

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8 January 2026

CSC Continuous Improvement Journey Update

Report from: Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director of Children's Services

Author: Rebecca Cooper, Head of Improvement, Children's Services

Summary

This report provides a written update to CYP Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Children's Services continuous improvement journey.

The report also highlights the priorities we have agreed, the actions we have taken and the things we still need to do.

It is anticipated that the next Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services could take place from Summer 2026, following the second focused visit in November 2025.

During the first half of the year key areas of focus have included:

- 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 and Fostering 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.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

2. Background

2.1 Following the 2023 OFSTED ILACS which judged Medway's Children's Services to be Good, an updated Continuous Improvement Plan was agreed by the Continuous Improvement Board and incorporated:

- priorities and actions for Medway Children's Services which have been developed by the Children's Services Extended Management Team through knowledge, data and understanding of their operational priorities.
- actions for senior leaders which support the delivery of the plan.
- actions for the statutory partners including education, health and police which are developed and governed through the current Continuous Improvement Board.

2.2 We have implemented strong succession planning with a competent and confident Children's Services Management Team, with permanent Assistant Director appointment in June 2025, followed by the recruitment of permanent HofS to maintain stability.

2.3. The Continuous Improvement Board meets three times per year with a forward plan that supports the implementation of the updated Continuous Improvement Plan and the engagement of all partners in this.

2.4 The plan is dynamic and has been updated as we continue to make progress. We continue to be aspirational for our families and are determined to provide consistently good or better services. We celebrate the progress we have made on this journey whilst recognising that we have more work to do to achieve further improvement.



- 2.5 We have four priority areas which inform the strategic continuous improvement plan, that then feed into and inform our service delivery plans. This creates a golden thread which connects the strategic and operational actions directly to the impact on children and families which we have continued to measure through direct feedback, our quality assurance activity and engagement with our staff and partners.
- 2.6 In April 2025 Children's Services received a Focused Visit from Ofsted where inspectors looked at the Local Authority's arrangements for Children in Need or subject to a Child Protection plan. This visit was carried out in line with the ILACS framework.
- 2.7 Headline findings told us that senior leaders in Medway continue to focus on improving and developing how children in need or subject to a child protection plan are supported.
- 2.8 Since the inspection in 2023, when the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection were judged as requiring improvement, improvements have been made to arrangements for children who are 16 or 17 and at risk of homelessness. In addition, there is a continued focus on developing and improving the response provided to disabled children and to adolescents at risk of exploitation.
- 2.9 The quality and impact of social work practice for Children in Need or Children subject to Child Protection plans continue to be variable, with much not yet reaching the standard to which the Local Authority aspires. There have been some improvements made but these are fragile and are yet to be embedded. The letter was published on 2 June 2025.
- 2.10 However, inspectors reported that progress overall has been hindered by increased demands on the service, alongside turnover of more senior managers and challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff.
- 2.11 In November 2025 Children's Services received a second Focused Visit from Ofsted where inspectors looked at the Local Authority's arrangements for Children in Care and this included:
- The quality of matching, placement and decision making for children in care
 - Children in care at risk from child sexual/criminal exploitation
 - The response to children missing from care
 - The experiences and progress of children living in unregistered provision
 - The impact of leaders on practice with children in care.
- 2.12 The letter will be published on January 12th 2026, but early indicators confirm that we know ourselves well, presenting an accurate self-assessment.
- 2.13 **Continuous Improvement Board** – the Board was established in 2019 and following our Good ILACS in July 2023 the Board agreed to reset its focus and

approach to continue to support all partners in its ongoing practice improvement work, but to meet only three times a year. The role of the Board continues to support, engage and hold accountability for the Continuous Improvement Plan.

- 2.14 **Internal governance** – Several key areas of practice have established ‘task and finish groups’ (neglect, domestic abuse, exploitation, sufficiency, engagement and direct work, and permanence) which report monthly on progress to CSMT as well as to QAPIB and the Continuous Improvement Board. Cross cutting work strands and areas of specific practice improvement are built into each Service Plan.
- 2.15 **Corporate Governance** - Delivery on the Continuous Improvement Plan is supported and overseen by the Leadership meeting, chaired by the Leader of the Council and supported by the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Executive. There are also regular reports to the Children’s Management Team.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 Immediately following the conclusion of the Ofsted focused visit in April, work commenced at pace to address the areas identified for improvement. The following actions were initiated as part of our commitment to driving positive change and delivering improved outcomes for children and families:
- 3.2 **Development of a New Continuous Improvement Plan** - A comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan has been developed to provide a clear strategic framework for driving service enhancements. This plan outlines key priorities, measurable objectives, and timelines for implementation, ensuring a structured and accountable approach to delivering sustained improvements across Children’s Services, encompassing improvements identified from ILACS 2023, focused visit 2025 and external reviews. In addition, a 'Plan on a Page' has been developed to clearly articulate the strategic priorities for staff over the next three years.
- 3.3 **Service Plans** – Service plans are updated quarterly, and these plans link with the overarching Continuous Improvement Plan and incorporate key focus areas identified through recent inspections and reviews. The alignment ensures coherence in strategic direction and operational delivery, promoting consistency and shared accountability across teams.
- 3.4 **Targeted Support from the Practice Development Service** – since September 2025, the Practice Development Service has been supported in delivering targeted support to frontline teams to strengthen and improve practice. We have rolled out bespoke audit training to our managers followed by targeted training for assessments (November), Planning (December) and Supervision (December). We have commenced this training with our managers and are rolling out across the wider workforce to all frontline practitioners January – March 2026. This includes bespoke coaching, and practice-led workshops aimed at embedding best practice, enhancing

professional confidence and addressing specific areas for development identified through quality assurance activity. We are working at pace to continue to address those areas of inconsistent practice.

- 3.5 **Relaunch of the Supervision Policy** - The Supervision Policy has been relaunched to reinforce the importance of high-quality, reflective supervision and robust management oversight. The policy sets out clear expectations for frequency, content, and recording of supervision sessions, and is supported by training and guidance to ensure consistent application across the workforce. This is being further supported by the training as above.
- 3.6 **Strengthening Capacity in Key Operational Areas** -To improve the timeliness and effectiveness of pre-proceedings work, we recruited to a second Case Progression Officer. This additional capacity supports more proactive case tracking and earlier intervention. Furthermore, the in-house specialist parenting assessment team has been expanded to increase capacity and reduce reliance on external providers, thereby improving timeliness and quality of assessments.
- 3.7 The pillars of **engagement and direct work, workforce, practice** and **leadership** are central to delivering safe, effective, and high-quality services for children and families. They provide a structured foundation for sustainable improvement. Together, these pillars ensure that improvement is both strategic and embedded in everyday practice.
- 3.8 **Engagement & Direct Work** - Effective engagement with children, families, and partners leads to better outcomes. It ensures services are co-created, holistic, and responsive to the voices of those we support.
- 3.9 We engage with children and families to create opportunities to hear and understand their views, involve them in their plans and engage them in strategic development of our services. We will be launching our updated Participation Strategy at the end of 2025. We will ensure the child's voice is recorded and engage them in creative direct work which reflects their views, likes and dislikes about their circumstances; this will then be used to inform future decision-making. We will write in a way that is easy for them to understand and address our case recording to the child to improve this. This is a feature of some improved case recording with support for staff to embed this into their routine best practice
- 3.10 **Workforce** - A skilled, supported and stable workforce is essential. Priorities include effective recruitment and retention, manageable caseloads, and ongoing professional development.
- 3.11 We are working hard to stabilise a skilled, and permanent workforce which is key to our strengths-based approach to practice. The stability and experience of the workforce continue to be the most significant and stubborn challenges and barriers to progress. This has meant that some social workers have higher caseloads than we would like, and these higher workloads are contributing to the variability in the quality of practice. We maintain a

relentless focus on recruitment and retention to address this. We will build on our targeted approach to professional development and career progression that is recognised and valued by staff. We have launched our new recruitment film and are seeing some positive appointments impacted by the recent changes for agency staff. This has resulted in 7 staff converting from temporary to permanent posts since April this year. Experienced workers are returning to the children's workforce choosing Medway as an employer of choice and all posts from our recent investment have been filled, enhancing capacity.

- 3.12 **Practice** - High-quality, evidence-based practice underpins all interventions. Timely analytical assessments, SMART and culturally competent plans and reflective supervision are key to achieving positive outcomes.
- 3.13 We continue to focus on the ambition to deliver consistently high quality, purposeful interventions that achieve positive change for children and families. We have a relentless approach to equipping the workforce to work with children and families to understand their needs through analytical assessments, that lead to meaningful plans and strive to achieve the best outcomes for children that we can. We know that there continues to be some variability in the quality and impact of this work, and we continue to focus on strengthening management oversight and supervision to drive progress. We have rolled out targeted training across the workforce commencing in September 2025 and using this as a focus on those areas of our practice that we want to further strengthen.
- 3.14 **Leadership** - Strong leadership drives vision, culture, and accountability. It ensures improvement plans are implemented, supports sound decision-making, and fosters continuous learning.
- 3.15 We seek to demonstrate effective leadership and management which supports high expectations for all our children and young people. Every manager is accountable for delivering good services for children through effective oversight and supervision, and work to create a culture which values learning from quality assurance and continuous improvement. Our leadership team support provision of conditions for social work practice to thrive and our "high support-high challenge" is central to our approach.
- 3.16 We are building on the range of resources available to support delivery of plans, provide choice and accessibility of stable and supportive homes for our children in care and care experienced young people, and work with partners to meet children's needs relating to education, aspiration, and health.
- 3.17 We seek to manage our resources efficiently and effectively, demonstrating oversight and rigour in any decisions to commit resources, thus ensuring best value and positive impact for our children and families.
- 3.18 We are responding to the national agenda and strive to meet the expectations of the recent Independent Review of Children's Social Care, ensuring that all our services provide the right support at the right time, so children thrive in

their families, that we support family networks, act decisively when children are in need of protection, and our children in care have a stable home and meaningful relationships.

- 3.19 **Quality Assurance** – Our Learning and Accountability Framework provides a line of sight to the impact our interventions have on a child and family. The service provides a quarterly report on activity and findings. Quality assurance activity is supported through effective reporting, monitoring and oversight of our Continuous Improvement Plan and service plans, regular consideration of performance data and dashboards at team and service level, and by the corporate leaders at a monthly Oversight Board, and a bi-monthly **Quality Assurance and Performance Information Board (QAPIB)**, chaired by the Director of People, to provide a line of sight into practice.
- 3.20 We are responding to the feedback from our recent focused visit with similar pace and following the publishing of our letter any actions will be integrated into the Continuous Improvement Plan and Service Plans and tracked with the same rigorous governance as outlined in this report.

4 Financial implications

- 4.1 For 2025/26, Children's Services budget was £76,945,100, reflecting an increase of £2.220,000 million compared to the 2024/25 budget.
- 4.2.1 The budget included additional investment of £1.581million for additional staffing resource to support the service in moving from Good to Outstanding. Recruitment for most of these posts started in April 2025, and an update on progress will be provided in the next report.

Lead officer contact

Rebecca Cooper, Head of Improvement, Gun Wharf, 01634 336319
Rebecca.cooper@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50227723>
[Children's services inspection](#)

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50278326>
[Children's services focused visit](#)