

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 August 2026

Early Years Update Report

Report from: Dr. Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive

Author: Rebecca Smith, Lead Education Professional

Summary

This report provides an update on progress on the recommendations previously shared following a commissioned review by the Local Government Association in June 2025.

1. Recommendation

1.1. The Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. Early Years provision is a statutory responsibility under the Childcare Act 2006, which requires local authorities to secure sufficient childcare and ensure access to early education for all eligible children. The Early Years improvement activity outlined in this report supports the Council Plan priorities around giving children the best start in life, reducing inequalities and improving school readiness.

2.2. This report provides the committee with a progress update on the delivery of the Early Years Improvement Programme and the actions undertaken to improve outcomes for children, families and providers across Medway.

3. Background

3.1. The Priorities within the Early Years action plan have been drawn from Early Years SEND review and are in line with SEND Improvement Priorities, the Best Start in Life (BSiL) programme across Education & SEND and Public Health directorates and the Education and SEND Ambitions action plan.

3.2. There are 9 priority areas, updates against each are provided within this report.

4. Priority 1 – Vision & Strategy

- 4.1. Work at pace to develop a vision and strategy, co-produced with families and stakeholders, for EY and SEND that places the youngest children at the centre

Progress to date:

- 4.2. Co-producing working definitions of child and parent across all workstreams to ensure consistency and a child centred approach. Progress is being made in coproducing a clear and consistent vision in relation to 'school readiness'; how this is defined, measured and embedded across services.
- 4.3. Extensive programme of visits to childminders, PVIs and school-based nurseries to strengthen relationships and understand local need.
- 4.4. Formal link established with TINEY childminder agency (16 childminders in Medway).
- 4.5. Development of a childminder stay and play network: now running four weekly sessions (Gun Lane, Riverside, Deanwood), with expansion to Hoo planned for autumn.
- 4.6. Strengthened cross agency relationships with Public Health, Medway Community Healthcare (MCH), and Speech and Language Therapy service (SaLT).
- 4.7. Sector wide questionnaire distributed; 100+ responses outlining strengths, priorities, emerging needs and sector challenges.
- 4.8. Family Information Service linked and embedded within the Local Offer. Further developments identified.
- 4.9. Strengthened partnership with the Kent & Medway Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs; training and support offer regularly promoted to all Medway settings.
- 4.10. Consultation underway across Health and Education to develop an integrated 2-year check, scheduled autumn rollout.
- 4.11. Established process across Education and Commissioning teams analysing referral rates across EY settings and consequently identify and respond to CPD needs.
- 4.12. Collaborative programme with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been designed to provide a three-month summer project supporting mothers of 2–3 year olds to access EY education and family services, delivered at Chatham Library (July–September), including sessions with Hubs and EY settings.

- 4.13. Formation of the Early Years Partnership Board; a multi-agency strategic group that helps improve outcomes for young children (particularly those aged 0–5) by bringing together partners from education, health, childcare, family support, and the voluntary sector.
- 4.14. An Early Years strategy will be published in December 26.

5. Priority 2 – Data & Needs Analysis

- 5.1. Gather and analyse data to identify those most at need considering intersectionality, to ensure resources are targeted, taking account of sufficiency.

Progress to date:

- 5.2. Collaborative work across Public Health and Education to build systems, including a Best Start in Life (BSiL) dashboard to track KPIs and performance.
- 5.3. Use of significantly increased granular data base to inform decision making, incorporating: an overview of sufficiency of Early Years provision (child minders, private, voluntary and independent settings and school based nurseries), Quality Assurance visits to EY settings, mapping of Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) profile, Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes per school, allocation of Special Education Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF), Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), and sharing data with health partnership.
- 5.4. Ongoing discussions about developing an integrated Best Start in Life data platform across Health, Social Care and Education using a range of information / intelligence measures including obesity, oral health, 2yr old checks and infant feeding rates across different wards. Work is on-going to broaden existing data base and oversight to include Eys where currently only school-based data is captured.
- 5.5. Review of uptake of places and working parent funding in relation to sufficiency data focusing on:
 - children with SEND only claiming 15 hours despite eligibility for 30; exploring barriers and ensuring communication re entitlement
 - uptake of funded (entitlement) places for 2-year-old children for families receiving additional support

6. Priority 3 – SENIF

- 6.1. Develop a transparent, responsive and robust approach to SENIF to meet need.

Progress to date:

- 6.2. The Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) process has been strengthened based on provider feedback, moved to a single application form; sector feedback has been positive.
- 6.3. From September 26, SENIF panels will be held online with sector representatives involved in decision making.
- 6.4. Coproduction with stakeholders a document 'Ordinarily Available Provision in the Early Years' (OAP) to define the expected baseline of inclusive provision that every Early Years setting in Medway should be able to offer. The document intends to provide a supportive framework for children with additional needs before providers seek more specialist support.
- 6.5. From January 27, aligned with the publication of the OAP, SENIF will move to a banded funding system to better meet children's needs.
- 6.6. Collaboration underway with external organisations including the University of East London (ISEY) and Oxford Assessment programme (NELI) a leading national communication and language programme for Early Years, to inform content within OAP, ensuring leading evidence-based approach supporting a consistent strategy across the sector.

7. Priority 4 – Joint Commissioning with Health

- 7.1. Extend joint commissioning arrangements with health, including pooling resources to enable better EY service integration.

Progress to date:

- 7.2. Working with Medway lead speech and language therapist (SaLT) and Commissioning to identify areas of need and strengthen joint pathways.
- 7.3. Strengthened partnership with Health colleagues to support the OAP professional working group.
- 7.4. Developing integrated process for the 2 year health check and separately, the 2-year progress check that are consistent, recognised and used collaboratively across Health and Early Years settings.

- 7.5. Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index

8. Priority 5 – EY Learning Environments

- 8.1. Invest in developing the EY learning environments to better meet the needs of children with SEND.

Progress to date:

- 8.2. Targeted allocation of EY Inclusion Funding (EYIF) to settings with greater funding directed to settings with high Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) ratings.
- 8.3. Partnership Transition programme underway with five schools with historic low Good Level of Development outcomes (end of Reception year) working with reception class teachers and EY settings to identify and remove barriers to learning and services. Specific focus on addressing challenges for vulnerable groups of children.
- 8.4. Working at pace with evidence based programmes to roll out targeted interventions for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including the Transition Programme with targeted schools.
- 8.5. The Quality Assurance framework has been extended to include a specific Early Years focus: QA visits underway in provisions with children allocated EHCPs to improve quality for children with complex needs.
 - Data shows only 33% of children with EHCPs achieve GLD, informing targeted improvement work.
- 8.6. The DfE School-Based Nursery (SBN) Programme Phase 3 aims to increase access to high-quality early years education and childcare by creating and expanding nursery provision in areas where it is most needed, particularly disadvantaged communities. Working in partnership with schools, expressions of interest have been reviewed based on sufficiency data in relation to available childcare provision, inclusion and targeted areas supporting disadvantaged children.
 - Areas for consideration for phase 3 school based nurseries fall within the Peninsular, Luton and Chatham.
 - Linking school based nurseries to Work Experience pathways for NEETs, in collaboration with the post 16 team.
 - Driving uptake of 2 year Early Learning Funding by examining barriers such as limited sessional offers; this is informing school based nursery planning.

9. Priority 6 – Local Offer

- 9.1. Develop a mechanism for the local offer to enable families of EY children with SEND to navigate the system and access the support and services.

Progress to date:

- 9.2. Work continues to refine information within the Local Offer to incorporate clear links with the Family Information Service directory to ensure families are provided with clear information about what support is available across education, health, and social care services in Medway.

- 9.3. Coproduction with parents / carers for the Ordinarily Available Provision for Early Years document is central to this priority.

10. Priority 7 – Universal Offer & Graduated Response

- 10.1. Refocus the EY provision to enable a rich universal offer with clear advice on ordinarily available provision and a graduated response to need.

Progress to date:

- 10.2. OAP Early Years document in development through collaboration with stakeholders.
- 10.3. Regular SENCO forums delivered to provide briefings, support training and development.
- 10.4. Discussions with FE provider to develop a bespoke course to upskill practitioners in delivering and implementing support.
- 10.5. Partnership with Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs; specific focus on training for the sector including strengthening quality of teaching and interactions, particularly in communication, language and Personal Social Emotional Development (PSED).

11. Priority 8 – Multi Disciplinary Team

- 11.1. Establish a multi-disciplinary team approach with the right skills and level of support matched to need, including transition.

Progress to date:

- 11.2. Strengthened relationships across the Early Years SEND team, MCH and Public Health.
- 11.3. In addition to the targeted schools Transition programme, there are strengthened transition pathways for children with emerging needs through introduction of MY Path approach in collaboration with Educational Psychologists.
- 11.4. Early years workforce training programme delivered and on-going.
- 11.5. Appointment of the Early Years Transformation Lead.
- 11.6. Recruitment underway for Early Years Inclusion lead working in Hubs to support families, early years settings and schools.
- 11.7. In line with national changes, the existing Wrap Around Childcare (WAC) officer role now incorporates wider initiatives including Free Breakfast Clubs and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme under the umbrella of

the School Age Childcare initiative. This aims to improve oversight and support to schools and childcare providers in offering consistent, high quality and accessible services before and after the school day.

12. Priority 9 – Training & Leadership Development

- 12.1. Develop an integrated training and leadership support offer to build capacity within the sector to deliver the EY and SEND strategy.

Progress to date:

- 12.2. Training delivered for all EY SEND Officers, sensory teams and educational psychologists. Ongoing programme of training is scheduled on a regular basis moving forwards.
- 12.3. Universal offer and ensuring consistent approach to support children with school readiness; utilising and promoting system leadership and school to school support.
- 12.4. Training delivered for reception class teachers on EYFS and effective assessment.
- 12.5. Training on the 2-year progress check delivered to early years settings in July.
- 12.6. Revised Early Years team structure.
- 12.7. Moving to a new model of working for SEND (Inclusion) Officers which is impact focused and setting led.
- 12.8. Embedded professional network and development opportunities for the Early Years Transformation Lead.

13. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Fragmented SEND support in Early Years	Inconsistent implementation of SEND support across Early Years settings may result in children not receiving appropriate support and intervention at the earliest opportunity.	Implement the Ordinarily Available Provision framework, continue development of the Early Years Strategy and maintain oversight through the Early Years Partnership Board.	B 3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Insufficient SEND expertise in the Early Years workforce	Workforce knowledge and confidence may vary across settings, impacting the quality of inclusive practice and support for children with additional needs.	Deliver the ongoing Early Years training programme, SENCO forums, leadership development and partnership work with Stronger Practice Hubs.	B 2
Inadequate multi-agency collaboration	Delays in information sharing and coordinated support between education, health and other partners may affect outcomes for children and families.	Continue development of integrated working arrangements through the Best Start in Life programme, Early Years Partnership Board and strengthened commissioning arrangements.	C 3
Increasing demand for SEND support	Rising numbers of children requiring SEND support may increase pressures on Early Years settings and local authority resources.	Implement revised SENIF arrangements, develop the Ordinarily Available Provision framework and monitor demand through data analysis and sufficiency planning.	B 2
Limited uptake of funded Early Years entitlements	Eligible families may not access funded childcare and early education places, reducing the impact of early intervention and school readiness initiatives.	Continue targeted promotion through the Family Information Service, Family Hubs and community engagement activities, including targeted projects with partner agencies.	C 3
Variability in quality across Early Years provision	Differences in quality and outcomes between settings may contribute to inequalities for	Continue quality assurance visits, targeted support, transition programmes and workforce	C 3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	vulnerable children and those with SEND.	development activity.	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	1 Critical 2 Major 3 Moderate 4 Minor

14. Financial Implications

- 14.1. Early Years improvement activity is being delivered through existing resources, including the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Early Years Block, High Needs Block, BSiL programme and other relevant funding streams. This report provides an update on progress and has no additional financial implications.

15. Legal Implications

- 15.1. The service supports the local authority's statutory responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006 and the Department for Education's Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities
- 15.2. The improvement activity outlined in this report supports the Council in meeting its duties in relation to early years provision and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Lead officer contact

Rebecca Smith, Lead Education Professional, rebecca.smith@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1- Early Years Action Plan

Background papers

None