

Children's Social Care Update

7 August 2025

Kelly Cogger – Assistant Director



Focused Visit Update

Rebecca Cooper – July 2025

Focused Visit Overview and Context

- Visit Date: 29–30 April 2025
- Focus: Children in need or subject to child protection plans
- Inspectors: Amanda Maxwell & Rodica Cobarzan
- General Observations
 - Continued focus on improvement since 2023
 - Progress made in some areas (e.g. homeless 16–17 year olds) and response to exploitation
 - Challenges persist:- staffing instability, inconsistent quality of practice
- No priority actions

Quarter 1

- Relentless approach to continuous practice improvement with a focus on key areas
- Addressing workforce sufficiency challenges
- Preparing for Children's social care reforms and a focus on family decision making
- Ongoing work with Commissioning to improve placement choice, availability and oversight, with key funding streams, development and growth of our own children's homes
- Our continuous improvement plan has been refreshed with ongoing focus on the impact of our intervention, consistency of practice, our workforce and closing the loop on all our quality assurance activities

Areas for Improvement

- Quality of assessments and planning remains inconsistent
- Management oversight and supervision not yet consistently effective
- Delays in intervention and decision-making, especially in pre-proceeding
- Continued variability in the quality of practice for disabled children
- Commissioned specialist assessments delays hinder progress for children

Workforce: Retention and Recruitment

- Improved induction feedback
- Practitioners returning to Medway
- Planned recruitment campaign in development with filming and release in the Autumn
- Workforce instability remains a key barrier
- Staff vacancy rate
- Higher caseloads for some staff

Medway Children's Services Continuous Improvement Plan on a Page 2025-2028

#Make it Medway

Be Brave, Be Decisive, Work at Pace

Engagement and Direct Work

- Participation
- Children's voices
- Purposeful intervention
- Writing to the child

Workforce

- Recruitment
- Retention
- Progression
- Grow our own
- Quality induction
- Celebration
- Welfare

Practice

- Quality of Practice
- Exploitation
- Neglect
- Children and Young People with Disabilities
- Partnerships
- Permanence

Leadership

- Visibility
- Supervision and Management Oversight
- Budget
- Sufficiency
- Decisive decision making

Children Matter in Medway

Our Vision: Working together, keeping children and families at the heart of what we do

How will we
measure Impact?



What children &
families tell us

What our Staff say

Quality Assurance

Inspection preparation and timeline


- ILACS 2023 Date: 17 to 28 July 2023
- Focus Visit Date: 29–30 April 2025
- Preparation for a possible **Joint Targeted Area Inspection** (JTAI) - from September 2025 JTAs are to focus on child sexual abuse within in the family. Working across the partnership in readiness for inspection
- Preparation for **ILACS** from summer 2026 (Standard and short inspections will usually happen once every 3 years, plus or minus 6 months)

Medway Youth Justice Plan

Nicoleta Stangu – August 2025

Progress Achieved so Far

Strategic Improvements



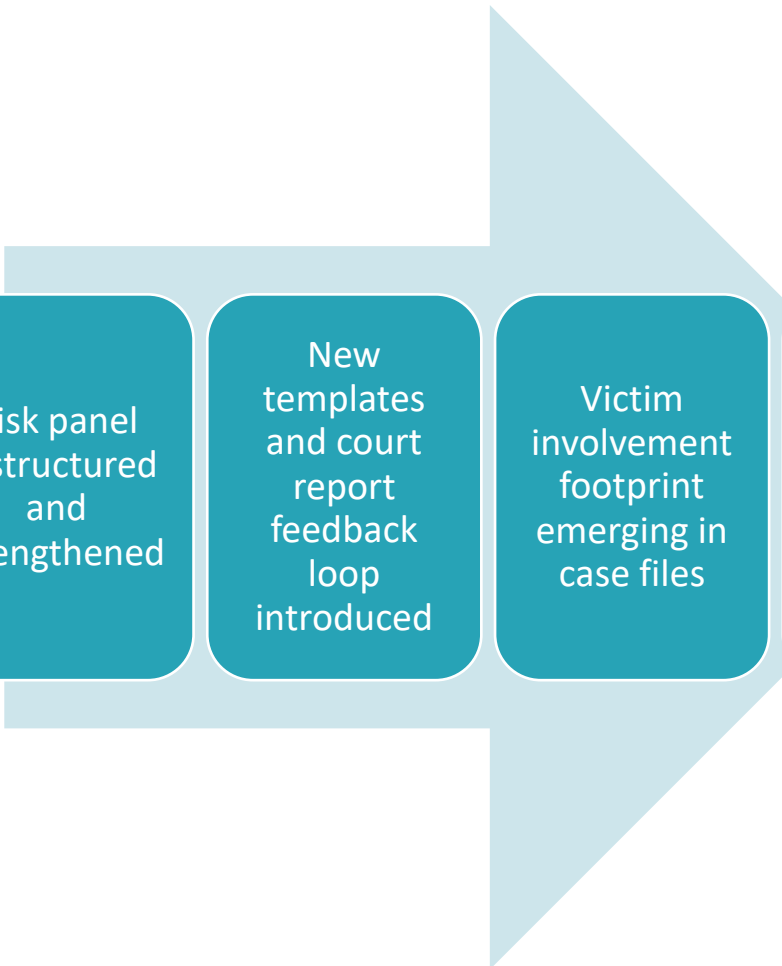
Increased funding and staffing to better assess, plan, and deliver intervention tailored to children's needs

Improved management oversight with new Practice and Team Managers

Adopted Trauma-informed way of working and training completed across all Medway schools

Police Outcome 22 intervention: 92% of children did not reoffend

Operational Improvements



Risk panel restructured and strengthened

New templates and court report feedback loop introduced

Victim involvement footprint emerging in case files

Power BI dashboards developed for better data analysis

Performance Highlights



First Time Entrants (FTE):

- 29% reduction in FTEs (from 206 to 146).
- Still higher than statistical neighbours but progress is steady

Reoffending:

- 32.9% reduction in reoffences per reoffender (from 5.75 to 3.86).
- Outperforms South East average (3.96)

Custody:

- Increase in custodial sentences (from 1 to 5).
- Mainly due to breaches, robbery, and serious violence

Disproportionality:

- 40% of offending population from ethnic minorities vs. 23% of general population

Key Risks and Challenges

Workforce & Capacity:

- Staff turnover and experience level
- Inspection outcomes impacted by inconsistent practice

Education, Training & Employment (ETE):

- 35% of children not in suitable ETE at end of order
- Only 50% achieved at least one qualification in 2024–25

Information Sharing:

- Need for formal Service Level Agreements to be developed with partners
- Risk of fragmented planning and missed safeguarding opportunities

Victim Support:

- Limited coordination with external victim services
- One dedicated Victim Worker in post

Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board



The delivery of the Child first Principles is central to the ethos of the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board and this Youth Justice Plan.

Inspection preparation and timeline

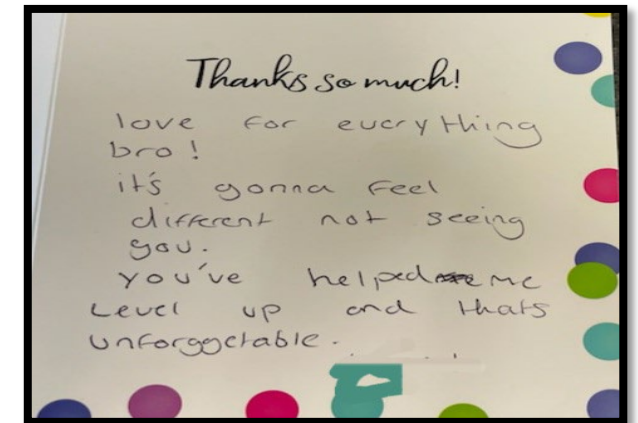
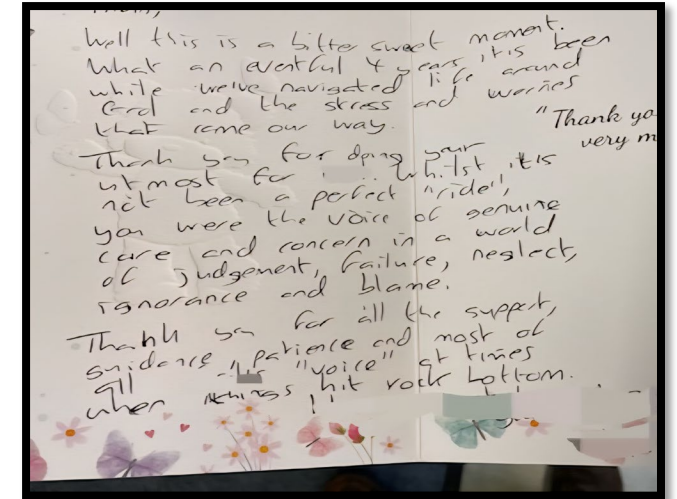
Prevention of Offending: Early identification and targeted interventions

Victim Support: Improve coordination and feedback mechanisms

Workforce Development: Training in trauma, exploitation, and risk management

Disproportionality (fairness, equity and inclusion): Data-driven action plans and inclusive service design

Youth Voice: Embed participation in planning and service delivery



IRO Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Amanda Harris – August 2025

Main Messages 2024-2025

- **IROs continued to review children's care plans** and how the Local Authority has discharged its duties to Children in Care in a timely manner, offering high support and challenge to the services, teams and social workers. There was good evidence of IROs improving outcomes for children
- **Data trends** : most children in care are aged 10 and above, and the main reasons children left care were when they turned 18 years of age or returned to live with their parents or family members
- **Unregulated care arrangements:** Medway used less unregulated and unregistered care arrangements, for older children, by the end of the year. In March 2025, there were 16 such arrangements, decreasing to 5 by the end of the year. The opening of one children's home, Eden House, in 2024 and the planned opening of another is welcomed
- **'Mockingbird' model:** IROs have welcomed the impact of this for Medway's own foster carers and its positive impact for children, along with the **strengthening of permanence work** in the children in care service, though a dedicated permanence lead worker

Main Messages 2024-2025

- **Placement stability:** work to strengthen this for children in care, including improved matching children to long term carers, remains a key area of improvement, as well as work to offer children fewer changes of social workers
- **The recording and sharing of care plans** remains an area to improve, with work being planned to develop this next year
- **Life story work** and providing children with explanations they can build on about their lives and moves in care remains an area to strengthen
- **Further work** by the department, should consider whether an increased frontloading of assessments in PLO, and earlier interventions, may help families maintain children at home and reduce the need for care proceedings

Key Objectives for 2025-2026

- Collaborate with teams and services to develop and improve life story work
- Review children subject to DOLs and in unregulated care arrangements three monthly
- Children's care Plans; implement quality assurance activities to help service improvement, to include the streamlining of other plans such as EHCP plans, through quarterly activity, during Q2-Q4 (July 2025 – March 2026)
- Support work to develop care plans for children in care, aged under 16 years and under

Key Objectives for 2025-2026

- Scope an IRO post 18-year offer and to discuss with senior managers by September 2025
- Consider publishing a child friendly version of this plan, co-produced with children, by September 2025
- Continue to scrutinise Adoption Support Plans, supporting greater open adoption
- Refresh how IROs help young people to chair or steer their review meetings
- Further develop IRO profiles, making these accessible to children and young people

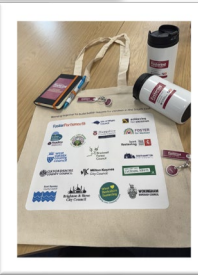
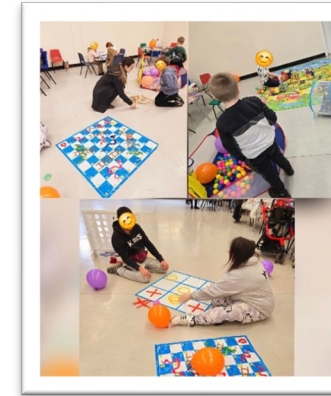
Annual Fostering Report 2024 - 2025

Andrada Pepenel – August 2025

Key Objectives for 2024–2025

During the 2024–2025 period, Medway Fostering Service focused on the following strategic goals:

- **Increase the number of in-house foster carers**, reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies
- **Enhance recruitment from diverse backgrounds**, ensuring our carers reflect the communities we serve
- **Strengthen the support offer for foster carers**, making it competitive and appealing to prospective carers
- **Expand specialist fostering provision**, including homes for sibling groups and Parent and Child arrangements
- **Join the Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE) Hub**, fostering regional collaboration and shared learning
- **Launch Medway's first Mockingbird Constellation**, supported by Local Authority Fostering South East and Department for Education (DfE) funding, to provide a community-based model of foster care that enhances stability and support
- **Submission for Ofsted Registration of Supported Homes hosts**, we have submitted to register the Supported Homes hosts with Ofsted in October 2024, and this is still being processed by Ofsted
- **Diagnostic review in March 2025:** Local Government Association conducted a comprehensive diagnostic review of our service. This review provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on our current practice and gain an external perspective on our strengths and areas for improvement



Registration and deregistration of foster carers

Year	Newly approved generic fostering households	Newly approved kinship care households (inc. temp approvals)
<u>2020-21</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>2021-22</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>2022-23</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>2023-24</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>2024-25</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>19</u>



Year	Deregistrations
2016-17	40
2017-18	34
2018-19	40
2020-21	42
2021-22	53
2022-23	39
2023-24	31
2024-25	38

Reasons	Count
Carer ceased fostering	1
Carer retirement	11
Ceased fostering because the family adopted the child/children	1
Ceased fostering because the family took out a special guardianship	13
Initiated by fostering service	7
Personal carer circumstances	3
Transferred to IFA	2

Key Objectives for 2025–2026

- **Increase the number of in-house foster carers**, reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies
- **Enhance recruitment from diverse backgrounds**, ensuring our carers reflect the communities we serve
- **Strengthen the support offer for foster carers**, making it competitive and appealing to prospective carers
- **Expand specialist fostering provision**, including homes for sibling groups and Parent and Child arrangements
- **Implement the new restructured Fostering Service as of 1 April 2025**

Key Objectives for 2025–2026

- **Continuation of collaboration with the Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE) Hub**, fostering regional collaboration and shared learning
- **Launch two additional Mockingbird Constellations** with specific themes around adolescents and children and young people with disabilities
- **Ofsted Registration of Supported Homes hosts**, we have submitted to register the Supported Homes hosts with Ofsted in October 2024, and this is still being processed by Ofsted
- **Kinship Allowance Pilot provider application**: submission of application to Department for Education (DfE) to become one of the local authorities to become one of the participating local authorities
- **Development of the Kinship offer**: implementation of key reforms around the kinship offer as outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Questions

