

Cabinet

11 March 2025

Regional Care Co-Operative Update

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
(including statutory responsibilities)

Report from: Kelly Cogger – Assistant Director Children's Social Care

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Summary

This report provides the Cabinet with an update on the progress with the development of the Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) Pathfinder. This is a Department for Education (DfE) funded project to encourage local authorities (LAs) to work together more closely on the commissioning and procurement of placements for looked after children. In July 2024, the Cabinet agreed to join the RCC Pathfinder and enter into relevant discussions and collaborations with DfE/other LAs as appropriate with an updating report when the full design of the RCC had been agreed which would provide further detail of the agreements reached and the legal and financial implications.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the following:

- i) Progress on the capital funding award given to the Council from the RCC.
- ii) Current work in development across the South East RCC.
- iii) Opportunities for more capital funding in 2025/26 and consideration of match funding or using existing capital buildings as our contribution.

2. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

2.1. Medway can benefit by working collaboratively on selected areas of development with other SE Local Authorities. Other South East authorities have agreed to join and being part of the RCC opens Medway up to further collaboration and funding opportunities over the next 2 years.

2.2. Following consideration of a report at the Cabinet meeting held on 30 July 2024, the Cabinet asked to receive a further report on the development of the

RCC when more detailed information about the implications and opportunities of the project for Medway Council was available ([Decision 125/2024 refers](#)).

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Children's Services has agreed to contribute £75,000 to the RCC for development and staffing costs for the 2025/26 financial year.
- 3.2. The Council will receive £1.030m capital grant funding in April 2025 for redevelopment of Aut Even and the Eden House Cabin.
- 3.3. Further funding opportunities are likely to be available to Medway in 2025/26 financial year.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Southeast Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) is a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing the quality of care for looked-after children across the Southeast region. Funded initially through the Department for Education's regional care cooperative programme and on an ongoing basis by contributions from 18 member Local Authorities, the RCC focuses on addressing the fundamental issues in the children's social care market.
- 4.2. The RCC's three-year business plan outlines 5 strategic priorities and initiatives designed to improve regional data integration, enhance resource allocation, and support evidence-based decision-making. Key activities include developing a comprehensive data platform, creating a dynamic regional sufficiency model, and fostering collaboration between Local Authorities, health, and youth justice.
- 4.3. In the first year, the RCC will focus on establishing the data platform and integrating key datasets to identify regional trends and needs. The RCC's initiatives are expected to lead to significant improvements in care provision, better value for money, and enhanced outcomes for children and young people in the Southeast region.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. Medway have accepted the opportunity to be able to use the £1.030m Capital Grant funding in the 2025/26 financial year.
- 5.2. An Architect has been awarded for the Eden House Cabin Project and work is underway to get the designs completed and appoint a building partner. It is hoped this will be underway early spring.
- 5.3. Aut Even successfully got renewed planning permission in January 2025 and we are now out to tender for an Architect to draw up plans by April 2025. This will be a significant piece of work as a complete renovation and annex will need to be added. Appointing to a builder will happen soon after with a view of commencing work in the summer of 2025.

- 5.4. Three further match funded capital grant schemes for specialist areas are to become available in 2025/26.
- 5.5. Any future bids will need to be in line with Medway's Sufficiency Strategy "A place called home."
- 5.6. There are five agreed priorities for Southeast RCC. These are:
- Data sharing – How data can be shared and how we can build a common picture of need and resource across the South East (SE).
 - Placement availability – What can be done better between local authorities to share and trade availability of placements.
 - Workforce – How can the SE work on recruitment campaigns and training to ensure that there is enough good quality workforce to provide care within new provisions.
 - Complex care – How can the LA work together with ICBs to reduce unregulated placements and find specialist support for some of our most complex children and young people.
 - Collaborations – Sharing ideas information and innovation to ensure the SE are at the cutting edge of children's social care.

Note: Medway has representation at all groups as well as the Strategic Board.

6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
RCC Fragmentation / disengagement	Hampshire have pulled out of the RCC but all 17 other SE authorities are continuing and signed up as it stands	Ensure Medway are actively involved in all aspects and understanding any risks and indeed opportunities that may be present	CIII
Workforce for Eden House and Aut Even	Workforce is a challenging element of building any residential capacity but there is a clear workstream in the RCC to develop this	As a local authority member of the Southeast Regional Care Cooperative, we are working together with the other 17 members to develop a regional approach to having a high quality local workforce. This includes plans to develop a regional workforce academy which will support recruiting, training and retaining the registers managers needed. It will also be creating clear and suitable career pathways and progression for all residential	BIII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		staff. The RCC will also be developing a practice model to prepare our workforce to meet the needs of children who have had complex and traumatic lives. The RCC also already completed the first piece of research in the region surveying the local workforce and holding focus groups with residential workers. The RCC is committed to working with authorities who are successful in securing capital to help them staff the new resources with high quality staff and registered managers.	

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

7. Consultation

- 7.1. Stakeholders including parents and carers and young people will be involved in informing the design and ethos of both Aut Even and Eden House Cabin.

8. Climate change implications

- 8.1. The expanding of Medway's local resources is in line with our sufficiency strategy and our wish to, where appropriate, bring as many young people back to Medway to be supported. By doing this this will reduce the carbon footprint of professionals travelling elsewhere in the UK to visit and support our young people.
- 8.2. Plans for Aut Even and Eden House Cabin include eco-friendly proposals including Solar Panels, Electric charging points etc.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1. Children's Services have agreed to contribute £75,000 to the RCC for development and staffing costs for the 2025/26 financial year.

9.2. The Council will receive the £1.030m capital grant funding in April 2025. This means the previously allocated capital funding will no longer be needed for the project.

10. Legal implications

10.1. Delegated responsibilities have been agreed for the RCC to be delegated to Lee - Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy CEO as per the decisions agreed in the previous Cabinet report that was considered by the Cabinet on 30 July 2024 ([Decision No. 124/2024 refers](#)).

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Appendices

None

Background papers

[Independent review of children's social care: final report](#)

[Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love](#)

[Cabinet – Tuesday, 30 July 2024](#)