

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

**Tuesday, 3 December 2024**

**6.30pm to 9.19pm**

**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, Lammas, 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:**

Leanna Rogers (Headteacher Representative) and Alice Pledger (Teacher Representative)

**Substitutes:** Keith Clear, Medway Parent and Carer Forum (Substitute for Lisa Scarrott)

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3 December 2024

**In Attendance:** Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education  
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND  
Kelly Cogger, Acting Assistant Director Children's Social Care  
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer  
Katey Durkin, Chief Finance Officer  
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive  
Aeilish Geldenhuis, Head of Public Health Programmes  
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning  
Medway Youth Council (Esha Dosanjh and Amelia Van Nierkerk)  
Andy McNally-Johnson, Head of Corporate Accounts  
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts  
Amy St Louis, Child Friendly Medway Project Officer  
Angela Taylor, Community Partnership and Engagement Officer, Child Friendly Medway

### 468 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Lisa Scarrott, (Medway Parent and Carer Forum).

### 469 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 3 October 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

### 470 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

### 471 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

#### Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

#### Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

#### Other interests

There were none.

## 472 Meeting Theme: Finance

### Discussion:

Members received a presentation on finance and considered the reports under this theme.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

The medium term financial position was a challenge as financial pressures continued to grow and this would be challenging for Medway, the review being undertaken by Central Government was welcomed.

**Government financial support for Local Authorities** - in response to a question on whether the Government announcement on financial support would ease the pressures of the anticipated overspend, the Committee was informed that the Government, in announcing the budget were clear that they recognised that local authorities had been underfunded and were keen to address issues with pressures. Additionally, changes would be made to distribution of funding, details of which were yet to emerge.

In the policy statement, it was made clear that distribution of funding would be based on need, with increased funding directed to Local Authorities that had higher areas of deprivation or who were less able to raise income through local taxation. It was currently difficult to estimate what the announcement meant for Medway who were amongst the 20 lowest funded local authorities per resident in England. The caveat for consideration by officers in terms of increased funding was whether additional costs may materialise.

**Overspend** - it was asked what the likelihood of overspend would be for the coming year given that Medway continued to experience increased migration, which would increase budgetary pressures on the Council. It was explained that budgetary predictions were made with the best information available at the time and it was difficult to predict in totality what would happen each year.

The report alluded to the considerable savings to be made from SEND transport and it was asked what knock on effects had been considered. The Committee was advised that Medway had to date been generous with its transport policy, providing significantly more than neighbouring authorities and more than required statutorily. Legislation had changed to reflect that children with an EHP did not have to be provided with transport if they were not attending their nearest suitable school.

It was further commented that it was vital to ensure that all implications of non-provision of transport be looked into and not just the savings that could be made. Members were reminded that decisions for children on EHCPs were made based on need. A banding system was in operation and each child received the same amount of funding regardless of whether in mainstream or SEND specialist provision. There was an increased drive for inclusiveness as part of the national as well as Medway's agenda, for provision for all children in mainstream schools.

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**Travel training** - members of the Committee commented that more was needed to be done to support independence of SEND children, including provision of travel training to support transition to adulthood. Officers said that there was a transport group in place exploring options and the Council would also be working with Medway Parents and Carers Forum, who currently provided travel training. Further work was planned on empowering children to use public transport.

It was asked what wider work had been undertaken in SEND and viewed as priorities for the next 3-5 years. The Committee learned that there was anticipated significant growth in pupil numbers due to inward migration of families and as a result transport would continue to be a challenge. Additionally, there were many children that still attended specialist provision outside of Medway, this remained a challenge due to the significant continued uplift in associated costs. Reviews were ongoing, with exploration of different ranges of options. Council wide, further exploration was needed on the travel infrastructure of Medway to make travel easier and more accessible for families.

**Reduced timetables** - it was commented that some children in specialist provision were placed on short timetables as a means to manage issues and it was asked whether there would be provision in the budget to assist schools in providing extra support should it be needed. The Committee was informed that schools went through a graduated approach and layered on support as needed. At a point where they experienced difficulties in meeting needs or required additional funding, they approached the local authority for support. In all cases, officers worked with schools and families to understand the needs of the child. Schools had a duty to report the implementation of a reduced timetable, the team would review what the timetable entailed, and any concerns were discussed with the school.

A Member of the Committee added that it was important to note that reduced timetables were not implemented as a means to reducing a child's access to education, it was used solely as a temporary measure whilst work was undertaken on reintegration of the child onto a full timetable. Reduced timetables were effective and useful when used appropriately.

**Advice** - the Committee was informed that parents were able to access SEND inclusion advice and support from the family hubs, in particular in instances where parents and carers felt relationships had broken down with the school.

It was asked how the additional investment that was proposed in the journey of children's social care from good to outstanding would involve and how would this drive fit into the wider plans of the service. The Committee was informed that investment would be made in recruitment, increase in staffing capacity, including management. Review was being undertaken on the Early Help service which had experienced increase in contact and now required additional support. Further investment in placement of children locally and increased support for those placed outside of Medway.

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The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive added that the 2025/26 financial year was the penultimate year to make significant improvement ahead of the next Ofsted inspection and whilst confident that some categories could achieve outstanding, focus would be on ongoing stabilisation and consistency in service.

**Impact of budget on families** - concerns were highlighted as to the possible impact to families whilst the service trying to enforce budgetary controls and it was asked what safeguards were in place. The Committee was informed that the review work to develop the budget began early in the financial year, with officers asked to identify where pressures would be and predict what their service would look like in the year ahead. Those projections formed the basis of the draft budget.

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive added that the approach taken in formulating the draft budget was welcomed and was confident that the budget being presented with continued to ensure the needs of children were met with the appropriate resources in place.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)**- in response to a question on the use of AI in completion of paperwork, how risks would be managed through the pilot and dissemination of this way of working in other areas, officers said that AI would complete tasks alongside officers and comparisons would be made to identify gaps. Whilst the use of AI would save time, it would not negate the use of a human and would be used mainly as a quality assurance programme to ensure vital details were not missed out in case reports. The pilot would be run in a tempered and moderated way and AI used as a tool to support officers with efficiency. Caution would always be taken to ensure no replacement of human input.

In response to a question on investment in business change and transformation, the Committee learned that this was an ongoing area of investment that was included in this year's budget.

### a **Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2025/26**

Discussion of this Item can be found at minute number 472.

#### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to reduce the budget deficit for 2025/26 and to continue to liaise with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to secure support through the Exceptional Financial Support scheme.
- b) The Committee noted that their comments on the proposals outlined in the Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets 2025/26 in so far as they relate to the services within the remit of this Committee are fed back to the

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Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2025.

### **b Capital Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2024/25**

Discussion of this Item can be found at minute number 472.

#### **Decision:**

- a) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the results of the second round of capital budget monitoring for 2024/25.
- b) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the Chief Executive will use the revised delegation limits in the Constitution to agree virements from unallocated Basic Needs Grant as follows:
  - i) an additional budget of £25,000 to cover the cost of further works to the car park relating to the Hundred of Hoo 1 Form Entry Primary Expansion scheme,
  - ii) £66,000 to complete works to the Hoo Academy 6th form facilities.

### **c Revenue Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2024/25**

Discussion of this item can be found at minute number 472

#### **Decision:**

- a) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the results of the second round of revenue budget monitoring for 2024/25.
- b) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by the Full Council.

### **d Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarters 1 and 2 2024/25**

Discussion of this item can be found at minute number 472.

#### **Decision:**

- a) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Q1 and Q2 2024/25 progress of the performance indicators

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used to monitor progress of the Council's priorities, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

- b) The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

### 473 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2023-24

#### **Discussion:**

The Committee received a report which detailed the work undertaken by the MSCP in the last year and sets out the progress made by the partnership against key priorities.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Members raised several questions in relation to Oasis Restore and the Democratic Services Officer undertook to collate the questions and ensure they are addressed in the report that is expected to be presented at the 9 January meeting on the secure school.

**Safeguarding partnership** - in response to a question on how the partnership worked effectively, noting some of the financial challenges of the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Members were informed that the partnership worked on the basis of openness and transparency. Conversations regarding pressures took place and there was also the independent scrutiny function in place.

**Engagement** - it was asked how effective engagement was between the partnership and the secure estate, in particular, since the recent change in management. The Committee learned that engagement worked well, there was an MSCP sub group in place for the secure estate and the plans regarding their monitoring had been developed and agreed.

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive added that there were regular meetings with Oasis and would be meeting with the founder in December. Additionally, she received notification of placement of all young persons.

**Children of prisoners** - in response to a comment as to whether there was any information regarding children of prisoners as this was an emerging vulnerable group, officers said that it was expected that all officers in contact with prisoners and families would make the appropriate referral to children's social care if there were concerns or a need identified.

The work being undertaken under Priority 4, violence against women was welcomed, and it was asked if the body of work would include the practice of virginity testing and hymenoplasty in some cultural communities following a report in 2022 that Medway as well as some London Boroughs continued to be hotspots for these practices. The officer undertook to look into this and provide a briefing note to the Committee.

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It was asked if there had been any changes in ensuring representation on the partnership by SEND Headteachers, additionally it was noted that there were no child death figures included in this annual report. The Committee was informed that there was primary, secondary and post 16 representation and there was also representation on a school by school basis in multiagency group work. There was a delay in production of this year's child death data which was why it had not been included in the report.

**Start for life** - it was asked if it was anticipated that the Start for Life Programme would result in savings for children's social care and what the thresholds of needs were in the service. Members were informed that it had been announced that another year of funding would be made available to support the programme. There were no savings made as the money received was a grant, all of which was expected to be spent or returned if not spent. The team had undertaken work to develop a sustainable programme beyond the life of the grant funding. In terms of thresholds, there was a multiagency threshold guidance in place led by the MSCP. This was currently under review with soft changes being made in relation to respective language. Training on threshold guidance continued to be accessible to practitioners across Medway.

**Temporary accommodation** - in response to a question on how often out of area temporary accommodation placements in Medway were becoming early help, child in need and child protection cases. The Committee learned that if a family was placed in Medway with no previous statutory involvement but developed a need during their time in temporary accommodation, this need would be the responsibility of Medway. If a family was already an open case to the placing authority, that authority would retain responsibility for the family. If the family then secured permanent residency in Medway, the placing authority were able to transfer their statutory responsibility to Medway. If the need for the family fell under the Early Help service, it would be Medway's responsibility as this was not a statutory service.

It was further clarified that across Medway and Kent there were approximately 3,500 children in temporary accommodation and in Medway this amounted to 422 households and 990 children.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2023-24.
- b) The Committee requested that a briefing note to be provided on the prevalence of Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty in Medway.

## **474 Child-Friendly Medway Annual Report 2023-2024**

### **Discussion:**

The Committee received the annual report which highlighted the activities, events and projects from the previous year. Child Friendly Medway was



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launched in 2021, and their work continued to be led by the voice of young people in Medway.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Following the successful launch of the initiative, the work of the team continued to grow from strength to strength. There was good cross party support for the work being undertaken and the progress made on such an important subject was commendable.

**Aspirations** - it was asked how further the aspirations of Child Friendly Medway could be embedded in the work of the whole Council and how other directorates could engage. The Committee learned that since the launch, the team continued to work across the whole Council as this was a community initiative that was focused on wider issues such as education, climate change, the environment. Feedback received from young people were disseminated to directorates and teams. There were many opportunities to work collaboratively as well as engage with various teams.

In response to a question on what the Council and partners could do to ensure that their vision matched the ambitions of Child Friendly Medway, the Committee was informed that this was a community wide initiative and in sharing feedback about what young people want, they would continue to explore opportunities to work with Council departments as well as continued engagement with external partners. Further reflection was needed on the next steps of the initiative.

**Ambitions of young people** - it was asked how to ensure that the ambitions of young people were not affected by internal processes, and the Committee was informed that the team played an important role in championing the importance of listening to young people and used their platform to explore what was important to them. The team would continue to engage at all times to ensure they remained focused on aspirations of young people.

The team's priorities were centred on being accountable to young people. The first year of the programme was listening to young people and the second focused on development of core responses to their needs.

The team were working on an initiative called young citizens that was being rolled out across primary schools, years 3-6 across Medway. The initiative focused on celebrating the achievements of young people.

**Preparation for adulthood** - it was asked how young people were being prepared for adulthood and to be more resilient. It was commented that it was important to realise that small changes made big difference to the lives of young people. It was vital for adults to promote change in society by being advocates for the younger generation, listen to their needs, ideas and aspirations and not be afraid of change.

**Decision:**

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The Committee noted the Child-Friendly Medway Annual Report 2023-2024.

### **475 Work programme**

#### **Discussion:**

Members considered a report regarding the Board's work programme.

#### **Decision:**

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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