

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

Wednesday, 11 June 2025

6.30pm to 9.23pm

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), Gilbourne, Gulvin, Hamandishe, Jackson, Joy, Nestorova and Mrs Turpin

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

Akinola Edun (Parent Governor Representative)

Added members without voting rights:

Olivia Sales Interim MYC Chairperson (Medway Youth Council)
and Rose Stokes Community Lead (Medway Youth Council)

Substitutes: Councillors:
McDonald (Substitute for Animashaun)
Nestorov (Substitute for Hubbard)
Perfect (Substitute for Spring)

In Attendance: Paul Clarke, Strategic Head of Education
Keith Clear, Medway Parents and Carers Forum
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Nicoleta Stangu, Head of Children in Care, Care Leavers and Youth Offending
Rebecca Wilcox, Chief Housing Officer

41 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun, Hubbard and Spring.

Apologies for absence were also received from Alice Pledger, Teacher Representative and Leanna Rogers, Headteacher Representative and Lisa Scarrott, Medway Parent Carer Forum.

42 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 6 March 2025 was agreed and signed as correct.

43 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

44 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

45 Meeting Theme: Housing

The Committee received a presentation covering the topics under this theme. This was followed by questions and discussions.

The discussions and decisions for this item can be found at minute numbers 45a – 45c.

a Medway's Children and Families placed in Temporary Accommodation

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which detailed actions to support families placed in interim and temporary accommodation and the action being taken to move families into settled accommodation.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

Placements outside of Medway - it was noted that the amount of Medway families placed outside of Medway had reduced to 10% with no families placed outside of Kent. It was however asked where those places were as parts of Kent were over 50 miles away from Medway. It was also asked how many

social housing properties came onto the market each year. The Committee was informed that many placements were in surrounding areas with a few a little further away but the main priority was to keep households with dependents in Medway where possible. Some families, however, could not stay in Medway for various reasons such as risks associated with domestic violence. The priority for the housing team was to prevent households from becoming homeless and it was vital for the team to be involved with households earlier where there was a possibility of them becoming homeless.

It was further asked what scope there was for families that had been placed outside of Medway to return, the officer said that all had the option to move back although a small proportion could not move back due to risk factors.

Prevention - it was noted that there was a very small percentage of care leavers in temporary accommodation, and it was asked what approach was taken to prevent an increase in numbers. The Committee was informed that there had previously been a significant number of care leavers in temporary accommodation and as a result of extensive targeted, collaborative and preventative work undertaken, the numbers had been greatly reduced.

Wrap around support - in response to a question on how closely children's social care and the housing department worked together on wrap around support for families, the Committee learnt that if a family was placed outside of Medway, and there was Child in Need or Child Protection needs identified, a referral would be sent to the relevant authority. An assessment took place on circumstances suitability when placing outside of Medway. It was added that children living in temporary accommodation was in itself not a safeguarding issue as those parents still held parental responsibility for the child. There were extremely low numbers of families in temporary accommodation that were under Local Authority care.

It was asked what the support for households looked like and the Committee learnt that as a Local Authority, there was a duty to provide support and there were two full time officers in post solely providing that support. Out of area placement visits took place as well as home visits for in area placements. The level of risk determined the frequency of visits.

Properties - it was asked what was being done to retain Medway properties for Medway families and the Committee was informed that it was difficult to stem the tide of out of borough placements as providers could offer placements to whomever they wanted to and historically Medway had cheaper rates which had made it attractive to other authorities. The Local Allowance allocated for Medway was low, whilst other authorities received higher subsidy rates which made it attractive and cheaper for them to place families in Medway.

Waitlists - it was commented that there were over 3000 families on the waiting list and approximately 700 lets per year, and it was asked what strategies were being utilised to reduce waiting times. It was also asked what was being done for large families who had been waiting for larger properties for a considerable period of time. The Committee was advised that there were various plans in

place to address some issues but the challenge was that there was not enough social housing to meet demand. There were limited numbers of 4 plus bedroom properties in Medway and incentives were being explored to encourage under occupiers to downsize. There were currently plans to purchase 198 properties for exclusive use as temporary accommodation and One Medway Lettings had recently worked to settle three of the largest families on the waiting list. There was extensive work being undertaken through marketing and comms to get more properties signed up to the scheme. One Medway Lettings would take on any size property available, but the priority was for larger properties, as this was in great demand in Medway.

The number of households in Medway with dependent children was high and it was acknowledged that there were issues with move on accommodation and the Move On team was created specifically to support that cohort.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

b Care Leavers Accommodation

Discussion:

The Committee received the report which provided an overview of accommodation for care leavers aged 18+, allocated within the 16+ Service.

Members then raised comments and questions including the following:

Staying put - it was asked what support was offered to foster carers as part of the Staying Put scheme, and the Committee learnt that there was financial support in place for foster carers, it was lower than fostering rates and young people were expected to contribute to rent and living needs as a way to support their independence. There was also support offered by fostering colleagues with any issues.

Property allocations - assurance was sought that accommodation would be made available for care leavers at Mountbatten House as was originally intended, as it had been suggested that this was no longer the case. This location would be ideal for young people due to its central location and good connectivity. The Committee learnt that Upper Mount was being developed by Medway Development Company, and it was likely that it would be purchased by the Council. This was a mixed bed development with 1,2, and 3 bedroom properties which meant that the site could not be just for care leavers.

The Local Lettings Plan was being drafted with negotiations still taking place and there would be a number of units allocated for care leavers but would not look to allocate the larger properties to care leavers. Some of the allocations would likely be vacant properties and would involve moving a family into a larger space, which would free up their property, possibly for a care leaver.

Young Inspectors - the Young Inspectors Programme was commended for being a brilliant project and it was asked what scope there was for it to be replicated. The officer said that although this was a pilot project, there was confidence that within six months the benefits could be evidenced, and it was hoped that the project could be replicated across services. The project would be time limited for the individual as they should learn, inspect, pass through, and then mentor the next person signed up for the projects. Conversations were taking place with Mid-Kent College on possible future qualification, that could be associated with the project.

Neighbouring authorities - in response to a question on how Medway compared with neighbouring authorities on speed of moving young people into supported accommodation, the officer said that young people had different needs, and the speed would be different for each child as addressing their need always took priority which meant that speed was difficult to measure.

Suitability of accommodation - it was asked what challenge there were in finding suitable accommodation, the Committee was informed that the housing department worked closely with children's social care and regular conversations took place on the expectations and needs of the young person. There was no compromise made on standards, and if a property was offered that did not meet expected standards, this would be conveyed to the Housing Team.

Decision:

The Committee noted the information in relation to accommodation for care leavers.

c Children's Commissioning Quality Assurance Processes of Children's Places and Young Inspectors

Discussion:

The Committee received the report, and Members raised several comments and questions which included:

There had been an increase of 83% in the number of cases concerning issues with providers on the previous year and it was asked what the driver was behind the increase. The Committee was informed that one of the reasons was that three years ago, there has been a rapid expansion of the market with many people embarking on the provider business with limited knowledge. This had resulted in an inexperienced workforce and limited quality standards and low quality standards which was now generating more issues and enquiries to be addressed. There had also been a rise in embargoed providers.

Embargoed Providers - it was asked what preventative measures were being taken against embargoed providers and their ability to set up new provision, the officer said that the Council tried to capture as much information as possible, but this was an area that still required further exploration. Local Authorities

worked together where possible on identification and there was a national database which held details of the providers

Clarification was sought on the term 'unregulated provider', and the Committee was informed that this was a provision that was not Care Quality Commission or Ofsted regulated, however this did not mean that the provision was unable to meet the needs of a young person. This type of provision was often used in instances where there was a time limited need and when a young person was in crisis.

The Commissioning team was commended for their hard work in maintaining standards despite increase in workload and demand.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the continued improvement and development of the Quality Assurance (QA) Team, and implementation of robust and efficient processes to raise quality standards in Medway and out of area and improved mapping of service providers in Medway and surrounding areas.
- b) The Committee noted the robust oversight and Quality Assurance monitoring of 'unregistered' and Embargoed placements in line with Medway Councils High Risk Placement Process, recognised by Ofsted during the 2023 CIC Inspection and monitoring inspection 2025.
- c) The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance team would lead on partnership working with partner local authorities, Regional Care Co-operative (RCC), Jersey Council and external agencies to embed robust quality assurance practice across the South East.
- d) The Committee noted the continuation and expansion of the Young Inspectors Programme beyond the pilot phase and support the integration of the programme into the wider QA Framework and Inspection Cycle.

46 Medway Youth Council Conference Report 2025

Discussion:

The Committee received the report which detailed the findings of the Annual Conference and were informed that there had been 119 participants (92 students and 27 teachers) and 20 schools represented. Additionally, there were over 300 responses to the survey leading up to the event. The range of participants was varied, and participants were able to express their views confidently regarding issues that mattered to them.

Travel infrastructure - in response to a question on how accessible young people found travel across Medway, the Committee learnt that many young people expressed issues with travel and transport links. Young people wanted

improvements to be made to the infrastructure to enable them to travel more easily. There were issues identified with frequency of buses, in particular in the more rural parts of Medway, as well as accuracy of information on the bus timetable App on arrival and departure times which often had a knock on detrimental impact.

It was commented that there appeared to be an increased number of respondents to the survey from young people that attend Grammar school, and it was asked how many of the respondents were Medway. The Committee was informed that the Youth Council would be working on how to get increased participation from Non-Grammar schools.

In response to a question on how the Council would respond to the findings of the survey, the Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive undertook to explore this, with thoughts that it be shared with the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership and it would be down to the various partners to respond to the information presented.

Survey findings - in relation to the survey findings that young people felt more was needed to support mental health in schools, the Public Health Principal and Strategic Head of Public Health Programmes said that there had been significant work carried out over the last 5 years to increase mental health and emotional wellbeing support. Commissioners had taken an iThrive approach to ensure there were services in place to meet need across the framework with Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support Teams in schools, online counselling support through Kooth and now for older young people through QWELL, dedicated pathways for care experienced young people and the new low mood and anxiety service called BRAVE. The challenge was not with provision or access but about pathways and ability to navigate the system and as a result, the Therapeutic Alliance was being developed to help young people and families navigate what could often be a complex system, the work on the Therapeutic Alliance was progressing well, with a go live date of April 2026.

It was commented that the collective worry about safety was concerning, and it was vital that the Community Safety Partnership take note of what young people had expressed and build in interventions to improve safety.

The issues with lack of work experience for young people and issues with work experience for young people with SEND was highlighted and a briefing note on this was requested.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Medway Youth Council Conference Annual report.
- b) The Medway Youth Council to seek responses from the recommendations made and for the feedback to be presented to the Committee.

**47 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary
- Quarter 4 2024/25**

Discussion:

The Director of Place and deputy Chief Executive presented the report and acknowledged the increase in red risks. The Committee was informed that discussions were taking place on addressing issues.

Members raised concerns on the high number of red risks presented amid the increase of demand on the budget. A Member expressed that it was imperative that the Portfolio Holders held senior officers to account on this matter and ensured that they maintained firm line of sight on progress.

The increased numbers of children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) whilst the amount of spend had decreased was notable and it was asked how this was being managed. The Committee was informed that the aim was for children with EHCP plans to have their needs met in mainstream schools where possible. The large costs experienced were for a for a small number of children in specialist provision.

It was expressed that the Integrated Care Board needed to attend a meeting to be held to account on the actions they were taking to address the needs of children in Medway and the provision available to support and improve outcome for young people.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Q4 2024/25 progress of the performance indicators used to monitor progress of the Council's priorities, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

48 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee discussed how best to utilise the October meeting which was Public Health themed to explore how better health could support schools with pressures of SEND, mental health and wellbeing of young people, what could be done to address the systemic barriers in supporting young people, including the crucial transition period to young adulthood. Additionally, how young people from various projects such as the young mayors programme, could support this work.

Decision:

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- a) The Committee noted the report and agree the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to accepting the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1.
- b) Democratic services to work with the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Opposition Spokespersons, the Chairperson of Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Integrated Care Board on issues highlighted.

Chairperson

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