

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 March 2026

Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Report from: Dr. David Whiting Director of Public Health

Authors: Aeilish Geldenhuys Public Health Principal and Strategic Head
of Public Health

Hannah Christie Partnership Commissioning Programme Lead
for Children and Young People Mental Health and Emotional
Wellbeing – Medway.

Summary

This report provides the members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Medway Therapeutic Alliance procurement and contract mobilisation.

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Committee is asked to note that North Kent Mind (NKM) have been successfully awarded the contract for the Medway Therapeutic Alliance Service.

1.2 The Committee is asked to note the mobilisation strategy for the launch of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance, on 01 April 2026.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The report falls within the Council Strategic priorities including “healthy active communities” and “all children achieving their best in school”.

2.2 The report also aligns with the People Strategy, in particular the priority “Children and young people in Medway will develop well”.

2.3 The budget for the Therapeutic Alliance will be pooled from Medway Council existing investment into specialist CAMHS services and NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (NHKMICB) Mental health Standards Investment funding aligned to the NHS Long-Term Plan.

2.4 In order to achieve this the Medway Therapeutic Alliance will work within the scope of the following frameworks and strategies:

- NHS Long Term Plan
- Kent and Medway Local Transformation Plan (LTP) in line with the Medway Specific LTP
- Medway Council Plan
- NHS Kent and Medway's Children and Young People's ICS Strategy
- Medway's Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Core 20 Plus 5
- SEND Strategy
- Parenting Strategy
- I-THRIVE framework
- Trauma Informed Practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences and clinical reference group documents

3 Background

3.1 The NHS Long Term Plan for 2024/2025 recognised the need for appropriate and timely mental health support for children and young people. Locally, within Kent and Medway this was further supported by the Kent and Medway Local Transformation Plan (Kent and Medway LTP) led by the NHSKMICB.

Priorities within the LTP are:

- Increase in community-based mental health services to meet the needs of more children and young people across Kent and Medway.
- Maintaining the waiting time standards in the eating disorder services
- 24/7 access to mental health crisis support reaching 100% coverage of all children and young people.
- Increase in number of Mental Health Support teams for children and young people in education settings
- Improving transition through a comprehensive offer of support for young adults.

3.2 In March 2024 the NHSKMICB shared a paper with the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlining a proposal to recommission children and young people Mental Health services. The proposal included three lots: Lot 1 the current specialist mental health services provided by North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT); Lot 2 Mental Health Support in Schools Teams and Lot 3 a new Therapeutic Alliance to provide 'Getting Help' support in line with the i-THRIVE framework (see Appendix 1).

3.3 The concept of the Therapeutic Alliance was to introduce a streamlined approach to commissioned mental health support services for children and young people with mild to moderate mental health and emotional wellbeing needs.

3.4 A decision was later taken and agreed at Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to commission the Therapeutic Alliance

with a separate service in Medway aligned to the social care and education geography of the unitary authority building on the progress made by Partnership Commissioning with locally commissioned services such as the Short Intervention Therapy Service and Building Resilience and Validating Emotions Service.

- 3.5 The Medway Therapeutic Alliance was designed and procured through a competitive procurement process at Medway Council, with a Section 75 agreement between Medway Council and NBSKMICB in place in relation to the pooled budget.
- 3.6 Following the competitive process for procurement, NKM were shortlisted as the most successful provider in terms of quality and finance and provided an excellent person-centred presentation. The final decision to award NKM the contract was made at the November (2025) Cabinet meeting.
- 3.7 The Medway Therapeutic Alliance brings together several smaller contracts into one place, some locally and some across Kent and Medway, with the aim of making it easier for families and professionals to navigate the support available for mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- 3.8 Therefore, the Medway Therapeutic Alliance service will provide 5–18-year-olds (inclusive of the 19th birthday and up to the age of 25 years for those with special educational needs and those who are care leavers) with NICE evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health and emotional wellbeing needs. This service will include priority pathways for those Children in Care, Care Leavers and those in the Youth Justice Service or at risk of re-offending as well as focusing on at risk groups of vulnerable children and young people.
- 3.9 The contract model will be a lead provider (NKM) who are sub-contracting the following aspects to locally commissioned services. Despite the sub-contracting elements, NKM will have overall responsibility for the contract, and will ensure that any child or young person who accesses the services below will have a streamlined journey:
 - Digital offer of support: Kooth and BFB Labs
 - Peer support and mentoring: SALUS and Young Lives Foundation
 - Positive Behaviour Support- Nick Barratt Consultancy
 - Specialist Traumatic Bereavement Services- CHUMS
- 3.10 NKM will directly provide support for LGBTQIA+ children and young people, and care leavers as part of the core offer, ensuring those who are part of 'At Risk' groups and vulnerable are able to access a range of different interventions and therapy.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 Mobilisation of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance commenced mid-December (2025), with a go LIVE date planned for 01 April 2026. This aligns with the re-commissioning/transfer of the specialist mental health services, the ending of current contracts across Medway (planned for 31 March 2026) and the commencement of the Kent Therapeutic Alliance on 01 April 2026. A weekly core mobilisation meeting has been established between NKM and Partnership Commissioners.
- 4.2 In addition to the core mobilisation meetings, sub-groups have been established to support the development of the service delivery through robust consultation and engagement. Members include Children's Social Care, Youth Justice, Education & SEND, Medway Parent Carer Forum (MPCF), Medway's Youth Council, Sub-contracting and Existing Providers as well as Specialist Mental Health Services.
- 4.3 The current focus of mobilisation is to ensure all children and young people open to existing services are supported to finish their treatment/intervention. For children and young people who cannot do so, NKM are working closely with those providers to ensure there is a timely, safe and effective transfer to the Medway Therapeutic Alliance.
- 4.4 With regard to ensuring the wider system are aware of the pending changes and to support the navigation of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance, NKM will be creating webinars from February 2026. These webinars will be for Medway professionals and parents/carers that will provide up-to-date information on the delivery of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance and how to access and refer. These webinars will be recorded and shared via Partnership Commissioning and on the webpage for the Medway Therapeutic Alliance. As part of mobilisation NKM will also be co-producing communications with children and young people, ensuring all communication is fully accessible and child friendly. This will include videos on their webpage detailing the Medway Therapeutic Alliance service offer, as well as FAQ's, additional support and resources.
- 4.5 As part of the wider programme of work across the NHSKMICB, NKM will be part of the 'Mental Health Collaborative' (MHC). The MHC is a partnership between NHSKMICB, Medway Council, Kent County Council, NKM and Salus (the Kent Therapeutic Alliance provider) and NELFT (the current specialist mental health provider). The aim of the MHC is to explore the future of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing services across Kent and Medway, focusing on transformation to fully embed early intervention and prevention.
- 4.6 North Kent Mind Model
 - 4.6.1 NKM are the successful lead provider in the Medway Therapeutic Alliance (see Diagram 1).

- 4.6.2 NKM has a strong track record with children and young people aged 5–18 (up to 25 for care leavers and those with SEND), delivering i-THRIVE aligned therapy, workshops, peer support and consultation. From July 2024–25, they supported 910 children and young people in Medway through offers such as Short Intervention Therapy (SIT) for care-experienced children and young people, BRAVE (Building Resilience and Validating Emotions) for low mood/anxiety, counselling and Wellbeing Coaching in over 17 schools.
- 4.6.3 The model will operate a ‘no wrong door’ policy, so no young person will be turned away without support. All referrals will be reviewed by trained Screening leads within the Single Point of Access (SPA), overseen by the Clinical Lead who will review any high-risk cases. High risk referrals are triaged the same day (within four hours), priority group referrals within three working days and routine within five.
- 4.6.4 There are 5 triage outcomes pathways:
- Self-Help Only: children and young people receive a co-produced care plan with access to digital psychoeducation, drop-in groups and a ‘What’s On’ guide for informal and preventative support.
 - Digital Support: Kooth, Lumi Nova or Service Website Resources
 - Drop-In Group Support: focused on building resilience, coping strategies and social connection; delivered in trusted settings.
 - Assessment Required (Targeted Interventions): appointments are scheduled promptly following triage and all children and young people are supported under our Waiting Well approach
 - Urgent/Risk Pathway: Immediate risk cases receive safety plans with consent. Referrals are made to CAMHS, Crisis Team or safeguarding front door.
- 4.6.5 NKM have included care co-ordinator capacity within the service offer to support care-experienced children and young people, care leavers, LGBTQIA+ young people and those at risk of offending. Coordinators will work closely with personal advisors, virtual school and the care leavers team. All children and young people from priority groups will have a named Coordinator, who will offer regular check-ins (more frequently where risk or need is higher) and help children and young people stay engaged and feel in control. Plans will be co-produced and reviewed at key points to remain relevant.
- 4.6.6 To manage demand and ensure no children and young people are left unsupported, NKM will adopt a proactive ‘Waiting Well’ model. This means that support begins from triage, not first intervention, with open access to self-help and group-based support. This helps to keep children and young people supported whilst waiting, reducing anxiety and encouraging self-management. All children and young people, regardless of referral outcome, receive a digital welcome pack and immediate access to:
- Psychoeducational materials
 - Guided self-help resources
 - Drop-in groups
 - A ‘What’s On’ guide for informal, community-based support

4.6.7 All accepted referrals receive a strengths-based assessment within four weeks of triage, in line with the specification. Assessments will be offered in person or online based on children and young people preference. Practitioners are trained in trauma-informed, person-centred practice. Assessments explore emotional and behavioural needs, family and social context, support networks and any risk factors such as suicidal thoughts, self-harm or aggression.

4.6.8 The support offer and personal care plan is then aligned with the children and young people's goals, needs and preferences. Interventions span both the Getting Advice and Getting Help quadrants of i-THRIVE. Some support begins immediately after triage (e.g. drop-in groups, digital tools), while others require a full assessment and practitioner allocation.

4.6.9 Support options include:

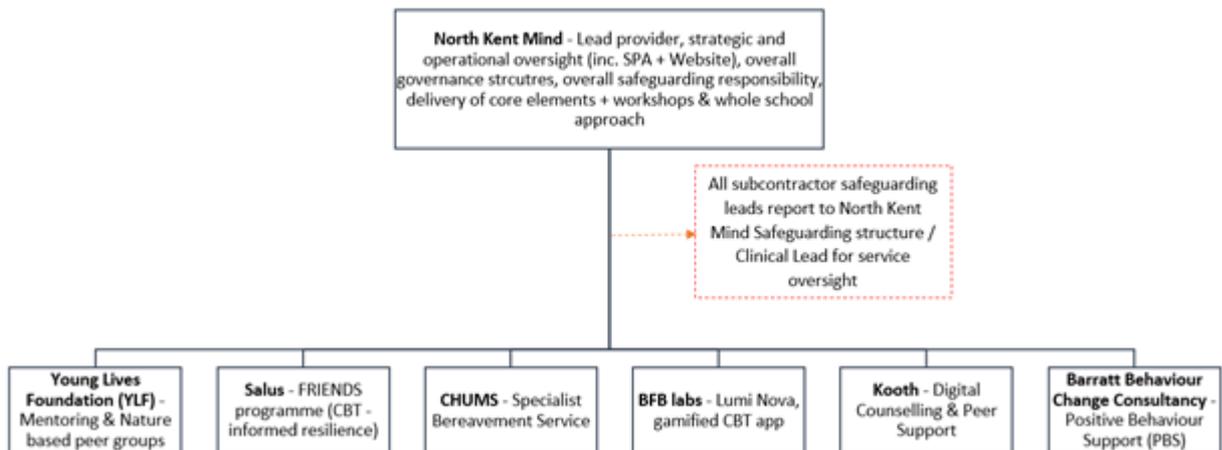
- Kooth – Digital Support Offer
 - 1:1 anonymous text-based counselling, moderated peer forums and curated self-help content for children and young people aged 10–25
 - Moderated topic-specific spaces (e.g. identity, anxiety, school stress) available 24/7
- BFB Labs – Lumi Nova Digital Therapy
 - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy informed therapeutic game for 7–12-year-olds focused on anxiety, psychoeducation and exposure therapy
 - Inclusive format suitable for neurodivergent children and young people or those with SEND
- Peer Mentoring and Support
 - Trauma-informed 1:1 and group mentoring for care-experienced children and young people or those at risk of offending
 - Informal peer group support using creative or nature-based settings
- Salus – Intensive Mentoring Pathway
 - Structured, trauma-informed mentoring for children and young people with emerging or escalating needs, building emotional literacy, coping skills and engagement
 - Provides a step-up from open-access or lower-intensity mentoring above, supporting children and young people who require more focused and sustained intervention
- North Kent Mind
 - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – evidence-based support targeting unhelpful thoughts and behaviours
 - Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) informed interventions – emotional regulation, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness skills
 - Counselling – relational support to explore feelings, build insight and support change
 - Creative therapies – art, play and non-verbal expression, particularly for younger or neurodivergent children and young people
 - Active Monitoring – brief, guided self-help co-produced with children and young people via National Mind, rooted in psychoeducation and emotional regulation

- Wellbeing coaching – strengths-based sessions focused on building agency, hope and resilience
- LGBTQIA+ safe spaces - creative sessions, led by trained staff and/or volunteers with lived experience. Targeted parent/carer drop in for peer support and shared experiences
- Barratt Behaviour Change – Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)
 - Functional Behaviour Assessments and co-produced Behaviour Support Plans
 - Coaching in real-life settings such as home or school to support consistent behavioural strategies
 - PBS parent programmes to build capacity for positive regulation and connection at home
- CHUMS – Traumatic Bereavement Support
 - Trauma-informed group programmes, including peer support, memory work, creative expression and storytelling
 - 1:1 grief-informed support, including therapeutic or coaching-based sessions tailored to the child's experience
 - Psychoeducation and emotional support workshops to help children and young people understand and process feelings such as grief, guilt and anger, including for those with early signs of complex grief
 - Parent/carer group offering supportive spaces for those supporting a bereaved child at home or in school

4.8.10 All interventions will be available in digital and paper formats, with flexible delivery options including evening appointments up to 6pm and Saturday sessions running until 1pm. Sessions will take place in North Kent Mind offices, Medway Family Hubs, schools and approved community venues, ensuring support is accessible in familiar, local settings.

4.8.11 In addition to the above support offer, NKM have committed to ensuring the Medway Therapeutic Alliance is shaped, led and continuously improved by those with lived experience of emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. North Kent Mind will appoint a named Lived Experience Lead to deliver this function, with a focus on embedding co-production, lived experience insight and the voices of children, young people and families into every aspect of service design, delivery and review.

Diagram 1: Therapeutic Alliance Structure



5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Workforce: TUPE	<p>There is a risk that not all existing staff will be eligible for TUPE into the Medway Therapeutic Alliance (based on roles available and skillset/qualifications) thus increasing the risk of redundancy.</p> <p>This may also impact staffing levels and increase the need for additional recruitment.</p>	<p>NKM have employed a HR TUPE consultant to manage the TUPE process for existing eligible staff.</p> <p>All existing staff who are eligible for TUPE are being met with by NKM and TUPE consultant for 1-1 to establish where they might sit within the service.</p> <p>Any staff member not appropriate for the roles available (based on the role/skillset and qualifications) will be offered (where appropriate) another role within NKM.</p> <p>Any staff member not suitable for</p>	B-III

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<p>available roles will be made redundant by NKM who have already set aside the funding to cover this potential cost.</p> <p>The planning of TUPE and recruitment is being managed in parallel to ensure that roles are out to advert as soon as possible so the service is fully staffed by 01 April 2026.</p> <p>TUPE will be finalised before 01 April 2026 as per NKM's mobilisation plan and to meet the legal aspects of the TUPE process.</p>	
<p>Workforce: Recruitment of new staff</p>	<p>There is a risk that not all new roles will be recruited to before 01 April, impacting on the service delivery that can be provided.</p>	<p>NKM have already as per mobilisation plan, put a number of roles out to advert (which had been prepared in case they were awarded the contract).</p> <p>NKM have a bank of staff to utilise in situations where they have not fully recruited or have staff vacancies as an interim measure.</p> <p>NKM are planning to ensure that the core delivery of the service will be</p>	<p>B-III</p>

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<p>delivered on 01 April, with smaller elements being postponed if they are not fully recruited into all roles. This would for example be the workshops which would be appropriate to develop over time.</p> <p>NKM have ensured that the system enabler roles are recruited to by internal staff and/or any staff eligible for TUPE.</p> <p>NKM have already ensured that for the services being sub-contracted staff are available to commence on 01 April.</p> <p>Induction training prepared to onboard staff in a timely manner.</p>	
<p>Communication and Engagement: Launch of Service/Changes to Service Delivery</p>	<p>There is a risk that the communication around the pending changes is not shared appropriately or in a timely way. This has the potential to lead to anxiety in the system, increase of complaints and reduction in children and young people accessing emotional wellbeing support.</p>	<p>NKM are working closely with partnership commissioners, MPCF, children and young people, parents/carers and partners to develop the communication for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Closure of existing services 	<p>C-III</p>

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Launch of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance <p>Co-produced communication is being created to ensure it meets the needs of the wider system. (With parents/carers and children and young people).</p> <p>A 'Comms and Engagement' Sub-Group has been established to develop, review and share the appropriate communication.</p> <p>NKM are members of the NHSMKICB Comms and Engagement Group which will support the development and sharing of communication.</p> <p>Partnership Commissioners are sharing all information via the Medway Local Transformation Plan Meeting/with members.</p> <p>NKM are creating webinars to present the Medway Therapeutic Alliance to Medway</p>	

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		<p>professionals and parents/carers.</p> <p>NKM will have a dedicated webpage to the Medway Therapeutic Alliance up and running by March 2026, with information accessible formats.</p>	
<p>Contract: Delay of signed contract by 01 April 2026</p>	<p>There is a risk that the delay of the signed contract impacts the service delivery as well as the sub-contracting elements.</p>	<p>Medway Council have provided NKM with a letter of intent (via the Kent Business Portal) this is sufficient from a Council perspective to enable the provider to proceed with sub-contracting arrangements.</p> <p>Partnership are working closely with category management and Legal colleagues to process the contract.</p>	<p>B-IV</p>
<p>Service Delivery: Case Transfers</p>	<p>There is a risk that the transfer of children and young people from existing services to NKM will be delayed or have gaps in information.</p> <p>In addition, there is a risk that children and young people experience multiple transitions at the</p>	<p>Early planning has been implemented, Partnership Commissioners led on collation of all existing services waiting list information.</p> <p>Provider meetings established to review caseloads/transfer lists.</p>	<p>C-III</p>

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	early stages of mobilisation.	<p>Warm handovers to be completed.</p> <p>Clear data template and standardised handover templates developed.</p> <p>Clear communication and transition protocols implemented.</p> <p>Overlap of services, to ensure children and young people are merged into the Medway Therapeutic Alliance before 01 April 2026.</p>	
<p>Governance: Safeguarding, SoP, Escalation Routes</p>	<p>There is a risk that policies and procedures including Safeguarding are not established by 01 April 2026, due to timing and sub-contracting element.</p>	<p>Meetings completed already to cross reference the service specification and NKM's bid to develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). NKM meeting with sub-contractors to ensure individual SoPs are developed that align.</p> <p>NKM part of the MHC Steering Group which is developing processes for children and young people who need to be stepped up or down from</p>	D-II

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		specialist mental health services. Safeguarding is a standing agenda item and Safeguarding Strategy developed by NKM Director.	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Consultation and engagement took place over an 18-month period across Kent and Medway, led by NHSKMICB commissioners, Medway Council Partnership Commissioners and the NHSKMICB Lived Experience Lead. In addition, within Medway children and young people, families and Medway Parent Carer Forum engaged through face to face and virtual methods.
- 6.2 Engagement consisted of events such as the Big Conversation, the Medway children and young people Mental health event, the youth summit as well as summer and autumn activities. 487 children and young people and families were engaged, with 981 contributions provided through poems, drawings, podcasts and short films as well as feedback on patient experiences through an online survey called 'Have your say' which was hosted by NHSKMICB.
- 6.3 In addition, children and young people and families in Medway were consulted on the proposed model of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance as well as relevant elements of the service specification. The feedback provided was valuable in the further development of the service, and those who engaged were kept updated of changes and next steps.
- 6.4 Stakeholders and partners were engaged and consulted with through webinars, designed to provide an overview of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance as well as to collate feedback and recommendations. Key partners which included Children's Social Care, Education, SEND, Youth Service, Youth Justice Service and MPCF were also provided with the draft service specification with a request to provide additional feedback.

- 6.5 Informal and formal market engagement events were held in Medway, including virtual and face-face workshops to better understand the market and gain their views. These events were positively received by the providers, who supported the lead provider model, with sub-contracting elements. In addition, Partnership Commissioners were able to shape the service specification based on the feedback and recommendations.
- 6.6 Children and young people from Medway Youth Council, MPCF, and professionals from Children's Social Care, NHSKMICB Looked After Children's Team and NHSKMICB SEND Team supported the evaluation as part of the competitive procurement process. This included the development of questions in relation to children and young people, parents and carers, Children in Care, and children and young people in the Youth Justice Service as well as evaluating the provider responses.
- 6.7 As part of the mobilisation plan, North Kent Mind are engaging with children and young people and their families in Medway. This will be to ensure that there is co-production from the outset in relation to service design and delivery. This work will feed into the Comms and Engagement sub-group, which will review the progress. Members include MPCF, Specialist Mental Health Services, Youth Council, and SEND.
- 6.8 Examples of engagement and co-production will include communication regarding the launch of the service, service name, correspondence, poster design, delivery of workshops as well as preferred methods of communication. The Comms and Engagement sub-group will feed into the Core Mobilisation Meetings, which are held weekly.
- 6.9 NKM are also members of the NHSKMICB children and young people Comms and Engagement Group, to ensure communication and engagement is aligned to the Kent Therapeutic Alliance and the Kent Therapeutic Support Service, both provided by Salus. Specialist children and young people mental health services will also be present at these meetings, to ensure a unified response for children and young people mental health services across Kent and Medway.
- 6.10 NKM are also members of the Quarterly Co-production meetings led by the Child Health Commissioning Team, to ensure they work in partnership with key partners and stakeholders across Medway. This will enable NKM to reduce duplication of co-production, have opportunities to work across sector and share information on their co-production projects.

7. Climate change implications

- 7.1 There are no implications as a result of this report.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The Medway Therapeutic Alliance will be funded via a pooled budget. This will be made up from Medway Council's existing revenue at a total of £426,000

which is currently invested into the specialist CAMHS service and £895,869 from NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board, through the Mental Health Investment Standards funding. A section 75 agreement is being drafted between Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 Under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, the procurement is a Process 3 procurement (Rule 18), and the process set out in this report meets the requirements for such procurements. The procurement was advertised on the Kent Business Portal, in compliance with rule 18.4 of the CPRs.
- 9.2 Medway Council has the power under the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 and the Localism Act 2011 to enter into contracts in connection with the performance of its functions.
- 9.3 This report has been presented as a Process 3 medium risk procurement, and therefore the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Procurement Board will therefore set the risk and reporting stages for the remainder of the procurement process for Gateway 4.
- 9.4 The S75 agreement which underpins the Better Care Fund, will need to be updated, following approval from Cabinet and before the start of the contract on 1 April 2026.

Lead officer contact

Hannah Christie, Programme Lead for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing, hannah.christie@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1: i-THRIVE Framework <https://implementingthrive.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/THRIVE-Framework-for-system-change-2019NEW-2.pdf>

Background Paper

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE O&S 7 March 2024 Children and Young People's Mental Health Future Contracts
(<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=5671&T=0>)