KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 23 September 2026.

PRESENT: Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair), Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair), Mr J Defriend, Mr J Eustace, Mr J Finch (Substitute for Mr T L Shonk), Mr A J Hook, Mr M A J Hood, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mallon, Mr T Mole, Mr H Rayner, Mr P Thomas and Mr D Truder

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P Webb

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms C McInnes (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Ms I Crisan (Director of Operations, Integrated Children's Services), Ms D Bride (Assistant Director, Adolescents and Family Hubs) and Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

67. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item A1)

Apologies were received from Mr Shonk, for whom Mr Finch was substituting. Apologies were also received from the Parent Governor and Church Representatives.

The Chair welcomed Mrs Lawes, who had joined the Committee since publication of the agenda.

68. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting
(Item A2)

There were no declarations of interest.

69. Minutes of the meetings held on 1 July and 3 August 2026
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 1 July and 3 August 2026 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chair.

70. Kent Family Hubs - Impact, Effectiveness and Sustainability
(Item C1)

1. The item was introduced by Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, and officers from the Children, Young People and Education Directorate, who presented the report on the impact, effectiveness and sustainability of Kent Family Hubs. Members were advised that Family Hubs formed part of a national government programme which differed significantly from

the previous Children's Centre model in terms of scope, age range, funding arrangements, reporting requirements and delivery expectations.

2. Officers explained that Family Hubs provided a whole-family approach for children and young people aged 0-19 and up to 25 for those with SEND. Members heard that, unlike the previous Children's Centre model, Family Hubs operated through a hub-and-spoke approach involving physical locations, outreach provision, community venues, digital services and co-location with partner services, including libraries.

3. Officers advised that Government funding and delivery requirements prescribed much of the Family Hub model and limited local flexibility. It was explained that the programme required extensive reporting against national measures and operated within a different performance framework to that used under the former Children's Centre arrangements. It was emphasised that direct comparisons between the two models were difficult due to differences in programme objectives, eligibility criteria and performance measures.

4. The Chair explained that the Committee's purpose in considering the report was to understand the impact of the Family Hub model and to consider whether changes in policy and service delivery were achieving the intended outcomes for children, young people and families across Kent.

5. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion included the following:

   a) Officers advised that Kent's priority remained improving outcomes for children in the early years, particularly attainment of a Good Level of Development. Members heard that targeted work was continuing within schools and that successful initiatives would be shared more widely through the Practice Hub for early years.

   b) Members discussed the challenges associated with comparing Family Hubs directly with the previous Children's Centre and Youth Centre provision. Officers emphasised that the models were fundamentally different and therefore direct comparisons in attendance and activity levels were not always meaningful.

   c) Concern was raised regarding the extent to which Family Hubs were meeting the needs of older children and young people. Officers explained that Family Hubs focused on targeted interventions for vulnerable young people, including emotional wellbeing programmes, contextual and online safety work, youth participation activities and Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) provision.

   d) Members sought assurance regarding the development of performance measures and outcomes. Officers advised that a Family Hubs performance framework had been developed and was in the process of establishing robust baselines against which future performance and outcomes could be measured.

   e) In response to questions about accessibility, officers advised that outreach activity formed a key part of the Family Hub model and included delivery

through schools, village halls, libraries, community venues and other local settings. The importance of digital services was also highlighted, although officers confirmed that digital provision was intended to complement rather than replace face-to-face support and the importance of maintaining direct engagement with children and families was emphasised.

f) Members requested further information regarding outreach activity, including the location, frequency and type of provision being delivered. Officers advised that timetables existed for core Family Hub activity accessible via the link: Your local family hub - Kent County Council and would ensure this information was also highlighted to Members and partners through Local Children's Partnership Group meetings.

g) Consideration was given to the support available for adolescents and young people. Members expressed concern that reductions in youth provision across Kent had resulted in gaps in services for older children and teenagers. Officers acknowledged these concerns and outlined the targeted youth interventions delivered through Family Hubs together with wider partnership activity.

h) Members discussed the role of Family Hubs in supporting vulnerable groups, including children at risk of exploitation, serious youth violence and emotional wellbeing concerns. Officers advised that contextual safeguarding arrangements and multi-agency partnership working formed an important part of the Family Hub model, identifying, planning and responding to contextual concerns with multi-agency partners.

i) In response to questions regarding outreach to underserved communities, officers explained how Family Hubs worked with traveller communities, schools, health partners, voluntary organisations and local community groups to improve engagement and access to services.

j) Discussion took place regarding disparities in provision between districts. Officers advised that resources were allocated according to need, with greater levels of funding and service provision directed towards areas with higher levels of deprivation.

k) Members sought assurance regarding future sustainability and the impact of Local Government Reorganisation and grant funding arrangements. Officers advised that Family Hubs were primarily funded through Government grants and that planning work had been undertaken to understand future delivery requirements. Members were informed that KCC's direct financial contribution represented a relatively small proportion of the overall programme funding.

l) Members highlighted the importance of strong engagement with schools, nurseries, childminders and other community organisations to increase awareness of Family Hub services and encourage earlier access to support.

m) Officers outlined the range of digital and communication tools used to support engagement, including websites, online resources, communication boards, social media activity and the Family Hub directory.

6. Following questions, the Chair welcomed comments and views from Members on the report. These included:

    a) Members welcomed the information contained within the report and recognised the positive work being undertaken through Family Hubs, particularly in relation to supporting families with younger children.

    b) A number of Members expressed concern regarding the apparent lack of provision for older children and young people and suggested that further consideration be given to how opportunities and support for this group to be strengthened.

    c) Members emphasised the importance of measuring outcomes and understanding the impact of policy changes over time, including comparisons between previous service models and current arrangements where possible.

    d) Members requested greater visibility of existing youth, outreach and community provision available within districts to enable them to better promote and signpost residents to available services and appropriate support. The link to this information is here: Kent Family Hub - Kent County Council

    e) Members emphasised the importance of face-to-face engagement and cautioned against overreliance on digital provision, particularly where digital exclusion or accessibility issues remained.

    f) Members suggested further consideration be given to how Family Hubs and the wider Council could support voluntary and community-led youth provision.

7. The Cabinet Member and officers responded to the debate and confirmed:

    a) Family Hub buildings were available for use by partner agencies, community organisations and charities within the Family Hub Network, where capacity permitted and where services were delivered free of charge to families.

    b) Existing programmes already supported volunteering, peer mentoring and community participation and had led to positive outcomes for some participants.

    c) A directory of services was available and the link: Kent County Council - Local Directories | Kent Family Hub Directory would be circulated to Members to assist with community signposting and awareness raising. Officers agreed to review, update and improve this directory.

    d) Outreach provision was delivered in a variety of ways, including through schools, community venues, libraries and targeted work with vulnerable groups, and officers would continue to promote awareness of available services.

8. The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and Members for the discussion. He acknowledged the considerable challenge involved in comparing Family Hubs with previous models of provision but noted the strong level of concern expressed by Members regarding youth provision across Kent. The Chair considered that the discussion had highlighted the importance of future reporting on outcomes, performance measures and the effectiveness of arrangements for children and young people. He also welcomed the development of the national and local performance frameworks and requested that future reporting to Members incorporate the information presented to the Start for Life Board and any relevant national benchmarking data.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

71. Work Programme
(Item D1)

1. Members noted that the agenda for the next meeting contained several substantial items and suggested that appropriate time be allocated to allow full consideration of the reports.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Work Programme.