

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

**Thursday, 8 January 2026**

**6.30pm to 8.45pm**

**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, 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:**

Esha Dosanjh (Medway Youth Council), Silas Hurren (Medway Youth Council), Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum) and Leanne Trotter (Healthwatch Medway)

**Substitutes:**

Councillors:  
Nestorov (Substitute for Animashaun)

**In Attendance:**

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  
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes  
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning  
Andrada Pepenel, Head of Provider Services  
Rebecca Smith, Lead Education Professional: Quality & Inclusion  
Roy Smith, Youth Service Operations Manager

**583 Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Animashaun.

**584 Record of meeting**

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

### 585 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

### 586 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

#### Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none

#### Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none

#### Other interests

Councillor Howcroft-Scott disclosed that she was a Trustee for Medway Parents and Carers Forum.

Councillor Jackson disclosed that she was a Trustee for Medway Parents and Carers Forum.

Councillor Nestorov disclosed that he was the Chair of Governors at Barnsole Primary School.

### 587 Meeting theme: Education

#### **Discussion:**

The Committee received a presentation on the items under this theme, and this was followed by questions and discussions.

**Retaking GCSE English and Maths** - it was commented that sixth forms did not always take on young people that did not pass GCSE English and Maths who wanted to study other subjects, and they had to go onto college to take English and Maths, when they should be able to attend sixth form to retake those subjects alongside other A-level subjects. The Committee was informed that some sixth forms did still take on pupils and allowed them to retake GCSE English and Maths alongside other subjects at A-level. Ultimately it was down to individual schools and providers to make the decision and determine their offer, a decision based on what was feasible for them to deliver as well as the young person's capability.

It was further commented that even if a young person had not passed GCSE English and Maths, they should not be prevented from taking other subjects, as taking other subjects was better than not being in education at all. The

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Committee was informed that discussions continued to take place with partners on the offer for young people. Schools could not be compelled to take on young people for sixth form education, it was difficult for schools to make sixth forms financially viable, and they needed to consider the number of courses offered as well as funding available. The service continued to work with schools to make sixth form provision and offer accessible for young people and feasible for schools.

**Exclusions** – in response to a comment that the report highlighted high exclusion rates and the impact on Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) figures, the officer informed the Committee that the suspensions and exclusions data presented were for 2023/24 and since then there had been significant progress made in reduction of permanent exclusions which would be evident in the validated published data for 2024/25. As a result of the revised Fair Access Protocol (FAP) schools Trusts had developed internal programmes of suspensions which enabled children to remain onsite and receive support rather than being sent offsite.

**Sharing of learning** – it was asked if the service was confident that sharing of good practice took place between schools. The Committee was informed that schools were viewed collectively, the school to school agenda focused on celebrating successes and highlighting this in correspondence such as in school bulletins. The local headteacher network worked proactively and supported each other, Academies participated and engaged with the schools forum and there was good collaboration and sharing of practice between maintained and academy schools in Medway.

**Tracking progress post Covid-** in response to a question on what provision had been put in place as some of the effects on young people following Covid was only now emerging and what support was in place for teaching and school staff, the officer said that work continued to be undertaken nationally to understand needs of children during that period as well as those born during at that time. On analysis of comparative data, there was no evidence of more of an effect of the impact of Covid on Medway children against those nationally during that period. Social communication issues of children as a result of Covid had now started to emerge and work was being undertaken with public health, speech and language, and other groups to address issues. There had been some benefit of the teaching strategies utilised during that period, such as understanding of virtual learning and development of increased online learning provision for parents and carers. Support for teachers was provided and continued to be provided through their individual school trusts.

**Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) outcomes** - there was concern regarding the performance of SEND children in Medway which were below national average in academic outcomes at every point of measure. Officers explained that at the recent inclusions conference, one of the areas of discussions was the use of data to tackle issues with disparity. Working with teachers and local provision on a way forward to meet the needs of young people was a priority and focus for educators. There was a commitment to work with Early Years providers to develop a plan to address academic outcomes.

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There were already plans in place for all other phases, however, these needed to be reviewed.

**SEND and NEET** – in response to a question on the number of SEND children that were NEET and what specific options were in place to encourage them to continue with education and training, the officer said that whilst there were no specific post16 plans in place, children with Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) as part of their plans had incorporated their aspirations for post16 such as securing internships. Young people without an EHCP could access further education such as A-levels or college courses.

It was further commented that many children from deprived areas as well as those that were Elective Home Educated (EHE) became NEET and it was asked how that was being addressed. The Committee was informed that there had been some work undertaken to improve understanding of the factors that led to NEET status for those cohort of children. The changes expected in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools' Bill would address issues with children being EHE as it would allow for a register to be kept of those children and more LA powers for children that were vulnerable. There was already targeted work being undertaken within the Information Advice Guidance (IAG) team who contacted families with children that were EHE to ensure they received information about their options post 16, as they missed out on crucial careers advice and guidance provided in schools.

**Early Years** – it was commented that there was evidence of good levels of achievement of developmental milestones in early years but learning outcomes were below national average and it was asked if this was due to teaching issues. The officer said that the 'Best Start in Life' initiative was welcomed due to the work being undertaken in moving children through the transitional stages of education. Leaders focused on transition from preschool, worked towards government targets and performance of children at the end of reception. Quality of teaching was also being looked into, to support improved quality interactions and building on what was already in place to ensure children achieved expected milestones.

### **a Annual Report on School Performance for the Academic Year 2024 to 2025**

#### **Discussion:**

Discussion of this item can be found at minute no 587.

#### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the Annual Report on School Performance for the Academic Year 2024 to 2025.

### **b Update on NEETs - Not in Employment, Education or Training**

#### **Discussion:**

Discussion of this item can be found at minute number 587.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the Update on NEETs - Not in Employment, Education or Training report.

**588 Medway Council Youth Service Peer Review Report**

**Discussion:**

The Head of Service – Provider Services introduced the report which provided a synopsis of the review completed by the National Youth Agency (NYA) in July 2025. The peer review identified strengths such as knowledge of the community and need, retainment of open access to youth service, targeted provisions and leadership.

Members then raised comments and questions including the following:

The Youth Service was commended on their inclusivity at all their events and the difference made to the lives of children and families across Medway.

Staff were viewed as role models and were instrumental in the support provided to children not in the school system or attending school for various reasons.

The Youth Service should continue to encourage young people that access their service to look into apprenticeship schemes to become future youth workers themselves and continue to give back.

**Mapping and Phasing** - in response to a question regarding the recommendation by the NYA on mapping and phasing of service provision, and if this had been completed, the Committee was informed that priorities included reviewing the needs assessment, stakeholder engagement, consultation and mapping of all the different elements that made up the youth offer. There has been some extensive work undertaken working with children's services to strengthen the participation strategy, and understanding of different needs to identify gaps in services.

It was further commented that mapping exercises had been completed across services over the years, and it was asked how the information previously gathered would be utilised. The officer said that it was not intended for a significant amount of time to be spent on mapping or duplication of work, as pointed out, mapping had taken place across services, the issue was that there was no central point for the information gathered. The exercise was being completed as it was crucial to know exactly what was happening across all sectors, including sectors such as faith and the voluntary sector as this improved awareness as well as the offer and access to extra provision for young people. Any information and support with this exercise would be welcomed.

**Interaction with schools** - in response to a question on what the relationship was with education providers in Medway, the Committee was informed that the service had a good relationship and worked extensively with some schools and Trusts. They were currently working on a number of projects with schools such as reduction of exclusions and with those at risk of youth offending.

**Recruitment and Retention**- in response to a question on what other teams could learn from the ability of the service to recruit and retain staff, the officer said that recruitment and retention of staff across services in general was always a challenge. The strength of youth work was that it is a community related provision. There was a very dedicated team of staff, many of whom had been in the service for a considerable number of years, and whilst this is not unique to Medway, it had been aided by the support received from the senior and political leadership. Staff support each other extensively despite the challenges with the work. The team were proud to be providing youth work in their community of Medway.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and the recommendations made by the National Youth Agency Peer Review Team.

**589 Regional Care Co-operative and Children's Residential Care Services Update**

**Discussion:**

The Head of Children's Services Commissioning and Placements introduced the report which detailed the progress made in the 'Homes and Future' and also with the residential care services. Medway officers ensured that their voice continued to be heard within the co-operative, made up of 16 LAs. The Regional Care Co-operative (RCC) had now set up as a community interest company under the 'Homes and Future' title to allow for some independence to be able to work separately as well as jointly with other local authorities.

Members then raised comments and questions including the following:

The standards and delivery of service at Eden House and Parklands was commended for being exceptional.

Staff abilities to sensitively liaise between the service and families was commended for being outstanding.

**Grants** - in response to a comment that the report referenced the £900k grant for Aut Even which must be spent by March 2026, and what the likelihood of the unused part of the grant being returned to the DfE, the officer said that the project was on target with its scheduling, with some of the early stages already completed

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The Finance Business Partner- Children's, added that in the event that the funds were not fully utilised by the March 2026 deadline. The local authority would submit a request for the funds to be retained on the basis of having met the requirements for substantial compliance of the project.

**Delays to opening of Eden house** – it was commented that there has been delays to the Eden house project and it was asked what lessons had been learnt. The officer acknowledged delays were experienced with the project and many lessons had been learned, however, some of the delays were outside of the local authority control. Some delays were experienced as a result of Ofsted timelines, which had since improved.

**In house provision for complex needs** - it was asked more could be done to improve resource in Medway to prevent the number of young people with complex needs having to receive care outside of Medway. The Committee was informed that work was being undertaken across networks to positively influence the market. There were also conversations across the RCC on how to share resources.

The Head of Children's Services Commissioning and Placements acknowledged that staff at EDEN were inspirational and had created an environment where young people felt safe, they always went the extra mile and deserved recognition and accolade for their hard work.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted the continued engagement and membership of the Regional Care Co-operative (RCC).
- b) The Committee noted the progress and plans for development of Medway Residential Children's homes.

## **590 CSC Continuous Improvement Journey Update**

### **Discussion:**

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care presented the report which provided an update on the continuous improvement journey since the service was rated good in 2023, and particularly over the last year. It was highlighted that:

- Two Ofsted focused visits had taken place in 2025 with good outcomes.
- External reviews had been invited for the Youth Service and the Fostering Service.
- The monitoring of progress of the continuous improvement journey was overseen by the Improvement Board.
- The service continued to prioritise recruitment and retention.

Members then raised comments and questions including the following:

The service was commended for all its hard and transformational work.

The priorities and focus of the service was evident throughout the report and on interaction with social workers and other staff at different events, it was clear that they were proud to work for Medway and were here for the long term. This provided assurance on the level of service being received by children and young people in Medway.

The feedback received from carers and foster carers on the difference the Mocking Bird approach had made was inspiring.

**Staff turnover** – it was asked what was being done to address issues with staff turnover and whether it was still difficult to retain staff. The Committee was informed that the overall retention of staff had improved. There were particular services over different periods which experienced more movement. There had been recent recruitment of a permanent service manager post which meant that all service managers were now permanent staff members. The service continued to ‘grow our own’ in terms of social workers and practitioners as the aspiration was to retain staff. There had also been a strong focus on the induction programme, for which there had been positive feedback received from staff.

**Ofsted observation** – it was commented that Ofsted referred to variance and fragility in the practices for children, and it was asked what improvements were being made to address concerns. The Assistant Director Children’s Social Care said that this was mainly in relations to recruitment and retention of staff and the term used by Ofsted was ‘fragility of workforce’. This was in reference to permanency of staff and continuity of practice. An induction program had been devised for interim and locum staff which supported the quality of work expected by Medway, to be achieved within a 3 month period. It was however expressed that until consistency and performance in the workforce was achieved, fragility would remain. The service continued to work towards a more permanent workforce which would in turn translate to stability in service. It was important to remain honest and transparent about any issues experienced in the service.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

## **591 Work programme**

### **Discussion:**

The work programme was presented for information.

The Democratic Services Officer referenced the efforts being made to recruit co-opted members and asked for Members’ support.

### **Decision:**

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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:**

**Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer**

Telephone: 01634 332104

Email: [democratic.services@medway.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@medway.gov.uk)