

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

**Thursday, 9 January 2025**

**6.30pm to 9.28pm**

**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), Campbell, Gulvin, Hamandishe, Hamilton, Jackson, Joy, Lammas, Perfect, Spring and Mrs Turpin

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

Sharon Docherty (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative,  
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark)

**Added members without voting rights:**

Leanna Rogers (Headteacher Representative), Archie Blundell  
MYC Chairperson (Medway Youth Council), Esha Dosanjh  
(Medway Youth Council), Amelia Van-Niekerk (Medway Youth  
Council), and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum)

**Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Field (Substitute for Animashaun)

**In Attendance:** Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education  
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND  
Steve Chalke, Founder, Oasis Charitable Trust  
Hannah Christie, Programme Lead Childrens Mental Health and  
Emotional Wellbeing  
Kelly Cogger, Acting Assistant Director Children's Social Care  
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer  
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes  
Rebecca Smith, Lead Education Professional: Quality &  
Inclusion  
Clare Wilson, Chief Operating Officer, Oasis Restore Secure  
School

**565 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Animashaun and Lenny Williams (C of E Diocese Representative, Rochester Diocesan Board of Education).

**566 Record of meeting**

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

**567 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**568 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

Disclosable pecuniary interests

Leanna Rogers disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) due to her employment at Thames View Primary School and being a Governor at Fort Pitt Grammar School, she would leave the meeting if any specific reference was made to the schools and the trusts they were under.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

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

Councillor Field disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) as he is a Governor at Abbey Court School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference was made to the school.

Councillor Hamilton disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) as she was a member of the Rochester Grammar School Charity and Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School Scheme and would leave the meeting if any specific reference were made to the schools.

Councillor Joy disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School Performance Report) as he was a Governor at Capstone School and Parkwood School and would leave the meeting if any specific reference were made to the schools.

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 were made to the trusts.

Councillor Mrs Turpin disclosed an interest on item 5 (Annual School performance Report) as she was a Governor at Balfour Junior Academy and a member of the Fortis Trust and would leave the meeting if any reference were made to the school and trust.

### Other interests

There were none.

## 569 Meeting Theme: Education

### **Discussion:**

The Committee received the report which summarised Medway's schools' performance for the academic year 2023-24.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

**Early years** - it was asked what the contributing factors to decline in performance outcomes for pupils in Early Years and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Committee was informed that whilst there had been a decline in Early Years, this was a slight reduction and did not presently cause significant concern as it could be due to changes in analysis of individual settings. In SEND, whilst the detailed analysis was not currently present, it was felt that this was due to challenges of placements and accessibility to provision.

A comment was made that the decline in Early Years outcome may be due to the fact that this cohort were the babies of the Covid Pandemic, there was a break in their socialisation and delays to development of fine motor skills and achievement of key milestones had been affected.

Concern was raised regarding Early Years cohort and it was commented that it was vital to keep a pertinent eye to ensure that this decline does not continue throughout the other key stages.

**Provision for children with SEND** - it was commented that concern had previously been raised regarding changes to provision for SEND pupils due to pressures of the safety valve, and assurance has been provided at the time that there would be no decrease in attainment outcomes. It was asked to what degree the new measures had affected attainment outcomes. Members were advised that the pressures in SEND do have an impact on outcomes but in terms of the safety valve measures which was a financial management programme, increasing support was being provided to pupils with SEND. Improvements had been made to services and a direct correlation could not be made between the safety valve measures and the decline in performance outcomes. Additionally, £1.1 million had been invested in outreach work, 70 out of 80 schools has signed up and were involved in trauma informed training and attendance had increased. The resources in mainstream schools and specialist

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schools in terms of net funding had increased and individual support funding was still available to pupils with SEND as well as the whole school funding.

**Data** - members asked how the data collated was utilised and how were schools' explanations validated as some of the trends were concerning. The Committee was informed that the information was disseminated to headteachers of schools and discussions around the data presented took place at headteacher forums. There were robust systems in place on accountability as headteachers held each other to account, Ofsted, Schools Trust as well as the Council also took responsibility of holding schools to account. The Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools also received and reviewed the data and as a result an education symposium had been arranged to take place on 3 March 2025 to discuss in greater detail the changes that needed to be made and actions to be taken.

**Attendance** - concerns were highlighted regarding attendance figures of pupils and that Medway appeared to be consistently playing catchup to the national average figures. Officers agreed that there were still issues with absence figures but that the information presented with was lagged and there had been some improvement to persistent absence rates whilst unauthorised, authorised, and severe absence remained above national averages. The whole education system needed to be more ambitious, and these were the issues that would be discussed at the upcoming education symposium.

It was further asked what learning could be derived from other schools and trusts, to manage issues with attendance. Officers said that there were ongoing conversations between schools on tackling absenteeism and it was important to note that we all had a statutory duty to promoting education excellence and recognising wider responsibilities to achieving best outcomes for young people in Medway.

**Exclusions** - members of the Committee highlighted the increase in permanent exclusion of pupils, enquired as to whether there were any reasons identified for increase in exclusions and also asked what the analysis and correlation if any, with high suspension rates and SEND pupils. Officers acknowledged the increase and informed the Committee that the department regularly challenged schools on their exclusion rates. Members were reminded that they were also able to challenge schools, that they sat on governing bodies and trusts of, regarding the information presented. It was important to note that permanent exclusion was a last resort for schools and the decision to exclude was not taken lightly as schools were fully aware of the impact to pupils and their families. In Medway, exclusion rates for SEND pupils were lower than their peers. In the last year, there were some schools where pupils displayed high level of disruption and persistent obstructive behaviours which resulted in suspensions and permanent exclusions.

It was asked why Medway was slightly above national average on provision for SEND support but slightly below on Education Health Care Plans (EHCP), officers said that there were more children with EHCP's than several years ago.

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Medway had a large proportion on SEN(K). EHCP numbers had now stabilised in line with the national average.

**Children in Care** - it was commented that there was a notable difference in performance of Children in Care in Medway against the national average and what measures were being taken to address issues. Officers acknowledged the disparity and informed Members that this was an area of priority for the Corporate Parenting Board and the Virtual School's Partnership. The Virtual School was undertaking more robust tracking, looking at outcomes of children placed within and outside of Medway and also utilising pupil premium to address outcomes.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted the Annual Schools' Performance Report, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

### **a Annual Report on School Performance for the Academic Year 2023 to 2024**

The discussion and decision of this item can be found at minute number 569.

### **570 Oasis Restore Secure School Update**

#### **Discussion:**

The Founder of Oasis Charity Trust and the Chief Operating Officer of Oasis Restore gave a presentation which provided an update on progress since the school opened.

The Committee was informed that:

- This was the first establishment of its kind in the country. An opportunity for change and difference within the youth custodial estate.
- The law was changed to allow for a nonprofit charity to run this provision for young offenders.
- The secure school did not just operate on trauma informed practice as its practices were also based on a healing concept.
- The school was a dual registered children's home and academy trust, regulated and inspected by Ofsted.
- The placing authority was the youth custody service, and the courts decided who would be placed at the secure school. Discussions were held prior to placement to determine if the school would be able to adequately care for the young person.
- The school would care for young people aged between 12-18, with capacity of up to 46 at any one time, both boys and girls.
- There were approximately 144 staff which included 16 qualified teachers and an in-house mental health service.
- In the last year, 82.9% of offenders were reconvicted within 12 months of finishing a custodial sentence.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

It was commented that this was a revolutionary change to the youth offending/justice system. It was questioned what security was in place given that keys were not used in the school. How effectiveness would be measured and the associated cost of £250k per young person.

The Committee was informed that a decision had been made to use fobs in all areas instead of keys due to sensory problems the jangling of keys could evoke, however, the extent of security at the school should not be underestimated. There were approximately 900 security cameras in and around the premises. The cost of £250k was not per young person and it would cost the same to run the establishment if there was one young person or whether at full capacity of 46. The school was highly regulated and was being measured by everyone, including the Ministry of Justice, Ofsted, its own Governing Body, and was under scrutiny by all services across the country.

**Socialisation** - in response to a question on how socialisation and friendships would be safely managed, how the one girl that was currently placed there navigated her stay and if males and females would be separated in the school. The Committee was informed that presently there was an average of 500 young people in youth custody across the country, and a very small percentage of that figure were female. As well as addressing issues with male offending it was important to gain better understanding and insight on female offenders. The young female in the secure school had integrated well, she was in a flat on her own, with the choice to socialise and integrate with everyone during the day. The plan for the school was for males and females to have separate sleeping quarters with the ability to socialise during the day where it had been established that mixing worked well.

**Conflict** - it was further asked how issues of conflict would be managed, and the Committee was informed that there had been small incidences of conflict which were managed through a daily debrief, with reflective sessions and information shared at the handover of staff. There was confidence and willingness by staff to step in and address any issues but there was still a need for further learning on awareness, identification and prevention of conflict.

**Workforce** - members were encouraged that significant progress was being made and it was commented that staff retention, ongoing development and stability in the workforce would be key to achievement of outcomes. The Committee was informed that the leadership were cognizant of retention of staff. They were being realistic and anticipated a spike in leavers when the school was operating at full level and realisation of the reality of the role as this could be very triggering work. Support had been built into the model to support staff throughout with their roles, as well as with personal issues and development. There was a strong commitment to personal development of staff and the teaching staff had fed back that they were gaining more work satisfaction than they would if they were in a mainstream school setting.

**Punishment** - it was commented that the ethos of the school was one that was not based on punishment, and this could be very controversial, with many people having strong opinions on this. It was asked if consideration had been given to how the victims of crime may feel about the lack of punishment and how it was proposed that poor behaviour would be managed. The Committee was informed that this model was not about excusing the crime committed, poor behaviour and decisions but focus was on understanding of behaviours. The young people were made to face and realise the impact of their actions on the lives of victims and their families. There were clear boundaries and expectations on behaviour set at the secure school and with natural consequences in place.

**Substance misuse and gang culture** - in response to a question on management of substance misuse and gang culture, it was acknowledged that there were serious issues in the country with gang culture. Any identified issues would be managed through the core teams, with therapeutic work, and through Personal Health Social Emotional (PHSE) Education, including life story work but it was important to understand that this work could only be undertaken with young people who were ready to embark on that difficult emotional journey. It was vital to understand that if a young person was sent back to the same environment upon release, which was how the system was currently set up, there was an extremely high likelihood that they would reoffend as they were vulnerable and intertwined in that culture. Oasis Restore operated with a focus on provision of alternative ways of life for young people beyond the realm of custody once they were released by providing alternatives such as halfway homes. This provision was outside the government remit but not outside the remit of the organisation. There was partnership working in place with charities that worked with gangs to come into the secure school to deliver enrichment programmes. There was a team in place to support young people with substance misuse or addiction, but this was not an immediate issue at the school.

**Christian Faith** - it was asked to what extent the secure school approach was influenced by the Christian Faith and what the prediction would be on re-offending rates when young people left the estate. The Founder of Oasis Charitable trust confirmed that he was a Christian and Baptist Minister but not considered an evangelical by most due to his work and theology of inclusion for all which was at the heart of his work. He informed Members that the operations of the secure school were not based on Christian theology but one based on science, what was known about childhood and adolescent brain development and an understanding of changes to a traumatised brain. The Charity's theology was simply, that they did not believe in 'an eye for an eye or tooth for a tooth'. Love and nurture of a person changed and regulated the functions of the brain. There needed to be changes to the whole custodial estate in order to address issues with reoffending rates.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted the update report.

**571 Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Services across Medway**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received an update report on progress of the Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Services Procurement. The Committee was informed that the first contract that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) intended to tender for was the therapeutic alliance. Medway Public Health Team had successfully advocated for a separate therapeutic alliance for Medway as this aligned with Education and Children's Social Care and it was important for there to be a nuance as part of the Medway Model.

Included in the report was an update on the growth of existing services and the proposed therapeutic alliance would pull all services together in a way that would make it easier for professionals and families to navigate the system.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

**Services** - in response to a question on how easy it would be for families to refer to these services and how were they informed that the services exist, the Committee was advised that work had been undertaken to promote the services available through a directory of services, websites including through the Medway Parent and Carer Forum. Presently when a referral was made to Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), following assessment, if it were determined that their need could not be met by CAMHS, they would be signposted to the appropriate service. What was being proposed under the new model was a single referral and assessment point for professionals and families to refer to where the work would be undertaken to meet needs, and a referral would only be progressed onto CAMHS if necessary.

The Medway Focus was welcomed and praised officers for advocating for this for the children of Medway.

**Private care homes** - it was commented that there was an increase in two person private children care homes and it was asked what was being done, with the emergence of increase in private child care provision to ensure that providers engaged with Medway support services and the ability of Medway services to confidently establish strong partnership working. The Committee was informed that the impact of placements on children was an area of priority, high focus and officers continued to work with partners in the Planning Department to outline any concerns. It was, however, difficult, due to planning regulation to give feedback on providers but conversations were held to discuss and outline the quality of provision was that expected for the children of Medway. It was important to note that this was a complex sector, but the Council expressed to all providers the expectation to work in partnership if they wanted to come and establish their services in Medway. It was made very clear the level of expectation for children's placements and the high standards required of children's provision.



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It was added that one of the benefits of partnership working was that there were officers within the Council that worked closely with the ICB, had the understanding of the acute needs of children and were able to procure bespoke services to address needs. There was also a firm understanding of thresholds, in particular for CAMHS who had a high threshold due to their very specialist provision of services. Officers were able to work on building a robust range of services for children that did not meet the CAHMS threshold.

### Decision:

- a) The Committee supported the contracting approach described and that NHS Kent and Medway ICB continue to provide regular updates to the Committee as the work progresses.
- b) The Committee noted the current service offered for children and young people in Medway and the impact these services were having on children and their families.

## 572 Short Breaks Sufficiency Update

### Discussion:

The Committee received an update report on the work undertaken towards the priorities of the Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy.

The team had worked closely with the Medway Parent and Carer Forum in co-production and consultation on driving forward aspects of the priorities.

Members were provided with additional information which included:

In quarter three, October to December 2024, the Rocks short breaks service at Rivermead School supported 176 young people, 30 families at 700 sessions. This was a significant increase on the previous period. Reports and feedback from families had been positive.

The five residential apprenticeships were now in place to work at parklands, Eden House, or the Rock. All the young people were from a variety of backgrounds and keen to develop their careers.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Clarification was sought on figures in the report that stated that £200,000 savings to be invested back into short breaks, and table two stated that larger figures of capital was needed for the service in future years.

The Committee was informed that that services had been streamlined to address issues and bring in efficiencies which had resulted in savings. There had since been a central agreement that there would be a need for investment in the short term which would result in a cost effective service in the longer term.

**Access to short breaks** - it was commented that access to short breaks could be bureaucratic, and it was important to ensure that it complied with and fulfilled its obligations which was to keep families together. Additionally, there were issues with recruitment of Personal Assistants due to the amount they were allowed to charge. It would be more beneficial if family members could be PA's as they could better meet the needs of the child and should be compensated through payment for their time. Members were informed that previously there had been no definitive criteria for applications for short breaks, officers had been making their own decisions and this had highlighted a need for standardization and as a result there was now an escalation route built into the process for cases that did not meet the criteria. The criteria developed was robust as possible to ensure fairness across the service with the ability for exceptions to be made in some circumstances.

In response to a further question on what measures were in place to ensure that the system would not be abused, the Committee was informed that there were processes in place including an annual audit and review.

**Backlog** - it was asked if the resources that were being put in place would clear the backlog and what the time frame would be from receipt of application to award of respite. Officers were confident that the additional 1.4FTE would be sufficient to assist the wider team in the clearance of the backlog. It was difficult at this stage to determine how long the process would take as it would depend on individual cases and whether there was missing information at the time of submission of an application. An average could be provided as an update to the Committee upon clearance of backlogs.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted compliance with short breaks legislation in production of a short break services statement, and significant improvements in how we interact and communicate with disabled children and their families.
- b) The Committee noted the plans to increase availability of inclusive universal services through comprehensive training, workforce development and stakeholder engagement.
- c) The Committee noted the external investment into developing and expanding short break provision at ROCC and in the community.
- d) The Committee noted the commitment to ensuring our provisions are appropriately resourced by filling the local offer officer position, acquiring new staff for the children's short break team (1.4FTE) and 5 apprentices who will be being trained to work in children's residential settings.
- e) The Committee noted the changes to the short break grant scheme and associated changes to internal process that will improve experiences

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and outcomes for our customers, as well as delivering savings up to £200,000.

### 573 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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