

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

Wednesday, 10 June 2026

6.30pm to 10.10pm

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, Gulvin, Hamandishe, Hamilton, Hubbard, Hyne, Jackson, Joy, Lammas, Spring and Mrs Turpin

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

Louise Holden (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark)

Added members without voting rights:

Esha Dosanjh (Medway Youth Council), Silas Hurren (Medway Youth Council), Levi Paley (Medway Youth Council), Jacqueline Rudden (substitute Teacher representative), Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum), Leanne Trotter (Healthwatch Medway)

In Attendance: Morolake Arifalo, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust
Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Melissa Beaumont, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust
Paul Clarke, Strategic Head of Education
Steve Chalke, Founder, Oasis Charitable Trust
Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning
Rebecca Reynolds, Director of Safeguarding, NHS Kent and Medway
Nancy Sayer, Associate Director and Designated Consultant Nurse for LAC and UASC NHS Kent
Clive Tracey, Director of Prevention, Inequalities and Children's Services KCHFT
Tracy Webb, Assistant Director Children's Services Medway Community Healthcare
Clare Wilson, Chief Operating Officer, Oasis Restore Secure School
Robert Wilson, Youth Worker

48 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Jessica Beer (Teacher representative).

49 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 5 March 2026 was agreed signed as correct.

50 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairperson had agreed to take agenda item 6 – Oasis Restore Secure School Update as a matter of urgency, to enable early discussion on the improvement journey.

51 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Jackson declared an interest in agenda item 9 – Sufficiency Strategy 2026-29 A Place Called Home, in that she was exploring care provision, and would remove herself from the room and take no part in the discussion or vote thereon.

Other interests

There were none.

52 Medway Youth Council Conference Report 2026

Discussion:

The report made key recommendations from young people about how issues raised on 10 March 2026 Medway Youth Council (MYC) could be addressed. The MYC had sought to capture young people's experiences of living, learning, socialising and developing in the current digital landscape at its annual Young Peoples Conference DigiCon: The impact of Digital Technology on young people within an ever-digitising society.

The Chairperson commended MYC for producing a clear, well-structured and thoughtful report, noting the significant work undertaken and the strong emphasis on ensuring that the voices of young people across Medway were heard. The Committee expressed unanimous praise for the quality and depth of the report.

Social media - Members reflected on the relevance of the report to their own experiences as parents and carers. It was acknowledged that whilst concerns remained regarding screen time, gaming and social media use, the findings provided reassurance that many young people demonstrated awareness of online risks and adopted sensible behaviours, such as interacting only with known contacts and seeking parental consent for in-game purchases. In response to questions as to what advice they would give parents and carers concerning social media use, MYC representatives advised that it was important to listen to young people's perspectives when considering regulatory approaches, highlighting the balance required between safeguarding and avoiding overly restrictive measures that could inhibit digital skills development and future employment opportunities. It was noted that rapid technological advancement required adults and decision-makers to improve their own understanding in order to effectively support young people.

Engagement - In response to questions, MYC representatives advised that engagement with young people at the conference had been inclusive, with facilitators ensuring that quieter participants and those with additional needs were supported to contribute.

Harmful content - It was highlighted that young people in Medway generally reported lower than average screen time compared with national figures and demonstrated awareness of the risks associated with AI and harmful online content. In response to questions, MYC representatives explained that reluctance to report harmful content was largely due to a lack of trust in platforms taking meaningful action and that their lone voice would not make a difference. It was agreed that encouraging reporting and reinforcing its importance remained essential.

Employment - In response to questions, MYC representatives advised that there were concerns with regards to future employment especially around mathematical and art based careers. It was suggested that this could form a topic for future work.

Education - The Committee discussed the use of AI in education, noting that both students and teachers were increasingly using AI tools. It was noted that different schools had different approaches and varied in their digital literacy and uses, with teacher fatigue suggested with regards to 'policing' the use of AI in homework. It was suggested that education should focus on responsible and critical use, including understanding that AI was not always accurate. Concerns were raised regarding reliance on AI, potential impacts on learning outcomes, and the need for consistent expectations for both students and staff. It was suggested that whilst young people were fairly confident users of technology, this did not necessarily translate into advanced technical understanding. It was important to improve digital education and access. An MYC representative gave an example of a concern with losing art creativity giving an example of a teacher using AI to create a picture undermining the time and effort a student could spend in creating something themselves.

During the discussion, a query was raised regarding the Council's digital procurement and sustainability approach. Officers undertook to provide further information outside the meeting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Medway Youth Council Annual Conference Report 2026 and the recommendations made as a result of findings from the conference.

53 Oasis Restore Secure School Update

Discussion:

The report provided an update to the Committee detailing actions taken as part of the planned improvements to address safety and security issues following temporary closure in August 2025 as a result of findings of an Ofsted monitoring visit. Representatives of Oasis Restore were present to answer questions of the Committee.

Accountability – The Committee expressed concern regarding the Ofsted judgement of “inadequate” for leadership and management and sought clarification on the specific steps taken to address these findings. In response, representatives acknowledged the shortcomings identified by Ofsted, particularly a loss of confidence in leadership during the early operational phase. It was explained that some leaders had been unable to meet the demands of a challenging environment, and this had been recognised and addressed. There was now a new registered manager, a position which had been vacant and additional measures included targeted leadership training, particularly for middle managers, and strengthened oversight within the residential team where concerns had been most pronounced.

Members expressed significant concern regarding accountability, delays in rectifying faults, and the financial implications of the closure period. It was explained that capital works and procurement had been managed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and that subsequent delays had been linked to central government processes. There was concern expressed about the MoJ's role and the failure in the procurement of the wrong type of doors and the failure to procure new doors more speedily.

Further discussion addressed lessons learned from the initial closure of the site. It was confirmed that Ofsted had undertaken a monitoring visit during early operation and, at that stage, had considered the environment safe for a reduced number of children. However, the accumulation of issues, particularly relating to the physical infrastructure, had ultimately led to the decision to close. It was pointed out that Oasis Restore had chosen to close the site and had not been made to close. Ofsted, as regulator, had been aware of the decision and had been supportive of the rationale.

Ethnicity data - Members sought clarification regarding the presentation of ethnicity data within the report. It was explained that the categories used reflected those required for reporting to the MoJ and Youth Custody Service and were system-generated. Representatives undertook to consider improvements to the presentation when reporting to this Committee whilst continuing to meet other reporting requirements.

Staff - Concerns were raised regarding staff conduct, specifically issues of overfamiliarity and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. This had been recognised as an issue and in response, a series of measures had been implemented, including enhanced staff training, clearer guidance on professional boundaries, and revised approaches to consequences to ensure consistency. It was noted that inconsistency between staff responses had undermined children's experience of boundaries, and work would therefore be focused on ensuring a more coherent and structured approach while still tailoring care to individual needs.

The Committee also raised questions regarding staff safety, training, and support. It was outlined that a number of measures had been introduced during the closure period, including revised training programmes, updated restraint techniques, strengthened medication management processes, and enhanced mechanisms for staff feedback, including union representation and direct engagement with trustees.

Model viability – In light of everything experienced so far, the overall viability of the model was queried. In response, it was acknowledged that whilst there had been issues, a more therapeutic, child-focused approach was still the way forward. There was concern that leadership had not been replaced, however it was advised that it was not the same leadership team as there was a mix of new and old.

In response to concerns regarding safeguarding, behaviour management, and risks such as weapon-making and assaults, it was stated that many issues had been exacerbated by failures in the physical infrastructure, particularly the damaged doors. With these issues addressed, along with improved training and clearer operational frameworks, it was anticipated that risks would be significantly reduced.

MYC representatives provided additional challenge, particularly regarding the timeliness of improvements and the impact on young people. It was confirmed that performance would be subject to continuous internal monitoring, alongside independent Ofsted inspections conducted at least twice yearly, and that progress would be actively reviewed on an ongoing basis, rather than just solely at inspection points.

The Committee welcomed the invitation to visit the premises and hoped this would happen as it had not previously. The item had led to lengthy discussion and the Chairperson requested that any further questions be sent to Democratic Services.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted progress made to date as detailed in the presentation at Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee requested that in future reporting further information be provided on ethnicity data and medication management.
- c) The Committee agreed to the Chairperson writing on their behalf to the Ministry of Justice and local Members of Parliament regarding the matters discussed.

54 Looked After Children - Initial Health Assessments

Discussion:

The report presented data on Initial Health Assessments for Medway's Children in Care covering the 12 month period from April 2025 to March 2026.

The Committee considered the report presented by the Associate Director and Designated Consultant Nurse for LAC and UASC NHS Kent and Medway, noting that this would be her final attendance at the Committee. The Chairperson expressed appreciation for her contribution, inviting questions from Members. Members paid tribute to her work, highlighting her professionalism, openness and commitment, particularly in addressing challenges relating to initial health assessments, including those for children placed out of area. It was noted that her approach had demonstrated accountability and care, and Members expressed the hope that her successor would maintain similar standards.

Delays - In response to questions regarding delays in initial health assessment requests, the complexities at the start of a child's care journey, including the sensitive and legal processes required, were explained. Findings from a recent deep dive analysis were highlighted, which identified Section 20 voluntary arrangements as a significant factor, particularly due to delays in obtaining parental consent. Additional factors included situations where children, particularly babies, remained in hospital at the point when an assessment would usually take place. It was noted that an action plan was being developed to address these issues.

The Committee was reassured that processes were in place to monitor performance, including regular meetings between social care and health colleagues. Early indications since the deep dive suggested improvements, although challenges around consent remained an issue.

Data sharing - The Committee discussed the need for improved data sharing and consistency across Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), particularly in relation to children placed out of area. It was clarified that current work was focused on developing a tool to better understand the health profile of children in care to better inform commissioning decisions and allocation of resources.

Quality – It was explained that, unlike local provision, the ICB could not directly ensure the training and standards of clinicians in other areas. As a result, some reports were returned for further work where they did not meet required standards, which contributed to delays. However, maintaining quality was essential to ensure that assessments were meaningful in informing children's health outcomes.

It was suggested that where reports had to be sent back, other local authorities should be advised as they may not be aware. The Committee were advised that escalation processes were in place but officers would investigate mechanisms for strengthening feedback and escalation.

Succession - In response to questions, the Director of Safe Guarding, Kent & Medway NHS outlined the ICB's commitment to children in care, and recruitment of specialist staff. The Committee stressed the importance of maintaining strong leadership and safeguarding organisational knowledge and expressed concern about wider workforce pressures and the loss of experienced staff within the ICB. In response to a question it was confirmed that exit interviews were undertaken and that feedback informed organisational improvement plans.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson again thanked Nancy Sayer (Associate Director and Designated Consultant Nurse for LAC and UASC NHS Kent and Medway), for her significant contribution and wished her well for the future.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee requested that officers explore mechanisms for strengthening feedback and escalation with relevant bodies regarding out of area poor-quality initial health assessment reports.

55 Medway Community Healthcare Children's Services Overview and Future Strategy

Discussion:

The Committee received the report presented by Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust and Medway Community Healthcare (KCHFT) representatives, which set out the three year plan to improve outcomes for children and young people of Medway. The report detailed what would be delivered each year, drive in improvements, workforce development and framework for accountability.

Assessment delays - In response to questions, it was acknowledged that there were significant challenges, particularly in relation to waiting times for neurodevelopmental and therapy needs. Concern was expressed regarding the number of children awaiting diagnosis beyond 18 weeks. It was recognised that

these delays were unacceptable and ongoing work to review and align clinical pathways across Medway and Kent were outlined, with a view to enabling earlier intervention and support.

It was highlighted that, whilst children awaited diagnosis, enhanced support through a needs-led approach was offered, to ensure children received appropriate support irrespective of diagnostic status.

'This is me' pilot project - In response to a question querying evidence of its effectiveness, it was advised that the pilot project designed to support children and young people with neurodivergence, without first requiring a formal diagnosis, had been established as a corporate project with formal governance arrangements, and that key performance indicators (KPIs) and milestone tracking would be developed and reported both internally and to the Committee.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) - It was stated that the rise in requests was linked to parental perceptions that EHCPs were necessary to access support, alongside broader systemic factors. It was suggested that this may further increase as a potential financial driver within school funding arrangements and this may need to be looked at.

Capacity - Concerns were raised regarding workforce capacity and recruitment challenges, particularly within speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services, which were impacting waiting times. Officers outlined measures being taken to increase capacity and improve early identification and intervention, including the use of assistant practitioners and closer integration with health visiting services.

Private assessments - Members discussed inequalities in access to services, including variations in provision for certain conditions and concerns about reliance on private assessments. Officers acknowledged the challenges in understanding the full impact of pursuing privately funded pathways. The ICB held the data on Right to Choose pathways but not in the granular detail required to fully understand this impact.

The Committee agreed to send in any additional questions to Democratic Services.

Decision:

The Committee noted the submission from the Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust and Medway Community Healthcare as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

Having declared an interest in the following item, Councillor Jackson removed herself from the meeting.

56 Sufficiency Strategy 2026-29 A Place Called Home

Discussion:

The Committee received the report which set out updates on the previous 2023-2026 Strategy and proposed areas of development for the Council over the next 3 years. A wider collective of Council Services was required to deliver the plan and so it had wider commitment outside of Children's Social Care.

It was noted that a sufficiency strategy for children's services was a mandated document for all local authorities and needed to be published on the Council website. Local authorities had a statutory duty under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (introduced by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) to: "Take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their area." It was further noted that the report would be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 30 June 2026.

National Transfer Scheme (NTS) - A Member raised a number of queries in relation to the NTS for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In response, Officers confirmed that the 80 children received over the three-year period were part of the NTS, with a combination of allocated and voluntarily accepted placements. It was explained that many young people arrived aged 17 and transition out of children's services upon turning 18, which affected overall figures. Officers highlighted that Medway had been recognised as one of the most effective local authorities in delivering the scheme, with high standards of accommodation and timely placements. All but one placement had been made within required timescales, generating approximately £300,000 in additional funding.

Officers further outlined the range of support available, including partnerships with accommodation providers, supported housing schemes, and culturally appropriate foster placements. In financial terms, it was reported that approximately £3.5 million had been spent in the previous year on asylum-seeking children, with £2.4 million received from central government, resulting in a Council contribution of around £1.1 million. A similar shortfall of approximately £1.4 million was anticipated in the current financial year. The primary driver of the gap was the reduction in funding once young people turned 18, with weekly funding decreasing significantly despite ongoing support responsibilities.

Clarification was also provided that Medway was currently supporting fewer unaccompanied asylum-seeking children under 18 than its assessed allocation, and that decisions to accept placements were made based on capacity and suitability, including cultural matching considerations, rather than exceeding allocation. The ongoing financial pressures were attributed largely to funding arrangements and the cost of placements, rather than discretionary intake.

Kinship Care - Further questions were raised regarding data within the report, specifically around apparent discrepancies in placement numbers. Officers clarified that kinship care arrangements, such as special guardianship orders, were not classified as children in care and were therefore reported separately. Members welcomed kinship care and being placed with family such as grandparents but highlighted the need for future planning and support as carers aged. Officers confirmed that assessments included consideration of wider family support networks and contingency planning.

Care leavers in temporary accommodation - In response to a query, officers advised that numbers were minimal and were not located in Medway. It was noted that some cases categorised as unsuitable accommodation reflected circumstances beyond the Council's control, such as personal choices made by young people post-18.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the progress of the Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026.
- b) The Committee noted the priorities for the next 3 years.

Having removed herself from the discussion of the previous item, Councillor Jackson returned to the meeting.

57 The One Medway Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarter 4 2025/26

Discussion:

The Committee received the report and appendices which summarised the Council's performance in Quarter 4 2025/26 on the delivery of the One Medway Council Plan (OMCP) 2024/28 priorities. The report also presented the Quarter 4 2025/26 review of strategic risks.

A Member expressed concern that a significant proportion of performance indicators remained below target. Whilst acknowledging that some targets were intended to be stretching, concern was raised that consistently unachievable targets may reduce motivation, and it was suggested that some measures should be reviewed to ensure they remained realistic. In response it was advised that targets aligned with national reforms, particularly a shift towards early intervention and prevention. Although several indicators were currently rated red, many showed an improving trend, and it was not considered appropriate to revise targets at this stage.

Further concern was raised regarding Medway's position in the bottom 20% nationally for 16- and 17-year-olds with known destinations. Officers explained that, despite performing better than regional and national averages for unknown destinations, overall performance had declined due in part to the loss of over 60 local training providers, placing increased pressure on remaining provision. A

range of improvement activity was outlined, including pilot programmes with schools, the Department for Education, electively home-educated young people, and the Youth Justice Team. Early signs showed improving engagement. Additional Council funding of £250,000, alongside an existing government grant, would support further targeted interventions, including expanding vocational training opportunities.

The Committee agreed to send in any additional questions to Democratic Services.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Quarter 4 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.

58 Work programme

Discussion:

The work programme was presented for information.

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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