

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

Thursday, 3 October 2024

6.30pm to 9.20pm

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, Campbell, Gulvin, Hamandishe, Hamilton, Jackson, Joy, Perfect, Spring 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:

None

Substitutes: Councillors:
Anang (Substitute for Lammas)
Clear (Substitute for Scarrott)

In Attendance: Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer
Scott Elliott, Head of Health and Wellbeing Services
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
Michelle Pink, Customer Relations Manager
Sandy Weaver, Complaints Manager for Social Care
Dr David Whiting, Acting Director of Public Health

311 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence from Councillor Lammas, Archie Blundell (MYC Chair), Alice Pledger (Teacher Representative), Leanna Rodgers (Headteacher Representative), and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carer Forum).

312 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 1 August 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

313 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

The Chairperson extended thanks on behalf of the Committee to Raj Bharkhada, Interim Assistant Director Children's Social Care for all his hard work during his time at Medway and wished him well in the future.

314 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Sharon Docherty declared that she is a governor at St Mary's School.
Councillor Perfect declared that he was a Beyond Schools and Inspire Partnership Academy Trust Member.
Councillor Mrs Turpin declared that she was a governor at Balfour Junior Academy and a member of the Autism Trust.
Councillor Hamilton declared that she was a member of the Rochester Grammar School Charity and Sir Joseph Williamson Mathematical School Scheme.
Councillor Mandaracas declared that she was a trustee at the Sunlight Centre.

315 Meeting Theme: Public Health

Discussion:

Members received a presentation on Public Health - Children's Health and considered reports on the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme and the Childhood Obesity Five Year Plan.

Members commended the team for all the work that was being carried out across Medway, and raised several comments and questions which included:

Hospital attendance – clarification was sought on hospital attendance by Ward, and the Committee learned that the data presented was a snapshot of

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hospital attendances for children under 5 years old. The data showed the wards that statistically had significantly higher than average attendances, and these were wards that were in close proximity to the hospital. The increased instances of attendance could have been as a result of difficulties in the ability of families in getting GP appointments. Work continued to be undertaken across the Council on addressing issues with GP access.

Asthma - it was asked what the drivers were for under 19 year olds emergency admissions for asthma. The Committee was informed that there were a range of issues associated with emergency admission, and the Medway and Swale Health Care Partnership continued to work on interventions. Across the (HCP), it had been identified that the management of asthma plans needed to improve, due to a culmination of understanding of the condition by parents, GP reviews, as well as appropriate use of medication. The HCP now had a dedicated Asthma Nurse working to address the issues presented and ensuring that asthma plans were appropriate for the individual. Across Medway, 34 schools had signed up for the asthma friendly programme which focused on training and education as well as engagement with school nurses. The school nurses supported the asthma programme as part of their work in school function. It had been identified that historically there had been limited training for GPs on asthma and that not all patients had a well-crafted asthma plan in place. Additionally, annual reviews were not always robust. The work of the asthma nurse was to upskill GP Practices, in particular those practices where their patients had high instances of hospital attendance.

A breakdown of hospital attendance by Ward was requested to determine a link between air quality and the impact on asthma. It was advised that data was available, and the Committee was informed that a Task and Finish Group Review was being conducted, which included strands of work on air quality and asthma. Discussions took place on what could be done to improve air quality, in particular, near schools where vehicles were often idling, and it was suggested that schools continue to engage through the use of other parents and children in the community and that information could be disseminated through the headteachers newsletter on what additional action could be taken to improve air quality around schools.

Family hubs - it was asked if Medway had lost out on a year of delivery due to receiving the funding late to start the project. The Committee was informed that Medway was not unique in that situation as this was the same for many authorities across the country. It had been challenging to ensure investment over a two year period instead of three as it took time to commission services, however, they had succeeded in accomplishing what was planned and ensured that there was a comprehensive programme and offer in place. The Finance Business Partner added that Medway was bound by the terms of the grant and worked hard to utilise the funds in order to prevent having to return any grant funding back to Central Government.

Funding - in response to a question on what the plan was at the end of 2025 when the grant funding ceased, it was explained that this had been a concern from serious consideration was given as to whether to apply. It was decided,

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universally, to apply for the funding as it would be instrumental in increasing investment and improving the infrastructure for young people in Medway. The funding had been used to invest in future sustainability of some of the programmes that were already in place as well as training and delivery of other programmes. All investments had been risk assessed in order to understand the impact to date. The SEND team were now moving into the family hubs, however, there were improvements and investment to be made to the satellite spaces to make them more viable.

The Family Hubs enabled a more generic offer of support for the community that was not just limited to social care and all families would be able to engage with and access various activities through the hubs. Early Help Co-ordinators were in place to identify families with emerging needs and support staff on how to engage with families.

Medway Champions - it was asked how many people had been through the Better Medway Champion programme and how was the impact they were having in the community measured. The Committee learned that there had been over 500 people trained. It was made clear at the beginning of the programme that the aim was to have community champions that were confident to engage in conversations about health and signpost appropriately and not about them having to return data on the number of conversations they had with people. Members were reminded that they were all welcome to attend training and become champions.

Obesity – in response to a question on what the Local Authority was doing to tackle healthy eating in schools, it was acknowledged that healthy school food was a vital aspect to addressing obesity. The team had identified a funding pot and commissioned the Food for Life Programme, and two years into the programme, 41 schools had signed up and were working through the objectives. Members were urged to reach out to schools in their Wards to encourage them to sign up to the programme which had one more year to run.

A Member added that whilst the Food for Life Programme was beneficial, further conversations needed to take place with schools about the companies they contracted for their catering services. It was confirmed that the Public Health Team did engage in challenging conversations and encouraged schools to be strict about their guidelines when awarding catering contracts.

Improving food choices – it was commented that it was disappointing to see young people making poor food choices out in the community and schools needed to ensure that there were better healthy food choices on the schools' catering menu. It was explained that there was a comprehensive Personal Health Social Economic programme across schools in Medway which provided a wide range of information and support on healthy eating and exercises which had been developed to provide children and young people with the knowledge to make informed choices. It was also important to note that addressing poor eating was rooted in behaviour change by equipping the community with the resources, opportunity, and motivation to make better choices by reinforcing the

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messages at every opportunity through partnership with all services, businesses, and institutions across Medway.

It was added that it was vital that schools and parents work together in partnership to address issues and provide support for children. There was also a need to make access to sports and means of exercise available to all children in Medway.

Dad space – in response to a query on the progression of the programme, the Committee was advised that the first course was scheduled to commence on 12 October, and they were currently working with the community on where the session would be held. It was important to have a robust maternal parenting programme but just as important to focus on dads. Work was being undertaken with the Dads' Institute on a universal programme that would cover all important paternal milestones.

Drinking in pregnancy - it was commented that there was a lack of data on activities to address drinking in pregnancy. It was explained that there had been some work undertaken in the last 18 months, with comprehensive training in place for social care staff and front line professionals. The Family Hubs/Start for Life was a universal programme which targeted the areas of most need, and this included those at risk of drinking during pregnancy. The Public Health Team delivered a healthy pregnancy programme that addressed all risks and worked extensively to ensure that midwives consistently reported concerns as part of the foetal alcohol syndrome programme.

Health checks - it was commented that young people over the age of 14 with SEND were eligible for a health check, which was offered by some GPs but not all. Additionally, many parents were not aware of this entitlement, and it was asked what could be done to ensure consistency of practice. The Head of Children's Commissioning said that at present, Medway exceeded the national average of checks, achieving over the 75% target. Historically the number of checks completed had been low and a lot of work had been undertaken to increase the offer as well as take up. The next step was to ensure that the outcomes and pathways from the health checks were progressed.

Walk to school programme – it was asked what more could be done to encourage parents and carers to participate, as not all children were attending their nearest primary schools which put pressure on families to drive. It was acknowledged by officers that there were challenges and more needed to be done to support families to walk to school. The active travel group supported the programme and continued to explore various ways to encourage families. There were various programmes and groups taking place across Medway which all had a positive impact, and Members were encouraged to lend their support promoting the programmes within their Wards.

Food partnerships – in response to a question on what was being done to ensure children were at the heart of strategies, it was explained that officers had been working on the Medway Food Strategy which was due to be

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presented to Cabinet. This focused on all aspects of food, healthy eating, growing, and buying food as well as food waste.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.
- b) The Committee noted the Childhood Obesity Five Year Plan.

a Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme

The discussion and decision of this item can be found at minute number 315.

b Childhood Obesity Five Year Plan

The discussion and decision of this item can be found at minute number 315.

316 Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Discussion:

The Manager for Social Care Complaints introduced the report which provided information regarding Children Services complaints and compliments for 2023-24.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

The net zero data for Stage 1 complaints for the Children in Care Team 4 was commended.

Responses to a young person's complaint - in response to a question on how the process was made clear to a young person, it was explained that if a young person made a complaint directly, they were offered and provided with an advocate. Social Workers also explained their rights and the Independent Reviewing Officers were skilled at reinforcing the understanding of the process. If a complaint was received via a parent, it was made clear that it was the young person's complaint and not that of the parents. If the complaint was received via a Councillor, consent was always sought with the young person to share any outcomes or information from the investigation with the Councillor.

Approach and Learning – it was asked how the Children's Social Care Department embedded the approach to complaints and how learning fed in to the wider improvement of the service. The Director of People said that how complaints were handled was of the utmost importance. The complaints process was sometimes the only way that a family, going through the social care process, felt they could get their voices heard so it was important that the process was fair and dealt with within the timescales given and that the family's views and feelings were treated with high regard.

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The message for all, including social workers was that families must be informed as to how they can complain and any concerns that were presented should be treated as a complaint if raised and presented as one.

The Manager for Social Care Complaints added that a lot of work had been undertaken and was ongoing with the social workers and senior leadership team on managing the process effectively.

Members collectively noted the range of compliments received by the service and recognised the important of sharing the learning from these positive experiences.

A comment was made that volumes of complaints were low, and it was queried whether it was difficult for people to make a complaint. The Complaints Manager for Social Care explained that unlike previously, complaints which did not meet the statutory requirement were investigated and responded to through the Council's non-statutory complaints procedure. The numbers of statutory and non-statutory complaints combined therefore made up the total number of complaints and any reduction reflected overall service improvements.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

317 Missing Children

Discussion:

The Head of First Response and Family Solutions introduced the report which provided information and data on children who went missing from home and care during the period April 2023- March 2024.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

Missing Looked After Children - it was commented that the report stated 98 missing children were in the care of Medway and 146 were the responsibility of other local authorities and it was asked what conversations took place regarding those children. The Committee was advised that a significant amount of work continued to be undertaken on prevention and understanding of why children went missing, which was attributed to a number of factors. It was essential to continue to address issues on a multi-agency approach basis with all partners and conduction of return home interviews (RHI) were also essential. The teams continued to engage with other local authorities but clarified that they held responsibility for RHIs for the children placed in Medway. The data trends in missing looked after children was complex and any trends identified would be reported in the next annual report.

It was further asked whether RHIs took place for children placed outside of Medway and it was confirmed that meetings did take place but more needed to

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be done to increase the numbers of interviews, in particular, by the use of technology and how to utilise this more effectively. It was also important to ensure that the interviewer was the same person each time in order to build a relationship and environment of trust.

Additional needs – it was commented that there was a lack of information on missing children with Special Educational Needs and Disability and the officer agreed to capture the information for the next report as well as details of children on Education Health Care Plans.

Support for repeat missing children and families - it was asked what support was in place for families and the Committee was informed that support was in place through various services including early help teams and schools. In instances of increased repeat missing episodes, the multiagency model approach and response was utilised to explore support needs as missing episodes were often symptomatic of other issues and factors to be considered in the family households.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

318 Work programme

Discussion:

The work programme was presented for information.

Decision:

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

Chairperson

Date:

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