

Children's Services

SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023-2025

A PLACE TO CALL HOME





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INTRODUCTION

Four foundations

In Medway we are ambitious for our children. We want them to live with their families wherever possible, with the right support in place to make their childhood's successful and happy. Where that is not possible, it is critical that we have the right services and support in place to care for those children, and to ensure that they grow up in supportive homes where their needs are met, and which promote their outcomes. Ensuring that we have sufficient services and homes to meet children's needs is critical to meeting those objectives.

Our children and young people in Medway are unique. They will each have their individual experience of family life and growing up and it's critical that we value and respect such uniqueness. When challenges arise in families that makes it difficult for them to care for their children, it is important that we have sufficient services and support available to try to prevent family breakdown, but also in the event that this occurs, that children and young people are well supported and cared for. We want our children to succeed whatever their pathway, which is why it is so important that we focus on ensuring there are sufficient services in place to meet their needs, whatever their journey. This is why we have set our priorities for sufficiency on the following four foundations, which reflect the child's journey to adulthood and independence.



This strategy sets out how Medway Council as the corporate parent will provide and commission the right care and support for children in our care (CiC) and care experienced young people that best meets their needs.

The strategy is informed by the analysis of need and by what the children in our care and care experienced young people have told us. It aims to enable our children and young people to be supported in places that they can call home and feel loved, cared for and supported.

This refreshed strategy covers the period January 2023 – January 2025. Performance data in the strategy is based on information reviewed following a snapshot of metrics on the 31 December 2022 and the 2021/2022 statutory return which contains details of every child in our care.

Our ambition is for our sufficiency strategy to be a "live" document, underpinned by a dynamic dataset and effective use of business intelligence. This will ensure that plans are current, and providers can respond more dynamically to our local need.

Duties, responsibilities and principles

All Local Authorities (LAs) are required to take steps that secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation and support within their local area. These services need to meet the needs of children and young people that the local authority is looking after, and those who have recently left care at the age 18.

The duty for the local authority to provide placements for children in care is explicit in the Children Act 1989. In 2010, the statutory guidance for the sufficiency duty was issued. The guidance places a duty on LAs to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they include, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

The Children Act 2004 defines sufficiency as “a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they become looked after”. This strategy will cover early intervention and prevention provision that helps to reduce the number of children entering care, as well as set out how Medway will provide and commission the right care and support for children in our care and care leavers that best meets their needs. It covers the period 2023-25.

National context

There is growing momentum behind calls nationally for greater oversight into the structure and functioning of the children's placement market. This is about challenging issues surrounding financial risk of heavily debt-loaded companies, the impact of the biggest companies dominating market share and the profit margins of some providers in the sector, and delivery of better outcomes for children placed with providers. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) highlighted this in their Children's social care market study report (March 2022), concluding that there are significant problems in how the placement market is functioning.

The ADCS report on Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 (December 2022), outlined that as more children require specialist support, together with the instability in the placement

market, the challenges LAs face to provide the right homes for children in care at an affordable price are becoming ever greater.

The government commissioned 'Independent Review of Children's Social Care' and the HM Government implementation strategy, will have significant implications for commissioning of placement provision within the lifetime of this strategy. We will continue to strive to achieve the best outcomes for our children and families as we navigate the change.

Our vision for children in Medway

Our vision for all children and young people in Medway is:

"Working together, keeping children and families at the heart of what we do"

We will achieve this by:

- working together with children, young people and families to help them feel safe, secure, valued and supported.
- supporting children to live in stable supportive homes, building caring and consistent relationships, which help them to develop into independent adults.
- valuing strengths, celebrating differences and listening to children, to keep them at the heart of what we do."

Corporate Parenting Responsibility

Medway council, working with our partners, and supported by the Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC), are committed to improving the outcomes for children in our care so they grow into independent and thriving young adults. As good corporate parents we aim to:

- Provide **stability** for children in our care.
- Give children in our care **choice**.
- **Plan** well for their care.
- Take an **active role** in their lives and care.
- **Listen** and that children feel listened to.
- Make children in our care feel **safe**.
- Ensure that children in our care **know their rights**.
- Ensure that children in our care are **treated the same**.
- Show the same level of **aspirations and hope** for our care leavers.
- Show that we are **ambitious** for children in our care.

Our Corporate Parenting Board champions the corporate parenting role across the authority and partners. It is not about knowing who the children are; but is about championing their needs in our work. In Medway that work is built on delivering impact and improving outcomes for our children in our care across five themes - ensuring children and young people and care leavers feel safe and cared for; health and support; home and housing; school, college and work; and listening to you. Central to enabling this is that we can provide enough places that our children can call home, with the right love, care and support wrapped around them.

Overview of Medway

About our local area

Medway is located on the north coast of Kent, neighboured by Kent County Council and the London Boroughs of Bexley and Bromley to the east. It is the largest unitary authority in the South East of England. It is made up of the densely populated areas of Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, and Rainham and larger, much more sparsely populated rural areas. e.g., the Hoo Peninsula.

The latest census data (2021) shows that Medway has a population of 279,800. The population is younger compared to England, with 23.4% of the population aged under 18 years. This equates to around 65,400 children and young people.

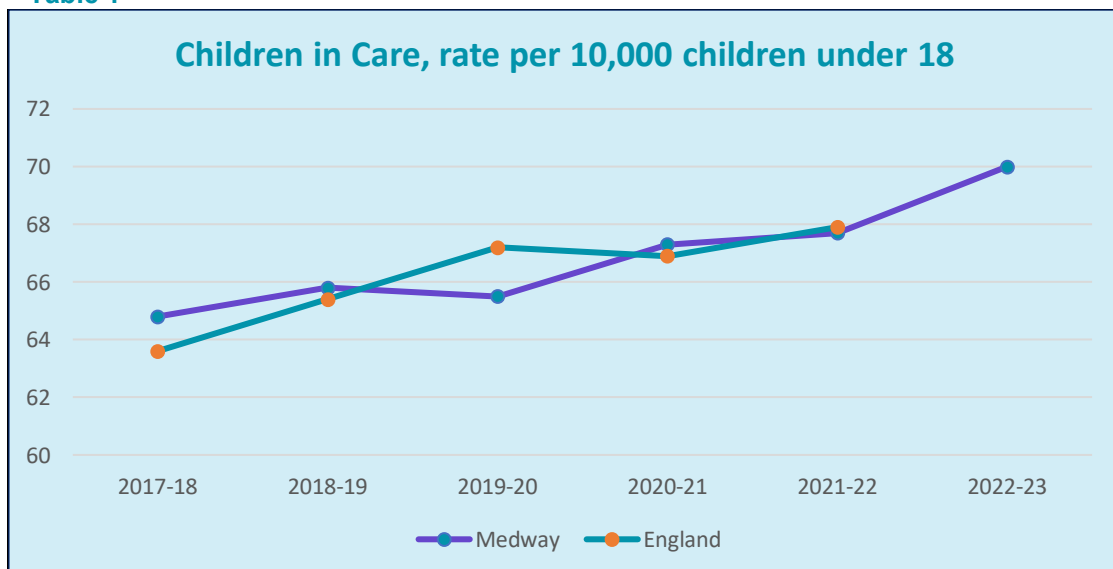
Most of the population are classified as White British, with the next largest ethnic group being Asian. Deprivation is higher than the England average. Medway contains some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England; these neighbourhoods are in Gillingham and Chatham.

Demand for children's services

In Medway, the numbers of children in need of help and protection have increased since 2020. The number of children in need open to the service in December 2022 were 377 per 10,000 population, above latest available statistical neighbour rate of 329.1 and national rate of 267.9. Those children subject of a child protection plan have reduced from the rate of 71.2 in 2020 to 42 per 10,000 population in December 2022, now in line with the national rate, but below our statistical neighbours (44).

At the end of December 2022 there were 458 Children in our Care, at a rate per 10,000 population at 70.0. The rate has increased steadily over the last 3 years, is in line with the latest available national rate of 70, and lower than the latest available statistical neighbour rate of 74 (Table 1). At December 2022, Medway has 180 care experienced young people aged 18+.

Table 1



In Medway,



Characteristics of children in our care in Medway

64% were between 10 & 17 years old

58% were male

20% were from an ethnic minority background

Care Needs and Placements



77% of children in our care were in foster care and 10% were in residential children homes



21% of children in our care had education, health and care plans (EHCPs)



11% of children in our care moved more than three times in the last year



33% of children in our care were placed more than 20 miles away from their home address



13% of children in our care left through adoption

Care Leavers



There were 180 care leavers in December 2022

92% of care leavers were living in suitable accommodation

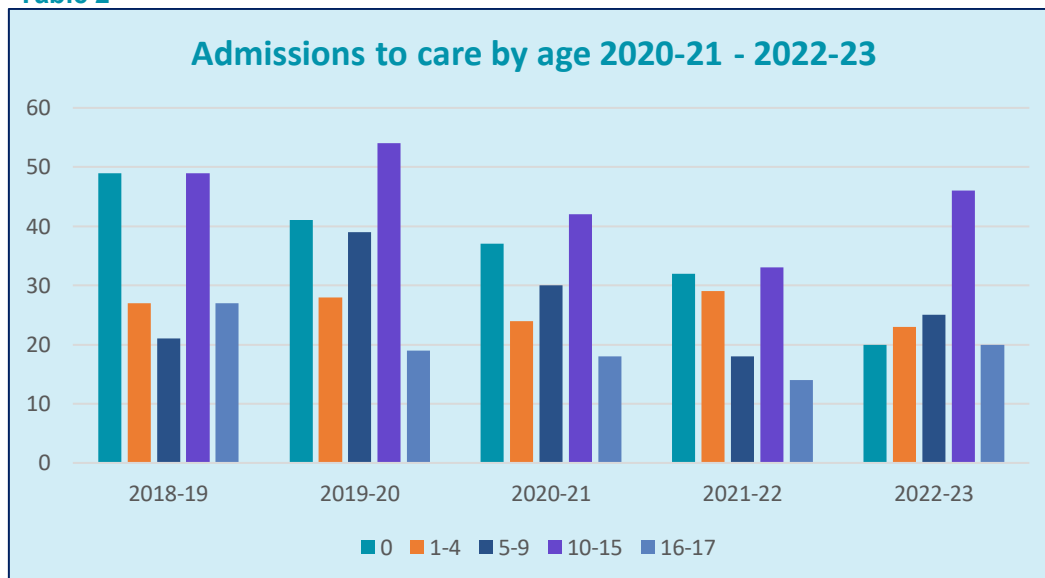


57% of care leavers were in education, employment or training



Whilst the rate of children in care in Medway has seen only a steady increase, there is an underlying trend related to the needs of the children and young people in our care becoming more complex. Children are coming in to care at an older age. The pressure for demand for placements largely comes from a growing cohort of 10–17-year-olds (Table 2).

Table 2



There are several different factors affecting vulnerable adolescents in Medway. These include child sexual exploitation (CSE), criminal exploitation (CCE), offending and re-offending. We know nationally that 45% of serious violence is committed by those aged 10-24 years old (gangs and county lines, knife and weapon crime, robbery, and violence with injury). The Council as a corporate parent, has a responsibility to children in its care, but ultimately a wider responsibility to ensure that Medway is an environment where adolescents grow up, with healthy relationships, in a safe place free from adverse situations. Intervening early is key. To that end we must ensure the support offer for prevention is strong. This includes wrapping support around parents and the child or young person (multidisciplinary service) and working with partners and other services to disrupt activity.

The percentage of Medway care leavers in Employment, Education or Training (EET) has increased in the last three years from 45% to 57%. This compares with the latest available Southeast average (57%) and national (55%). We know that not being in employment, education or training is known to place young people at more vulnerability of becoming an offender than their peers.

Where are our children and young people in our care living?

The vast majority of Children in our Care in Medway live in family settings. We believe that this type of placement in the vast majority of cases, is the best arrangement for children. It allows for the development of attachments to main care givers and the experience which most closely represents a place they can call home. As at December 2022, 70% of Medway children in our care were living with a foster carer (Table 3).

Where possible our aim is to place children with Medway Council foster carers as these are carers overseen and supported by our own in-house fostering service. As at Dec 2022,

42% of children living with foster carers, were being cared for by our own foster carers. The remainder were cared for by independent or private foster carers. 7% of children were living with connected carers. These are carers from the child's own extended family network.

Table 3 - Children and young people in care (at December 2022)

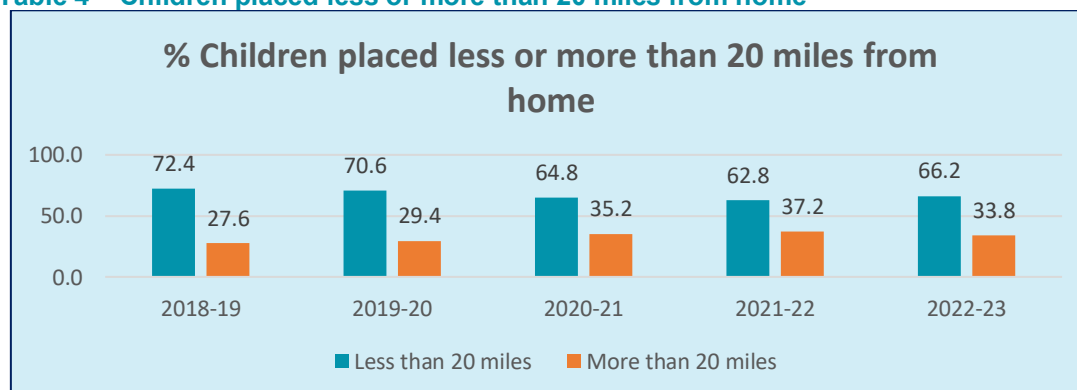
Accommodation type	In- House	Private	Other	Total	%
Foster home	134	182	2	318	70.5%
Connected Carers	33	-	-	33	7.3%
Placed for Adoption	-	-	9	9	2.0%
Placed with Parents	-	-	8	8	1.8%
Children's Residential Home	-	43	2	45	10.0%
NHS	-	-	1	1	0.2%
Residential School (52 week)	-	1	-	1	0.2%
Parent and Child Accommodation	-	4	-	4	0.9%
Secure Accommodation	-	-	-	0	0.0%
Supported Accommodation	2	29	6	37	8.2%
Youth Offending Institute	-	-	2	2	0.4%
	169	259	30	458	100%

Consistency and stability are one of the most important aspects of a child's life if they are to have the best chance of a happy and successful journey through childhood. It is critical that children grow up with consistent caregiving, in homes where they experience a sense of belonging, without disruption to important routines and bonds.

Overall, we have been successful in securing stability for many children in our care in the longer term, with 69% of children living with their carers for over 2.5 years. However, we have found ourselves increasingly challenged by the lack of suitable homes for children in the local area, particularly for children with complex needs. This has created challenges in respect of sufficiency, and for effective matching, leading to a recent rise in number of children with 3 or more placements in the last year (now 11% of children in our care), although this is in line with statistical neighbours, also at 11%.

We believe that it is important for most children to continue to live within the local area so that links to their family and community can be maintained, where appropriate. Table 4 below shows the proportion of children placed within and more than 20 miles of the Medway's boundary, 34% (155) of children were placed more than 20 miles from Medway in Dec 22.

Table 4 – Children placed less or more than 20 miles from home



Where are our care-experienced young people living?

We aim for our young people leaving care to be in homes which are most suited to them, and that young people find suitable places to live after leaving care.

The percentage of our care leavers (aged 18-21) in suitable accommodation in Medway is 92% (165) (which is an improving picture), and above the national figure of 87%.

We have a small percentage 3% (5) who continue to require residential support. Of the other care leavers in suitable accommodation:

Several of our care leavers live in a family setting:

- 9% (17) of 18-21 -year-olds continue to live with their former foster carers after leaving care in Staying Put arrangements.
- 3% (5) live in shared lives arrangements.
- 14% (25) live with family or friends.

Most are in semi-independent or supported living:

- 21% (38) young people live in supported accommodation after leaving care. These are houses where the council commission both the accommodation and support.
- 6% (10) live in a foyer arrangement.
- 6% (10) young people live in university accommodation in connection with their studies.

An increasing number are living independently:

- 31% (55) live in a self-contained social housing or private rented tenancy.

Sufficiency challenges

Most children and young people in care are living outside Medway's local area – Whilst 66% (304) of children in our care live under 20 miles from Medway, there are a high number 59% (271) of children and young people in care living outside Medway's local boundary. This is down from 62% (281) in December 2020 as we make progress through our market shaping work with providers. Medway have continued to see increasing challenges in meeting the needs of Medway's children. Over 380 children are placed in the Medway area by other neighbouring local authorities, which draws heavily on the availability of homes for children in the local area. This presents considerable challenges to our sufficiency locally, leading to Medway often having to place children at a distance.

More children are coming into our care at a later age –The number of children coming in to care when aged 10-15 years old, has increased over the last 2 years, up from 27% in 2021 to 34%. A notable proportion of children entering our care are adolescent males.

More children, who are coming into our care, have additional support needs – During and post the Covid-19 pandemic, despite having relatively stable numbers of children in our care, we have seen some noticeable changes in the cohort. There is more complexity to some of our children and young people's emotional and behavioural needs, as well as significant ongoing impact of trauma. Coupled with shortfalls in capacity in child and adolescent mental health assessment and support, this has resulted in the need to develop highly bespoke packages of care to support and care for young people, often at

considerable cost to the Council. There are currently insufficient local foster carers who can care for children with complex needs to ensure they can live in a family home while in care, and a shortfall of specialist provision nationally.

The number of children living in unregistered care arrangements, has increased - this is because of the national shortage of secure children's home beds, and homes that can meet the needs of children with complex emotional, behavioural and mental health needs (around 10 young people). Most LA's have children in some form of unregistered provision. This has been recognised as a challenge by Ofsted, the DFE, ADCS and across the whole sector.

Insufficient foster carers and increasing complexity of young people entering care has increased our reliance on residential care –The use of residential care has increased over the last 3 years from 7% (35) in 2019/20 to 10% (46) in December 2022, including unregistered supported accommodation placements this rises to 12% (56). Children coming into care in crisis has contributed to this over the last 2 years, as has a lack of foster carers.

Insufficient parent and child placements - Medway has had a significant increase in the need for parent and child placements over the past 2 years. It has risen from 2 in 2019/20 to 10 in 2022/23. This increase is predominantly as a result of court related judgements, which have changed the threshold in terms of when a child can be separated from a parent as an interim measure before care proceedings are concluded. Occasionally, the courts seek to keep the parents together. This is creating a need for parent(s) and child placements. Existing provision does not meet the needs of some of our complex families or allow us to undertake parenting capacity assessments.

Insufficient short break provision and community-based support services for disabled children - Medway does have some excellent provisions including places such as Parklands that offer overnight respite care (in-house) and ROC Rivermead Inclusive Trust (school run). But we need to work with these provisions to try and upscale the offer to allow more families to access support and also meet demand in existing families. There is a need for more community-based support services for disabled children to support them to remain at home with their families for longer.

SUFFICIENCY PRIORITIES

Medway's Outline Sufficiency Strategy (2020-2025) has been evolving since the summer of 2020. In response to the challenges identified, over the past 2 years, the Council agreed a significant investment to drive forward proposals to develop a range of preventative and support interventions and to create a stronger more visible presence with providers to shape the market and provide more local places that our children can call home.



Supporting Families

Protecting children and young people, and strengthening families, so they can live safely at home.

Outcome: We support more children to safely remain in the care of their parents

Providing support to families

We know that to keep more children safely in their families and divert them from higher levels of interventions we must provide interventions that create meaningful change in, or offer support for families. Our aim has been to do that by developing a multidisciplinary service that can provide our workforce with seamless access to timely and effective wraparound support for parents for needs such as mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse challenges. This will help to reduce harm for children. Our focus has been on children with complex needs and those on the edge of care. We know we need to intervene early. Growing up within a family network means retaining a strong sense of identity, culture and place, which young people have told the review is often lost or significantly diluted through care.

Over the last year we have been prioritising work to strengthen the support offer for prevention. This includes increasing the Family Solutions offer, and better understanding the needs of disabled children and their families to increase the range of support available for them. Effort has been invested in building sustainable capacity and mobilising services in a coordinated way to develop the multi-disciplinary service to provide wrap around support to children and families involved in the statutory social work teams. Provision includes the adolescent support offer, family group conferencing, and a newly formed specialist assessment team and the family partnership. We believe that, with the right help, children can safely remain within their family network to receive the love and support they need rather than enter into care. Although in its early stages in terms of assessing impact on improved outcomes for our children and families, we will continue to embed this service offer.

The Family Partnership Project (in partnership with Public 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 40 very vulnerable parents 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.

Several specialist parent and child placements are required as part of court proceedings. Medway has a lack of provision to undertake residential assessments or parent and child foster care placements. Our intention is to develop provision in this area including capacity for family assessments. Alongside this our intention is to work intensively with families in pre-proceedings to enable a reduction in risk and prevent escalation into proceedings, culminating in children coming into care. The multi-disciplinary service will provide intensive assessments with parents in the family home, preventing the need for parent and child placements where possible to provide more realistic models of assessing parenting capacity.

Working with vulnerable young people

Intervening early and ensuring the support offer for prevention is strong in Medway is key to reducing serious youth violence including child sexual exploitation (CSE), criminal exploitation (CCE). In partnership with the Violence Reduction Unit, Medway Taskforce (a multi-agency team working together to keep Medway a safe place to live, work and visit) and Kent Police schools team, our Medway Youth Services are developing a bespoke approach to focused deterrence work which targets resource towards young people identified as vulnerable to, or engaged in criminal activity like 'youth street groups'. The youth work is street based, with a presence in places and spaces, (e.g., railway transport hubs) and supports intelligence sharing in relation to risk and safeguarding. Detached youth workers build relationships with young people which will disrupt activity and with support from other agencies provide diversionary opportunities for them. Experience tells us that when trusted adults are around, young people will reach out when they are ready.

In response to the number of young people attending Accident and Emergency in Medway who were presenting with mental health issues, an on-site youth work team offer a confidential space to explore the needs of children and young adults, catching them in reachable moments when the young person is likely to engage. In many cases the mental health issues are related to the trauma from involvement in crime. The team follow the young person back into the community and ensure they have access to ongoing support when they leave.

What will we do:

- Strengthen the potential for family networks, actively involving families in the permanency planning for children from the point a child gets a social worker.
- Undertake further work to ascertain needs of disabled children and their families for community-based support to enable children to remain at home wherever possible
- Increase support to families to help children to return to their home through the early help offer and multidisciplinary service.
- Focus on pre-birth parenting support to provide intensive assessments with parents in the family home, preventing the need for costly residential assessments or parent and child placements, which take families away from their supports and communities.
- Increase local parent and child placements including a provision able to support whole family assessments.
- Improve wrap around support for our adolescent young people - for those going missing and subject to exploitation to keep them in their communities, helping families to cope.

- Develop youth services focused deterrence work as an approach to serious youth violence, including 'reachable moments' and transport hubs.



A place to call home

Providing loving and caring family homes in Medway for children and young people in care

Outcome: More children, while in our care, live in family homes in Medway

Fostering

It is our intention that wherever possible, children and young people should be looked after in Medway in a family setting. They should be placed with foster carers and in-house foster carers where these are available and best match, where it is safe to do so. In-house foster carers can offer placements at a lower cost than Independent Foster Agency placements. Reducing the overall costs of providing service to children and young people in care enables us to invest more in services for children and young people who are on the edge of care, and in preventative services.

An enhanced in-house fostering service 'offer' to foster carers was introduced in September 2021. This included a revised payment scheme and a comprehensive support package and developing a therapeutic approach. The therapeutic teams have developed a primary hub and an adolescent hub to provide additional support to those children and their carers where there is a risk of placement breakdown. The hubs are loosely based on the Mockingbird model with "grandparent" carers who provide sleepovers and social events to give the main carer a break and give support direct to the main carers. This model is recognised nationally and internationally as a means of enhancing placement stability through targeted support. Our hubs are targeted at the two different age groups which is different to the Mockingbird model and allows the skills of the hub carers to be maximised.

In December 2022, we had a total of 149 approved fostering households (134 placements), compared to December 2020, we have seen a 3% decrease overall. Several carers left the service following the Covid-19 pandemic. Our work continues to drive up recruitment of in-house local foster carers, with our campaigns attracting new carers despite a challenging market.

What will we do:

- Continue with targeted recruitment and marketing activity to expand overall numbers of foster carers.
- Increase the in-house fostering cohort, with dedicated capacity especially for age range 10+ years.
- Further development of the hubs model, including provision for disabled children.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

Most commissioning frameworks operating in the service have been recommissioned over the last 12 months. This was to ensure they are effective and relevant to the current context

and challenges. A joint IFA Framework was developed between Medway and Kent County Council, which went live in 2022 and is being actively used. A new Medway only supported accommodation framework is also now live. This specific framework has brought over 40 new providers forward who want to work with Medway Council. Medway have also joined the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), a regional framework which means further providers are available to us, as well as additional resources to support the sourcing, contracting, monitoring and annual fee negotiations of children's placements.

Autumn 2022 saw new commissioning frameworks being put in place to provide additional stability and support for families on the edge of care and appropriate outcomes-based interventions that can be delivered to the children in our care. These frameworks are already seeing good engagement and results and include floating support, enhanced support services, emotional wellbeing support, activity and respite breaks and tuition.

What will we do:

- Increase the availability of independent fostering agency carers within the local area, through commissioning partnerships and framework management.

Residential Children's Homes

The national lack of foster care placements has seen an overall growth in the use of residential placements for children. Medway like other LA's has seen a steady increase in these types of placements. We recognise that for some young people their own preference may be for a residential provision rather than family-based care. For others a period of residential care and stability will support them to access a stable family-based placement in the future.

The increasing shortfalls in residential provision locally, combined with the increasingly complex needs of some of our young people, has led to increasing challenges locating suitable local provision. Current statistics indicate that over 90% of residential placements are outside Medway. Medway currently have 46 children living in residential provision, and 10 in unregistered supported accommodation placements. We also care for young people with learning disabilities who reside in 52-week school placements.

Medway has no in-house residential homes for children in our care. It does have a short breaks residential home for children with disabilities. Our intentions are to develop in-house provision to increase local capacity and capability and reduce reliance on the external market.

Parklands overnight residential provision provides short breaks for children who spend less than 75 days a year in this setting. Our home for children with complex care needs is valued by the children and families who use it, usually as part of a package of other help and support to the family. There is insufficient short break capacity, and a waiting list for use of the existing provision. Our intention is to commission more.

Strategic relationships have been created with several providers to allow Medway to get increased placement sufficiency. Regular forums and market management events take place to develop and maintain relationships with providers. This goes some way to ensuring that placement costs are being prevented from escalating excessively. Medway has also

continued as Members of the Southeast LASER framework which provides Medway with access to hundreds of residential providers.

Supporting our young people with Special Education Needs and/or Disability

The support for children and young people with special educational and/or disability is described in more detail in the Medway Local Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) Strategy 2022-25. We know there is insufficient community-based support which enable children to remain at home wherever possible. We also have more work to do to ensure that SEND children and families can have access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place. Providing sufficient high quality SEN provision within mainstream schools, to support as many children as possible to remain in a mainstream setting or resourced provision in a school. For those children with the most complex needs who need the support of a special school, the SEND strategy is seeking to provide as many places as are necessary to keep children in local schools close to their home area.

What will we do:

- Increase the number and the quality of residential provision within Medway through market shaping with residential providers and monitoring.
- Based on current and emerging needs, take a strategic commissioning approach in developing the market to provide suitable local provision for complex teenagers both on the edge of care and in care who are at high risk of criminal exploitation.
- Increase residential provision capacity including in-house provision by developing two modern, high quality and flexible provisions for Medway's children including:
 - a specialist home for children with neurodiverse conditions including learning disabilities and autism [LD&A], and
 - an EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties) Children's Home building sufficiency for young people that are in crisis or need a Deprivation of Liberty order (DoL).
- Improve commissioning arrangements for complex joint placements and arrangements that support these, i.e., short breaks/respite capacity and community-based support services.
- Improve the recruitment and retention of staff working in our in-house provisions.
- Keep under review the needs and interests of all children and young people living in residential settings to ensure that this continues to be the most appropriate place for them to live.



Promoting Stability

Safe, stable and caring places to live so children and young people can get the most out of life.

Outcome: Children and young people in care have their individual needs supported at the right time in a safe stable and caring environment

Providing the right care and support for children and young people with additional needs

A partnership with an outstanding Ofsted provider to better access IFA placements and launch a local emergency bed facility has been developed. The facility offers care for children who need somewhere safe to stay immediately (an emergency placement

breakdown or subject to police protection), usually for a few nights. This regulated short term provision has positively supported nearly 20 young people since it opened in the summer of 2022. It has prevented several young people from being placed out of the local area or in unregulated provision at short notice. This provision offers a short-term intervention while searching continues for a more appropriate placement and has led to successful matching with suitable foster carers for a number of very complex children, as well as reducing the need to use unregistered settings..

What will we do:

- Build capacity in short term fostering, to look after a child or young person for a few weeks while a young person is in crisis or while permanency plans are progressed for them.
- Develop a second Emergency Bed Provision to help address the emerging need of increased placement breakdown and where children have been urgently removed using Police Protection powers.

Wrap around services

More work to reduce disruptions is essential to deliver the consistency and stability needed, particularly for our children in foster care to ensure they feel loved, cared for and supported.

A new framework of specialist floating support providers has been commissioned to allow for specialist wrap around services. This will help stabilise placements and proactively address emerging needs. A wide variety of supportive services are now available for our young people and families. These include 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.

What will we do:

- Work with foster families to reduce disruptions by providing early, wrap-around support for young people, and their foster carers to maintain stability at home.



Moving forward

Supporting young people to be where they need to be in life so that they can thrive and be independent.

Outcome: More children move to homes which are most suited to them, and young people find suitable places to live after leaving care

A child's right to family life should be prioritised wherever possible. Our aim is that families should be actively involved from the point a child gets a social worker. Where children cannot remain with their parents, wider family and friends should be looked to for support. Medway is working to enable more children to live within their family networks even where they cannot live with their birth parents.

Special Guardianship Orders

Where it is not appropriate for a child or young person to return home to their birth family, adoption or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) may be a good option for them. Adoption allows the adoptive families to have sole parental responsibility. In this context, there is often no, or limited, contact with the birth family. SGOs are a Family Court order which allows a child or young person to live with someone, other than their parent(s) – often an extended family member, friend or long-term foster carer – on a long-term basis. While special guardians have day-to-day parental responsibility, SGOs are designed to be a longer-term option which maintains links with the birth family.

Medway have invested in fees and additional staffing to support Special Guardianships mitigating concerns about finances, and support (either practical or therapeutic) to enable them to parent the children involved. This has enabled the team to provide more training, including a bespoke "Skills to Care" course focused on the needs of special guardians and connected carers, and also therapeutic parenting courses. Regular support groups and social events have also provided much higher levels of support, which have been welcomed by Special Guardians. A duty worker is available daily to give immediate advice and support when needed.

What we will do:

- Strengthen our support offer to SGO carers, financial allowances, training and practical support.
- Increase our capacity to undertake connected carers assessments.

Supported and semi-independent living options

A significant proportion of Medway's care population (circa 64%) is in the older age range (10-17 years). Our scrutiny of the individual circumstances of children, tells us that a considerable proportion of the older teenagers will move on to require suitable accommodation provided or facilitated by the council, to help them achieve independence. Older young people will have a need for semi-independent / independent accommodation within the next 2/3 years.

Strong relationships with local and regional providers are in place. Notably we work with a number of providers around short-term unregulated placements to ensure young people are supported by experienced staff before they find their forever home.

Young people will have different needs and readiness to be able to live independently and we support them with this transition. This may mean living in supported accommodation, foyer, or independent living with their own tenancies. This will be a key stability factor affecting young people's ability to continue education, training and maintain employment.

The sufficiency need for supported accommodation includes as appropriate any unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Where supported accommodation best meets the young person's need, a new Supported Accommodation framework has launched. This has significantly increased the number of providers available to work with us via a dynamic purchasing system (DPS) model. Providers are encouraged to secure accommodation in the Medway local area.

We have undertaken extensive mapping and analysis work over the last year to better understand the needs of our care leavers. We now have a much clearer analysis of young people's pathways, and of the sufficiency that is needed locally to respond to this.

We have worked successfully over the last year with our colleagues in the council's housing department, to increase the number of care leavers accessing their own tenancies. We will continue to build on this work to embed it into general practice.

Extensive work has taken place with corporate colleagues across the council to ensure that care leavers' needs for move on accommodation and support, is built into our building procurement intentions for future housing stock. This will enable young people to move on without waiting for significant periods for accommodation, which was unfortunately sometimes the case prior to 2022. We still have more to do to embed this level of strategic planning as business as usual.

What will we do:

- Continue collaboration with housing colleagues to identify more single person tenancies for young people leaving care who are ready to live completely independently beyond their 18th year.
- Drive strategic collaboration cross council to develop housing and accommodation solutions which meet need in the medium term for expected numbers of young people leaving care.
- Commission a wider range of accommodation based and floating support services for care leavers (including semi-independent foyer accommodation).

Monitoring delivery of the strategy

The progress of this strategy is monitored and tracked by the Children's Services Management Team led by the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care as a key programme within the improvement plan.

The Strategy has an annual review of progress.

The Strategy is underpinned by action plans and tracking to allow for progress to be monitored, issues highlighted.

