

# Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Supplementary agenda no.1

**A meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held on:**

**Date:** 5 October 2023

**Time:** 6.30pm

**Venue:** Meeting Room 9 - Level 3, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR

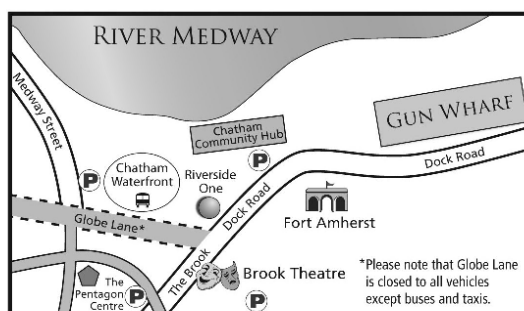
## Items

11 Additional Information - Presentation

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3 - 32)

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**Date: 27 September 2023**



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# Children's Services

## Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Director of People – Dr. Lee-Anne Farach  
Rebecca Cooper – Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding  
Kelly Cogger – Head of First Response and Family Solutions  
Ingrid Crisan – Head of Provider Services

**5 October 2023**





## **Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback**

- Full Ofsted re-inspection (ILACS) took place between 17<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July 2023
- Letter published Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

# Excellent News!

- I am delighted to share with you that Ofsted found the overall effectiveness of our services for children and families in Medway to be

# GOOD

- This is a testament to the hard work of our practitioners and managers, and support from the Council over the last four years,
- It is the first time in Medway's history that its services for children have been found to be GOOD



# Judgement areas

- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: **Requires Improvement**
- The experiences and progress of children in care: **Good**
- The experiences and progress of care leavers: **Good**
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: **Good**



# What did inspectors find?

- Services for children and families in Medway have substantially improved since the inspection in 2019.
- Most families receive the right support at the earliest opportunity and their situations improve
- Managers and social workers demonstrate a clear understanding of risk, and thresholds are applied appropriately
- The majority of assessments are detailed with clear evaluation of strengths and risks leading to appropriate recommendations for next steps.
- Children are seen regularly by social workers. Visits are purposeful and children have meaningful conversations,

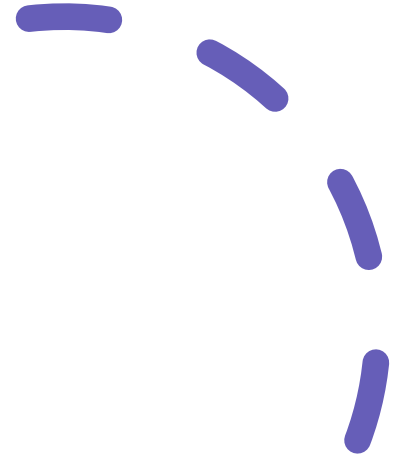


# What did Inspectors find?

*(Continued)*

## • Children in Care

- There have been improvements for children in care and care leavers, who now receive good care and support
- The majority of children in care live in stable homes with carers who are nurturing, supportive and caring
- Most children come into care at the right time and when it is in their best interests.
- Children's health and educational needs are very well met. Children enjoy a wide range of leisure and enrichment activities.
- A small number of children live in unregistered children's homes. There is regular and effective multi-agency oversight of these arrangements while more suitable registered arrangements are sought.
- Foster carers are well supported and feel valued following the recent positive changes and developments in the fostering service.





# What did Inspectors find?

*(Continued)*

- Leaving Care

- Personal advisers (PAs) are strong advocates for their young people, and are committed to improving their lives.
- The 'care leaver hub' is a warm, safe and welcoming environment.
- The specialist housing adviser helps young people navigate housing processes, which results in the prevention of homelessness. There is however a lack of choice of accommodation for some of the most complex young people,
- Navigators help young people to access health services. Challenges remain, however, with the availability and accessibility of emotional and mental health support for care leavers.
- Care leavers are well supported to achieve in education, training or employment. PAs and young people value the support from the in-house 'aspirations adviser'
- The care leaver offer is easily accessible and details what statutory and supplementary support and assistance young people are entitled to



# What did Inspectors find? *(Continued)*

- Leadership

- Corporate and political leaders have addressed the systemic weaknesses and there is now a strong, determined and cohesive leadership team.
- Improving the quality of support for the children of Medway is a clear priority for the collective corporate leadership team and there has been significant investment
- Senior leaders maintain close oversight and scrutiny of the impact of practice on children's lives.
- **Children matter in Medway** and senior leaders refer to the 'family business' offering work experience opportunities and apprenticeships to their care experienced children.
- There have been significant improvements in the quality and impact of the corporate parenting board.
- The new corporate and political leadership have given their ongoing commitment and support to the continual improvement journey of children's services.
- There is a stable senior leadership team in place for children's services who have a clear and realistic understanding of the further improvements needed to ensure that all children receive a consistently good or better service
- There is a robust and effective quality assurance process and the newly formed 'Practice Development Service' has strengthened the chosen approach to promote learning and development in practice



# Workforce

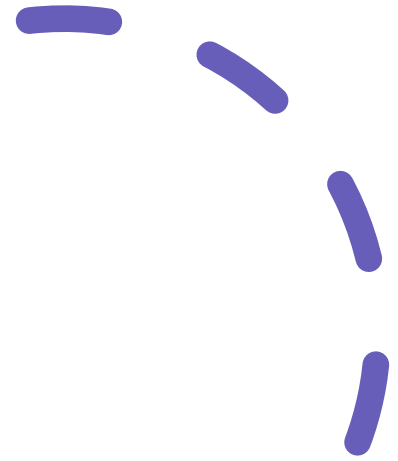
- Senior leaders have embraced and developed every possible measure to ensure that they offer the workforce the best possible environment to practise in, which is supportive, yet holds social workers to account for their practice and development.
- There have been significant challenges regarding recruitment and retention of the workforce. Leaders have been persistent and creative in their activities to increase the capacity and stability of the workforce.. There continues to be significant challenges in this area, but leaders have an effective line of sight to this and mobilise the workforce to address these challenges.
- There has been improvement in the impact and quality of management oversight and supervision, but the quality of this is not yet consistently applied to all case work.



# The journey is not yet done - what Ofsted have told us we still need to improve

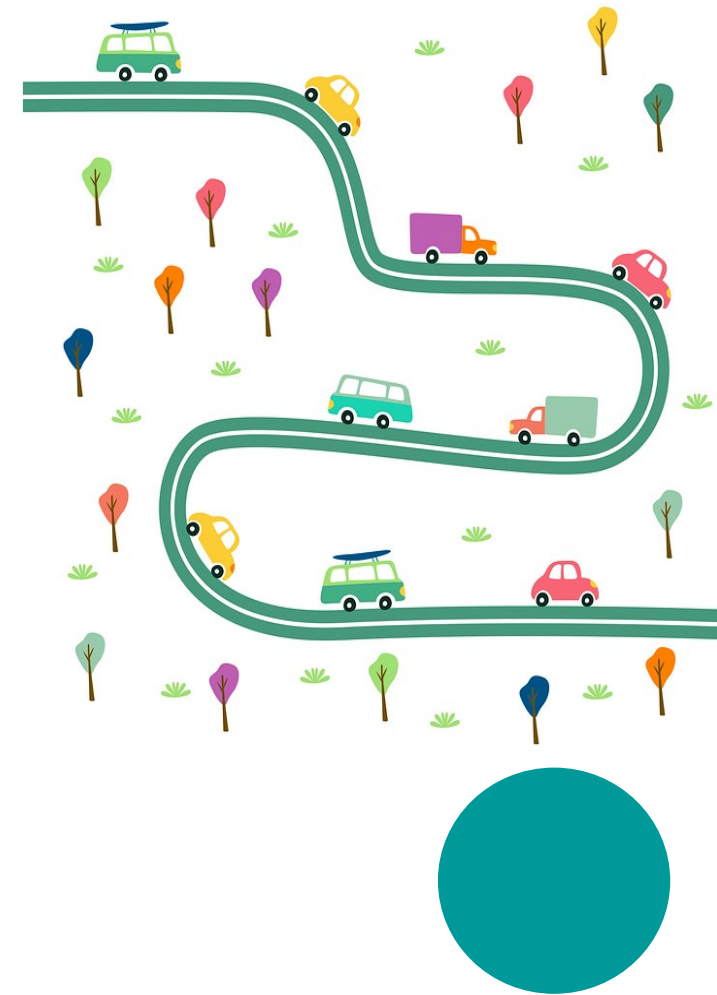


- The quality and impact of social work practice, specifically in the longer-term support provided to adolescents
- The quality and effectiveness of assessments, plans, interventions and responses for children who are at risk of exploitation and/or risk outside of the home.
- The quality and variety of direct work and life-story work available to children.
- The quality and consistency of assessments and planning to support disabled children.
- The quality and consistency of management oversight.



# Next Steps

- This outcome is a well-deserved recognition of all the hard work invested in our improvement journey but there is still work to do
- Ofsted will be back to do a focused visit in a year and will expect to see progress against their areas for improvement
- It is essential that investment to support improvement activity is sustained, which has been a challenge for Medway in the past
- **We will continue to focus on:**
  - Maintaining focus on improving consistency and quality of practice across all service areas, particularly the response for children who are at risk of exploitation and/or risk outside of the home.
  - Developing the partnership approach to contextual safeguarding and serious youth violence
  - Improving our response to young people aged 16/17 at risk of homelessness
  - The quality and variety of direct work and life-story work available to children.
  - The quality and consistency of assessments and planning to support disabled children.
  - Improving mental health support for children in care and care leavers
  - The quality and consistency of management oversight
  - Extending the choice and availability of homes for our children in care and care leavers
  - Supporting our workforce and developing our workforce offer
  - Building on our communication and engagement with our workforce
  - Increasing our workforce sufficiency, capacity and retention
  - Improving participation and engagement of children, young people and their families who use our services





Remember - children matter in Medway

# Medway Sufficiency Strategy – Overview and Progress



# A PLACE TO CALL HOME



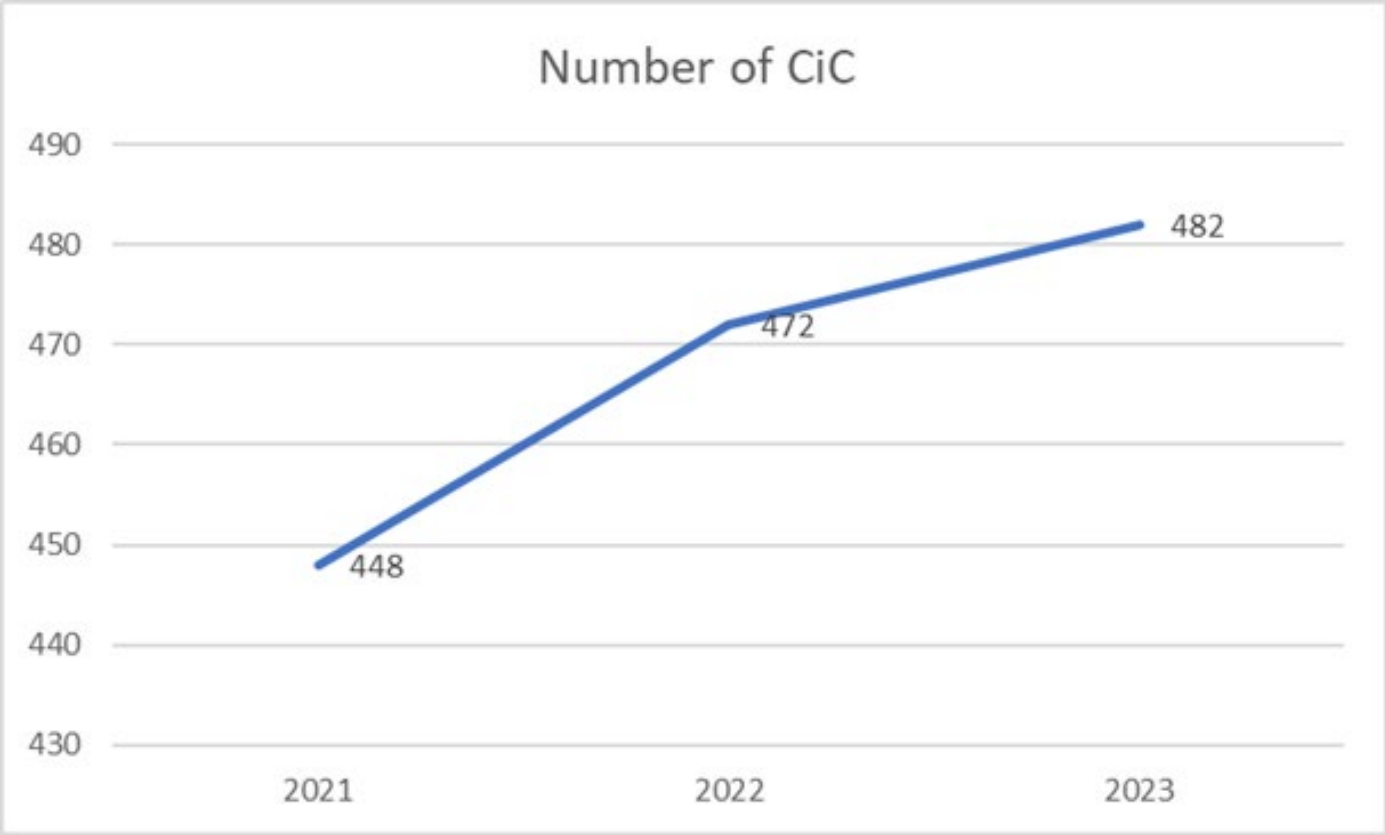


## Key Themes – 2023-2026

The sufficiency priorities and key actions to be taken over the next 3 years are set out in the strategy around four foundation themes:

- **Supporting families** – supporting more children to safely remain in the care of their parents.
- **A place called home** – more children in our care living in family homes in Medway.
- **Promoting stability** – Individual children’s needs are supported at the right time in a stable and caring environment.
- **Moving forward** – ensuring our care leavers find suitable places to live.

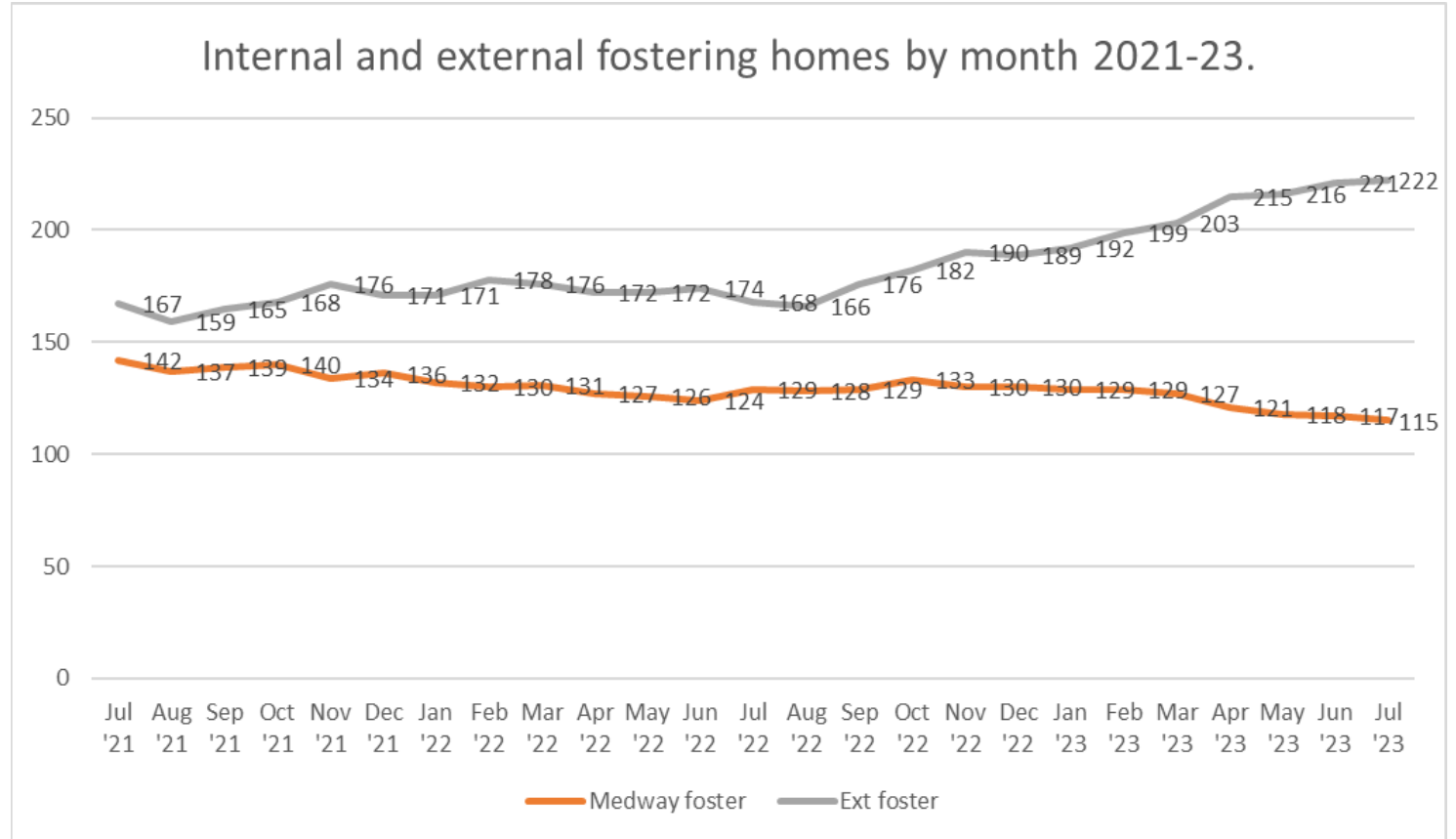
# Numbers of Children in Care



2021	2022	2023
448	472	482
0	+24	+10

# Fostering Context

Year	Av IFA Cost	% Increase
2022	£1,393.27	
2023	£1,510.37	7.8%



# Residential and Post 16 Context

Number of children's home placements in July 2021-23 (not including school or P/C).

2021	2022	2023	Overall Average for past 3 years
43	39	36	42

	2021	2022	2023
Supported Accommodation	27	35	42
Supported Lodgings	4	2	0
Total	31	37	42

# Challenges

- Increasing numbers of children in care
- Increasing numbers of large sibling groups coming into care
- Complexities and needs of young people increasing
- Workforce challenges across residential and supported accommodation providers nationally.
- UASC placements to drive up numbers of CiC by at least 12% by the end of 2023/24
- Volumes of young vulnerable CiC placed in Medway by other LAs continues to rise, with the July 2023 figures showing at least 400 placed in Medway by other local authorities. This provides a number of challenges around sufficiency of placements but also strain on wider health and educational services, as well as a significant amount of care leavers with housing rights post 18
- Recruiting internal foster carers continues to be a challenge.

## Theme 1- Supporting families

### Progress –

- New Multi Faceted Framework in place with over 100 new approved services to support young people and families (Supported Accommodation, Floating Support, Therapeutic Services, Tuition)
- Innovative support programme introduced including boxing and fitness sessions and support for young people around weight management.
- Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) has been introduced to provide wrap around family support.
- Increased the Family Solutions offer to provide better support for those families on the edge of care.

## Theme 2 - A place called home

### Progress –

- Eden House Management Team appointed. Ofsted Registration due to be submitted Oct/Nov 2023.
- Architect drawing up plans for refurbishment of Aut Even
- First Emergency Fostering Provision (Hazel House) launched in Sept 2022. Second provision (Anchor House) due to be launched by end of Sept 2023.
- Relationships developed with Caritus Homes and Canterbury House to have exclusivity on Residential Placements and Homes.
- Commissioning 28 day assessment fostering placements due to be in place by end of 23/24.
- Robust QA over all placements and new tracker of Unregulated placements ensure excellent oversight of standards of care for our CiC.

## Theme 3 - Promoting stability

### Progress-

- New processes and support from commissioning have been introduced to ensure more effective stability meetings with foster carers and to take a solution focussed approach to supporting families to maintain placements when young people's needs have increased or relationships with carers have become strained
- A wide variety of supporting services (approved) are now available to support our young people and families with skills such as positive behaviour support (PBS) and trauma informed workers, family support workers, workers who can provide personal care, Registered Mental Health Nurses, workers who are restraint trained and a variety of other skills. All are quality assured and can be used to support and stabilise at short notice.
- Closer working with colleagues from health and the police to provide support (and in some instances funding) to young people and families.
- New Family Contact Service Launched in June 2023 (run by Family Action) to ensure that family contacts are safe, appropriate and proportionate.



## Theme 4 - Moving forward

### Progress -

- Care Leavers Housing Project has seen a more proactive approach to meeting Care Leavers needs and reduced spend (not support) on post 18 accommodation.
- New panels process is meaning that young people who are 16+ are regularly reviewed and post 18 plans are planned well in advance.
- The Family Partnership Project (in partnership with health colleagues) was launched in April 2022 to support women who have lost care of several children through public law proceedings to support these parents to keep children in their care. So far over 30 very vulnerable families have engaged actively with the project allowing them to access specialist services in a timely manner such as therapeutic counselling, advocacy, domestic abuse support and many other services. The project has already seen some significant results in reduced levels of repeat pregnancies and young people being able to stay or return to their families.

## Next Steps

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- To continue to be the Local Authority of choice for local and national providers.
- To commission frameworks for Drug and DNA testing
- To commission a contract to provide ISW support and to improve continuity.
- To open Eden House for Medway YP in early 2024
- To undertake the renovation of Aut Even
- To bid for DFE Short Breaks funding to improve the availability and quality of offer to families and young people.
- To explore benefits and impact of a Regional Care Council across the Southeast.
- To continue to try and bring more young people back closer to Medway and our services
- To provide a place called home for all of our UASC young people.
- To secure some dedicated Parent and Child assessment placements (fostering and residential)

# Workforce Update – October 2023



# Recruitment

- Nationally the number of children’s social workers directly employed by local authorities decreased for the first time in 5 years by 2.7% (900 social workers, and vacancies increased by 21% (7,900).
- The number of children’s social workers directly employed by Medway is 187. This has increased by 61 social workers since 2019
- The vacancy rate of children’s social workers in Medway compared to England and the South East is shown below:

	2019	2020	2021	2022
England	16.4%	16.1%	16.7%	20.0%
South East	16.0%	15.4%	15.8%	18.8%
Medway	20.4%	29.0%	21.5%	29.4%

As of 31 August 2023, the vacancy rate for Medway is 29.65%. This equates to 78.94fte social work vacancies.

- The number of new children’s social workers starting in Medway for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 August 2023 was 42.50fte. A further 7 social workers will start in Sept 2023. This is an increase to the previous year where 32 new social workers started during the period 1 October 2021 – 30 September 2022.

# Staff turnover

- The turnover rate for Children’s social work in Medway compared to England and the South East is shown below -

	2019	2020	2021	2022
England	15.1%	13.5%	15.4%	17.1%
South East	15.0%	12.6%	14.6%	18.6%
Medway	22.5%	18.3%	18.1%	19.3%

The turnover rate for Medway for the period 1 October 2022 – 31 August 2023 is 23.45%.

- Number of permanent social workers who have left Medway during the period 1 October 2022 – 31 August 2023 is 43.91fte. This is as a result of resignations, ill health, retirement, lifestyle choices or in a small number, dismissal or settlement due to capability concerns.
- Exit interviews are offered to staff who resign. Over the last year the main factors contributing to staff leaving include pay, career progression, workload, excessive hours and work life/balance.
- Stay interviews are undertaken by the Principal Social Work team. Key themes identified from staff about why they stay in Medway include having supportive managers and teams, a good culture, feeling valued and supported, learning and development opportunities, and visible, stable and approachable senior leaders. In contrast some of the areas where staff feel conditions could be improved includes unsupportive managers, bureaucratic processes, pay (particularly for non social work staff) and IT (Mosaic and surface pro laptops).
- The turnover of permanent and agency workers impacts on the ability to embed consistent practice.

# Agency staffing

## Agency

- Agency use across the South East region varies significantly from 38.5% to no agency.
- An increase in agency staff opting to join project teams has led to a significant decrease in supply of agency workers available to cover individual roles.
- The total number of agency staff across Medway Children's Services has increased to 84. This includes three project teams (46 agency workers) procured by Medway to help cover unfilled posts.
- The cost of project teams is significantly higher than rates agreed under the Memorandum of Cooperation which is creating financial pressures for the authority.
- The total number of agency leavers during the period 1 October 2022 to 30 June 2023 is 43.
- The results from a government consultation paper on 'Child and Family Social Worker workforce' were due to be published in September 2023 but have been delayed. It is anticipated that from Spring 2024 all local authorities will be required to comply with the national rules governing the use of agency workers. [Child and Family Social Worker Workforce – government consultation](#).

# Planned Activity – next 6 months

- Newly Qualified Social Workers – propose to recruit a further cohort in April 2024
- Rolling programme of 4 social work apprentices every two years. Next intake of 4 apprentices commences in January 2024.
- Step up to Social Work 14 month programme - commences in January 2024 – 4 students (funded by DfE)
- Quarterly temp to perm events being held to encourage further conversions
- Meeting with agencies being held in October 2023 to increase partnership working
- Perm and agency glide path being created with key targets to reduce number of agency staff and increase stability across the workforce
- European recruitment campaign
- Hosting open day for recruitment
- Continuing to advertise roles across Jobs Go Public and Guardian.
- Increase use of social media postings to attract permanent candidates.
- Working with agencies to replace bank/project workers with permanent staff or agency workers on MOC rates.

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