

Children's Services

CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2025- 2026

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Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2025-2026

Foreword from the Lead Member for Children's Services

As Lead Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, I am pleased to introduce this year's Corporate Parenting Annual Report. This report highlights the progress we have made over the past year, celebrates the achievements of our children and young people, and reflects our ongoing commitment to being the best corporate parents we can be.

Our responsibility as corporate parents extends beyond providing care and protection. It is about creating opportunities, raising aspirations, and ensuring that every child in our care and every care experienced young person has the support they need to achieve their potential and lead fulfilling lives. This commitment is shared across the Council, our partner agencies, carers, and communities, all of whom play a vital role in helping children and young people succeed.

Throughout the year, we have continued to strengthen our focus on listening to children and young people, valuing their views, and using their experiences to shape and improve the services we provide. Their voices remain central to our decision-making and help us to better understand what is working well and where we need to do more.

This report demonstrates the dedication of staff, carers, partners, and elected members who work tirelessly to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. It also acknowledges the challenges that remain and reinforces our determination to continue driving improvement, reducing inequalities, and supporting young people as they move towards independence.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to working together with ambition, compassion, and purpose. By building on our achievements and learning from the experiences of our children and young people, we will continue to ensure that they are safe, heard, valued, and supported to thrive.

Children Matter in Medway, and their success will continue to be at the heart of everything we do.



Lead Member and Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

Councillor Adam Price

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Parenting is “a collective responsibility, with all officers and members of the Local Authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked-after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high-quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care” (DfE 2013, Director and Lead Member for Children’s Services – Roles and Responsibilities).

Corporate parenting is the legal and moral responsibility of the local authority and its partners to provide the best possible care, protection, and opportunities for children in care and care leavers. Rooted in the Children Act 1989 and strengthened by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, this duty requires us to act with the same commitment, ambition, and care that any good parent would show.

This report provides an overview of Medway’s Corporate Parenting Service and sets out our progress, strengths, and areas for development between April 2025 and March 2026. It summarises how we are meeting our responsibilities to children in care and care-experienced young people and outlines the activity delivered through our Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets quarterly, with five sub-groups reporting into the Board. Councillor Adam Price has been the Lead Member for Children’s Services since May 2023 and he has chaired the CPB since July 2023. Membership of the CPB crosses all key areas, including representatives from elected members, the Council’s children in care council (Medway Children and Young People’s Council (MCYPC), Council officers including Virtual School, and strategic leads for key partner agencies.

Our refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025–2027 sets out five priorities that guide everything we do:

1. Safety and permanence
2. Preparing for independence and adulthood
3. Health and well-being
4. Education, training and employment
5. Listening and participation

Each priority is supported by clear promises that reflect what children and young people have told us matters most to them; being heard, being loved, feeling safe, being supported in education and employment, and having a stable home. We recognise that care-experienced young people face additional barriers and we are taking action to address inequality and structural disadvantage. Medway’s population of children in care continues to grow. As such, the Council responded in 2024 to make being care experienced a locally protected characteristic to address the systemic inequity and hardship experienced by children in care.

Medway Children’s Service’s vision highlights the need to work together, keeping children and families at the heart of what we do. This will collectively enable us to ensure children in care and care leavers in Medway are afforded opportunities to achieve their potential. This report outlines how we are delivering on that ambition, through strong corporate parenting, multi-agency partnership, and a commitment to continuous improvement and achieving excellence.

2. Key achievements

Launched the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025–2027, co-produced with children and young people and underpinned by a clear implementation plan focused on improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers

Positive Ofsted Focused Visit (November 2025), recognising strong leadership, effective corporate parenting oversight, stable relationships between children and practitioners, and improvements in permanence, safeguarding and placement stability.

Improved placement stability, with 72.8% of children in care for over 2.5 years remaining in the same placement for at least two years, representing the strongest performance in recent years.

Significant progress in permanence planning, with 47 children achieving long-term matched placements and increased numbers achieving permanence through adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangements Orders and kinship care.

Reduced reliance on unregistered care arrangements, falling from 18 children in 2024 to just 1 child by March 2026 through investment in local placements, fostering and residential provision.

Improved education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers, with participation increasing to 74%, exceeding local targets and national benchmarks.

Maintained strong accommodation outcomes for care leavers, with over 90% living in suitable accommodation and an increase in Staying Put arrangements supporting successful transitions to adulthood.

Strengthened safeguarding arrangements, contributing to a reduction in missing episodes, improved responses to exploitation risks and enhanced multi-agency working.

Enhanced participation and co-production, including the launch of the refreshed strategy, development of co-produced independence resources, launching of the Young Inspectors Programme and wider involvement of young people in service design.

Introduced new support for care leavers, including a Specialist Housing Advisor, enhanced emotional wellbeing pathways and the establishment of the Supporting Care Leavers Reform Workstream to prepare for national reforms.

Improved health and wellbeing support, including the launch of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance, continued high performance in Review Health Assessments and development of tailored health pathways for care leavers.

3. SERVICE ACTIVITY

Launch of CPB strategy 2025- 2027

In Medway, we are firmly committed to ensuring that children in care and care-experienced young people are supported, valued, and given every opportunity to thrive. This commitment is shared across the whole partnership, recognising that corporate parenting extends beyond the local authority and includes schools, health services, employers, and the wider community.

In November 2025, Medway launched its refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy (2025–2027), setting out a clear vision and priorities for improving outcomes. The strategy builds on local strengths while identifying key areas for development, focusing on ensuring that children and young people feel safe, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential across all aspects of their lives.



The delivery of the strategy is supported through a robust governance structure, with key thematic subgroups, including Permanence and safety, Health and Wellbeing, Education, Participation, and preparation for independent living, driving forward priority actions and providing oversight of progress.



Importantly, Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC) have played a central role in shaping and strengthening accessibility, including the co-production of child-friendly versions of the strategy tailored to different age groups. This ensures that children and young people can easily understand the commitments being made to them and how they can engage with and influence delivery.

Since its launch, implementation has progressed through a coordinated action plan, with regular reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board, ensuring clear oversight, accountability, and a continued focus on delivering meaningful change for children in care and care leavers.

Ofsted focused visit

A focused visit by Ofsted to Medway's Children's Services took place on 25–26 November 2025, with findings published in January 2026. Inspectors highlighted a number of clear strengths, recognising that senior leaders demonstrate a strong and visible commitment to improving outcomes for children in care, supported by aligned corporate and political leadership. Practice was found to be consistently child-centred, with children benefiting from trusting and stable relationships with social workers who know them well. Decision-making about children entering care was timely and appropriate, and most children were living in stable homes that meet their needs. Oversight from Independent Reviewing Officers was identified as a particular strength, alongside continued investment in local placement sufficiency, which has helped reduce reliance on unregistered provision. Inspectors also noted improvements in safeguarding practice, including strengthened responses to children who go missing and those at risk of exploitation, as well as a more stable and skilled workforce contributing to greater consistency of care.

The visit also identified areas for further development, which are well understood by leaders and already being addressed through improvement planning. These include improving the consistency of care planning, strengthening the quality and application of risk assessments (particularly in relation to exploitation and missing episodes), and ensuring more consistent management oversight and reflective supervision.

In addition, inspectors highlighted the need to further improve how the needs of children placed outside of Medway are met, particularly in relation to access to education and health services. Overall, the findings reflect a service that is continuing to make positive progress, with strong foundations in place and a clear focus on driving further improvement to achieve consistently high-quality practice for all children in care.

Overall, the findings from the November 2025 focused visit provide strong assurance that Medway continues to build on its positive improvement journey, with clear strengths in leadership, practice, and partnership working. Inspectors recognised a service that is increasingly stable, child-centred, and ambitious for its children, with purposeful action already underway to address the areas identified for further development. This reflects a culture of continuous learning and improvement, with leaders and partners well placed to sustain progress and deliver consistently high-quality outcomes for children in care and care leavers across Medway.

National Reforms

Nationally, children's social care is undergoing significant reform, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers. These reforms build on the "Stable Homes, Built on Love" strategy and have been further strengthened through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the Government's 2026 implementation plan. Together, these set out a whole-system transformation centred on ensuring that children grow up in stable, loving homes and that care leavers receive consistent, extended support into adulthood.

Key changes include the development of integrated multi-agency approaches to safeguarding and support, increased placement stability through fostering and regional care arrangements, and strengthened expectations around corporate parenting responsibilities across all public services. There is also a clear national emphasis on improving outcomes for care leavers, including enhanced support with accommodation, employment, health and education, and the introduction of a strengthened "Staying Close" offer, extending practical and emotional support up to the age of 25, where necessary.

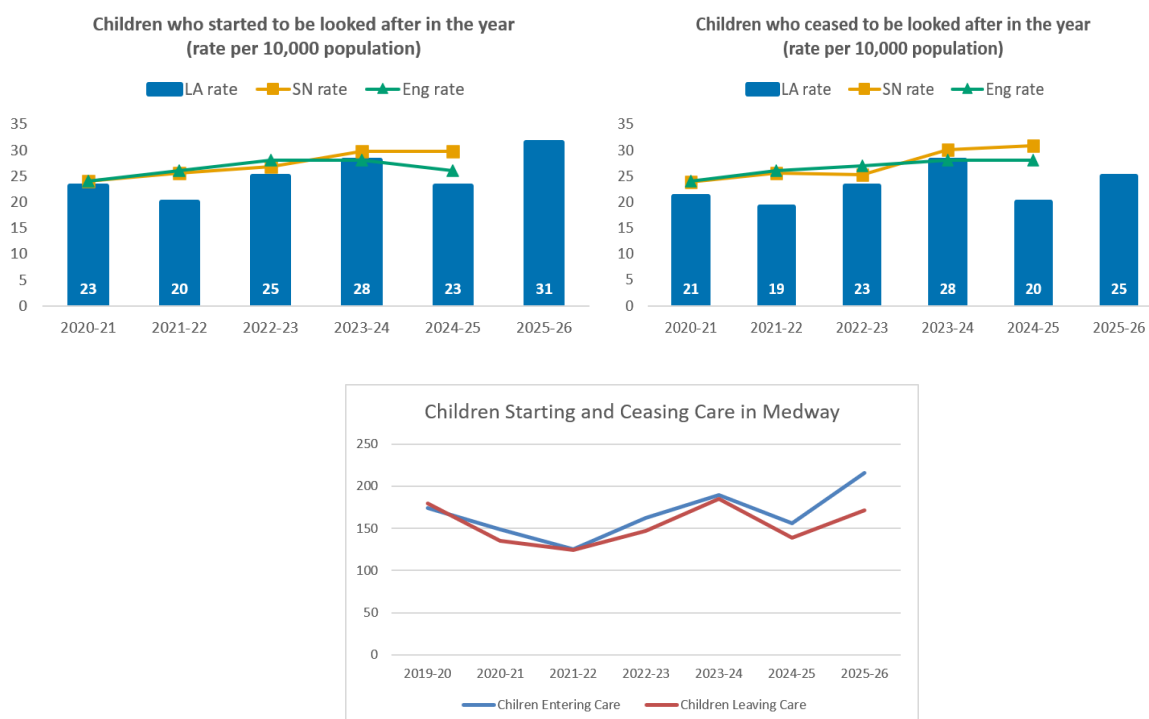
Alongside these reforms, there is a growing expectation that local authorities adopt a whole-system, partnership-led approach to supporting care leavers, ensuring that the Local Offer is not only comprehensive but also visible, accessible and co-produced with young people. The statutory requirement to publish and regularly review a Local Offer continues to be a key driver in ensuring care leavers can clearly understand and access the full range of support available to them across services.

In response to this national direction, Medway launched the Supporting Care Leavers Workstream in March 2026, bringing together partners from across the council and wider system to further strengthen the local offer. This workstream provides a dedicated multi-agency forum focused on enhancing collaboration between services such as housing, health, education, employment and adult services. Its aim is to ensure a more joined-up and proactive approach, increasing the visibility and accessibility of support available to

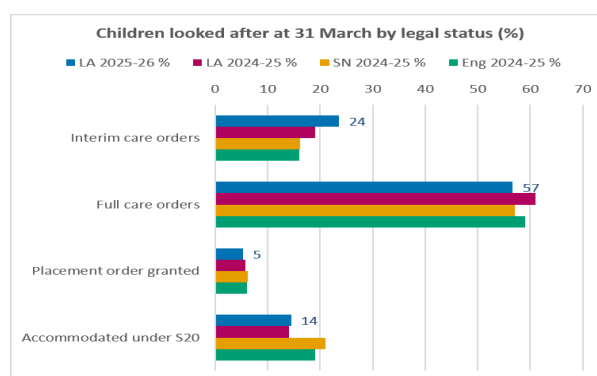
care leavers, while driving improved outcomes. By aligning local practice with national reform priorities, the workstream is supporting a more coordinated, ambitious and young person-centred offer, ensuring that care leavers in Medway receive the consistent, high-quality support they need to successfully transition into adulthood.

4. PROFILE OF MEDWAY'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION

Over the last 12 months, between April 2025 and March 2026, Medway has seen a notable increase in the number of children in care, rising to 547 by year end. While this represents a growth of 52 children (10.5%), it also reflects the Local Authority's continued responsiveness to safeguarding needs within the community. The rate of children in care has increased to 79.5 per 10,000 of the child population, continuing a steady upward trend seen in recent years. There was also a rise in the number of children entering care, with 216 admissions during the year. Although higher than the previous year, this reflects the dynamic nature of demand, with similar patterns seen in earlier years. Positively, more children also transitioned out of care, with 171 leaving during the year, demonstrating ongoing efforts to secure appropriate longer-term outcomes.



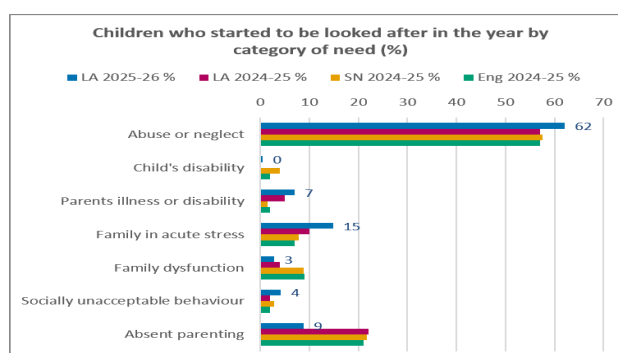
The legal status profile of children in care has seen a modest change over the reporting period. While Care Orders continue to account for the majority of children looked after, this proportion decreased slightly to 56.7% (a reduction of 4 percentage points). Over the same period, the proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders increased to 23.6% (an increase of 4.4 percentage points), reflecting a greater number of children at an earlier stage of care proceedings at year-end.



Abuse and neglect continued to be the primary reason for children entering care, accounting for 62% of all care starts during 2025–26, an increase from 58% in the previous year. This remains the most significant presenting need among children becoming looked after.

While the overall numbers within other categories were smaller, a number of notable changes were observed:

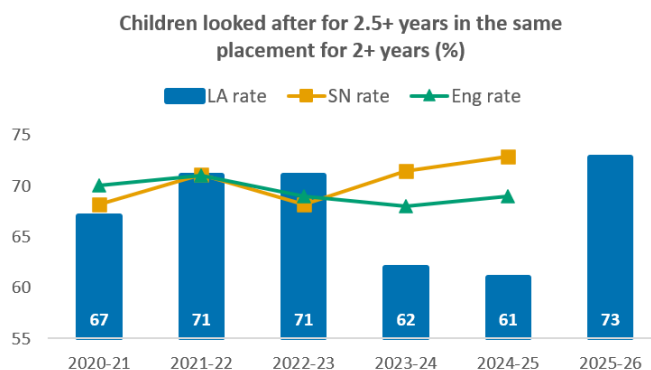
- The proportion of children entering care due to Absent Parenting (including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) decreased significantly from 22% in 2024–25 to 9% in 2025–26.
- Family in Acute Stress increased from 10% to 15%, indicating a growing number of families experiencing significant pressures and challenges.
- The proportion of children entering care due to Socially Unacceptable Behaviour increased to 4%, double the rate reported in the previous year. This reverses the downward trend that had been observed in this category prior to 2023–24.



Fostering remains the primary placement choice, supporting 411 children at the end of March 2026. While this represents a slight proportional decrease, it continues to highlight the importance of family-based care within Medway's sufficiency offer. Despite this reduction, Medway's rate remains above both the national and regional averages reported last year. Of the children living in foster care, 123 were placed with Medway's in-house fostering service.

Placement stability has improved significantly during the year. Of the 180 children who had been in care for more than 912 days as of 31 March, 72.8% (131 children) had lived in the same placement for at least 729 days. This is a notable improvement from 61% in the

previous year and represents the strongest performance recorded for this measure over the past five years, exceeding the previous high of 71% achieved in March 2023.



This improvement also brings Medway's performance in line with that of its statistical neighbours. Permanence arrangements have remained steady overall, with consistent numbers of children achieving adoption and Special Guardianship Orders, alongside a welcome increase in Residence Orders granted during the year.

The profile of children leaving care remained broadly consistent during the year, although there were some changes in permanence outcomes. The proportion of children leaving care through adoption reduced slightly to 8.8%, compared with 10.6% in the previous year. The proportion of children exiting care under a Special Guardianship Order also saw a small decrease, accounting for 11.7% of all care leavers. In contrast, 14 children (8.2%) left care under a Child Arrangements Order, compared with no children leaving care through this route in the previous year.

In addition:

- 29.2% of children leaving care returned to live with their parents, a slight decrease from 31.9% in the previous year. However, a higher proportion of these returns occurred outside of the planned care pathway, accounting for 6.4% of all children leaving care, compared with 2.1% in 2024–25.
- The proportion of young people remaining with their foster carers through Staying Put arrangements at age 18 has remained relatively stable, with 27 young people continuing to live with their foster families. This reflects ongoing commitment to supporting young people to make successful and stable transitions into adulthood.

5. PROFILE OF MEDWAY'S CARE LEAVERS POPULATION

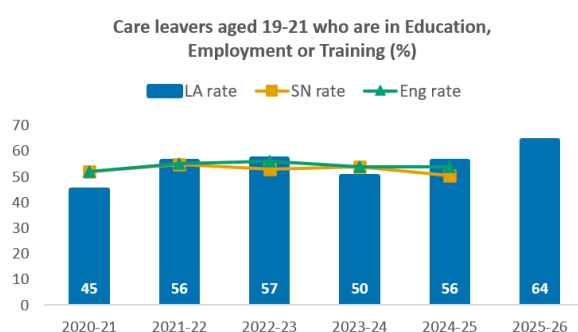
During 2025–26, there was continued evidence of positive outcomes for children in care and care leavers, particularly in relation to placement stability, engagement with services, and participation in education, employment and training.

A total of 76 young people aged 16 and over left care during the year. Of these, 69 (90.9%) remained looked after until their 18th birthday, representing an improvement from 85.7% in the previous year. This reflects sustained efforts to provide young people with the

stability and support needed to remain in care for longer, enabling them to benefit from ongoing preparation for adulthood and transition planning.

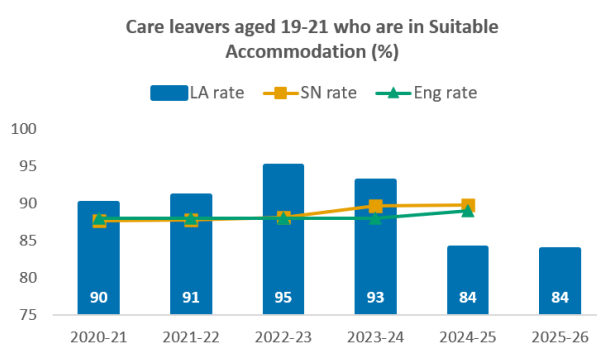
Engagement with care leavers remains strong. Of the 179 care leavers aged 19–21, 164 (91.6%) were recorded as being in touch with the local authority, maintaining performance at a similar level to the previous year. Of those not in touch, five young people (2.8%) had declined contact, while ten (5.6%) were assessed as no longer requiring services.

Outcomes relating to education, employment and training have also improved significantly. The proportion of care leavers aged 19–21 who were participating in education, employment or training (EET) increased to 64.2%, representing the highest level achieved in recent years. This includes 3.9% of care leavers engaged in higher education, 30.7% participating in other forms of education, and 29.6% in employment or training. These outcomes demonstrate continued progress in supporting young people to acquire the skills, qualifications and opportunities needed to achieve independence and long-term success.



Despite these positive trends, challenges remain. Just over a quarter (27.4%) of care leavers aged 19–21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET), with the largest proportion (16.8%) attributed to other reasons not related to illness, disability, pregnancy or parenting responsibilities. In addition, EET information was unavailable for 8.4% of young people, including those who were not in touch with the authority. Addressing barriers to participation and improving the completeness of outcome data will remain key areas of focus in the coming year, alongside maintaining the strong levels of engagement already achieved with care leavers.

Accommodation outcomes for care leavers aged 19–21 have remained strong and stable during 2025–26, with 84% of young people living in suitable accommodation, consistent with the previous year's performance. This continued stability reflects the effectiveness of pathway planning and the support available to young people as they transition towards greater independence.



The accommodation profile of care leavers demonstrates a range of options tailored to individual needs and circumstances. More than a third of care leavers (38.5%) are living independently, evidencing positive progress towards self-sufficiency and adulthood. There has also been an increase in the proportion of young people living in transitional accommodation, rising by five percentage points to 15.6%, providing additional opportunities for care leavers to develop independence skills within supported environments before moving to fully independent living.

Family and relationship networks continue to play an important role in supporting young people beyond care. The proportion of care leavers living with parents or relatives increased to 13.4%, while 6.7% remained living with former foster carers under arrangements that continue to provide stability and ongoing support into adulthood. Collectively, these figures highlight the range of accommodation pathways available to care leavers and demonstrate Medway's continued focus on ensuring young people have access to suitable, stable accommodation that supports their wellbeing, independence and long-term aspirations.

6. OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE/HOW WE MEASURE UP AGAINST OUR PROPOSED STRATEGY PRIORITIES

Across 2025–26, there has been measurable progress across all five strategic priorities, with particular strengths in permanence planning, placement stability, and strengthened management oversight. Multi-agency working, improved tracking systems, and a continued focus on children's voice provide a strong foundation to further embed consistency and maximise impact ahead of the next review period.

The next section of the report analyses how we benchmark the priorities, as set in our Corporate Parenting strategy 2025- 2027, promises and focuses on some insights into the work being done to deliver the strategy. Our looked after children and care leavers, expect us to assume ambitious corporate parenting responsibilities for them under the following priorities:



Priority 1: Safety and Permanency

Ensuring that children, young people, and care leavers are protected from harm, experience consistent and nurturing care through stable placements, and are supported by skilled, committed carers who provide a sense of belonging and long-term security.

Over the past year, Medway has made significant and measurable progress in improving safety, stability, and permanence for children in care, with clear evidence of strengthened practice, systems, and outcomes.

External scrutiny continues to provide strong assurance that children are entering care at the right time, with timely decision-making and effective placement matching. This reflects a more confident and consistent application of thresholds and improved care planning, ensuring that children receive the right support at the right time.

A key area of progress has been placement stability, which is fundamental to children's sense of safety and belonging. Stability has continued to improve year on year, with 72% of children under 16 who have been in care for over 2.5 years remaining in the same placement for at least two years, a notable increase from 61% the previous year. Earlier improvements were also seen during 2025, where stability reached 68%, at that time the highest recorded. This sustained improvement demonstrates the impact of better matching, enhanced support to carers, and earlier intervention where risks to placements are identified.

Alongside stability, there has been strong progress in achieving permanence for children. The proportion of children long-term matched with their carers increased to 55% in September 2025, with a continued upward trajectory into 2026, achieving 57% at the end of March 2026. In total, 47 children were long-term matched during 2025–26, representing a significant improvement on previous years and reflecting more effective permanence planning and oversight.

Permanence is being achieved through a range of routes. There has been an increase in adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), and kinship care arrangements, ensuring children experience lasting relationships and a strong sense of belonging. During the year:

- 15 children achieved permanence through Adoption Orders
- 17 Placement Orders were granted and 20 children placed for adoption
- 20 children achieved permanence through SGOs and 10 through Child Arrangement Orders
- The number of children living with kinship carers increased to 37 (from 26 in 2022–23)

This progress reflects the strengthened role of the Kinship and Post Order Support Team and kinship pilot, which have improved early identification of family options and the support available to carers, enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks.

At the same time, there has been a continued focus on ensuring permanence plans are right for each child, not simply progressed quickly. As at March 2026, 29 children had been

in their placements for over 11 months and were eligible for matching but had not yet been formally matched, as reunification or alternative permanence options were still being carefully considered. This reflects a child-centred approach to permanence, where decisions are based on achieving the most appropriate long-term outcome.

The service has also strengthened permanence infrastructure and oversight, which has been central to driving improvement. This includes:

- Weekly Permanence Panels chaired at senior level
- A fully embedded permanence dashboard providing real-time tracking
- A dedicated permanence leadership role and task-and-finish group
- Introduction of an Over-14s matching process, improving permanence outcomes for older children

Together, these developments have resulted in earlier identification of drift and delay, more timely decision-making, and greater accountability across the system.

Despite this strong progress, challenges remain. Delays in care proceedings continue to impact the timeliness of permanence, with many cases exceeding the 26-week target due to wider court capacity issues. While initiatives such as the Designated Family Judge Trailblazer Pilot have supported some improvement, these systemic pressures continue to slow decision-making for some children.

In parallel, there has been a strong focus on reunification, ensuring that children can safely return to their families where appropriate. Practice has been strengthened through improved tracking and regular review of recommendations made at the end of care proceedings. This ensures that opportunities for safe reunification are proactively revisited, supporting more children to return home where it is in their best interests.

The service is responding proactively through strengthened tracking, enhanced management oversight, and the use of evidence-based frameworks such as the NSPCC Reunification Framework. As a result, while external constraints remain, the overall direction of travel is positive, with more robust practice, improved outcomes, and a clear focus on continuous improvement.

Progress in stability and permanence has been further supported by enhanced placement sufficiency and local provision. Medway has:

- Expanded emergency fostering provision to stabilise placements and allow planned transitions
- Reopened its in-house children's home (Eden House), providing high-quality local care
- Continued to develop fostering capacity, including participation in the Mockingbird model and national recruitment initiatives.

These developments have contributed to a significant reduction in unregistered care arrangements, from 18 in 2024 to just 1 as of March 2026. This is a notable achievement in the context of national sufficiency challenges and reflects strong strategic commissioning and market engagement. Importantly, this has enabled more children to live in safe, regulated, and stable environments, often closer to their communities.

Medway's in-house provision has also strengthened quality and stability, with the in-house

children's home currently rated Good by Ofsted, and further expansion planned to meet the needs of children with more complex needs. This supports the broader ambition of ensuring children are cared for locally, in family-based or high-quality settings wherever possible.

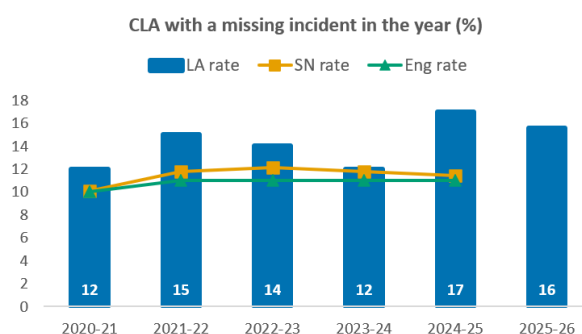
In parallel to improvements in placement stability and permanence, there has been continued strengthening of safeguarding responses, particularly in relation to missing children and those at risk of exploitation. This has been a key area of focus across the service, with a clear shift toward more proactive, coordinated and relationship-based interventions.

There has been a positive reduction in both the number of missing incidents involving looked-after children and the proportion of children affected during 2025–26. A total of 755 missing episodes were reported during the year, compared with 912 in the previous year, representing a notable year-on-year decrease.

The proportion of looked-after children who experienced at least one missing incident also reduced, falling from 17.3% in 2024–25 to 15.6% in 2025–26. There has also been an improvement in the frequency of repeat missing episodes among those children who do go missing. The average number of missing incidents per child reduced from 8.4 in 2024–25 to 6.8 in 2025–26.

While this demonstrates encouraging progress and reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen safeguarding and support arrangements for vulnerable children, the proportion remains elevated when compared with historic levels and continues to require close monitoring.

Multiple missing episodes remain a particular area of concern. During the year, 10.1% of looked-after children in Medway experienced more than one missing incident, highlighting the continued vulnerability of a cohort of children who may be at increased risk of exploitation, harm, or placement instability. Reducing repeat missing episodes will remain a priority, with a continued focus on early intervention, effective return-home interviews, and multi-agency safeguarding responses to address the underlying factors contributing to children going missing.



Performance data demonstrates strong delivery of statutory safeguarding processes, with 99% of Return Home Interviews offered and 86% completed within 72 hours, ensuring that children's voices and lived experiences are captured and used to inform safety planning. This has supported a more responsive approach to identifying risks, patterns and triggers linked to missing episodes, enabling more effective preventative planning.

The establishment of dedicated exploitation practitioners working intensively with vulnerable children has further strengthened the service's response. As an example, between January and March 2026, 25 children at risk of exploitation were supported through targeted intervention, including one-to-one direct work, contextual safeguarding and multi-agency risk management. Some of these children were children in care.

This cohort presented with highly complex and overlapping needs, including experiences of sexual exploitation, grooming, missing episodes, domestic abuse, and exposure to harmful peer and online environments.

In response, the service has embedded a multi-agency, trauma-informed approach, with practitioners actively participating in child protection conferences, strategy discussions and care planning forums to ensure risks are continuously reviewed and addressed.

There is clear evidence of strengthened partnership working, including collaboration with health services, youth justice, police, education providers and specialist services such as substance misuse support.

Importantly, practice has increasingly focused on building trusted relationships as a protective factor, recognising that many young people at risk of exploitation struggle with engagement and trust. A flexible, relationship-based model has been adopted, using creative approaches such as community-based activities, volunteering, and alternative engagement methods to maintain contact and reduce risk.

This approach has led to tangible progress, including:

- Improved engagement in education, training and positive activities
- Reduction in substance misuse for some young people
- Increased confidence, resilience and social connection through structured and supported experiences

There has also been a stronger focus on contextual safeguarding, with joint work taking place in community settings and identified high-risk locations. This includes coordinated outreach activity with youth services and policing, ensuring visible professional presence and consistent safeguarding messaging.

While risks linked to exploitation and missing episodes remain complex, often compounded by factors such as placement instability, disengagement from education, and adverse childhood experiences, the strengthened approach to early identification, multi-agency planning, and direct intervention is improving risk management and reducing harm.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that the corporate parenting service has made substantial progress in improving safety, stability, and permanence for children in care. More children are experiencing stable homes, achieving permanence through a range of pathways, and benefiting from stronger, more coordinated safeguarding responses. The foundations are now firmly in place to build on this progress and further improve timeliness and consistency, ensuring that every child experiences a secure and lasting sense of home.



Priority 2: Preparing you for Independence and Adulthood

We will support you to build the skills, confidence, and resilience you need to thrive as an adult — whether that's living independently, working, studying, or contributing to your community in your own unique way.

Over the past year, the Corporate Parenting service has made strong and demonstrable progress in supporting children in care and care leavers to prepare for independence, underpinned by improved planning, strengthened partnership working, and a clearer focus on outcomes.

A key strength continues to be the quality, consistency, and co-production of planning, with 94% of pathway plans up to date, exceeding local performance targets. This reflects a well-embedded approach where planning is truly child-centred and developed in partnership with children in care and care leavers, ensuring their voices, views, and aspirations are central to decision-making.

Young people are actively supported to contribute to and shape their own pathway plans, enabling them to influence the support they receive and the direction of their transition into adulthood. Plans are regularly reviewed, with a clear focus on responding to each young person's evolving needs and ambitions.

High levels of engagement have also been maintained, with 93% of care leavers seen within required timescales, ensuring sustained relationships with professionals and providing ongoing opportunities for their voice to be heard, valued, and reflected in practice.

This progress has been further supported through the establishment of a dedicated Independence and Preparation for Adulthood Corporate parenting Subgroup, which has met regularly since October 2025 and provides clear governance and oversight of this priority area. The subgroup has played a key role in driving consistency and strengthening practice, including the development and review of practical tools to better prepare young people for adulthood. These include tenancy training programmes, independence booklets, and budgeting support, helping to equip young people with the skills and confidence needed to live independently.

The Young Inspectors Programme has provided valuable insight into the experiences of care experienced young people living in supported accommodation. Findings highlighted positive relationships with staff, safe and welcoming environments, and a commitment to promoting independence, while also identifying opportunities to strengthen young people's involvement in decision making, improve communication about available support, and enhance engagement in education, employment, and key work activities.

Alongside this, there has been a deliberate focus on improving the quality and consistency of support provided by carers, providers, and professionals. Work is ongoing to clarify expectations around evidencing readiness for independence, ensuring that pathway plans are meaningful, reduce duplication, and provide a clear picture of each young person's progress. This has been complemented by strengthened partnership working with housing,

adult services, and commissioning, enabling a more coordinated and effective response to young people's needs as they transition to adulthood.

Importantly, there is now a clear shared understanding across services of the key factors that underpin successful transitions, particularly the relationship between stable accommodation and access to education, training, or employment. This has informed a more integrated approach to planning, recognising that positive outcomes in one area are dependent on stability in another.

There has also been continued progress in providing stable and supportive living arrangements for care leavers. The number of young people remaining with their foster carers under Staying Put arrangements has increased significantly, from 11 in 2023 to 27 in March 2026, supporting continuity of relationships and reducing the risk of early homelessness or instability.

More broadly, outcomes for care leavers in Medway remain positive in comparison to national benchmarks. Of the 210 care leavers currently supported (172 under 21 and 38 over 21):

- 92% of 18–21-year-olds are living in suitable accommodation, above the national average of 88%
- 8% are in unsuitable accommodation, despite an overall increase in the care leaver population
- a range of accommodation options are now in place to support different levels of need, including:
- 27 young people in Staying Put arrangements, maintaining stable family environments
- 7 young people in Shared Lives placements, offering a family-based model of support
- 34 young people in supported accommodation, where both housing and support are commissioned to meet individual needs

This reflects a more diverse and flexible accommodation pathway, enabling young people to move toward independence at a pace that is right for them, while ensuring appropriate levels of support remain in place.

Since joining the service in November 2025, the Specialist Housing Advisor has played a significant role in strengthening housing stability for care experienced young people through early, preventative intervention. Their work has had a direct and tangible impact, supporting 18 young people to better understand their housing rights, sustain tenancies, and reduce the risk of homelessness. This proactive approach has already led to positive outcomes, including preventing prolonged homelessness for a vulnerable care leaver through effective, trauma-informed advocacy that secured temporary accommodation despite an initial refusal. This demonstrates the significant value of having dedicated, specialist expertise in place to intervene early and safeguard young people from escalating housing crises.

The role has also made a meaningful contribution at a strategic level, improving access to appropriate housing pathways and ensuring that young people's voices inform service development. Through active engagement in corporate parenting forums, Move On planning processes, and close partnership working with Medway's Local Housing Authority, the Housing Advisor has strengthened coordination and decision-making. Their advocacy has secured key outcomes for individuals, including successfully enabling

access to the Housing Needs Register following initial refusals, thereby improving long-term housing prospects. In addition, the introduction of regular feedback mechanisms has enhanced quality assurance and ensured that lived experiences directly shape ongoing improvements across accommodation services, further embedding a responsive and young person-centred approach.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that Medway has strengthened its approach to preparing young people for adulthood, with clear improvements in planning, partnership working, and accommodation outcomes. Young people are now experiencing more stable transitions, better coordinated support, and increased opportunities to develop the skills they need to thrive independently.

Case Study: Supporting a Vulnerable Care Leaver Through a Multi-Agency Approach

In early 2026, a care-experienced young person facing significant challenges, including mental health concerns, domestic abuse, homelessness and complex health needs, was supported through a coordinated multi-agency response involving housing, health, outreach and 16+ services. Through persistent partnership working, safe accommodation was secured and adapted in response to emerging risks, while regular multi-disciplinary meetings ensured a trauma-informed and person-centred approach. Central to the success of this intervention was the development of a trusted relationship with the young person, enabling their voice to remain at the heart of planning and decision-making. Although work continues to secure longer-term accommodation and support, the young person has demonstrated increased stability and engagement, highlighting the importance of relationship-based practice and effective multi-agency collaboration in improving outcomes for vulnerable care leavers.



Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing

We will support and encourage you to live a happy, healthy life — both physically and emotionally. We will make sure professionals work together to design services that are tailored to your individual health and wellbeing needs.

The Corporate Parenting Board has maintained strong and active oversight of health outcomes for children in care through the Health and Wellbeing Subgroup, which continues to be well-supported by elected members. The subgroup has retained a clear focus on scrutinising performance against statutory health duties, ensuring that both strengths and areas for development are transparently reported and addressed.

Overall, performance in key areas of ongoing health monitoring remains strong. The timeliness of Review Health Assessments is particularly positive, with 93% completed within required timescales, demonstrating effective coordination and follow-up for children already in the care system. In addition, access to routine preventative healthcare is encouraging, with 86% of children in care up to date with their dental checks. Similarly, 81.2% of children were recorded as having up-to-date immunisations, providing a solid foundation for protecting children's long-term health and wellbeing. These outcomes

reflect sustained commitment across partners to prioritising the ongoing health needs of children and young people.

However, the Board has maintained a clear and honest focus on areas where performance is more variable, particularly in relation to Initial Health Assessments (IHAs). While completion rates for children placed within the local area remain comparatively strong at 82%, there are significant challenges for those placed out of area, where only 27% of IHAs are completed on time. This disparity highlights broader systemic pressures and complexities associated with out-of-area placements, including coordination across services and geographical boundaries.

In response, a detailed analysis of IHA performance data between August and December 2025 by health and social care. This has enabled the identification of key barriers contributing to delay, including placement instability, the specific challenges associated with Section 20 arrangements, and the complexity of securing timely health provision for children placed out of area. This analysis has directly informed the development of a targeted and evidence-based action plan, which is now subject to ongoing monitoring and scrutiny by the health and well-being subgroup to ensure sustained improvement.

Multi-agency collaboration continues to strengthen, with partners demonstrating a shared commitment to addressing identified challenges. There has been a particular emphasis on joint working with health partners to reduce delays in health assessments and improve the consistency of service delivery across different placement types. This collaborative approach is central to driving forward improvement and ensuring that children in care receive timely and effective health support regardless of where they are placed.

A health history for children in care transitioning into adulthood is a concise, comprehensive record that summarises their past and current health needs, including medical conditions, immunisations, medications, mental and emotional health, and any relevant safeguarding information. Its purpose is to support continuity of care, empower young people to understand their own health, and help them make informed decisions as they move into independence.

A shorter version is completed for unaccompanied minors due to the limited information available; however, this document still provides valuable health promotion links to support their wellbeing and access to services.

A copy of the document is distributed to the G.P and Social Worker if the young person consents for this document to be shared.

A total of 63 health histories were due between 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026 and 63 have been completed, demonstrating strong compliance and effective oversight of statutory responsibilities. This reflects a consistent approach to timely health assessments and ensures young people receive the information needed as they move toward independence.

For care leavers, a dedicated health pathway had been developed with Medway Community Healthcare, enabling continued nursing support until age 19 and increasing joint working between Personal Advisors and health professionals. This integrated approach aimed to ensure continuity, reduce duplication, and strengthen the health and wellbeing offer for young people transitioning to adulthood.

Medway has developed a strengthened and cohesive emotional wellbeing and mental health offer for children in care and care leavers, delivered through dedicated pathways within the Medway Young People's Wellbeing Service (MYPWS) and CAMHS. Between April 2025 and March 2026, this offer was underpinned by the i-THRIVE framework, ensuring a needs-led approach that enables children and young people to access the right support at the right time. Provision spans the full continuum from early advice and signposting through to specialist and risk support, with core services delivered by MYPWS (part of NELFT) alongside complementary interventions such as Short Intervention Therapy (SIT), and digital platforms including KOOTH and QWELL, which provides free, accessible mental health support for care leavers.

Children in care are prioritised for timely access to specialist interventions, typically through consultation clinics within two weeks of referral, supported by personalised care plans and a range of evidence-based approaches. The wider offer, including SIT and behavioural support services, ensured a flexible and responsive system tailored to individual needs, recognising the increased vulnerability of care leavers, targeted pathways have been further developed to support their transition to adulthood. This includes the Care Navigator pilot, focused on building resilience, independence and coping strategies, and a dedicated health pathway through the 16+ service, promoting continuity of care up to age 19.

These arrangements have been further enhanced by the introduction of the Medway Therapeutic Alliance in April 2026, a locally commissioned service providing a priority, needs-led pathway with rapid triage, accelerated assessment, and consistent care coordination.

The Board has also supported ongoing innovation to better meet the needs of children and young people. A notable example is the introduction of a digital speech and language tool within Youth Justice services, designed to improve the identification of communication needs and enable earlier, more targeted support for children involved in the youth justice system. This pilot reflects a proactive approach to addressing emerging needs and enhancing service responsiveness and extended the use of this tool to our children in care and care leavers.

As part of a collaborative partnership between Public Health, the Leaving Care Service, Mid Kent College, Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC), and a range of local health, education and community partners, a series of health and wellbeing resources have been co-produced with care-experienced children and young people. The project aims to ensure that information and advice are relevant, accessible and shaped by the lived experiences of young people themselves.

During the year, several new videos were developed in response to priorities identified directly by care-experienced young people. One video, *"What Are You Doing?"*, focuses on promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and was created following feedback from young people who identified mental health support as a key area of need. A further resource, *"How to Deal with Panic Attacks"*, was co-produced with a care-experienced young person who shared their personal experiences of panic attacks while in care. The content was informed by specialist clinical advice from North Kent Mind. In addition, *"How to Cope with Asthma"* was developed in response to concerns around the impact of poorly managed asthma on children and young people, with input from NHS clinicians and health partners to ensure the information provided is accurate and practical.

These resources are part of a growing library of co-produced content available through the Medway Local Offer for Care Leavers and a dedicated YouTube playlist. The initiative demonstrates the value of strong partnership working and meaningful participation, ensuring that care-experienced young people have access to trusted information that supports their health, wellbeing and independence.

For now, our videos can be found throughout the Health section of the Care Leavers Local Offer: (https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200260/local_offer_for_care_leavers/762/your_health) or on this playlist on the Council's own YouTube page: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZ43L06IzCAyvbIYg0rrrFJB6RtvLeO92&si=yIT8whwLS8Ulw-n6>

Elected members have positively recognised both the progress made and the culture of transparency underpinning this work. There is clear confidence in the direction of travel, with robust reporting of challenges alongside a strong focus on continuous improvement. This balanced approach ensures that the Corporate Parenting Board remains sighted on key risks while driving forward meaningful change in health outcomes for children in care.



Priority 4: Education, Training and Employment

We will champion your ambitions and support you to reach your full potential. Whether you're at school, college, university, or starting work, we'll make sure you have the same opportunities to succeed as your peers — and the support you need

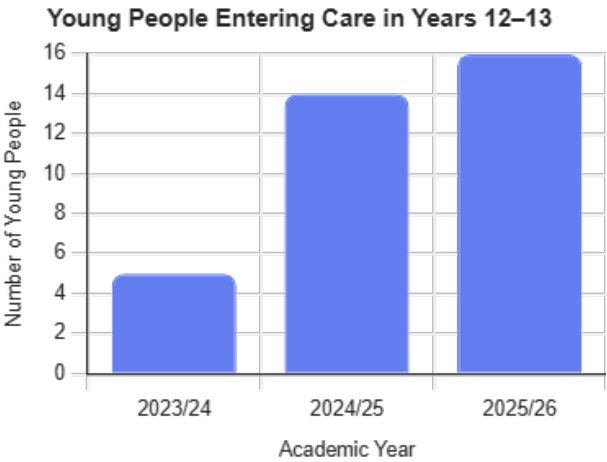
The Corporate Parenting Board has continued to prioritise education outcomes through a strong and collaborative partnership approach, with schools actively engaged as key partners within the Education Subgroup. This collective commitment has supported consistently high performance in education planning, with 99% of children in care benefitting from up-to-date Personal Education Plans (PEPs), ensuring that their educational needs are clearly understood and effectively supported.

Educational outcomes for Medway's children in care continue to show encouraging progress, particularly at Key Stages 2 and 4. At GCSE level, 10 young people achieved a combined pass grade (Grade 4+) in both English and Mathematics, with a number of pupils also achieving higher grades across both subjects. Attainment at Key Stage 4 remains a strength, with children who had been in care for 12 months or more achieving an average Attainment 8 score of 22.7, significantly above the national average for children in care (17.9). Furthermore, Attainment 8 outcomes in Medway have shown a consistent year-on-year improvement over the past three years, demonstrating the positive impact of targeted educational support and stability for children in care.

At Key Stage 2, 40.7% of children in care achieved the expected standard in the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics, exceeding the national average for children in care of 34.0%. This reflects the commitment of schools, carers and education professionals in supporting children to achieve positive outcomes despite the challenges many have experienced.

While outcomes for some younger children remain affected by factors such as placement instability and disrupted early development, work is underway through the Corporate Parenting Board’s Education Subgroup to strengthen support for literacy and learning. Targeted initiatives focused on improving reading and writing attainment aim to ensure that children in care continue to make good educational progress and fulfil their potential.

There is an increase in the number of young people coming into care in later years which places considerable pressure on securing Education, Employment and Training (EET).



Outcomes for care leavers in EET have also shown marked improvement. More recent data from January 2026 indicates a significant rise to 74%, compared to 56% in February 2025. This exceeds the local KPI of 60% and compares favourably against both statistical neighbours (61%) and national benchmarks (64%), demonstrating strong progress. In total, 145 young people have been supported into EET or volunteering opportunities, reflecting sustained focus on progression and preparing young people for adulthood.

The Education subgroup has maintained a clear focus on improving access to high-quality and appropriate education provision, including strengthening post-16 pathways, promoting the effective use of Pupil Premium to close attainment gaps, and delivering training to schools both within Medway and beyond.

The continued delivery of the Aspirations Officer role within the 16+ service has had a significant and demonstrable impact on improving education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers. A key strength has been the shift from traditional, clinic-based delivery to a more proactive and targeted outreach model. By engaging young people directly within foster placements and supported accommodation, the Aspirations Officer has been able to build stronger relationships, facilitate meaningful and personalised careers conversations, and support clearer pathways into EET. This tailored approach has resulted in increased participation and confidence among young people, with 76 CVs co-produced over the year and direct referrals made to a range of opportunities including Sports Direct training programmes, TCHC employability courses, and construction sector placements through Skanska. These interventions have contributed to maintaining a local NEET rate of 26%, significantly below the national benchmark of 39% for care leavers aged 19–21, evidencing the positive impact of sustained and focussed employability support.

In September 2025, 15 young people were attending university, and more were seeking guidance on educational opportunities, a positive sign of growing aspiration and

engagement.

The role has also strengthened partnership working, broadening access to opportunities and reducing barriers for vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Through the development of effective links with the Department for Work and Pensions, ESOL providers, community organisations and national employability programmes, the Aspirations Officer has enabled a more coordinated and responsive support offer.

Improved tracking and oversight, including the introduction of a dedicated UASC monitoring tool, has enhanced the service's ability to identify risk, track progress, and support transitions into education and training. This has directly enabled increased access to college placements and English language provision for those previously not engaged. In addition, active participation in strategic forums, including the Corporate Parenting Education Subgroup, has strengthened system-wide collaboration and influence. Collectively, this work has delivered a more joined-up, consistent and impactful employability offer, supporting better outcomes for young people at risk of disengagement and social exclusion.

At the same time, there is a clear and transparent recognition of ongoing challenges, particularly around attendance at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, most notably in Year 11, as well as the impact of suspensions and out-of-area placements on educational engagement. Despite these challenges, there has been notable progress, including individual success stories where children have been successfully re-engaged in education, and the finalisation of the Medway Education Promise.

The Board continues to drive forward improvements by strengthening systems, raising expectations, and ensuring that all children in care, including those placed outside Medway, receive a consistent and equitable educational experience.

Case study- Rebuilding Aspirations: A Journey Back to Learning

When the young person was first engaged with in December 2025, they had experienced significant trauma and instability. These experiences had contributed to significant disengagement from education, with the young person having missed substantial learning and expressing no intention of returning to school or pursuing further education. Through consistent relationship-building, regular communication, and a flexible, child-centred approach, the Aspiration Officer was able to build trust and identify their interests in beauty and future ambitions of running their own business. This enabled support to be tailored around their aspirations, gradually increasing their willingness to consider education and training opportunities.

The Aspiration Officer provided ongoing practical and emotional support to overcome barriers to engagement, including arranging and attending a visit to a Hair and Beauty training provider, supporting the completion of a college application, facilitating communication with college staff to reduce anxiety, and resolving application difficulties that placed their college place at risk. As a direct result of this intervention, they successfully secured a place at a local College to study Hair and Beauty. In addition to achieving a positive educational outcome, they demonstrated improved confidence, increased engagement with professionals, and a greater ability to plan for their future. This has provided them with a structured pathway towards independence, helping to promote stability, build resilience, and reduce the risks associated with their wider vulnerabilities.



Priority 5: Listening to You and Participation

We will strengthen your voice and influence by listening to you, involving you in decisions, and using your experiences to shape the services that support you. Your views matter — and we're committed to making sure they help drive change.

Participation, Engagement and the Voice of the Child

The Corporate Parenting Board continues to demonstrate strong performance in ensuring that the voices of children in care and care leavers are heard, valued and actively influence decision-making. Participation in statutory reviews remains consistently high, with 99% of children participating in their reviews and 98% of reviews completed within statutory timescales, reflecting a strong culture of child-centred practice and meaningful engagement.

The Participation Subgroup has played a significant role in strengthening participation arrangements across Children's Services. This has included promoting more inclusive and responsive practice through the use of participation tools such as MOMO, enhanced direct work approaches and targeted workforce development. Training initiatives, including Leaders Unlocked, have supported practitioners to develop confidence and skills in engaging children and young people, particularly those affected by trauma and neurodiversity.

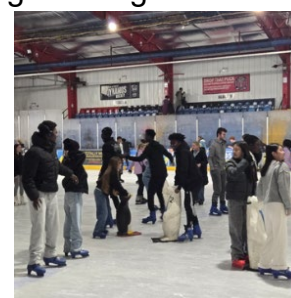
Feedback from the 2025 Annual Care Leavers Survey highlights many positive experiences of the service. Care leavers reported strong and supportive relationships with their Personal Advisors, valuing consistent communication, practical assistance and feeling listened to. Feedback also demonstrated positive engagement in education, employment and training, alongside support to maintain important personal relationships.

The survey identified opportunities for further improvement, particularly in increasing awareness of the Local Offer, strengthening co-production within pathway planning, tailoring communication approaches to young people's preferences and enhancing support relating to emotional wellbeing, independence, accommodation and access to health services. These findings are being used constructively to inform service development and improvement planning.

Positive relationships and peer networks are vital protective factors that improve young people's mental health, resilience, confidence and sense of belonging. Through a wide



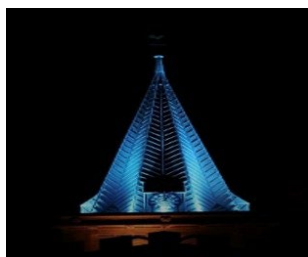
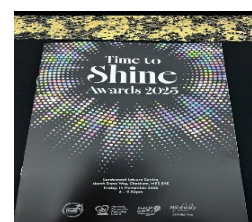
range of activities and events, the service provides opportunities for care leavers to build friendships, reduce isolation and develop positive connections, helping them to successfully transition towards independence. Events such as the Time to Shine Awards, Care Leavers Month celebrations, Black History Month, LGBTQIA+ events, Summer BBQs, Mother's Day, Eid, Ramadan and



Christmas celebrations, alongside regular activities including cooking, baking, bingo and Halloween events, create opportunities for young people to feel included, celebrated and valued.



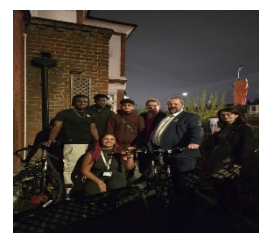
In November, we came together to celebrate our children and young people at our Time to Shine Awards, recognising their achievements, resilience and talent. We proudly celebrated all 183 nominations, honored the shortlisted nominees, and applauded our deserving winners. We were also delighted to be joined by the inspirational Dame Kelly Holmes, whose presence made the evening even more special for our children, carers, and staff.



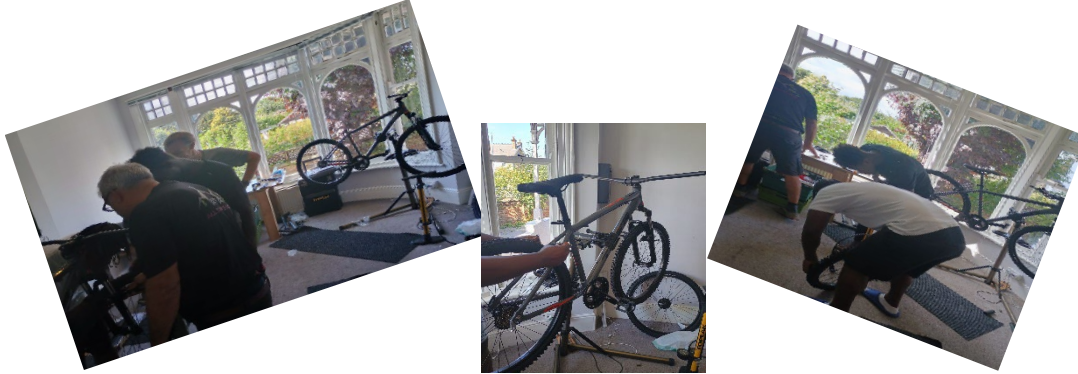
In November we also celebrated Care Leavers Month, recognising the achievements, resilience, and journeys of our care-experienced young people. As part of these celebrations, Rochester Castle's spire was illuminated in their honor, creating a powerful and symbolic moment that highlighted our pride in them and our commitment to championing their voices and futures.

Corporate Parent Active Pilot- In collaboration with our Regeneration, Culture, Environment & Transformation colleagues, we ran a six-week Corporate Parent Active Pilot, this started in February 2026. This pilot offered a group of 20 children in care, aged 11–14 and living in Medway, the opportunity to take part in a range of sports including tennis, wheelchair rugby, basketball, rugby, badminton and hockey. The aim was not only to keep them active, but also to give them the chance to try new activities, build confidence, and hopefully discover new interests and passions.

Alongside these activities, senior leaders and practitioners continue to engage directly with young people in their homes and communities, using relationship-based practice to build trust, understand individual experiences and strengthen engagement with the service. This approach is particularly important for newly arrived young people, helping them develop a sense of stability, belonging and connection. As an example, the Bike Scheme was developed in response to our young people's identified need, bringing together partnerships with Paramount Housing, Thrift and Thrive, local recycling centres, and charities. This initiative provides



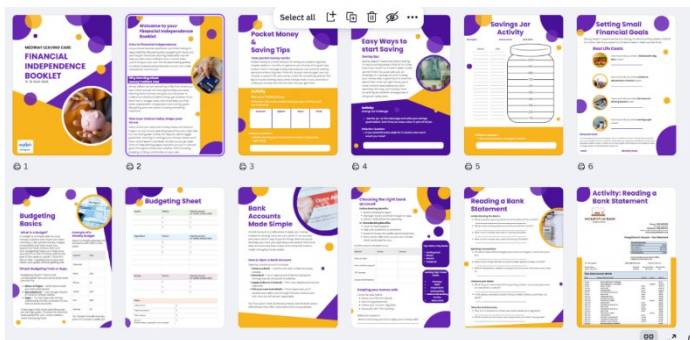
practical support for young people attaining bikes. We linked Fort4youthfoundation and Paramount Housing to help support other young people access bikes. We have been making referrals to the Bike Projects and continuously are supporting young people to attend Thrift and Thrive to access support in fixing bikes.



By supporting meaningful relationships and encouraging participation, the service helps young people access opportunities in education, employment, health and wellbeing, providing a strong foundation for positive outcomes and successful transitions into adulthood.

Impact of Participation on Service Development

Young people's feedback has led to tangible improvements in services and support. For example, concerns raised regarding transport barriers affecting attendance at the Care Leavers Hub led to successful discussions with providers, resulting in funded transport arrangements and improved access to participation opportunities and support services. This demonstrates to young people that their views can influence real change.



Participation has also informed the development of key resources designed to support independence and preparation for adulthood. Care-experienced young people co-produced both a Financial Independence Booklet and a comprehensive Independence Guide, ensuring that the information reflects real-life experiences, priorities and challenges faced by young people transitioning to adulthood.

priorities and challenges faced by young people transitioning to adulthood.

As part of our commitment to strengthening the Local Offer, we have focused on improving the accessibility of information and supporting young people to develop the skills and knowledge required for independent living. A comprehensive 37-page Independence Guide has been developed and shared with practitioners, managers and young people to gather feedback and ensure it remains practical, relevant and reflective of young people's experiences.

A co-produced approach has been central to this work, with young people directly influencing the content. Their feedback has helped ensure the guide addresses the realities of independent living, including topics that may otherwise have been overlooked. This has reinforced the importance of embedding young people's voices within service development and ensuring resources are meaningful and user-led.

Alongside this, we have begun exploring the development of a digital Local Offer to improve how information is shared and accessed. The ambition is to create a more accessible platform where young people can easily access the Local Offer, find information about upcoming events and opportunities, and connect with relevant support services.

Young people have also played a central role in shaping the Local Offer for Care Leavers, contributing feedback on existing services and influencing future developments, including plans for a more accessible digital Local Offer platform.

Strengthening Co-Production and Young People's Influence

Co-production has become increasingly embedded across the service. A notable example was the partnership with MidKent College, where care leavers helped co-produce a series of self-care videos for children in care and care leavers. Young people sat on decision-making panels, shaped content and ensured resources reflected lived experience. The project attracted national recognition through NHS England's Healthcare Inequalities Forum and has subsequently been shared with a number of local authorities as an example of innovative co-production.

The service has also strengthened engagement with the Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC), creating more opportunities for young people to influence local policy and service delivery. The introduction of the "Big Question" programme has further enhanced this approach and is closely aligned to the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership Board's strategic priorities, providing a mechanism to gather young people's views on key themes and areas for development. Moving beyond traditional surveys, the programme facilitates meaningful one-to-one and small group conversations, enabling a wider and more representative range of children and young people to contribute their experiences and perspectives, including those who may be less likely to engage through formal consultation methods. This approach helps ensure that service development and strategic planning are informed by the voices of children and young people and reflect the priorities that matter most to them.

Outcomes and Impact for Children and Young People

Participation activity has delivered a range of positive outcomes for children and young people, including:



- Increased confidence, self-esteem and self-advocacy skills.
- Improved relationships between young people and professionals, helping to build trust and engagement.
- Greater feelings of belonging and inclusion through participation in groups, events and community activities.
- Reduced social isolation through access to peer networks, Hub activities and celebration events.
- Increased access to education, employment, training and volunteering opportunities through partnership working.
- Improved preparation for independence through co-produced resources, tenancy training and life-skills programmes.
- Enhanced awareness of health, wellbeing and support services through targeted participation events and campaigns.

The annual Health and Wellbeing Event, co-produced in response to feedback from young people, successfully engaged 21 care-experienced young people and connected them with a wide range of support services in an environment designed around their preferences. The event promoted wellbeing, confidence, healthy lifestyles and practical life skills while strengthening connections with support networks.

Partnership working has significantly broadened opportunities available to young people. Through collaboration with organisations including the Young Lives Foundation, Child Friendly Medway, MidKent College, Public Health, NHS England, Kent Skills Hub and community organisations, young people have accessed advocacy, education and employment opportunities, sporting activities, wellbeing support and practical resources. These partnerships have enabled young people to influence wider systems while also improving individual outcomes.

The development of the Care Leavers Hub has also been shaped by direct feedback from young people. Improvements to the physical environment, the introduction of participation walls and structured feedback mechanisms have created a more welcoming, youth-focused space that promotes engagement, wellbeing and a stronger sense of ownership among young people.

6. KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2026- 2027

1. Improve Permanence and Long-Term Stability for Children in Care

Strengthen permanence planning to increase the proportion of children achieving long-term matches, permanence through kinship care, adoption, reunification and other family-based arrangements. Continue to improve placement stability, reduce placement moves and ensure children experience lasting and nurturing relationships. Medway Fostering Service's participation in the National Kinship Allowance Pilot and the wider Kinship Programme will further support these aims by strengthening support for kinship carers and increasing opportunities for children to achieve permanence within their family networks

2. Improve Health and Emotional Wellbeing Outcomes

Strengthen access to physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing services, with a focus on reducing delays in health assessments, improving outcomes for children placed out of area, and supporting care leavers to manage their health needs independently as they transition into adulthood.

3. Improve Education, Employment, Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities

Increase participation in education, employment and training by reducing NEET levels, improving educational attendance and attainment, and significantly expanding apprenticeship, work experience and employment opportunities across the Council and partner organisations. Particular focus should be given to supporting young people entering care during adolescence and those facing barriers to participation.

4. Strengthen Housing Pathways and Preparation for Adulthood

Deliver a comprehensive accommodation pathway for care leavers through the implementation of the Staying Close offer, Joint Housing Protocol and strengthened partnership arrangements. Improve housing stability, reduce homelessness risk and ensure young people have the practical and emotional support needed to transition successfully into adulthood

5. Promote Lifelong Relationships and Support Networks

Ensure every child in care and care leaver has access to strong, enduring and supportive relationships. Develop Lifelong Links, strengthen family and support network planning, and embed support network meetings at key transition points to enhance resilience, wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

6. Strengthen Participation, Co-Production and the Local Offer

Increase the influence of children and young people in shaping services by embedding co-production across all areas of practice. Improve awareness, accessibility and engagement with the Local Offer, ensuring it is visible, easy to navigate and responsive to the needs and aspirations of care-experienced young people.