

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 October 2026

Children's Services Reforms

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Summary

This report provides an update on progress implementing the national children's social care reforms in Medway.

The reforms aim to:

- help families receive support earlier.
- strengthen child protection arrangements.
- increase support available to kinship carers.
- improve the availability of local placements for children in care.
- improve outcomes for care leavers.

Progress continues across all reform areas. During the reporting period significant developments have included further design of the Family Help model, implementation of Family Network Support Packages, progress towards a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, expansion of support for kinship carers and continued development of plans to improve services for care leavers.

The report highlights achievements, next steps and areas where continued partnership working is required.

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- 1.1.1 Note the progress made in implementing children's social care reforms.
- 1.1.2 Note the key developments across all reform areas.

1.1.3 Note the importance of continued partnership working in delivering the reforms.

1.1.4 Provide comments and challenge to support successful implementation.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The Children and Families Reform Programme supports the One Medway Council Plan priorities by strengthening early intervention, improving safeguarding, supporting family networks and improving outcomes for children, young people and care leavers.

2.2 The proposals are within the Council's policy framework and support strategic priorities to improve outcomes for children and families, strengthen partnership working and deliver national children's social care reforms.

3. Background

3.1 The Government's programme of children's social care reform is designed to improve outcomes for children and families through earlier intervention, stronger safeguarding arrangements and improved support for children who cannot live with their birth parents.

3.2 In Medway, delivery is organised around five areas of reform:

- Family Help and Early Intervention
- Safeguarding and Multi-Agency Working
- Kinship Care
- Placement Sufficiency
- Care Leavers
- Cross-cutting Programme Enablers

3.3 The programme has also expanded to strengthen alignment between children's social care and SEND reforms.

4. Progress Update

4.1 Family Help and Early Intervention

4.1.1 Family Help is a national reform programme that aims to ensure children, young people and families receive the right support at the earliest possible opportunity. The intention is to bring services together around families, providing coordinated support before difficulties escalate and reducing the need for more intensive intervention.

4.1.2 Significant progress has been made in developing Medway's Family Help approach. During this period, officers have worked with partners across children's services, health, education and the voluntary sector to design how Family Help services will operate in practice. A draft

operating model has now been developed and is being refined through engagement with partners and staff.

- 4.1.3 A new Family Help assessment and planning approach has been completed following consultation with internal and external partners. This will provide a consistent way of understanding family needs and planning support across services. Updated threshold guidance has also been published to help professionals identify the most appropriate level of support for children and families.
- 4.1.4 The programme has also progressed workforce planning, including modelling future capacity requirements and developing key practitioner roles that will support delivery of the new model. In parallel, work is underway to prepare digital systems and reporting arrangements needed to support implementation.
- 4.1.5 Alongside these developments, Medway has commenced implementation of the Best Start in Life programme, which will strengthen support available to families with babies and very young children, including additional focus on parenting support and perinatal mental health.

4.1.6 **Next Steps**

- Finalise the Target Operating Model by August 2026.
- Begin workforce consultation during September.
- Develop workforce development plans.
- Progress Mosaic system development and staff training ahead of implementation.

4.2 **Safeguarding and Multi-Agency Collaboration**

- 4.2.1 National reforms seek to strengthen child protection arrangements through closer partnership working between agencies responsible for safeguarding children. In Medway, this includes development of a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) to improve information sharing, joint decision-making and coordinated responses to risk.
- 4.2.2 Work has continued to develop the proposed Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, with partners contributing to the design of operating arrangements, workforce structures and governance arrangements. Discussions have also taken place with neighbouring authorities and key statutory partners to learn from emerging practice and ensure alignment with wider safeguarding developments.
- 4.2.3 Progress has also been made in developing a shared safeguarding dataset through the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership, which will strengthen oversight of safeguarding activity and support continuous improvement.

4.2.4 Next Steps

- Finalise the MACPT operating model.
- Agree workforce and budget requirements.
- Agree implementation arrangements with partners and implementation timelines.
- Complete performance reporting arrangements.

4.3 Strengthening Kinship Care

4.3.1 Kinship care describes arrangements where children are cared for by family members or close family friends when they cannot live with their parents. National reforms place greater emphasis on supporting children to remain safely within their wider family network wherever appropriate.

4.3.2 This area has seen substantial progress. Family Network Support Packages are now operational, creating practical support for families who step forward to care for children. The Kinship Allowance Pilot has also continued to expand, increasing financial support available to eligible carers.

4.3.3 Significant work has taken place to improve systems and processes, helping practitioners identify family members who may be able to care for children at an earlier stage. Progress has also been made towards implementation of Lifelong Links, an approach that helps children build and maintain supportive relationships within their family network.

4.3.4 Schools have increasingly supported identification of kinship carers through engagement with designated teachers and wider communication activity.

4.3.5 Next Steps

- Increase referrals into Family Network Support Packages.
- Launch updated communications and engagement activities.
- Finalise Lifelong Links implementation.
- Continue development of the Kinship Local Offer.

4.4 Increasing Placement Sufficiency

4.4.1 The reforms seek to ensure there are sufficient high-quality placements available for children in care, reducing the need for children to be placed far from their local communities and support networks.

4.4.2 Work has continued to improve understanding of current and future placement needs. The workstream has engaged with the South East Regional Care Cooperative and explored opportunities to learn from regional developments in fostering, specialist provision and commissioning arrangements.

4.4.3 Benchmarking work has commenced with comparator authorities to better understand local performance and identify opportunities for improvement. Work has also progressed to improve multi-agency understanding of Deprivation of Liberty arrangements and the implications for children with complex needs.

4.4.4 **Next Steps**

- Agree fostering recruitment and retention targets.
- Extend Deprivation of Liberty training across partner agencies.
- Continue development of supported homes and sufficiency planning.

4.5 **Improving Support for Care Leavers**

4.5.1 The reforms recognise that care-experienced young people can face additional challenges as they move towards adulthood and independence. The objective is to strengthen support across housing, employment, education, health and relationships.

4.5.2 A number of important developments have taken place during this period. New partnership groups have been established to improve arrangements relating to housing, Staying Close support, education, employment and training opportunities. Work has also continued to enhance the Care Leaver Local Offer, ensuring information and support are more accessible to young people.

4.5.3 The programme has explored opportunities to strengthen family and relationship-based support through Lifelong Links and has begun developing improved performance information to better understand outcomes for care-experienced young people.

4.5.4 **Next Steps**

Delivery in this area remains dependent upon continued partnership working across council services and external partners, particularly in relation to housing and employment opportunities for care-experienced young people.

5. **Key Milestones**

5.1 The reform programme continues to make progress across all areas of national reform. While some aspects of delivery remain dependent on effective partnership working and implementation planning, the programme has moved from design into delivery across several key areas. Members are invited to continue their oversight of the programme and support the ambition to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Medway.

5.2 Achieved during July 2026

- Family Help Single Assessment and Plan signed off by partnership.
- Family Network Support Package offer launched.

- Family Network Support Package panel arrangements operational.
- Draft Family Help and MACPT target operating models developed.

5.3 Next Period

- Sign-off of Target Operating Model, job descriptions and grading structure by 31 August 2026.
- Completion of Lifelong Links options appraisal by 31 August 2026.
- Preparation for workforce consultation and implementation planning.

5.4 Over the next reporting period the programme will focus on:

- finalising Family Help arrangements
- progressing implementation planning
- strengthening multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- embedding new kinship support offers
- improving placement sufficiency planning
- advancing housing, employment and education opportunities for care leavers

6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Implementation of the MACPT model is delayed	Delay in confirmation of Police and ICB resources for MACPT.	Continued senior-level engagement through governance structures and partner discussions.	C2
Programme delivery timescales are affected	Competing demands on corporate enabling services delay systems, intelligence and implementation activity.	Establishment of dedicated Programme Enablers workstream to prioritise delivery.	C2
Implementation of the Target Operating Model is delayed	Potential timing of an Ofsted ILACS inspection reduces programme capacity.	Development of contingency planning and ongoing engagement with DfE.	C2
Programme outcomes are delayed by partner engagement issues	Variable engagement from partners outside the directorate impacts decision-making and implementation.	Earlier escalation and strengthened senior stakeholder engagement.	B2

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	1 Critical 2 Major 3 Moderate 6 Minor

7. Consultation

- 7.1 The Children and Families Reform Programme has been developed through engagement with internal services and key partners, including education, health, police and safeguarding partners. Ongoing consultation and co-production will continue as individual reform workstreams progress.

8. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

- 8.1 Following the announcement of the pause on 7 September 2026, officers will monitor the ongoing situation and will consider any relevant impacts as they arise.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The Children and Families Reform Programme is being delivered within existing approved budgets and governance arrangements.
- 9.2 Any future proposals requiring additional investment or changes to existing funding arrangements will be subject to separate approval through the Council's established decision-making processes.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1 The programme supports the Council in meeting its statutory duties in relation to children, young people and families, including responsibilities under relevant children's social care legislation and statutory guidance.
- 10.2 Delivery of the programme will require continued partnership working across the Council and with external organisations. Appropriate governance and information-sharing arrangements will be maintained throughout implementation.
- 10.3 The programme will continue to respond to any future changes in legislation, statutory guidance and national policy relating to children's social care reform.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None