

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

Tuesday, 2 December 2025
6.30pm to 8.43pm

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), Animashaun, Hubbard, Jackson, Joy, Nestorova, Spring and Mrs Turpin

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

Lenny Williams (C of E Diocese Representative, Rochester Diocesan Board of Education)

Added members without voting rights:

Alice Pledger (Teacher Representative), Olivia Sales , Chairperson MYC (Medway Youth Council), Will Kitney, Vice-Chairperson MYC, Kayda Tye, Diversity Lead MYC and Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Brake (Substitute for Gulvin)

In Attendance: Anna Batty, Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager
Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive
Sarah Featherstone, Group Manager MASH
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
Andy McNally-Johnson, Head of Corporate Accounts
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Sacha Rymell, Interim Head of Service – First Response and Family Solutions

495 Apologies for absence

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Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilbourne, Gulvin, Hamandishe and Leanne Trotter Healthwatch Medway.

496 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 2 October 2025 was agreed and signed as correct.

497 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

498 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.

499 Meeting Theme: Finance

Discussion:

Members received a presentation and considered the reports under this theme.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Education Health Care Plans - a Member raised a question at the 27 November 2025 Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting which was referred to this Committee for a response. It was asked, due to the rise in cost of Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, whether the Council had confidence that the money it saved through the introduction of the London Banding System was realised, given the need to invest to meet the additional demand of EHCPs. The Assistant Director Education and SEND clarified that costs had not risen but the numbers of EHCPs that were processed had risen, due to the announcement of SEND reforms, many believed that EHCPs would be removed, and this resulted in doubling of requests since April 2025, this was experienced Nationally.

It was commented that there had been an increase in reliance on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) in 2025/26 and it was asked what Medway had done to demonstrate it was moving away from government support as it was

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unsustainable and put pressure on finances. Officers acknowledged the use of EFS over the last few years and said that as part of the process for applying for EFS, a CIPFA resilience review was undertaken. One of the outcomes of that review was more regular reporting of progress against savings as part of the Financial Improvement and Transformation plan, which was reported to Cabinet. It was, however, made clear that the pressures being experienced were demand led. Services had worked extensively to plan and manage their budgets; however, pressures were beyond what had been planned and budgeted for.

Staff retention - a question was asked on how the long term issues with staff retention were being managed despite the annual increased pay award for staff. The Committee was informed that recruitment and retention of staff remained a national issue and continuous investment was being made to attract and retain staff in Medway. A recruitment video had been launched, as well as a five day induction programme with no cases for newly recruited social workers for 5 days. Exit interviews took place with staff that decide not to stay in Medway as well as stay interviews for staff who remain in Medway and there had been extensive learning derived from the interviews that had been instrumental in highlighting areas for change.

Overspend - further clarification was sought on the overspend of £1.5million on Client Support Packages and £1.384million in Inclusion and SEND. The Committee was informed that the Client Support Package supported children to remain in the care of families and carers to potentially prevent breakdown which could result in a child coming into Local Authority care and seeking placement for that child which would incur far greater cost than that of Client Support. The overspend in Inclusion and SEND was as a result of the doubling of EHCP assessment requests since April. A backlog project team was built in to address backlog, that project had ended and in order to prevent falling behind again and not meeting statutory time frames, some staff were retained to keep abreast of applications. The service was now meeting its targets and were above national average.

Members of the Committee agreed and commented that all children in Medway matter and there was a strong commitment demonstrated in improving outcomes for children and young people. It was vital to ensure that young people had the best start in life regardless of financial challenges experienced by the Council. Long term investment in services such as Early Help, and in-house foster carers was key as prevention was instrumental to improved life outcomes for children and young people in Medway.

Fairer funding modelling review – in response to a question on how much difference this would make, the Committee was informed that what had been reported was the national picture. There had been some modelling completed on what it may mean for individual Councils, and this was being reviewed by officers. There would be a multiyear settlement which was a welcome development, but part of the issue was that whilst Medway may benefit over the three year period, it may not be as quickly as we would want. This was due to the fact that in order for one Council to benefit, others may lose out, therefore a

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transition period had to be in place to minimise impact on other Local Authorities.

a Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2026/27

Discussion:

The discussion of this item can be found at minute no 499.

Decision:

The Committee noted that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to reduce the budget deficit for 2026/27 and to liaise with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to secure support through the Exceptional Financial Support scheme, should it be necessary.

b Capital Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2025/26

Discussion:

The discussion of this item can be found at minute no 499.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the results of the second round of capital budget monitoring for 2025/26.
- b) The Committee noted that Cabinet was requested to recommend to Council that £57,363 be added to the Pre-Beeches at the Rowans capital scheme, to be funded by available and unallocated Special Educational Needs (SEN) grant.
- c) The Committee noted the changes to the approved budget since Round 1 as set out in sections 7.1 to 7.4 of the report.

c Revenue Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2025/26

Discussion:

The discussion of this item can be found at minute no 499.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the results of the second round of revenue budget monitoring for 2025/26 and in particular the risk to interest and financing projections.

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- b) The Committee noted that Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by Full Council.

500 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2024-25

The Committee received a report which detailed the work undertaken by the MSCP in the last year and sets out the progress made by the partnership against key priorities.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Oasis Restore - it was asked what the likelihood was of Oasis Restore Secure School reopening as planned next year and what assurances could be given on the oversight of performance. The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive said that as far as she was aware the school was still on track to open as planned next year. The independent scrutineer was working closely with the secure school, and the report detailed the support being provided.

'Don't Disrespect' - it was asked whether the 'Don't Disrespect' campaign which was aimed at putting an end to public sexual harassment towards girls and women, was a direct result of social media activities, press and television programmes. The Committee was informed that it was a proactive campaign which had resulted in increased contact as people began to gain awareness and recognition of issues which had resulted in increased reporting.

It was commented that some young people had not heard about the campaign, and it was suggested that the profile needed to be raised and for the campaign to be promoted more, particularly in schools and colleges. The Officer said that they would continue to promote through all available channels as well as encouraging partners to increase promotion of the campaign.

Child death - there was concern that child death data was not present in the report and that the data was not being received by professionals to enable them to audit, scrutinise and learn from incidences. The Public Health Principal and Strategic Head of Public Health Programmes acknowledged that the data had not been included and confirmed that Kent County Council; was leading on production of two reports, a 2022-24 report to share learning and a 2024-25 which would draw on key themes. However, assurance was provided that learning from all child deaths were live and an overview panel with all partners present was held to review all cases, with actions and learning taken forward. Some of the actions and learning resulted in campaigns run by MSCP or shaped training.

Communication - the report alluded to an increase in communication and it was asked what the communication strategy encompassed. The Officer said that the primary audience for communication from the MSCP was other professionals in the partnership working with children and families on Medway, both paid and unpaid but also included communication for the wider

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communities. There was extensive communication by MSCP through social media, the website, and a bi-monthly bulletin. It was commented that it may be useful to have two separate comms one for professionals and one for the public, to enable two sets of data to be recorded in the report to evidence activities in both cohorts. The Officer agreed that going forward this information could be captured for future reports where possible. All campaigns were tracked and monitored to capture details of impact to ensure that messages were being received.

Young people - in response to comments on what actions were being taken to include the voice of young people in all activities. The Chairperson said that the level of participation of the Medway Youth Council with the Committee continued to grow and relationships strengthened. A few Members of the Committee were forming a focus group to explore improvement to inclusivity.

The young people in attendance from Medway Youth Council added that they were also working on how to increase inclusivity and participation in their annual conference going forward and were trying to promote involvement not just with schools but also from the network on home educated young people.

It was further commented that the level of participation in the Medway Youth Council Annual Conference had increased over the years, and the Medway Youth Council was also commended for their participation in all children related activities across Medway.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report

501 Missing Children Annual Report 2024-25

Discussion:

The Committee received a report which detailed the response to children who go missing from home and care. Officers highlighted the data, practice themes and response to learning. The Committee was informed that 86% of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) took place within 72hrs and there were many factors attributed to why children went missing or went missing frequently. Engagement with young people could often be difficult and all data captured were analysed and shared in reporting. The Key priorities for 2025/26 was that all children to be offered RHIs regardless of where they were placed and for increased collaboration with the commissioning team regarding push factors for why children went missing, such as not being in education, to assist with building in preventative measures.

Members then raised several questions and comments:

Data - in response to a question on whether the figures presented were just for Medway children or whether it included children placed in Medway, the Committee learnt that the data presented was for Medway children both living

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in and placed outside of Medway. Local Authorities were responsible for their own children regardless of where they were placed.

Measure of success- it was further commented that the report referenced 150 episodes of young people going missing, one of the targets was prevention of reoccurrence and it was asked what the percentage of reoccurrence was and success rate of prevention of recurrence. The Committee was informed that it was difficult to quantify and measure success of re occurrence as missing episodes occurred for various reasons, often it was a cry for help and occurred during difficult periods of a young person's life. What was key was identifying what the driver was by focusing on, engaging and building relationships with young people. The reasons for a young person being missing was difficult to report on in terms of percentages as a young person may report a different reason for the missing episode whilst a carer parent or teacher may report it as a different reason. This however was a complexity that officers would undertake to focus on in the coming year.

The Committee was also informed that the response to any child missing was consistent regardless of whether it was a child in care or not. When a missing episode occurred, the young person would be found by the police and would have already spoken to a professional, asking them to then go over everything again with another professional could often make engagement difficult. There were three Return Home Interviewers in post, they were independent, and they worked on the basis of building relationships with young persons and ensuring they understood the purpose of the interview.

Return home interviewers -it was asked if it would be beneficial for the Return Home Interviewer to be present when a young person was initially interviewed by the police once found and the officer said that they were trying to get to a place where a young person did not have to repeat their story to multiple professionals. This was often difficult as when a young person was found the police would speak to them in the first instance.

Data trend - in response to a comment that there appeared to be a trend in the data on ethnicity of young people that went missing and it was asked what could be done to address this, officers said that this would be taken forward as part of a review on future reporting. It was also requested that future reports included details of percentage of children with SEND that went missing as well as that of other disadvantaged groups.

Members on the Committee commented on the importance of building relationships with young people in the community and promoting oneself as trusted adults through various interactions with young people. There must be increased focus on creating safe spaces for young people. It was vital that young people had access to support networks and the Committee learned that there were places of safety promoted by child centred policing teams, with officers linked across all schools in Medway.

Outreach - in response to a question on what was being done to reach out to young people in terms of youth clubs, the Committee was informed that there

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were many forward facing youth service interactions with young people. There was a focus on being present where young people typically were, through the satellite project and mobile youth bus. Medway Youth Service had a strong social media presence which was used for outreach. There was also access for young people to many online resources with information on smoking, substance abuse and mental health support. Campaigns such as roadshows took place across schools and there were online resources for schools to deliver as part of their Personal, Social, Health and Economic curriculum on factors that could contribute to missing episodes.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report.
- b) The Committee to work with officers on the expectation for future reports.
- c) The Service to consider increase of Return Home Interviewers if viable.

502 The One Medway Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarter 2 2025/26

Discussion:

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report and informed the Committee there had been improvements in some areas and drew attention to the fact that the rate of S47 investigations were statistically similar to that of the national average and that the service had been challenged to increase focus on this area and deliver improvements. This was a good children's service which were capable of improving performance and bringing numbers in line with statistical neighbours.

It was commented that the targets set were ambitious targets that would challenge staff in the longer term. The direction of travel however remained encouraging.

Assurance was provided regarding the 2.5 year old mandated check for health visiting and that the Quarter 2 and 3 data showed that Quarter 2 figures was 82% and Quarter 3 currently was tracking at 83%.

The risk register was reviewed following the targets set as a result of the improvement journey which were set and measured in a different way as they were short targets that had to be achieved at a quick pace to evidence that the service was on the right track. These targets were longer term targets which showed the aims of the service and should be considered on that basis.

Decision:

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- a) The Committee noted the Quarter 2 2025/26 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.

503 Work programme

Discussion:

The work programme was presented for information.

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive informed the Committee that there had been a recent Ofsted Focused Visit, the outcome of which was expected to be published by mid-January and details of the outcome, following publication would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee on 5 March 2026.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report, agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, and accepted the proposed changes, outlined in italic text on Appendix 1.

Chairperson

Date:

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