

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

Tuesday, 1 March 2011

5.10pm to 8.35pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Avey, Baker, Kenneth Bamber, Gilry, Gulvin, Kemp (Vice-Chairman), Maple, Royle (Chairman), Smith and Sutton

Added members without voting rights

Bryan Frost (Governor representative), Lauraine McManus (Teacher representative, Richard Odle (Medway Youth Parliament representative) and Sam Tutt (Medway Youth Parliament representative)

Substitutes:

Councillors:
Etheridge (substitute for Councillor Carr)
Hicks (substitute for Councillor Andrews)

In Attendance:

Zoe Barkham, Wellbeing Strategy Manager
Rose Collinson, Director of Children and Adults
Angela Drum, Head of Legal Services
Juliet Sevier, Assistant Director Inclusion
Teri Reynolds, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

818 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 20 January 2011 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

819 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, Carr, Clarke, Val Goulden and Maisey and Jim Grogan (Roman Catholic Church representative) and Clare Murray (LINK representative).

820 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

821 Declarations of interest

There were none.

822 Countering bullying

Discussion:

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the meeting and officers introduced the report, summarising its content and the findings of the Countering Bullying Task Group.

Representatives from the following groups then gave a brief introduction about their organisation and its role in relation to countering bullying: -

- Beatbullying – carry out campaigning work and work predominantly with schools and in youth settings, do lots of peer mentoring courses including cyber mentoring;
- Bigfoot Education Arts – provide drama workshops to primary and secondary schools, helping students to understand different types of bullying and to have empathy for both the victims and the bullies;
- JustDifferent – talk to children and young people about disability and focus on the positives of being different;
- Local Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) based at schools and colleges – work closely with school Family Liaison Officers (FLO), Student Advocates, Peer Mentors and other colleagues that can provide support and advice. Where schools use the School Information Management System (SIMS) incidents are recorded on this;
- Medway Mediation Service – train young people to be mediators which proves very empowering for young people and teaches them to be empathetic, take responsibility for their actions and find resolutions. In addition it provides restorative justice conferencing, which is a powerful tool in bringing together the victim and bully in order to understand the hurt caused and provide closure to the issue;
- Show Racism the Red Card – provide advice in primary and secondary schools through workshops or physical activity sessions, such as football to educate students in understanding what racism is and why it is wrong. The charity also provides teacher-training events to empower teachers to engage in racism issues;
- Glencoe Junior School – The school's anti-bullying lead explained that when she arrived at the school it had some challenges with bullying. She became the anti-bullying lead and ran the school's council, which provides various assemblies relating to racism, children's rights and all types of bullying which empower other students. There were various ways in which children could report problems, such as approaching the anti-bullying lead or FLO or using a post box in the school or sending an email. She added that parents were very confident to speak to staff about incidents and in the school's ethos and procedures in addressing bullying. Some pupils of Glencoe added that bullies need to be shown the pain they cause victims and understand the consequences. The whole school community need to learn and understand body language and to listen;
- Sir Joseph Williamson Mathematic School – a student gave his view that culture in a school was key in tackling bullying. He felt there was not a significant problem with bullying in his school because of its strong culture of addressing issues and strong discipline;

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- Medway Youth Parliament – A representative raised concern about cyber-bullying, particularly in relation to a new application on facebook called 'formspring', which enabled users to leave anonymous comments. She also suggested that many young people were unsure of where to go for help and advice on specific bullying, for example, homophobic;
- Place2Be – currently based in some primary schools providing a therapeutic and counselling service for children. They look beyond the behaviour as often bullies are also victims in one way or another and often have self-esteem issues. It was hoped this service would be expanded into other schools including secondary schools, as often some year 7 children experienced issues following the transition from primary school.

The Members of the Countering Bullying Task Group then fed back to the Committee their findings. They commented that Glencoe Junior School was an example of best practice as they had faced the problem of bullying and embedded a culture of respect, sharing problems and listening, as well as supporting students and the Members encouraged other schools to follow its example. They added that School Governors needed to be fully aware and supportive of their school's anti-bullying policy

Members then asked a number of questions to officers and external representatives, which included: -

- *JustDifferent, do you provide support in mainstream schools?*
Yes, to help children and young people respect those that appear different. Sometimes the reception at the beginning of a visit can be difficult but once a dialogue has been established some good questions are asked by students.
- *Show Racism the Red Card, can you expand on how you educate ignorance?*
Racism comes through ignorance, which is often borne from lack of experience of diversity. We help children and young people to delve under the stereotypes of racism and be critical. Football is one engagement vehicle we use with ex-professional footballers, in order to gain a captive audience to then give the message. Other celebrities were also involved.
- *What would be good and effective ways of communicating with young people and sign-posting to various organisations?*
A PCSO explained that leaflets or contact cards would be thrown away and not used and suggested communication through posters, downloads and bluetooth were more effective in reaching young people with information. In addition, the Director of Children and Adult Services also explained that what ever communication methods were used, they needed to be affordable and sustainable in order for them to continue to be provided and used for generations of children and young people to come.

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- *Are we working well with GPs to pick up on possible issues relating to bullying or other emotional wellbeing difficulties?*

Medway Mediation explained that they did receive a fairly large number of referrals from GPs to their service. In addition, the Director of Children and Adult Services explained that GPs would be becoming more involved with commissioning of services and a GP representative also sat on the Medway Safeguarding Children Board so undertook to feedback the importance of GP referrals and sign-posting where it is felt incidents of bullying may be occurring.

- *Do Youth Workers also feed back to schools etc if there are bullying concerns?*

The Assistant Director, Inclusion explained that Youth Workers provide safeguarding supports and were beginning to work in schools to enable more opportunities for sharing information with schools and vice versa.

- *Is it possible to record whether young people who have experienced bullying incidents feel their issue was resolved?*

Officers confirmed that schools were asked for this information as part of the statistics the Council tried to collect from schools, however, many young people who are approached for feedback after an incident do not want to discuss the past event so getting their views was difficult. Officers were currently asking school councils to consider ways of doing this differently to achieve more information on what works well.

- *How can we intervene and provide support early enough to avoid issues of bullying and bad behaviour to continue and escalate?*

It was explained that it is important to engage all young people and for them to understand the consequences and the harm that is caused from bullying. Bigfoot Education Arts explained that the workshops they run included four characters, the by-stander, the bully, the victim and the teacher. It investigates why the bully is bullying and find that, in many cases, they are actually being bullied themselves. It therefore provides young people with the social awareness needed to address and understand bullying issues.

- *What can the local authority do to support partners?*

Various representatives from the external organisations explained that education of all teachers and school staff was important in ensuring they had core knowledge and understanding of anti-bullying issues. Ongoing raised awareness of anti-bullying was also a key factor. It was suggested that schools would benefit from a simple directory of contacts that could be used for resources or advice in relation to addressing various anti-bullying issues. Officers also explained that workshops for teachers had been run, in partnership with Kidscape, to raise awareness of all types of bullying and how to address issues. Another suggestion included school's having a lead person with responsibility for countering bullying and for them to be provided with sufficient time to effectively carry out such duties.

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Other comments raised during the debate included: -

- Concern when schools do not recognise that a bullying problem exists, most people felt that all schools have bullying in their schools;
- Important to understand the difference between bullying and what is 'friendly banter';
- Reference to bullying being reflective of what could be happening in a child or young person's home environment should be included in the policy;
- Schools should record all incidents, as well as interventions and outcomes;
- Different ways of training teachers and governors in best practice ways of addressing bullying should be explored;
- The culture of schools in countering bullying is key and needs to be open, enabling people to feel safe, providing a range of ways for students to share their problems and ask for support;
- Clarification of confidentiality when addressing bullying incidents;
- Ofsted would be providing a new framework later in the year which would cover four key areas, one of which would focus on behaviour;
- PCSOs try to educate young people to report incidents as witnesses;
- Information to be provided to Councillors with useful contacts in order to sign post concerned parents, carers, children and young people if approached with bullying concerns.

The Committee thanked all visitors for attending the information and for providing valuable input.

Decision:

The Committee recommended: -

- (1) the Cabinet to agree that Medway's Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy and Guidelines are updated in line with the key findings identified in the report and at the meeting and be revised, as and when appropriate and when legislation is enacted, to be compliant with: -
 - a. the references to behaviour and discipline as outlined in the Education Bill 2011;
 - b. the forthcoming Ofsted framework which is being amended to reflect the new powers relating to behaviour.
- (2) the Cabinet to agree that officers continue to encourage schools to work in partnership with the Council in relation to accessing anti-bullying support and guidance;
- (3) the Cabinet to agree that schools are encouraged to allocate time and resources in adopting methods of good practice in relation to countering bullying, such as having a countering bullying champion;
- (4) the Cabinet to agree that officers consider ways of promoting the use of technology to broadcast the message around countering bullying.

823 Work programme

Discussion:

The Chairman explained that group leaders had been consulted on the possibility of cancelling non-essential meetings of the Council in the purdah period leading up to the local elections in May. In relation to the next meeting of the committee, scheduled for 5 April 2011, the Chairman recommended that this be cancelled.

Concern was raised that if Professor Munro's final report was released following her independent review into child protection there would be a long delay in a report on its implications being presented to the committee. The Director of Children and Adult Service undertook to provide the committee members with a briefing note if the Munro report is published before the local elections and would also include it in the content of member briefings on safeguarding and children services which would be provided as part of the member induction programme after the election.

Decision:

The committee agreed that: -

- a) the Child Protection Monitoring Group is disbanded and the scrutiny of safeguarding children is continued as detailed in section 6 of the report;
- b) officers provide a member briefing on safeguarding and Members' role as corporate parents after the local elections in May 2011;
- c) the proposals in relation to the NHS National Review of Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Services in England, will not be classified as a substantial variation in Medway and therefore a joint regional or national Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will not be required;
- d) the Director of Children and Adults Services, in consultation with the Chairman and opposition spokespersons of this committee, consider the consultation of the NHS National Review of Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Services in England, following its launch on 28 February 2011, and forward any comments to the SEC HOSC network;
- e) a member briefing note be provided on the outcomes and implications of the Munro Independent Review into Child Protection in England if it is published before the local elections in May 2011;
- f) Member briefings on safeguarding and children services, as part of member induction programme after the local elections in May 2011, include the outcomes and implications of the Munro Independent Review into Child Protection in England.

824 Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care in attendance

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care informed Members of areas of development within his portfolio, which included: -

- Increased workloads of social care staff;
- Restructuring of the Integrated Area Teams (IAT);
- Increases in staff in Children's Social Care Services;
- Family Group Conferences;
- Recent unannounced inspection by Ofsted;
- Ofsted's rating of Medway's adoption and fostering services, the Old Vicarage and Aut Even;
- The art show produced by Medway's looked after children at the Brooke Theatre.

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

- Clarification that administration support staff had also been increased;
- Concern that staff would be encouraged to join other neighbouring authorities;
- Resilience in place for if partner support is reduced;
- Managing transition for young people to adult services;
- Statistics measured against referrals made;
- How benefit changes would affect looked after children leaving the authority's care;
- Measuring the effectiveness of the IAT restructure;
- How courts are challenged in relation to length of time for court proceedings.

Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care for his attendance.

825 Quarter 3 Council Plan monitoring

Discussion:

The Director of Children and Adult Services introduced the report to the committee and answered Members questions, which included: -

- Concerns about figures relating to road traffic accident fatalities involving children and young people and the possibility of adding a report on this issue to the work programme for 2011/12;
- Concerns relating to key stage 2 figures and how schools will be supported to achieve good results against raising floor targets;
- Support provided to child minders to ensure quality of care;
- Testing for under age purchasing of alcohol;
- Reductions in unemployment amongst young people.

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In response to some of the questions from Members the Director for Children and Adult Services explained that in relation to road traffic accident fatalities the two key groups were very young children and young people who were new drivers. Regarding key stage two she stated that it was important for schools and Children Services to be self-aware in order to improve standards. Furthermore, the Director undertook to forward the concerns around testing for under age purchasing of alcohol to the Medway Safeguarding Children Board in order for them to consider exploring any other measures taken by other authorities that Medway could learn from.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

Chairman

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