

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

Wednesday, 12 August 2026

6.30pm to 9.29pm

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, Burvill, Gulvin, Hamandishe, Hubbard, Hyne and Joy

Added members without voting rights:

Lisa Scarrott (Medway Parent and Carers Forum) and Jessica Beer (Teacher Representative)

Substitutes:

Councillors:
McDonald (Substitute for Jackson)
Nestorova (Substitute for Hamilton)
Pearce (Substitute for Mrs Turpin)
Perfect (Substitute for Spring)

In Attendance:

Maria Beaney, Finance Business Partner, Education
Celia Buxton, Assistant Director, Education and SEND
Chi Chiringa, Head of Provider Services
Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East,
Adoption Partnership South East
Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
James Harman, Head of Children's Services Commissioning
Kate Langford, Chief Medical and Outcomes Officer, NHS Kent
and Medway
George Matsuka, Clinical Lead Learning Disability and Autism,
NHS Kent & Medway
Rebecca Smith, Lead Education Professional: Quality &
Inclusion
Ed Waller, Chief Strategic Commissioning Officer and Deputy
Chief Executive, NHS Kent & Medway

201 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hamilton, Jackson, Spring and Mrs Elizabeth Turpin.

202 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 10 June 2026 was agreed signed as correct.

203 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

204 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 Perfect declared that in relation to agenda item 7, which mentions the LGA, that he is employed by the LGA.

205 Meeting theme: Children's Social Care

The Committee received a presentation covering the topics under this theme. This was followed by questions and discussions.

The discussions and decisions for this item can be found at minute numbers 205a and 205b.

a Adoption Partnership South East - Annual Report - 2025/2026

Discussion:

The Head of Adoption Partnership South East introduced the annual report which detailed the service activity and practice development for the period April 2025 – March 2026.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

The level of detail contained in the report was praised. The continued high level of progress made and support being offered to families despite challenges was commended.

Sibling groups – in response to a question on what was being done to recruit more potential adopters for siblings and what support was provided for those potential adopters, the Committee was informed that extensive information and support was provided. Monthly online marketing events took place with details on adoption and opportunities to attend meet and greet sessions. Sibling groups were more complex to match and there was targeted work being undertaken in that area as it was crucial to ensure that the right people were supported to take on caring responsibilities for siblings. There was additional preparatory training available for adopters to ensure that they understood the complex dynamics they may face and all adopters were encouraged to stay connected as they would require support at different stages of a child/ children's lives.

In response to a further question on data on harder to adopt groups, the officer said that all adopters were approved to take on any child. The focus and priority of the service was on having the right pool adopters and to support each individual through any preconceived ideas about the age of child they would like to adopt.

Average wait time for adoption – in response to a question on Medway children that had been waiting a long time, had to wait for an adoptive match and what the common characteristic were in relation to that cohort, the officer explained that there were currently 10 Medway children with placement orders with no current match. One of the pressures was with placement of siblings. When children were granted placement orders, extensive work was undertaken both internally and externally to find a potential match.

Average time between placement order and decision made - it was asked what had changed in terms of the average days from placement order to matching decision, to adoption order granted as the total average wait time had significantly reduced. The Committee was informed that the data presented was as a result of the significant work undertaken by the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care working with the judiciary to address issues with court timetabling and reduction in care proceeding timelines. There had also been extensive work undertaken on developing a robust and timely process to ensure that when a match was identified, they were progressed without delay. Tracking of those children had also contributed to reduction in timescales. Adopters were able to use the online portal to apply for an adoption order which reduced delay when they were legally ready to adopt.

Feedback- in response to a question on what adjustments were being taken to improve adopters experience at the end of the assessment process due to the negative feedback received as mentioned in the report, the officer said that this data was from 12 months ago. The data was presented to show transparent evidence of experience after an adoption order had been granted and related to delays between stage 1 and stage 2 of the process. Following that feedback,

mechanisms had been put in place to address those issues and ensure prompt assessment between stage 1 and stage 2. It was anticipated that this adjustment would translate to a difference in experience in next year's reporting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Adoption Partnership South East Annual Report 2025/2026.

b Annual Fostering Report 2025-2026

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which detailed activities of the fostering service during 2025-2026. The report also highlighted the aims and objectives of the service for the 2026/2027 financial year.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

The service was praised for its ongoing efforts and the commitment and dedication demonstrated by its foster carers.

Barriers to recruitment - it was asked what the greatest barriers were to the increase of conversion rate of enquiries to registered foster carers. The Committee was informed that Medway compared quite well nationally in recruitment of carers, but continued efforts were needed to attract more carers. Work was being undertaken to streamline the process and reduce the time taken to complete assessments whilst maintaining the robustness of the assessment process to ensure the right people were being supported through the process.

Recruitment strategies - in response to a question regarding changes to the Council's approach to recruiting and retaining foster carers, officers explained that they continued to actively listen and be accessible to foster carers. There were improvements to the level of support provided for those caring for children with complex needs. There were plans to extend the 'Mocking Bird' programme and provision of increased peer support for foster carers. There was also work to be undertaken on establishing a select group of carers to co-produce support activities.

Kinship - it was asked how the scheme was progressing and what support was being provided to grandparents, those that live in and outside of Medway and young people, in particular, being mindful to ensure that extra pressures were not created of circumstances where young people go from being cared for to being carers themselves. The Officer said that the Kinship Pilot had provided a valuable learning experience for everyone involved. The potential and opportunities for growth were extensive. There had been many benefits to children, young people and families, as well as positive effect on social care practice. Families were being consulted and worked with in partnership to

identify suitable packages that were tailored to their individual needs, with wider support packages and financial support provided as needed.

Support for Kinship carers – in response to a question on whether Kinship care was more sustainable and if the same level of support was provided to those carers, the Committee was informed that all carers received the same level of supervision and access to support. Kinship was a welcomed alternative to traditional foster carers due to the benefit for young people in maintaining their culture, wellbeing and identity.

Placement costs – it was noted that there were 10 fewer current active in-house foster placements and at a higher average cost than budgeted. It was asked at what point did stabilising capacity become overly optimistic and what was the financial cost to Medway of those 10 placements once the cost of independence is included. The Committee was informed that the average cost of placements was made up of the average cost of all fostering placements as the amount paid to providers varied dependant on age of the child with older children costing more. On average, every child placed with an external independent fostering agency costs £600 -£800 per week per child more than an internal agency foster carer. However, this increase amounted to 0.8% overspend on the fostering budget.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Annual Fostering Report 2025–2026 and the Annual Private Fostering Report for 2025–2026.

206 Changes to ADHD and Autism Services in Kent and Medway

The Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Strategic Commissioning Officer, along with the Clinical Lead Learning Disability and Autism from NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) introduced the report accompanied by the ICB's Chief Medical and Outcomes Officer.

The Committee was informed that the approach regarding the ADHD and Autism Right to Choose Pathways (RTC) was as a result of a combination of increased demand, growth in spend, along with a need to better manage the market of providers and quality of assessments provided by them, whilst balancing the obligations of the ICB to provide services to meet needs, as well as parents and carers right to choose providers.

A fundamental aspect to proposed intervention and how processes would be managed was based on clinical prioritisation and a categorisation framework had therefore been developed to group children, young people and adults by need to ensure that those with the most significant needs were prioritised. The categorisation framework operated on three levels of need which were classed as immediate, escalating and waiting list. This categorisation framework was a model that was already in place and had been used by statutory providers for the past 24 months. It was being developed for RTC providers to ensure that all children, young people and adults were able to access the same model of

pathway. Those on the waiting list category would be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that changes in need were identified immediately and re categorisation made as required. Reference was also made to other intervention support tools that could be provided irrespective of assessments, such as 'This is me'.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:

Waiting lists – Questions were raised regarding the waiting lists for Medway children on statutory and right to choose pathways and how the changes would impact current wait times. Members were informed that it was difficult to clarify the exact numbers of those on the RTC pathway, but the numbers waiting for statutory providers were approximately 10,000 on Autism and 4,000 on ADHD waiting list across Kent and Medway, and of total combined approximately 4,000 related to those in Medway and Swale. There were currently approximately 40 providers in the RTC market, and the data they held was unclear due to the quality of data and multiple submission routes. Some children were on more than one waiting list and recorded separately which had resulted in children and young people on multiple waiting lists for assessments. The waiting lists for those in the non-priority category was long and it was important that those children be assessed on the basis of clinical prioritisation.

Clinical quality – Going forward, all RTC providers would be required to work in the same way as statutory providers and ensure that decisions made were based on clinical need. Clinical quality remained a concern, and consideration was being given to undertaking clinical and spot audits on all providers.

'This is me' intervention – Questions were asked about what the 'This is me' tool included and how accessible it was for parents and carers. The 'This is me tool' had been developed 24 months ago and had been trailed. The trial had identified that if a child's strengths and issues were identified prior to diagnosis, work could be undertaken to support the needs of that child whilst they were waiting for formal diagnosis and prior to presentation of trauma. A Member of the committee expressed that formal diagnosis was often a gateway to accessing support, with many Medway parents and carers highlighting that support prior to diagnosis was limited, and any services signposted to were often based in Kent. It was vital that diagnosis should not be the point at which support and access to services was provided. There were serious concerns as to the impact this decision could have, which may not be realised until much later and may result in increased detrimental impact to mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and adults in the future.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – In response to whether an EIA was completed it was confirmed this was actioned and looked at the demographics of all children and adults across the system and impact would continue to be monitored as the plan to categorise through all-age arrangements was progressed.

Looked after children (LAC) – In response to a question on why LAC were not included category one and who was responsible for making decisions on

categorisations, the Committee was informed that all categorisations were clinically led and the categorisation for LAC was based on the fact that that cohort of children would likely already be receipt of support services. Looked after status would and should not necessarily determine an immediate need categorisation as this was based on clinical need for assessment. Equally if a LAC had the relevant clinical need they should be prioritised.

Impact on children and in particular girls – A Member expressed a view that the approach [EW1] did not align with the ICB's draft commissioning intentions and aspirations for all age model as delays, resulting in some children not being progressed through the pathway until at least April 2027, could result in a significant impact to children and young people's wellbeing. Particular reference was made to females, and that it often took longer to diagnose girls. It was asked what assurance could be given that Medway children and young people would not be adversely impacted by the decisions made. The Committee was informed that the all age proposals were devised to enable more clinicians to be able to deal with both children and adults and that this would ensure more all-round support and resilience in the system. Members were reminded that the commissioning intentions were draft, were being consulted on and Members were encouraged to provide feedback to help shape the final intentions. In relation to the diagnosis of females, it was explained that the national framework of diagnosis model that was being utilised across the country was historical and designed for white young boys and therefore females were often not identified as early on as they otherwise would be. However, it was confirmed that ever effort was being made to identify and prioritise need early, regardless of gender.

Lack of data – Members asked about why there was a lack of data and that it was difficult to determine the scale of the issues as a result of the lack of Medway specific data contained in the report. A member stated that it was unclear how long Medway children and young people would have to remain on the waiting list for assessment. It was further commented by members of the committee that the prioritisation model could have been better co-produced as the partnership meetings which took place in the production of the priority banding had heavily represented by Kent colleagues and there may be a need and opportunity for review.

A Member asked the ICB to share additional data as it was gathered to assist with effective scrutiny going forward. The Committee was informed that it was difficult to make a commitment to share all the data as some of the providers operating in Kent and Medway would have contracts with other ICBs that were not governed by Kent and Medway ICB, officers however agreed to share description of data points being collected as they were developed.

It was stressed that the ICB continue to work collaboratively with the Council to improve outcomes for children of Medway.

The Committee agreed to:

- a) Note the report.

- b) Request that the Integrated Care Board share description of data points being collected as they were developed.

207 Early Years Update Report

Discussion:

The Lead Education Professional introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made on the 9 recommendations areas of action and the Action Plan following the commissioned review by the Local Government Association in June 2025.

Members raised several comments and questions which included:

Collaborative programme cohort - the three month collaborative programme between the Department for Works and Pensions and the service was welcomed but it was questioned why it has been aimed at parents with 2-3 year old children and not younger. The officer said that the target group had been selected to encourage families who were considering returning to work. The first workshop had resulted in attendance by 30 families who attended not just with their children of the targeted age group but also brought other children in their families, and as a result more children beyond the target age group benefited from the session. The next session would be attended by a range of services and providers across Medway to enable families to be able to access that range of support. The first session held was a starting point to reach out to families across Medway.

Early years funding – it was asked how the Early Years funding that had been pledged by the DfE would be utilised in Medway. The Committee was informed that the report detailed the partnership working with Public Health which had enabled a detailed plan to be devised on how Medway's portion would be spent. There was a clear delivery plan in place for the funding and the Early Years Partnership Board, which had representation across early years, would hold the Council to account to ensure that the funding was being spent in accordance to the delivery plan. The Department for Education also held the Council to account with regular reporting to them on progress against the delivery plan.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

208 The One Medway Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarter 1 2026/27

Discussion:

The Committee received the report which summarised performance in Quarter 1 2026/27 on the delivery of these priorities. The report also presented the Quarter 1 2026/27 review of strategic risks.

A Member commented that there had been some progress and improvement noted against targets in this report.

Decision:

The Committee noted:

- a) The Quarter 1 2026/27 progress of the performance indicators used to monitor progress of the Council's
- b) The Strategic Risk Summary, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report and the two new risks that were added to the summary.

209 Capital Budget Monitoring - Round 1 2026/27

Discussion:

The Committee received the Capital Budget Monitoring Round 1 2026/27 report. The Children and Adults programme within the remit of this Committee was forecasted to underspend by £586,000 against the approved budget of £61.779million.

Building work at Eden House – it was asked what additional work had been required at Eden House and, the reasons for this. The Committee was informed that work was undertaken on the Cabin on the grounds of the premises due to collapse of the roof as a result of heavy solar panels. A DfE grant of approximately £70,000 was secured for that work. An Ofsted application had since been submitted to increase the number of children that could be cared from 5 to 6.

Underspend- it was asked how the underspent funds from the relocation of the Marlborough centre would be used. The Committee was informed that it would be used as part of the Dane Court secondary build.

Decision:

The Committee noted the results of the first round of capital budget monitoring for 2026/27.

210 Revenue Budget Monitoring - Round 1 2026/27

Discussion:

The Committee received the Revenue Budget Monitoring Round 2025/26 report. Children's Services forecasted an overspend of £5.228million, this was after proposed management actions of £2.800million.

In response to a question on why the format of the reports had changed, the officer said that the report format was being reviewed as the details that identified management actions were found to not be specific enough. The

review was not completed in time for this round of reporting but would be for round 2.

Budget pressures - concern was raised regarding the high budget pressures, and high interest rates being paid on borrowing. Officers acknowledged the concerns and commented that ongoing discussions and efforts continued to be undertaken to manage budgets, with particular efforts being undertaken to address high placement costs and support packages which were the areas of significant overspend.

Decision:

The Committee noted:

- a) The results of the first round of revenue budget monitoring for 2026/27.
- b) That Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by Full Council.

211 Work programme

Discussion:

The work programme was presented for information.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report and agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to accepting the proposed changes outlined in italic text on Appendix 1.
- b) The Committee agreed to recommend to full Council that Victora Aspin be appointed to the Committee as Headteacher representative for a two year term.

Chairperson

Date:

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