



Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Addressing Adult Social Care (ASC) Waiting List Backlogs

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Summary

Waiting lists in adult social care fundamentally undermine the principles of a prevention strategy, which aims to intervene early and provide timely support to reduce long-term dependency on care services. When individuals face prolonged delays in accessing care, their conditions often worsen, leading to increased complexity of needs and requiring more intensive—and costly—interventions later on. Instead of helping people maintain independence and wellbeing, extended waiting times force many into crisis situations, contradicting the goal of preventative care. Additionally, delays create pressure on emergency services and hospitals, diverting resources from proactive community-based support. A truly effective prevention strategy depends on swift access to services, ensuring individuals receive the right help at the right time to avoid deterioration and improve overall outcomes.

This report provides members of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the current waiting list pressures in Adult Social Care and to provide reassurance regarding the actions being taken to reduce waiting lists for care assessments and reviews, for Medway residents.

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is requested to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The Care Act 2014 specifies the general legal duties that Local Authorities have towards every individual living in their local area, regardless of whether they have needs for care and support, eligible needs, or neither. These duties apply regardless of the duration individuals have been living in the local area for.

2.2. These general duties include:

- Promoting individual wellbeing

- Preventing needs for care and support
- Promoting integration of care and support with health services
- Providing information and advice
- Promoting diversity and quality in provision of services
- Safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect

3. Background

- 3.1. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) [Spring Survey 2024](#) found that there were 418,029 people in England waiting for an assessment, care or direct payments to begin, or a review of their care plan as of 31 March 2025.
- 3.2. An ageing population and rising numbers of working-age adults with complex needs are driving up demand across Adult Social Care nationally.
- 3.3. Due to rising demand, as shown in Table 1 below, and constrained resources following a restructure in 2017, Adult Social Care has had to maintain waiting lists for assessments and reviews for both individuals in need of care and their Carers.

Metric Type	Value Type	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Requests for support from new clients, aged 18+	Count	8,535	8,505	9,690	11,160	10,933
Requests for support from new clients as % of population, aged 18+	%	4.00	3.98	4.49	5.17	4.97
Requests for social care support from new clients aged 18-64	Count	2,615	2,645	3,035	3,565	3,597
Requests for support from new clients as % of population, aged 18-64	%	1.55	1.57	1.79	2.10	2.08
Requests for social care support from new clients aged 65+	Count	5,920	5,860	6,655	7,595	7,336
Requests for support from new clients as % of population, aged 65+	%	13.20	12.94	14.36	16.39	15.44

Table 1 - LGA Adult Social Care Use of Resources

- 3.4. As a result, significant investment was made in 2023/2024, and again in this financial year to right size staffing. The service has also undergone a restructure, which was implemented on 1 March 2025. This introduced three distinct services of Early Help & Prevention (EHP), Long Term Care & Support (LTCs) and Safeguarding.

- 3.5. Long Term Care & Support and Early Help & Prevention have retained 3 locality teams based on postcode areas in each service. Prior to the restructure, all 3 teams were in one service and for the reasons already outlined, waiting lists developed in each service.
- 3.6. Early Help & Prevention (First Response) focuses on community support and early intervention strategies. Arranging short-term care to maximise independence. Focusing on Early Help & Prevention, enables issues to be addressed before they escalate, reducing the need for more intensive, long-term care. This proactive approach can improve overall wellbeing and quality of life for individuals.
- 3.7. Long Term Care & Support provides comprehensive support to adults residing in Medway who require ongoing support. This service is designed for individuals with chronic health conditions, disabilities, and mental health concerns with social care needs. People are supported to live in a range of settings: the majority in their own homes, others in supported living, and residential and nursing homes. The service strives to promote independence, improve the quality of life, and enhance overall wellbeing for everyone.
- 3.8. Separating these services allows for more efficient allocation of resources. Early intervention can often be less costly than long-term care, and by preventing issues from becoming severe, we can better manage our budget and resources.
- 3.9. With dedicated teams, increased management oversight and strategies for each service, we can achieve better outcomes for individuals. Early help can lead to quicker recoveries and less dependency on long-term services, while those who need long-term care can receive more focused and consistent support.

4. Waiting Lists

- 4.1. Following a sustained period of increased referrals as well as complexity of need, Medway's Adult Social Care services are experiencing significant pressures.
- 4.2. Early Help & Prevention
 - 4.2.1. In 2024/25, Medway Adult Social Care received 13,260 new requests for support, an increase of 21.3%.
 - 4.2.2. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the assessment type and number on the waiting list in the Early Help and Prevention Service.

Type of Assessment	Waiting list
Conversation 1 & 2*	307
Conversation 3*	69
Carers Assessment	146
Occupational Therapy Assessment	308
Trusted Assessment*	298

Table 2 – EHP Waiting lists

4.2.3. For information purposes:

- **Conversation 1 – Listen & Connect** emphasises early intervention, meeting the Care Act's requirements to prevent issues, reduce delays, and provide essential guidance.
- When people face crises - **Conversation 2 – Intensive Support** works to restore stability and empower them to regain control over their circumstances.
- For those needing sustained assistance, **Conversation 3 – Build a Good Life** focuses on long-term care and support, fostering a structured and fulfilling future.
- **Trusted Assessment** enables trained staff to assess both individuals and their living environments, recommending suitable equipment and home adaptations in straightforward cases to enhance daily functionality.

4.2.4. A risk management approach is used to review and effectively manage risk, if people's needs change.

4.3. Long Term Care & Support

- 4.3.1. The Long Term Care & Support service supports an average of 3,600 individuals, families and carers at any one time.
- 4.3.2. The service is responsible for annual reviews, changes in need, Community Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) and supporting our most complex individuals who may have learning disabilities and autism or mental health or substance misuse issues for example.
- 4.3.3. We are required to undertake annual reviews of Care and Support Plans for individuals and carers. We are currently achieving 40% of reviews within timescales. Our target is 80%.
- 4.3.4. As of 13 May 2025, there were a total of 1,292 outstanding annual reviews, 546 are over 12 months. There are also 386 outstanding carer reviews.
- 4.3.5. Individuals can experience significant changes in their situations due to health or personal circumstances which result in the need for unplanned reviews/reassessments of their care. As of 13 May 2025, there were 165 outstanding.

4.3.6. A rag rating system is in place and seniors and team managers risk assess, ensuring that cases are prioritised according to need and risk and ensuring that any urgent cases are dealt with immediately.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. The investment to increase the workforce and the new structure along with a complete review and refresh of Adult Social Care's pathways, processes, including updating all assessment/review templates to improve strengths based practice has introduced different ways of working, which with all change takes time to embed.
- 5.2. The following work is being undertaken or considered to improve our ways of working.

5.3. Early Help & Prevention

- 5.3.1. Increased recruitment to key roles and consideration being made to the proposed remodelling of the front door are essential steps in increasing service capacity, reducing waiting times, and ensuring that residents receive the right support at the right time.
- 5.3.2. These changes aim to create a more efficient, responsive, and person-centred approach to meet demand. In addition, we have allocated a dedicated resource to solely focus on outstanding assessments and reviews, so that we are working on new referrals as they arrive in order to stop the waiting lists increasing.
- 5.3.3. Key actions underway include.
 - a. Plans to expand Trusted Assessor models, as part of a remodelling program.
 - b. Project planning to source and implement digital tools.
 - c. Targeted recruitment and retention incentives to increase workforce stability.
 - d. The additional posts introduced through rightsizing, once fully recruited to will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Medway Council's Adult Social Care.
 - e. Weekly risk review panels to reassess cases and adjust prioritisation dynamically.
- 5.3.4. Early Help & Prevention is taking action to clear up the delays at the front door which will prevent escalation of need by carrying out timely assessment of early support. This will enable more effective demand management, by resolving queries at first contact can reduce assessment workload and downstream service demand.) An action plan is in place.
- 5.3.5. Following the restructure, the Performance and Intelligence teams are amending and developing reports, so that 'live' Early Help & Prevention performance can be obtained immediately.

5.4. Long Term Care & Support

5.4.1. The service is taking key actions to address the Long Term Care & Support backlogs as follows:

- Ongoing recruitment to vacancies and additional posts is key to reducing the backlogs. For example, locality 1 has 4 social care officer vacancies which significantly impacts capacity to keep pace with the work. The additional posts introduced through rightsizing once fully recruited to, will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Adult Social Care.
- Allocation of residential & nursing homes to social care officers for review responsibility. This has many benefits including building up relationships with care providers, reducing potential safeguarding concerns, economies of scale and reduced travel.
- Work to achieve a named worker model for our most complex clients which will give greater consistency of support to individuals. Research evidence huge benefits for the individual and efficiencies for the organisation.
- The introduction and embedding of the AI tool, Magic Notes, will reduce the administrative burden for staff and enable staff to spend more time supporting individuals.
- Consider innovative ways to manage reviews such as the introduction of a digital self-review.
- Setting percentage targets of overdue and current reviews to be completed each month, alongside weekly productivity targets.
- Offer the use of overtime only where the staffing budget permits.

5.4.2. A backlog action plan is in place with short-, medium- and longer-term actions identified to reduce the backlogs and ensure that we can respond to individuals in a timelier way. This will support continued independence and better outcomes for Medway residents.

6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Capacity	Insufficient resource to clear or sustain reduced waiting lists	Continue with recruitment and retention efforts.	All
Staff Burnout/Turnover	Increased pressure leads to sickness or resignations	Emphasis on staff wellbeing through check ins and attendance at ASC wellbeing sessions	BII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		Continue with recruitment and retention efforts.	
Identifying unmet need from waiting list	Clearing the list reveals more unmet needs, increasing care package costs	Continue to highlight possible unintended impact to SLT.	All
Failure to Embed Change	Focus on backlog reduction without long-term transformation	Continue with recruitment and retention efforts, focusing on changing internal and embedded ways of working and cultures of practice.	BIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

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

7. Climate change implications

- 7.1. This report has no implications for climate change.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. To reduce waiting lists, additional investment continues to be made in additional staffing, digital tools, to improve referral systems and support decision making, case management software and analytics. These investments are being made from the Adult Social Care Transformation Budget.
- 8.2. As Part of the budget build for 2024/25 £2.4million was invested in rightsizing of the ASC Staffing teams, and a further £1.8million was invested in the budget build for 2025/26 to support areas for improvement identified in the ASC Self Assessment.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The Council has a duty to promote the efficient and effective operation of a market in services for meeting care and support needs, with a view to ensuring services are diverse, sustainable, and high quality for the local population.

9.2. The Council must meet Statutory Care Act 2014 responsibilities. An Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted to ensure fair access.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None