wood introduced the report which provided an update on the improvement journey.

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

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Members were concerned about the level of failings identified, concerns raised were alarming and there was a lack of confidence that issues were being addressed at pace. The actions and improvements that had been made since the Ofsted inspection were not clear in the report. The officer reassured Members that issues were being addressed but reminded the Committee that the failings identified from the Ofsted inspection had occurred over a period of time. Addressing failings through the action plan in place as part of the improvement journey would take time. The improvement plan ensured that there was oversight and accountability at all levels and that senior management were being appropriately held to account.

Staff – in response to a question on what support was in place to address the wellbeing of staff and ensure their safety, the officer said that consultations had taken place with staff to capture their views on how to make them feel appropriately supported. A staff council had been developed as well as a 24hour staff line for them to raise any concerns and receive advice. There was also a reward and recognition scheme in place highlighting good areas of work.

It was further asked whether there was a good balance of gender and age of staff at Cookham Wood. The officer confirmed that the gender split was fairly even but there was some concern regarding the age of some staff who were only a few years older than some of the young people.

Leadership – it was queried why most of the leadership team were from adult secure estates and not from youth or education backgrounds. It was also asked how conducive separation of young people was to the regime. The officer said that at the time of the inspection, there were approximately 77 young boys on roll, with approximately 21 separated due to the risk to others. Some of the young boys were entrenched in gang culture and staff spend a significant amount of time trying to build relationships and trust. The conflict resolution team worked tirelessly to manage issues between different gangs. In relation to the leadership of the estate, Members were reminded that there were three other Public Under 18 Young Offender Institutes across the country and it was difficult to recruit a leadership team from any of them. All the leadership team at Cookham Wood had over 15 years experience and there were similar issues experienced in adult estates. The staff at Cookham Wood were trauma informed trained, and young people had access to art therapy, family therapy as well as access to education specialist services.

The Assistant Director of Education and SEND added that they had been working with the leadership team who had visited outstanding pupil referral units for valuable learning and compare the curriculum offered in those institutions. Inclusion training had also been offered to the staff at Cookham Wood.

Report from Cookham Wood - the update report from HMYOI Cookham Wood contained data intended for local use as internal management information. The official statistics related to youth custody performance data are published on GOV.UK following validation and can be accessed at the following link: [Youth justice statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/youth-justice-statistics) (for the Youth Justice

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collection page, but Youth Custody Report and Safety in the Children's and Young Persons Secure Estate publication)

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee recommended that the Director of People consult with the Governor of Cookham Wood for a visit to be arranged for members to attend Cookham Wood.
3. The Committee recommended that a six monthly written briefing update be provided on progress on the improvement journey.
4. The Committee recommended that the Governor of Cookham Wood attend a committee meeting on an annual basis.

507 Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency - Annual Report 2023

Discussion:

The Head of Adoption Partnership South East introduced the report to the Committee and provided some highlights since the report was written which included:

- Ofsted findings highlighted that since Medway joined the Regional Adoption Agency, there had been improvements on timeliness of identification of suitable adopters for children, prospective adopters were suitably prepared and assessed for their parenting role and the partnership appropriately prioritised the requirements of adopters to meet the needs of children.
- Significant improvements had been made and this was through joint working with Medway Children's Services, in particular, collaboration and improvement in permanency planning, robust monitoring and tracking as well as strengthened adoption care planning.
- Medway children were being matched in significantly less time than the national average.
- There were a high number of adopters approved and available for Medway Children.
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Members then raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

The report was commended for being informative, easy to read and exceptionally professionally written.

Adopter assessments - in response to a question on length of assessments and responsibility for target setting, the officer said that the timescales were significantly better than the national average. Targets were set by the DfE,

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stage one was part of a two month assessment process and whilst steps were taken to keep the time scales for this stage of the process down, the agency worked with its partners to ensure that adoption regulations were followed stringently to ensure that all requirements were met before progressing to the next stage of the process. Reduction of timescales were not done at the detriment of safe approvals.

In response to a question on the number of approved waiting adopters against children waiting to be placed, the officer said that Adoption Partnership South East had 17 approved adopters and 1 Medway child that an adopter was actively being sought for. The challenge with placements was whether local adopters could match the needs of a child/children and if this were not the case, prospective adopters would be sourced nationally.

Sibling placement – it was asked whether any decisions made not to place siblings together were made based on a social workers assessment or due to resource issues. The officer was confident in the decision making process of Medway Social Workers in placement of siblings and that often the decision to keep siblings together may mean that foster care placement may be more appropriate due to their high needs. A project has been embarked on to extend the pool of adopters for sibling groups and support social workers in the decision to keep siblings together where possible. There was an increase in adopters wanting to take on siblings which was encouraging. It was also vital to recognise that some children's needs were complex, and the high levels of trauma experienced may mean their needs would be best met if separated, despite the difficulty in the decision to separate them. In this instance, many adopters actively ensured maintaining of regular interactions between separated siblings by taking holidays together, meeting up for birthdays.

It was asked whether there were adopters that chose not to tell children that they were adopted. The officer confirmed that prospective adopters were informed right from the beginning of the expectation of honesty and that children were to be informed that they are adopted. This was non-negotiable as each child would be provided with a life story book and if prospective adopters were not comfortable with this, they did not continue in the process.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee requested that future reports provide detailed information on sibling placements.

508 Adolescent Service

Discussion:

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care introduced the report which provided an update on the changes made following the publication of Medway's 'Good' ILACS Judgement in September 2023.

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

Measure of progress - Members asked how the changes that had taken place to date would be measured, whether officers were satisfied of the progress and whether standards of delivery would be met by the next Ofsted visit. Additionally, joined up work with other agencies in particular mental health and the follow up process. The officer said that there had previously been issues with resilience in the team which was a small team that had to manage high risks with the cohort they worked with. There had also been issues with recruitment of available social workers, and they had been clear with Ofsted that this part of the service was an area of weakness. Since last year, the adolescent service had been restructured, and there was progress evident, and the service was moving in the right direction, however, improvements would take time and it would not be appropriate to suggest that by the next Ofsted visit, which could take place as early as Autumn this year, that work in this area would be the same quality as the rest of the service. The service had progressed significantly, with improved capacity and extra support.

In measuring outcomes, there were now robust quality assurance oversight and assistant team managers in place to ensure extra management oversight. Regular audits of cases and quality assurance activity would continue to take place to track progress.

Members were informed that all young people had wrap around care packages as part of their child in need plan and social workers collaborated with partners including health and education to ensure that young people's needs were being met. Strengthening of commissioned arrangements were in the process of being developed for provision of specialist intervention and to meet the needs of young people.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee agreed that further adolescent updates should be included annually, within the missing and exploitation annual report.

509 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and Members were informed that an information session was being arranged on Children and Young People's Mental Health Services Procurement Process. The date for the session would be shared in due course.

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Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report and agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to accepting the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1.

Chairperson

Date:

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