SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 23rd September, 2026

10.00 am

Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone

AGENDA

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 23rd September, 2026, at 10.00 am	Ask for:	**Anna Taylor**
Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone	Telephone:	**03000 416478**

Membership

Reform UK (7):	Mr J Defriend, Mr J Eustace, Mr T Mallon, Mr T Mole, Mr T L Shonk, Mr D Truder and Vacancy
Liberal Democrat (2):	Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair) and Mr A J Hook
Conservative (1):	Mr H Rayner
Green (1):	Mr M A J Hood
Labour (1):	Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair)
Restore Britain (1):	Mr P Thomas
Church Representatives (3):	Mr J Constanti, Mr M Reidy and Mr Q Roper
Parent Governor (2):	Ms R Ainslie-Malik and Ms H Carter

County Councillors who are not Members of the Committee but who wish to ask questions at the meeting are asked to notify the Chairman of their questions in advance.

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UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

A - Committee Business

A1 Apologies and Substitutes

A2 Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

A3 Minutes of the meetings held on 1 July and 3 August 2026 (Pages 1 - 24)

B - Any items called-in

C - Any items placed on the agenda by any Member of the Council for discussion

C1 Kent Family Hubs - Impact, Effectiveness and Sustainability (Pages 25 - 48)

D - To Note

D1 Work Programme (Pages 49 - 52)

EXEMPT ITEMS

(At the time of preparing the agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public)

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive
03000 416814

Tuesday, 15 September 2026

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, 1 July 2026.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R Palmer

IN ATTENDANCE: Ch Isp O Changizi (Kent Police), Mr S Fowler (Road Safety Intelligence Team Leader), Ms J Hanna (Domestic Abuse Projects and Partnerships Manager), Ms J Harman (Prevent and Channel Manager), Ms C Harris (Kent Fire and Rescue Service), Hartwell (Serious Organised Crime Manager), Supt R Marsh (Kent Police - Head of the Force Strategic Prevention Command), Ms J Mookherjee (Consultant in Public Health), Mr S Perez (Kent Fire and Rescue Service), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Mr M Rolfe (Head of Community Protection), Insp J Ross (Community Safety Inspector, Strategic Prevention Command (Kent Police)) and Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

55. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item A1)

Apologies were received by Mrs Hudson for whom Mr Rayner was substituting, Dr Sturley for whom Mrs Lawes was substituting and Mr Defriend for whom Mr Finch was substituting.

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

1. Mr Hook declared that was a barrister and often worked with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police. He also declared that his wife was a probation officer.

2. Mr Mallon declared that he was the Chairman of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (KMFRA).

3. It was acknowledged that many Members of the Committee were also Members of the KMFRA.

4. Mr Rayner declared that he was married to a woman and had two adult daughters.

57. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2026

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2026 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chair.

58. Kent Community Safety Agreement

(Item B1)

1. The item was introduced by Richard Palmer, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, who explained that refreshed Kent Community Safety Agreement was a statutory county- wide partnership document required under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. He explained that the April 2026 refresh replaced the previous 8 priorities with 3 strategic aims to guide community safety work in Kent.

2. The report was introduced by Shafick Peerbux, Head of Community Safety, and Superintendent Rob Marsh, Kent Police Head of the Force Strategic Prevention Command, who jointly delivered a PowerPoint presentation, the slides for which can be found HERE.

3. The Chair praised the report for addressing the Committee's previous requests and providing a clear and detailed overview of community safety across Kent. He also requested it be circulated to all Members as a valuable source of information on the work of Kent Police and partner agencies. Finally, the Chairman reminded Members to focus on the strategic aspects of the Community Safety Agreement and advised that the discussion would be structured around each of the priorities set out in the report.

4. The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee on Priority 1: Neighbourhood /Environmental Crime and Anti- social Behaviour. Discussion included the following:

   a) Supt Marsh explained that while Kent Police could not monitor all social media platforms, intelligence received from communities and other sources helped identify planned gatherings. He highlighted proactive policing measures, including dispersal orders and enforcement powers, and emphasised that neighbourhood policing teams worked closely with local businesses and communities to minimise the impact of antisocial incidents in coastal areas.

   b) Supt Marsh explained that Kent Police had undertaken a range of pre-planning meetings ahead of the summer period with key partners. He advised that policing plans focused on working with those organisations best placed to help prevent and respond to anticipated issues, although he could not comment on the extent of local councillor involvement in those arrangements.

   c) Supt Marsh advised that partners had planned jointly for the summer period in Thanet, with resources allocated based on previous demand patterns. He emphasised that anti-social behaviour (ASB) was taken seriously and confirmed that proactive measures and robust enforcement powers, including dispersal and arrest where necessary, would be used to address issues.

d) Supt Marsh outlined the graduated approach taken to tackling ASB, beginning with community protection warnings and escalating to formal notices and, where appropriate, Criminal Behaviour Orders. He reassured Members that the full range of available powers was used where necessary to address persistent offending.

e) Mr Peerbux explained that, although rail operators were not statutory partners to the Community Safety Agreement, they worked closely with community safety partners, including through local Community Safety Units and tactical meetings. He stated that their inclusion in the Agreement was a matter for the statutory framework rather than local partnership arrangements.

f) It was added that the partnership agreement was between the statutory partners, but wider organisations were involved in delivering specific work streams. For ASB, Kent Police worked closely with Southeastern Trains and British Transport Police through an information-sharing agreement, enabling joint action to prevent and respond to issues, supported locally by Community Safety Units and neighbourhood teams.

g) Mr Peerbux acknowledged that ASB was likely to be underreported. Partners continued to encourage reporting through a range of channels, including Kent Police and community networks. Supt Marsh added that while recorded data provided an indication of trends, it was required to be viewed in context, as single incidents could generate multiple reports. The importance of local intelligence from residents, councillors and parish councils were also highlighted as helping agencies identify and respond to issues.

h) Mr Palmer explained that Members, community wardens and Parish councils played an important role in gathering and sharing local intelligence. Residents were encouraged to report concerns through appropriate channels, as information from communities helped agencies build a fuller picture of local issues and respond effectively. He also emphasised that tackling crime and ASB relied on a two-way flow of information between the public and partner agencies.

i) Stephen Perez, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service (KMFRS) Community Intelligence and Partnership Lead, highlighted that Independent Advisory Groups operated in each district and provided a mechanism for communities, including councillors, to engage directly with police. He added that these groups acted as a critical friend, helped communities better understand policing, raised local issues, and provided feedback and reassurance on matters of concern.

j) Mr Peerbux advised that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was being considered as part of future planning, and work was underway to understand how partnership and reporting arrangements may be needed to adapt. However, he stated that until Government confirmed the future structure, it would be difficult to determine the precise impact and current arrangements were intended to provide a strong foundation for continued partnership and collaboration.

k) Supt Marsh explained the increase in ASB was attributed to changes in recording practices rather than a significant rise in incidents. There was no evidence of a correlation between hate crime and ASB across the county, including during periods of high-profile national events and protests, which generated very little associated ASB or crime. While it was not possible to confirm whether individual offenders were involved in both hate crime and ASB, Kent Police regularly reviewed hate crime reports to identify patterns and emerging issues, with any identified links addressed through local policing and problem-solving processes.

l) James Ross, Community Safety Inspector, Strategic Prevention Command at Kent Police, added that a new centralised approach now ensured that all calls were reviewed and ASB identified was formally recorded. This had resulted in higher recording figures and provided a more accurate understanding of ASB across the county.

m) Supt Marsh confirmed that online content that promoted, encouraged or glorified criminality, disorder or violence would be investigated and acted upon by the police. Whilst there could be challenges in determining intent where content was shared online, concerns about the promotion and sensationalising of criminal behaviour were recognised, and consideration was given to whether offences or other enforcement options may apply.

n) It was outlined that while the Police would not routinely police local authority meetings, any concerns or intelligence about planned disruption could be shared in advance through local Community Safety Units so that appropriate plans could be put in place. Police officers received training on public order powers and had access to specialist advice and support where required, ensuring that incidents of protest or disruption could be managed appropriately.

o) It was advised that a more reliable picture of ASB levels were expected in 2026/27, once the revised recording process had fully embedded, although some underreporting and duplicate reports could still affect the data.

p) Supt Marsh stated that Kent Police took a proportionate approach to groups gathering in public spaces and did not seek to criminalise young people socialising. Enforcement was focused on the small minority responsible for antisocial behaviour. He explained that the police may contribute to discussions about changes to local services, but decisions on service provision were made by the relevant agencies. He also highlighted the work of Kent Police's child-centred policing team and programmes such as Young Futures, which supported engagement, diversion and positive opportunities for young people.

q) Supt Marsh stated that Kent Police's neighbourhood policing model supported close partnership working with community wardens and other organisations involved in preventing crime and ASB. He stated that the police were keen to work jointly with such partners, recognising that these arrangements could provide valuable local intelligence and strengthen community engagement.

r) Supt Marsh advised that Kent Police already worked closely with the Environment Agency, particularly through its Rural Task Force, which shared intelligence and helped tackle fly-tipping and illegal waste activity. He explained that responsibility for investigating environmental offences primarily rested with the Environment Agency, while Kent Police led on cases involving organised criminality. He added that there were ongoing investigations into organised crime groups linked to illegal waste activity.

s) Supt Marsh explained that all reported crimes were assessed and allocated for investigation based on a solvability assessment. He advised that Kent Police was required to provide victims with information about available support services under the Victims' Code. He acknowledged that communication with victims was not always as timely as it should be and agreed that keeping victims informed of significant developments, such as arrests, charges or case closures, was important. He stated that feedback regarding victim updates would be shared with investigative teams. Kent Police did not hold information on how many victims took up support services, as these were delivered by partner agencies.

t) Supt Marsh advised that Kent Police worked closely with Trading Standards to tackle illegal retail activity, including through operations targeting illegal vape and tobacco sales. He explained that the police also targeted organised crime groups involved in retail crime, using national intelligence and local partnership work. He added that increased neighbourhood policing resources in town centres supported engagement with businesses and help address issues affecting retailers. Mark Rolfe, Head of Community Protection, added that Trading Standards worked closely with Kent Police to tackle unlawfully operated premises. He highlighted challenges where offenders moved between premises to avoid enforcement, and stated that work was underway across Kent, including closer collaboration with landlords to address the issue.

u) Supt Marsh stated that drug dealing remained a focus for Kent Police. He highlighted the link between substance misuse and wider criminality, adding that partnership working helped ensure those affected by substance misuse can access appropriate support while enforcement action was taken against offenders.

v) Mr Peerbux explained that progress against the three strategic aims of the Kent Community Safety Agreement would be measured through a performance framework focused on assessing the impact of activities and interventions. He said that further evidence of outcomes and contributions to the aims would be developed over time, supported by dedicated analytical capacity.

w) Supt Marsh explained that resource allocation was informed by the Cambridge Harm Index, which assessed the level of harm within communities and supports an intelligence-led approach to targeting resources where they were most needed.

x) Kent Police officer numbers were being maintained at the current baseline level, with no plans to reduce those numbers in the foreseeable future. While budget pressures would require efficiencies to be made, resources would continue to be managed to support delivery of priorities. The partnership was also developing a strategic and performance framework to help target limited resources where they could have the greatest impact on shared priorities, with data used to monitor the effectiveness of actions taken and their impact on outcomes.

y) Supt Marsh explained that decisions were informed by local context and impact, not solely by the volume of incidents reported. Neighbourhood policing teams were expected to understand issues affecting their communities, and resources could be deployed flexibly to support longer- term problem- solving where necessary, particularly where issues had a significant impact on residents' quality of life.

z) Mr Peerbux advised that local Community Safety Partnership strategic assessments were reviewed by the Community Safety Team and used to identify common priorities and themes across Kent, helping to inform county-wide strategic aims and support coordinated delivery between local partnerships.

5. The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee on Priority 2: Road Safety. Discussion included the following:

a) Stewart Fowler, Road Safety Intelligence Team Leader, advised that speed limits were reviewed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with national guidance and in consultation with the Police and other partners. Whilst changes to rural speed limits were being explored nationally and by some local authorities, there was currently no blanket policy to reduce speed limits on rural roads.

b) Mr Fowler reported that decisions on the installation of fixed and average speed cameras were the responsibility of the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership, which operated within national guidance and threshold criteria. He explained that the Safety Camera Partnership formed part of the Kent and Medway Safer Roads Partnership, which was responsible for road safety across the county and worked alongside Community Safety Partnerships to ensure efforts were coordinated and not duplicated.

c) 20mph speed limits were technically enforceable but were not routinely enforced due to limited Police resources. Supt Marsh confirmed that resident associations, as well as Parish Councils, could raise speeding and road safety concerns to the Police, and encouraged communities to participate in the Community Speed Watch scheme.

d) Mr Palmer highlighted that, while Community Speed Watch warning letters were issued after repeated offences, the scheme helped identify speeding trends and enabled the police to target resources more effectively. Mr Peerbux added that, although Community Wardens were not present across all areas, there were other channels for sharing local intelligence, and highlighted ongoing work to expand warden numbers through Parish and community sponsorship schemes.

e) Supt Marsh explained that targeted police operations were carried out to address nuisance vehicles and racing, involving a variety of organisations, and that new legislation would provide additional enforcement powers to tackle the issue. Inspector Ross added that the Crime and Policing Bill included powers to seize vehicles more quickly, which would assist officers in dealing with nuisance vehicles.

f) In relation to concerns regarding the use of e- bikes, Inspector Ross outlined that enforcement could be challenging but confirmed that individual districts were assessing the issue locally. He also reminded Members that e- bikes were not permitted on public roads unless part of an authorised rent scheme or being used on private land.

g) Mr Fowler advised that concerns relating to the replacement of vehicle-activated warning signs would be referred back to the relevant officer for consideration.

h) It was explained that the responsibility for parking enforcement rested with District Councils, but the police could become involved where an obstruction affected the highway.

6. The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee on Priority 8: Preventing Extremism and Hate. Discussion covered the following:

a) Jess Harman, Prevent and Channel Manager, acknowledged the impact of the funding cut on Prevent but advised that KCC had funded one Prevent Education Officer post. She explained that training and engagement with education settings would continue through a combination of online training, regular communications and partnership working. Members were reassured that existing processes and engagement with the education sector would remain in place.

b) Ms Harman explained that Prevent activity in Kent focused on ensuring that statutory partners, including elected Members, had due regard to the Prevent Duty. She highlighted the importance of community awareness, engagement and appropriate referrals in identifying and preventing radicalisation. Training was available to help partners recognise signs of both Islamist and extreme right-wing extremism, and close partnership working with Kent Police supported the monitoring of radicalisation activity.

c) Ms Harman advised that Prevent Threshold Guidance had recently been published in the public domain, providing information on the types of behaviours that may warrant a Prevent referral. She offered to share the guidance and other supporting resources with Members and confirmed further briefings could be provided if required.

d) Ms Harman explained that the decision to raise the national threat level to severe was made at a national level. She advised that, locally, partners undertook ongoing risk assessments, monitored community tensions and considered the impact of national events on Kent and Medway. She highlighted the importance of community engagement and stated that Kent had not experienced a significant increase in local tensions following recent national events.

i) Supt Marsh advised that where there were concerns about potential disorder at meetings, Kent Police should be informed in advance so that an appropriate response could be considered. He added that regular partnership briefings were held to share intelligence relating to protests and events, enabling partners to assess risks and respond accordingly.

j) Ms Harman outlined that local Prevent priorities were informed by the Counter-Terrorism Local Profile, which considered intelligence to a range of threats, including Islamist terrorism and extreme right-wing extremism. She reassured Members that Islamist terrorism remained one of the five Prevent priorities for Kent and Medway. However, local referral rates and intelligence indicated that the current focus in Kent was on extreme right-wing activity.

k) Kent Police had not seen a particular increase in reported anti-Semitic crime in recent months, despite national events that might have been expected to influence community tensions. Police maintained close engagement with affected communities, offering reassurance and encouraging the reporting of any concerns.

l) It was confirmed that the figure of approximately 115,000 recorded hate crime offences included all offences that met the threshold for recording as a hate crime, whether committed online or in person. The importance of educating people about the legal consequences of harmful online behaviour was also acknowledged, particularly in regard to young people.

m) Ms Harman agreed to give further consideration on how to improve awareness of Prevent among parents, including through enhanced communication and engagement. She also highlighted the Prevent Advisory Group as a key channel for sharing information and support across communities.

n) Supt Marsh agreed to consider whether a more granular breakdown of extremism-related offences could be provided, including the nature and location of incidents, subject to the level of detail available within existing recording systems.

o) Ms Harman advised that the Phase One Southport Inquiry had identified recommendations for Prevent and confirmed that partners were already considering how these would be taken forward locally, pending the Home Office response. It was requested that further Prevent training take place and for the Southport Inquiry be shared with Members.

7. The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee on Priority 3: Violence Against Women and Girls. Discussion covered the following:

   a) Supt Marsh confirmed that Kent Police had strategic oversight of its Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) work and advised that local concerns could be raised through Community Safety Units, with specialist Designing Out Crime Officers able to assess sites and recommend improvement measures.

b) In response to concerns about whether appropriate links existed between Kent Police and KCC Highways to support requests for street lighting, Mr Fowler agreed to take the matter away and discuss it with the relevant officers.

c) It was advised that the White Ribbon in Schools programme had been successfully delivered using the Police and Crime Commissioner crime reduction grant funding. However, the available funding was limited and could not currently support a wider rollout. It was agreed to consider how the programme could be shared more broadly across the county.

d) Jenny Hanna, Domestic Abuse Projects and Partnerships Manager, explained that the Know See Speak Out campaign was delivered in partnership with domestic abuse services and various partners. The team worked with partners including Kent Football Association (FA) and had shared campaign information with local football clubs to encourage participation. Engagement varied between clubs, but efforts continued to promote the campaign through existing networks and partnerships.

e) Ms Hanna reported that the male refuge provision was currently operating as a pilot. The outcomes would be reviewed later in the year, and any decision on expanding the service would depend on the funding available following that evaluation.

f) Supt Marsh confirmed that Project Vigilant operated across Kent, with trained officers using its perpetrator-focused prevention tactics regularly within the county's night-time economy.

g) Mr Palmer advised that any changes relating to CCTV provision and licensing would need to be considered through the relevant policy framework and agreed to take the matter away for further investigation.

h) Supt Marsh stated that the reduction in offences in Kent were attributed to sustained partnership work, including Project Vigilant, strengthened work on domestic abuse, and increased use of protective orders to target persistent offenders.

i) Kent Police's central VAWG team have provided guidance and community engagement sessions to support appropriate messaging on violence against women and girls. These sessions were delivered to schools, local authorities and other community stakeholders, and a contact for the team could be provided if required.

j) Supt Marsh explained that Kent Police focused on violence against all victims. However, the VAWG strategy was developed in response to specific concerns and events and did not detract from the wider work undertaken to tackle violence affecting anyone.

8. The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee on Priority 5: Serious Violence and Organised Crime and Priority 7: Substance Misuse. Discussion covered the following:

a) Dr Jessica Mookherjee, Assistant Director of Public Health, outlined that addressing unmet need required greater investment in prevention as well as treatment. While current drug and alcohol budgets were largely focused on supporting people with established substance misuse problems, she highlighted the importance of early intervention and improving identification of high-risk behaviours to prevent problems from escalating. Supt Marsh added that Kent Police routinely used drug testing on arrest and had one of the highest referral rates nationally from custody into treatment services, helping to direct offenders into support and recovery programmes.

b) Mr Rolfe stated that tackling the hidden economy and organised crime relied on partnership working with a range of agencies, including district and borough councils and Border Force. He added that it was too early to measure the overall impact of this work, given its relatively recent introduction, and that a timeline for evidencing outcomes could not yet be identified as the measures of success had not been clearly defined.

c) Dr Mookherjee explained that adult drug and alcohol treatment services were provided by two organisations, with hubs located across East and West Kent and additional support delivered through community partners. A separate service was available for children and young people, working flexibly through schools and other local settings.

d) Supt Marsh explained that Kent Police had teams dedicated to tackling County Lines, monitoring intelligence, identifying emerging threats and investigating organised drug-dealing networks, while local neighbourhood officers addressed street-level drug dealing and concerns within their communities.

e) Supt Marsh outlined that decisions on the installation of CCTV rested with local authorities. However, where police environmental surveys or audits identified improved CCTV or lighting as beneficial, recommendations would be fed into the relevant Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for consideration.

f) Mr Rolfe reported that the Local Vape Action initiative was operating in Tunbridge Wells, Ashford and Maidstone and was likely to be extended to other districts where it was supported by local partnerships. He added that while the disposable vape ban had reduced young people’s access to vapes, the issue remained significant and required both enforcement and education, with additional engagement from a District and Borough level welcomed.

g) It was suggested that the CSP consider concerns regarding levels of hate crime and the disruption of local authority meetings and provide a future update on any actions taken to address these issues.

9. Following the questions, the Chair welcomed recommendations from the Committee, which included the following:

a) A briefing be provided to Members on Prevent, including the current threat level and where the thresholds lay on extremism.

b) For the next meeting of the Crime and Disorder Panel to receive reporting on the impact of LGR moving forward.

c) More detailed information and statistics on serious and organised crime, specifically on the hidden economy, to be included in future reporting.

d) A coordinator be made available to interface with elected Members, stakeholders and the CSP to support the policies presented in Appendix D of the report relating to VAWG initiatives.

e) Consideration be given to the use and coordination of CCTV to support crime prevention and detection.

f) Issues relating to pavement parking causing obstruction be considered.

g) Mechanisms be explored to improve Member engagement, including opportunities for Members to provide feedback and receive information on significant community incidents and policing activity.

h) A review of countywide speeding measures, including current and potential changes to road safety policies, particularly camera enforcement policies, and their effectiveness in tackling speeding.

i) A future update to be given on the role of social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in community safety, including how AI is being used to identify risks, support prevention work, and address emerging threats.

10. The Chair thanked officers for the report and their attendance at the meeting. He recognised the need for a future discussion on resourcing and requested that future reports provide a clearer indication of the relative impact of each priority area to assist Members in understanding their significance across the county. It was advised that a new analyst within the team has access to the relevant data and will use this to inform future reporting.

11. It was acknowledged that once the minutes were finalised, partners would be requested to take into account the comments and concerns raised by the Committee.

12. The Chair proposed that the Scrutiny Committee note the report and make the following recommendations to the CSP:

a) A briefing be provided to Members on Prevent, including the current threat level and where the thresholds lay on extremism.

b) For the next meeting of the Crime and Disorder Panel to receive reporting on the impact of LGR moving forward.

c) More detailed information and statistics on serious and organised crime, specifically on the hidden economy, to be included in future reporting.

d) A coordinator be made available to interface with elected Members, stakeholders and the CSP to support the policies presented in Appendix D of the report relating to VAWG initiatives.

e) Consideration be given to the use and coordination of CCTV to support crime prevention and detection.

f) Issues relating to pavement parking causing obstruction be considered.

g) Mechanisms be explored to improve Member engagement, including opportunities for Members to provide feedback and receive information on significant community incidents and policing activity.

h) A review of countywide speeding measures, including current and potential changes to road safety policies, particularly camera enforcement policies, and their effectiveness in tackling speeding.

i) A future update to be given on the role of social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in community safety, including how AI is being used to identify risks, support prevention work, and address emerging threats.

13. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report and make the following recommendations to the CSP:

a) A briefing be provided to Members on Prevent, including the current threat level and where the thresholds lay on extremism.

b) For the next meeting of the Crime and Disorder Panel to receive reporting on the impact of LGR moving forward.

c) More detailed information and statistics on serious and organised crime, specifically on the hidden economy, to be included in future reporting.

d) A coordinator be made available to interface with elected Members, stakeholders and the CSP to support the policies presented in Appendix D of the report relating to VAWG initiatives.

e) Consideration be given to the use and coordination of CCTV to support crime prevention and detection.

f) Issues relating to pavement parking causing obstruction be considered.

g) Mechanisms be explored to improve Member engagement, including opportunities for Members to provide feedback and receive information on significant community incidents and policing activity.

h) A review of countywide speeding measures, including current and potential changes to road safety policies, particularly camera enforcement policies, and their effectiveness in tackling speeding.

i) A future update to be given on the role of social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in community safety, including how AI is being used to identify risks, support prevention work, and address emerging threats.

59. Work Programme

(Item C1)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 3 August 2026.

PRESENT: Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair), Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair), Mr M Harrison (Substitute for Mr J Eustace), Mr A J Hook, Mr S Jeffery (Substitute for Mr M A J Hood), Mrs M Lawes (Substitute for Mr D Truder), Mr T Mallon, Mr T Mole, Mr M Paul (Substitute for Mr J Defriend), Mr H Rayner (Substitute for Mrs S Hudson), Mr T L Shonk, Dr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr M Reidy and Mrs R Swansbury (Substitute for Mr Q Roper)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins, Mrs B Fordham, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr P Osborne, Mr R Palmer, Mr P Webb, Mr D Wimble and Mr R Yates

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Arnold (Corporate Director Finance), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer), Ms L Fisher (Assistant Director, South, Integrated Children's Services), Ms H Gillivan (Interim Director Adults and Integrated Commissioning), Mr A Jeffery (Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny)), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive) and Ms H Woodland (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

60. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A1)

Apologies were received from Mr Eustace, for whom Mr Harrison was substituting, Mr Truder for whom Mrs Lawes was substituting, Mr Defriend for whom Mr Paul was substituting, Mr Hood for whom Mr Jeffery was substituting, Mrs Hudson for whom Mr Rayner was substituting, Mr Roper for whom Mr Swansbury was substituting and the Parent Governor Representatives.

61. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A2)

There were no declarations of interest.

62. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2026

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2026 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chair.

63. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn 2025-26
(Item C1)

1. The item was introduced by Brian Collins, Deputy Leader, who presented the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report Outturn 2025-26 and highlighted that the report related to the first full financial year under the current administration.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

    a) Mr Collins advised that Adult Social Care (ASC) continued to represent one of the most significant financial pressures facing local authorities nationally. He explained that work was ongoing to strengthen financial management arrangements and manage increasing demand pressures. Whilst no guarantees could be given regarding future overspends, every effort was being made to minimise the requirement to draw on reserves.

    b) Mr Collins explained that the ASC overspend reflected a combination of factors, including increasing demand, procurement challenges and the non-delivery of planned savings. He highlighted that the level of overspend had reduced during the latter part of the financial year.

    c) Mr Collins stated that the General Fund reserve stood at 4.31% at the end of 2025-26 and was forecast to increase to 6.37% during the current financial year. He was explained that the Council continued to work towards maintaining reserves within the recommended range of 5-10%.

    d) Mr Collins advised that Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) activity had become embedded across the Council and expressed confidence that this work would contribute to future savings and improved financial performance.

    e) The Chair reminded Members that questions should relate to the report and that political debate would be addressed separately.

    f) Mr Collins expressed confidence in Council officers and the relevant teams and stressed that the forecasts had been prepared under the previous administration. He also highlighted the appointment of the new Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health and referred to the ongoing work being undertaken to minimise avoidable suffering for residents.

    g) Mr Collins highlighted the administration's achievement in reducing the Council's debt through measures such as early repayments, resulting in annual revenue budget savings of approximately £1.3 million per year.

    h) Mr Collins expressed that there would be no benefit in reinstating the Treasury Management Group, citing its previous lack of results when arrangements allowed for Member participation.

    i) Brendan Arnold, Corporate Director of Finance, advised that the Council had submitted the required Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Reform Plan to the Department for Education (DfE) and continued to work closely with Government advisers. He indicated that there was no reason to believe Kent would be less successful than other authorities participating in the process and that a decision was anticipated later in the year. He added that SEND pressures continued to be experienced nationally and that Kent continued to work with Government and partners to manage the associated financial risks.

j) Mr Collins highlighted the difficulty in predicting future overspends, stating that significant financial pressures remained within ASC and Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) services and that budget movements between financial years could occur.

k) Mr Collins highlighted that significant emphasis was being placed on the delivery of capital projects, with regular meetings held to oversee progress and the Council's infrastructure and property programmes.

l) In response to a question regarding Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) loans, Mr Collins advised that no decision had been made regarding the repayment of the loans and that any such matters would be considered through the Council's normal treasury management procedures.

m) Mr Collins highlighted that the position remained uncertain and subject to ongoing developments in relation to LGR, making it difficult to take definitive decisions regarding future capital expenditure at this stage.

n) Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, explained that rising costs associated with independent specialist placements reflected increasing levels of demand and national pressures. She outlined work undertaken to expand specialist provision, increase capacity within maintained schools and reduce reliance on higher-cost independent placements over time.

o) Ben Watts, Deputy Chief Executive, suggested that a number of matters raised during the discussion be taken away for consideration through the agenda setting process and addressed in a future report.

3. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

a) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the ongoing pressures within ASC and the impact that any future overspends may have on the Council's reserves position. The Member recommended further reporting to support monitoring and contingency planning.

b) A Member suggested a report be produced identifying capital projects should continue and which may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

c) A Member expressed concern that the assumptions underpinning the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) did not adequately reflect the Council's recent history of overspending and highlighted ongoing financial pressures within CYPE and the High Needs Block.

d) A Member suggested that future budget monitoring reports include clearer information regarding the impact of DOLGE activity to support effective scrutiny.

e) Mr Watts advised that identifying and reporting the specific financial impact of DOLGE activity could be challenging due to its cross-cutting nature but confirmed that officers would consider how best to reflect this in future reporting. It was confirmed a separate meeting would take place in order to identify how the matter could be best addressed.

f) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the deliverability of certain savings proposals within the 2026/27 budget, commenting that some budget lines did not appear to be fully costed and could increase the risk of future overspends. The Member requested that the September Q1 report include an update on the delivery of those savings and that their implementation continue to be monitored.

g) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the level of underspend within the capital programme and suggested that the Committee receive quarterly updates on capital spending to monitor progress and understand the reasons for non-delivery.

h) A Member thanked officers and the Deputy Leader for the report and commented that it provided reassurance regarding the Council's financial position during the period under review.

i) A Member highlighted the potential impact of delays to capital expenditure programmes, particularly in relation to building projects, and suggested that the administration set out the measures being taken to ensure approved capital budgets are delivered in a timely manner so as to maintain value for money.

j) A Member emphasised the importance of continued scrutiny of reserves, underspends and unrealised efficiency savings.

4. The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member to provide clarification on comments made during the debate. This included the following:

    a) Mr Collins clarified that he could not guarantee that overspends would not occur, particularly given the pressures within ASC and CYPE, but highlighted that he would continue working with officers to deliver the Council's financial objectives.

5. The Chair summarised the discussion and highlighted the importance of timely scrutiny of financial monitoring reports. He also emphasised the need to improve demand forecasting and understanding of future pressures, particularly in ASC and SEND, to support effective long-term financial planning. The Chair proposed to note the report and make the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

a) That further contingency planning in relation to Adult Social Care pressures be undertaken and reported to either the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee or the Scrutiny Committee.

b) That the September Q1 report include updates on the delivery of savings.

c) A paper be produced identifying the capital projects that must continue and those that may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

6. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report and make the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

a) That further contingency planning in relation to Adult Social Care pressures be undertaken and reported to either the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee or the Scrutiny Committee.

b) That the September Q1 report include updates on the delivery of savings.

c) A paper be produced identifying the capital projects that must continue and those that may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

64. SFI Executive Response
(Item C2)

1. The item was introduced by Mr Collins and Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health, who presented the Executive Response to the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry. Members were advised that all recommendations contained within the Inquiry report had been accepted and that work was progressing with relevant partners to support implementation.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

   a) Mr Henderson reported that a number of the previously agreed actions had now been completed, with progress updates set out in the report. He highlighted the inaugural Kent Water Resilience meeting scheduled for 8 October, as well as recent engagement between the Leader and John Halsall, the newly announced Chief Executive Officer of South East Water. Mr Henderson welcomed positive collaboration between Thanet Earth and the Environment Agency, confirming that licenses had been granted for further water extraction and outlining that this partnership approach was being encouraged through the Council's correspondence with relevant organisations.

b) Mr Watts advised that future monitoring of the recommendations could be undertaken through the Flood Risk and Water Management Committee, with matters returning to Scrutiny Committee where appropriate.

c) The Leader of the Council advised that she had recently met with the Chief Executive of South East Water and had raised concerns regarding the company's lack of statutory consultee status in relation to housing developments. She assured the Committee that the potential for KCC to have greater input into the planning application process remained under consideration and that discussions on possible next steps were ongoing.

d) Mr Watts acknowledged that progress updates would continue to be reported through the appropriate channels and indicated that a further report to the Committee was likely in due course. He also advised that officers would consider the suggestions made regarding KCC's role in the planning process, including any statutory or other constraints on what the authority could and could not do.

3. Following the questions, the Chair welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

a) A Member highlighted the importance of ensuring that the work undertaken through the Inquiry continued to progress and was not adversely affected by future LGR arrangements, including through collaboration with other relevant groups where appropriate.

b) A Member suggested that future progress reports include indicative target dates for implementation, where appropriate, to assist ongoing scrutiny and accountability.

c) A Member raised that KCC could play a strategic role in bringing together local planning authorities in water- stressed areas to make coordinated representations to Government on challenges of meeting housing targets where water infrastructure capacity is strained.

d) A Member reiterated the absence of timescales within the report and suggested that these be included to assist with monitoring progress. They further suggested a more comprehensive update report be brought back to the Committee in six months' time to enable further scrutiny of the progress against the actions identified.

e) A Member highlighted concerns about insufficient investment in water infrastructure and requested that the Water Resilience Partnership continue to encourage water companies to invest in and maintain their assets to improve resilience.

4. The Chair welcomed the positive response from the Executive and thanked Members, officers and stakeholders who had contributed to the Inquiry. The Chair proposed to note the Executive response to the recommendations made by the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Executive Response to the recommendations made by the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry.

65. Leader's Report - one year on
(Item C3)

1. The item was introduced by Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council, who presented a report outlining the challenges and progress made during the administration's first year in office. The report covered the Council's financial position, Adult Social Care, SEND, water resilience and highways, together with preparations for LGR.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

   a) The Leader advised that a key priority for the remainder of the administration was to ensure that the authority was handed over in the strongest possible position ahead of LGR, whilst continuing to maintain service delivery and financial stability.

   b) The Leader explained that she had prioritised work on the Council's finances and operations since taking office, rather than attending Scrutiny Committee meetings, and stated that this reflected a different leadership approach from previous administrations rather than an evasion of scrutiny. She added that she had confidence in her Cabinet Member to attend and respond on portfolio matters, citing regular communication across the administration.

   c) The Chair encouraged Members to maintain a balanced and constructive debate and reminded them to keep their questions relevant to the report and directed to those present and able to respond.

   d) The Leader expressed the view that the Council had inherited significant financial and service pressures from the previous administration, including high levels of debt and pressures with ASC, and outlined actions taken by the current administration to address these issues and improve performance.

   e) Christopher Hespe, Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation, reiterated that the Council had inherited significant financial challenges, including high levels of debt, budget overspends, savings targets and contractual issues. He also stated that the DOLGE programme had helped to mitigate financial pressures, deliver savings and support a culture of value for money and organisational improvement across the Council.

   f) Mr Hespe clarified that the £14 million figure referenced in the report represented one element of a wider programme of savings achieved during the year and indicated that a breakdown of the figure could be provided separately if required. Mr Collins added that the figure represented the reduction between the Q3 forecast overspend and the year- end return.

g) The Leader confirmed that the administration intended to submit an Expression of Interest to become a Foundational Strategic Authority, following central Government's confirmation of its preferred devolution option for Kent.

h) Mr Collins provided context regarding the reported overspend figures, indicating that comparisons should be considered in light of the previous administration's forecast position and the year-end outturn reported.

i) Helen Gillivan, Director of Adults and Integrated Commissioning, advised that risk matrixes were now in place for individual contracts and that lessons learned from a national provider failure and the subsequent audit had informed improvements to the Council's approach to assessing and managing provider risk.

j) Mr Watts acknowledged that performance against certain audit metrics had declined over the period referenced, recognising that performance could vary over time and should be considered within the context of the Council's wider operating environment.

k) The Leader confirmed that she was satisfied that sufficient contingency was in place to support delivery of future savings.

l) In response to a question regarding IVF services, the Leader stated that the matter required further consideration and that a response would be provided outside the meeting.

m) Mr Collins stated that, whilst the administration recognised the value of capital projects funded through borrowing, its concerns related to the overall level of debt inherited and the absence of a long-term strategy for its repayment.

n) The Leader stated that addressing the Council's financial position had been her initial priority since taking office and advised that, although water supply was not a County Council function, she had established the Kent Water Resilience Partnership to bring relevant organisations together and address water resilience issues in Kent.

o) Mrs Fordham advised that work was underway to streamline Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment processes and improve timelines and confirmed that reducing waiting times for assessments formed part of the Council's Key Performance Indications (KPIs).

p) The Leader stated that the administration took motions agreed by the Council seriously and acknowledged that, although Entry/Exit System (EES) was not a function of the County Council, the Council recognised its implications for Kent residents and was committed to responding to those impacts as appropriate. Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, further advised that a meeting with partner organisations regarding the EES was scheduled for the following day and highlighted the recent announcement of £20 million in Levelling Up Fund funding to support further improvements in Dover.

q) The Leader expressed concern about public awareness of LGR, encouraged residents to engage with available information and consultation processes, and highlighted concerns regarding the pace of implementation and the model selected by central Government for Kent.

r) The Leader advised that the impact of LGR made it difficult to assess longer-term objectives, including whether the Council would achieve its stated objective of limiting organisational growth under the DOLGE programme.

s) The Leader emphasised the potential financial risks associated with implementing LGR, stating that Government announced to support the transition was significantly below estimated costs. She explained that there remained uncertainty regarding how those costs would be met and the financial sustainability for the proposed unitary authorities.

3. Following the questions, the Chair welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

   a) A Member commented that the report and responses had focused primarily on activity rather than outcomes and emphasised the importance of demonstrating improvements in outcomes for residents, particularly in relation to SEND assessment times.

   b) A Member also expressed disappointment that a previous question regarding the publication of an action plan in relation to EES had not been directly addressed and sought clarification on the timescale for its publication.

   c) A Member relayed criticisms regarding LGR and the introduction of elected mayors, particularly in relation to planning powers and the potential impacts on local communities in Kent.

   d) A Member raised concerns that certain statements contained within the report had not been sufficiently substantiated, including figures surrounding DOLGE savings and water resilience.

   e) A Member expressed the view that future reports would benefit from a greater focus on factual information and measurable outcomes, supported by relevant performance data and audit findings, to assist Members in undertaking effective scrutiny.

   f) A Member thanked the Leader for the report and comments that future outcomes could not always be predicted with certainty and should be considered accordingly.

   g) A Member questioned whether, if LGR was considered likely to have significant negative consequences, the Council should take a similar position to that adopted by some other authorities and challenge its implementation.

h) A Member commented that the discussion had provided clarification that the Council's borrowing was linked the capital investment projects and highlighted that the repayment of certain loans had been undertaken through officer decisions and in accordance with the Council's Treasury Management policies. In response, Mr Collins clarified that he had been consulted on loan repayment decisions and that they had not been made solely by officers.

i) A Member argued that the report did not provide a comprehensive overview of Council activity, citing the omission of matters relating to Public Health, public transport, schools and aspects of Adult Social Care. It was clarified that the scope of the report had been agreed in advance to focus on a number of key strategic areas.

4. The Chair welcomed the Leader to provide clarification on comments made during the debate. This included the following:

   a) The Leader thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend and outlined that matters relating to LGR and Devolution, SEND delays and EES were more appropriately considered by the relevant Cabinet Committees.

   b) The Leader stated that she considered the report to be an accurate reflection of the key areas requested by the Committee and advised that the content of future reports could be shaped by Members' requirements.

5. The Chair summarised the debate, thanked the Leader for her attendance and stated the importance of balancing strategic oversight with detailed scrutiny. He highlighted the significant challenges facing the Council, including LGR, Adult Social Care and SEND, and encouraged continued cross- party collaboration on matters of long- term significance to Kent. The Chair proposed to note the report and this was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

66. Work Programme
(Item D1)

1. It was agreed that LGR related matters would initially be considered by the relevant Cabinet Committee and could subsequently be brought to Scrutiny if considered appropriate.

2. The Chair advised that requests for scrutiny on the decision to cease accepting refrigerators and freezers at Household Waste Recycling Centres would be more appropriately considered through the relevant Committee or agenda setting process.

3. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Work Programme.

From: Paul Webb, Cabinet Member, Integrated Children's Services

Ingrid Crisan, Director, Integrated Children's Services

To: Scrutiny Committee – 23 September 2026

Subject: Kent Family Hubs – impact, effectiveness and sustainability

Classification: Unrestricted

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1. Background and purpose

1.1 The Scrutiny Committee is considering whether Kent's Family Hubs model is achieving its intended outcomes, reaching families with the greatest levels of need, providing consistent access across the county, delivering value for money and operating sustainably.

1.2 This report responds to the 12 questions identified by Members of the Scrutiny Committee. For each question, it sets out the evidence currently available and explains what this indicates. Where a fuller conclusion cannot yet be drawn, this is generally because the relevant information has not previously been collected or reported in a directly comparable way, or because the contribution of Family Hubs cannot be separated readily from that of the wider system.

2. Kent Family Hubs offer and operating model

2.1 Kent's Family Hubs provide a whole-family offer for children and young people aged 0–19, and up to 25 for young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). The model brings together access to parenting support, infant feeding, home learning, SEND information, mental health support, adolescent services, family advice and community-based support through physical hubs, outreach, digital access and partner delivery.

3. Impact, performance and reach

3.1 Q1. What evidence is available to demonstrate that Family Hubs are improving outcomes for Kent's children, young people and families, and how do those outcomes compare with those achieved through the Children's Centres model that Family Hubs replaced? <u>Decision - 23/00092 - Kent Family Hub Model - Implementation - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy</u>

3.1.1 The Family Hub model was introduced following Kent's transition from Children's and Youth Centres to a whole-family, 0-19 (25 SEND) integrated model aligned to the Department for Education Best Start Family Hub framework. The model provides integrated access to parenting support and family advice through a network of services and partners.

3.1.2 The rationale for changing the model was:

- To replace separate Children's Centre and Youth Hub arrangements with an integrated **0–19 offer, extending to 25 for young people with SEND**.
- To provide a clearer single point of access to Kent County Council and partner services.
- To combine universal and targeted support across buildings, outreach and digital channels.
- To improve integration between youth provision, family support, health, public health and other partners.
- To meet the Department for Education (Department for Education) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) Family Hub requirements and secure approximately £11 million of transformation funding.
- To make better use of a reduced estate while extending access through outreach, community sites and digital provision.

3.1.3 Within the available resource, the revised model also sought to define more clearly the interventions offered and focus targeted support where evidence and local need indicated it would have the greatest impact.

3.1.4 A direct comparison with the former Children's Centre model is therefore challenging to make. Changes in service scope, age range, recording systems and wider policy context mean that data is not directly comparable. There is less resource, but it is more targeted, so the service may be reaching less people overall, but is targeting those families who most need the support.

3.1.5 Kent's priority has been to measure and report to the Department for Education on Best Start Programme level indicators. The key measure is the Good Level of Development (GLD) rate, which is the percentage of children who, at the end of the Reception year, achieve the expected level across specified areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. A child has a GLD when they meet the expected level in communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, literacy and mathematics. It is an indicator of school readiness. This reflects the combined influence of children's early experiences, family circumstances, early years education, schools, health services and Best Start Family hubs support.

3.1.6 Improvements in GLD rates across Kent are therefore relevant to the Family Hub programme but cannot be fully attributed to Family Hubs' work alone and may take several years to become fully evident following changes to early-help provision.

3.1.7 Kent's Good Level of Development (GLD) rate increased from 68.9% in 2025 to 74% in 2026. This is a positive system-level indicator consistent with the aims of the Family Hub programme.

3.1.8 Kent's GLD rate for children eligible for free school meals improved by almost four percentage points from 2025 to 2026. This improvement is particularly relevant because reducing inequalities and reaching families with higher levels of need are key objectives of the Family Hub model.

3.1.9 The Early Writing Project, delivered in 25 schools, achieved an average 12.3 percentage-point increase in Good Level of Development outcomes. These results reflect Kent's Best Start Local Plan activity and should not be attributed solely to Family Hubs. however, they provide relevant evidence of progress within the integrated system to which Family Hubs contribute.

3.1.10 The Family Hub model has brought early years, school-age and adolescent support into a more integrated whole-family framework. It has strengthened the offer for children aged 5–11, expanded parenting support for families with children aged five and over, and provided a clearer and more evidence-based youth offer, including targeted provision such as Compass programme. It also brings together SEND information and support up to age 25, digital access and delivery through community and partner networks.

3.1.11 In December 2025, Kent County Council has commissioned 31Ten to provide an independent review into barriers to engagement with the Family Hub and Start for Life offer, particularly among underserved groups. The research included 42 Early Help and Children's Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey. The review provides evidence about access, family experience and barriers, but it was not designed as a before-and-after comparison of Family Hubs and Children's Centres.

3.1.12 Kent Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Unit, Family Hubs and Management Information are developing a Kent Family Hubs performance framework to measure performance beyond the Department for Education Start for Life agenda. It is establishing baselines and trend measures for the current model and, where elements of historic data are sufficiently comparable, it will show change from the previous arrangements.

3.2 Q2. What are the key performance indicators for Family Hubs, and what do current performance trends tell us about their effectiveness?

3.2.1 The Department for Education management information return is the principal external reporting requirement for Family Hubs. It covers four broad areas: system and service delivery; workforce activity and partnership working; service use, reach and demographic characteristics; and parent and child outcomes for funded services, including infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent–infant relationships.

- **Sites and delivery:** openings, closures, co-location, whether sites meet the Department for Education definition, and services delivered through hub buildings, partner networks, outreach and community settings.
- **Workforce:** staffing, volunteers, collaboration and participation in programme-funded training.

- **Reach and participation:** service activity, usage, demographic characteristics and Parent Carer Panel activity.
- **Start for Life services and outcomes:** infant feeding, perinatal mental health, parent–infant relationships, parenting support and service-specific outcomes where local or commissioned-provider data are available.

3.2.2 The latest quarterly **Department for Education Management Information Return** for quarter 1 of 2026-27 provides a picture of the scale and breadth of activity delivered through Kent's Family Hub network:

- 9,594 users accessed Kent's Best Start Family Hubs during the quarter, with figures available across all Family Hub locations and a method used to discount repeat visits.
- 15 Parent Carer Panel meetings took place, with 39 parents and carers participating. Feedback from parents and carers was used to influence service design and delivery.
- 7,412 users accessed the EasyPeasy parenting app, all through online delivery.
- 3,712 people accessed Stay and Play provision, with a further 310 accessing SEND Stay and Play sessions and 59 accessing dedicated dads' sessions.
- 3,366 children received a two-year review incorporating an early-language identification measure.
- 1,515 people accessed Baby Groups, and 736 accessed Baby Massage provision.
- 956 people accessed the specialist infant feeding service, including 337 through online delivery, and 565 accessed National Children's Trust infant feeding groups.
- 591 people accessed parenting support, including 175 accessing SEND parenting support.
- Wider activity delivered through the Family Hub network included 356 users of universal and targeted youth services, 243 users of wider mental health services, 114 users of domestic abuse support, 16 users of debt, money and welfare advice, and three users of substance misuse support.

3.2.3 These figures reflect different measures, including unique users, service users and attendances, and some individuals may have accessed more than one service. They should therefore not be combined into a single overall total. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the breadth of support delivered and provide an emerging baseline for monitoring reach and participation over time.

3.2.4 The wider reporting timetable also includes the Best Start Local Plan update, grant return, maturity self-assessment and annual delivery plan.

All returns are subject to internal governance and assurance before submission.

3.2.5 Performance can also be considered at four connected levels:

3.2.5.1 **Individual evidence and outcomes:** feedback, pre- and post-intervention measures and follow-up evidence show participants' experience and whether change is sustained.

3.2.5.2 Examples include the Strengthening Family Relationships parent evaluation which included 42 pre-workshop surveys, 18 post-workshop surveys and 12 one-month follow-up interviews. Parents reported greater understanding of the effect of conflict on children, improved perspective-taking, calmer communication and a stronger focus on children's needs. They also described improvements in co-parenting arrangements and valued practical tools, including workbooks, planners, calendars and videos presenting conflict from a child's perspective. Participants reported applying the learning across different family circumstances, including separation and parenting children with SEND.

3.2.5.3 A further example, children who completed Your Direction (a course specifically for children whose parents are separated), all reported improved wellbeing scores.

3.2.5.4 **Intervention, activity and service performance:** activity, repeat attendance, completion and programme outcomes show reach, engagement and effectiveness.

3.2.5.5 For example, from 1 January to 30 June 2026, there were 2,288 SEND stay-and-play attendances by 521 people and 1,373 Youth Voice attendances by 107 children and young people, demonstrating repeat engagement.

- 80 people completed one-to-one or face-to-face Reducing Parental Conflict interventions
- 87 people completed Triple P for Baby.
- 43 people completed Strengthening Family Relationships workshops.
- Six children completed the Your Direction online course. All showed improved wellbeing scores and reported that the course would help them speak to their parents constructively.

3.2.5.6 **Workforce development and reach:**
The Department for Work and Pensions Reducing Parental Conflict programme illustrates the information available for this performance measure. In 2025–26, 746 staff across Integrated Children's Services undertook Strengthening Family Relationships or Court Ready development, including 349 Strengthening Family Relationships completions, 265 Court Ready completions, 165 train-the-trainer

completions and 115 attendees at a one-off seminar, demonstrating substantial workforce reach.

3.2.5.7 The Strengthening Family Relationships evaluation provides strong evidence of impact. It found sustained improvements in practitioners' understanding of parental conflict and its effect on children, their ability to identify and respond to conflict, their use of programme resources and their confidence in holding sensitive conversations and supporting improved communication and co-parenting.

3.2.6 Workforce development opportunities are also offered across the wider Family Hub Network, including Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners. During the current financial year this includes:

- Six cohorts of *Togetherness: A Solihull Approach* training, supporting a consistent, evidence-based approach to parenting support across Kent.
- Two cohorts of Makaton training, helping practitioners and partners develop more inclusive communication skills and improve accessibility for children and families with additional communication needs.

3.2.6.1 **Population-level evidence:** wider indicators show trends across Kent and inequalities between groups.

3.2.6.2 For example, Kent's Good Level of Development rate increased from 68.9% in 2025 to 74% in 2026, with an improvement of almost four percentage points for children eligible for free school meals. These indicators are relevant to the programme but reflect the contribution of the wider system and cannot be attributed to Family Hubs alone.

3.2.7 Taken together, the evidence indicates strong workforce reach, repeat engagement in some services and positive outcomes within selected interventions. However, evidence is not yet equally mature across all ways of measuring performance, or at population level, or comparable with previous models of delivery (such as Children's Centres).

3.2.8 The developing Kent Family Hub performance framework intends to bring qualitative and quantitative evidence together more consistently and establish baselines. Final measures, data-quality standards and reporting thresholds are currently being tested and agreed.

3.3 Q3. How does the Council assess whether Family Hubs are successfully reaching families with the greatest levels of need, including those who may not traditionally engage with support services?

3.3.1 Kent assesses reach by comparing information about local need with evidence about who is using services. Community profiles and local needs analysis identify the size, characteristics and distribution of local populations, including areas of deprivation, rural isolation, population growth and communities that may experience barriers to access. Local

Children's Partnership Groups add intelligence from schools, health services, voluntary and community organisations and other partners about emerging needs, gaps in provision and families who may not be visible through Family Hub attendance data alone.

3.3.2 Parent Carer Panels provide valuable qualitative feedback from parents and carers about their experience of Family Hub services, including whether the offer is clear, accessible, welcoming and responsive to family needs. They can help identify practical barriers, test communications and proposed service changes, and involve families in shaping delivery.

3.3.3 Online and hybrid Parent Carer Panels are intended to reduce barriers associated with travel, childcare, working hours and attending an unfamiliar venue, making it easier for a wider range of parents and carers to participate, including from home, encouraging involvement from those who would find an in-person meeting difficult to attend. However, Panel members are generally already connected to Family Hubs or related services. Their feedback provides important evidence about the experience of current service users but cannot on its own establish whether the wider population is aware of the offer or explain why families who have never engaged do not access it.

3.3.4 Kent considers Panel feedback alongside independent research, community outreach, partner intelligence and targeted engagement with underserved or seldom-heard groups. The diversity and representativeness of Panel membership is monitored, with active recruitment of fathers and male carers, families from minority ethnic communities, families with SEND, rural and coastal communities, and others who may be under-represented.

3.3.5 In the last three quarters, 411 people engaged with Parent Carer Panels. Of those whose ethnicity was recorded, 63.64% were White British, meaning 36.36% were from other recorded ethnic groups. This indicates that the Panels are engaging a sizeable and ethnically diverse group of parents and carers. Since September 2025, 174 parents and carers have participated in Parent Carer Panel activity. The majority of participants were female (147), with 26 male participants and one participant whose gender was not recorded.

3.3.6 Parent Carer Panels provide a mechanism for families to influence service design and delivery. Feedback gathered through these panels has informed a range of service improvements. For example, parents requested more information about support available following the birth of a baby, which resulted in signposting to multilingual Togetherness parenting courses and additional one-to-one support through Stay and Play services. Feedback about difficulties accessing local groups led to the introduction of outreach Stay and Play sessions in community locations. Parent feedback has also informed targeted work with fathers and male carers, including the co-design and commissioning of a podcast series for new fathers, evening engagement sessions to enable working fathers to contribute to service development, greater promotion of father inclusive activities, and the recruitment of local fathers to help shape parenting content and resources.

3.3.7 Parent and community feedback has also informed wider inclusion activity. For example, concerns about barriers facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities led to community outreach events, improved signposting to support services, and cultural competency training for Family Hub staff, helping services become more accessible and responsive to the needs of local communities.

3.3.8 In line with Department for Education expectations, an Outreach Framework is being developed to identify and better understand communities that are currently underrepresented in Family Hub services. The framework is being co-produced with partners and informed by the lived experience of families. It will identify local needs, workforce development requirements and engagement approaches, whilst providing a flexible model that can be tailored at district level to reflect the needs of individual communities.

3.3.9 Partnership referrals, the Family Hub Network, and Health Visiting help identify families who may benefit from support and provide routes into Family Hub services. Targeted outreach tests whether adapting the location, timing, communication or method of delivery improves access for groups who are less likely to attend a main hub building.

3.3.10 Taken together, these sources allow the Council to assess whether service use broadly reflects the needs and demographics of each district, identify groups or places that appear under-represented, and adapt outreach and delivery in response.

3.3.11 The developing performance framework is intended to strengthen this assessment by comparing participation and outcomes by district and population group. It will consider not only initial attendance, but also whether families return, complete courses, take up onward support and report improved outcomes. This will provide a more meaningful assessment of reach than total attendance figures alone.

3.3.12 Additionally, the Family Hubs Practice Development and Quality Assurance function has developed a service specific Quality Assurance Framework to provide systematic assurance that the Family Hub model is operating safely, consistently and effectively across Kent, and that its delivery remains focused on accessible, integrated and earlier support for children and families. Year 1 has deliberately concentrated on safeguarding and partnership delivery, establishing the essential baseline from which the quality, reach and impact of the wider offer can be assessed. Through a common methodology comprising district self-assessments, reflective safeguarding conversations, staff focus groups, focused practice observations, building and health and safety assurance, and district feedback, the programme has quality assured ten of the twelve districts to date, with the remaining visits scheduled for completion by October 2026. This work has created the first consistent countywide picture of safeguarding practice within Family Hubs and has identified both effective practice and recurring variations.

3.3.13 Year 1 has also demonstrated that the framework is an active improvement mechanism rather than a review process alone. Findings have been converted into district Next Steps Plans, management follow-up, thematic governance reporting and targeted practice development. They have informed the introduction of the Record of Concern process, the development and rollout of Family Hub Safeguarding and Child Protection Guidance, strengthened due-diligence arrangements for the Family Hub Network, clearer expectations for partner use of hub premises, improved review of Local Management Agreements and risk assessments, and the design of the Year 2 Quality Assurance Framework methodology.

3.3.14 The Practice Development and Quality Assurance function provides the oversight and continuity across this cycle by co-ordinating multi-agency evidence, identifying cross-district themes and ensuring that learning is translated into service improvement and is visible through governance.

3.3.15 Building on this established safeguarding and partnership baseline, Year 2 will introduce a modular Quality Assurance Framework comprising defined Lines of Enquiry selected through evidence, cross-district learning and service priorities. Across the programme, data deep dives will be combined with targeted sampling, practitioner and family experience, partner feedback, moderation and improvement planning to assess reach, access, quality, impact and outcomes. This wider model will examine whether families with the greatest levels of need are represented in service use, why particular groups or communities remain under-represented, and whether changes to outreach, communications, venues, digital provision or partnership routes improve access and sustained engagement.

3.3.16 Repeated quality assurance beyond Year 2 will provide a stronger longitudinal view of whether identified barriers reduce, improvement actions are embedded and the Family Hub offer delivers equitable reach, consistent quality and measurable benefit.

3.3.17 **Independent research:** In December 2025, an independent review by 31Ten examined barriers to engagement with the Family Hub and Start for Life offer, particularly among underserved groups. The research included 42 Early Help and Children’s Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey.

- Family participants included five fathers or male carers, six Asian parents and two care leavers. No Gypsy, Roma or Traveller families were recruited. Findings relating to this group were therefore drawn from staff evidence, demographic analysis and published research rather than direct testimony.
- The review found that the key barriers were around transport, working hours, childcare, language barriers, digital exclusion, difficulty finding information, fear of judgement, lack of confidence entering unfamiliar

buildings or established groups, and environments that may not meet the needs of people with SEND or neurodivergence.

3.3.18 The review indicated that the factors supporting access were trusted relationships, flexible times and locations, supported introductions, community outreach, whole-family provision, and welcoming and inclusive environments.

3.3.19 These findings subsequently informed improvements to Kent's approach to reaching families who have not traditionally engaged with services, including more targeted outreach, delivery through trusted community settings, supported introductions, more flexible access, clearer communication and tailored engagement with underserved groups.

3.4 Q4. What impact, if any, have Family Hubs had on demand for more intensive services, such as children's social care, crisis intervention services and SEND support?

3.4.1 Family Hubs aim to reduce escalation by helping families access support earlier through parenting programmes, infant feeding support, SEND advice, home learning activities and integrated family support.

3.4.2 It is unlikely to be possible to attribute changes in demand for Children's Social Care, crisis intervention or SEND support to Family Hubs alone. Demand is shaped by many interacting factors, including population change, deprivation, levels of need, referral thresholds and practice, wider service capacity, national policy and the contribution of health, education, Early Help and community services. Families may also receive support from several parts of the system at the same time. Even with stronger long-term and comparative data, any assessment would therefore demonstrate the contribution of Family Hubs within the wider system rather than establish a simple causal relationship.

3.4.3 The Council holds information on wider service demand as well as Family Hub activity and outcomes. The developing performance framework is intended to bring these sources together more consistently, including indicators such as re-referrals to Early Help and Children's Social Care after families had accessed Family Hub services. Baselines, follow-up data and comparison with wider demand trends will strengthen the evidence about whether Family Hubs are contributing to earlier support and reduced escalation. These measures should be interpreted as evidence of contribution, not proof that Family Hubs alone caused any change in demand for more intensive services.

3.4.4 For example, recorded activity provides evidence of the scale of earlier SEND-related support. From 1 January to 30 June 2026, Kent's Power BI data show:

- 2,288 attendances by 521 people at SEND stay-and-play sessions.
- 434 interventions providing support services for children with SEND.

- 803 SEND parenting-support interventions.
- 967 sensory-room interventions.
- 460 families accessed speech and language programmes (Little Talkers, The Communication Tree, Making it Real)

3.4.5 These figures demonstrate that Family Hubs are providing accessible SEND-related support at scale, including support that may help families before needs escalate. They do not, however, establish the effect on statutory referrals, crisis demand or the need for more intensive SEND services.

3.5 Q5. How is the Council ensuring that there is consistent access to, and quality of, Family Hub services across all areas of Kent, including rural and coastal communities?

3.5.1 Kent operates a countywide model with:

- A defined core offer.
- Common service standards.
- Practice Framework.
- Quality Assurance Framework.
- Workforce development programme.
- Audit and peer review arrangements.
- Performance scorecards.

3.5.2 Local delivery is adapted through district planning, network sites, outreach and digital access. The December 2025 31Ten review confirmed why this matters. Transport and rural access were prominent barriers, including an example of a parent with two young children facing a 40-minute walk to the nearest hub. Families also described practical barriers associated with working hours, childcare, confidence in entering unfamiliar buildings and difficulty finding clear information.

3.5.3 Kent has used these findings to strengthen delivery beyond the main Family Hub estate. Network sites, schools, libraries, community venues and voluntary, community and faith organisations provide more familiar and accessible settings. Some Family Hubs are co-located with libraries, enabling families to access support in a familiar, non-stigmatising community setting that they may already use for books, activities, information or digital access. Co-location can increase awareness of the Family Hub offer, support informal engagement and make it easier for families to move between library resources and Family Hub support in one visit. Districts can also use drop-ins, targeted community activity, supported introductions and outreach in rural or underserved areas where families may be unable or reluctant to attend a hub building. This approach is intended both to bring support closer to families and to use trusted local relationships and community facilities as routes into the wider Family Hub offer.

3.5.4 Digital access is a complementary part of this model rather than a replacement for face-to-face support. Families increasingly expect to be able to find information, book services and use appropriate online resources at a time that suits them. Digital provision can offer access 24 hours a day, including during evenings and weekends, and may reduce barriers associated with travel, working patterns, childcare and anxiety about attending an unfamiliar setting.

3.5.5 Kent Family Hub has continued to strengthen its social media presence, with increases in both follower numbers and content reach across the countywide Kent Family Hub social media accounts and district-level channels. This growth has expanded the programme's ability to communicate with parents, carers and families, improving awareness of available services, activities and support.

3.5.6 The increase in audience engagement demonstrates the effectiveness of social media as a key communication channel for promoting the Family Hub offer, supporting targeted campaigns, and directing residents to local services. Growing digital reach also supports the programme's objective of ensuring families can easily access information and connect with support within their communities.

Measure	September 2025	September 2026	Change
Followers	61,334	69,721	+13.67%

3.5.7 An increase of 13.67% in followers over the past year demonstrates steady and sustained growth in the Kent Family Hubs social media audience. This indicates ongoing success in attracting new followers each month and increasing the visibility of Family Hub services.

3.5.8 To further strengthen awareness of the Family Hub offer, Kent Family Hub has established a dedicated LinkedIn channel for professionals. The new channel will support professionals in identifying and promoting appropriate services, enabling them to signpost families more effectively to local support. It is also expected to increase awareness and understanding of the Family Hub offer amongst the family hub network and practitioners, helping to strengthen engagement with services and improve access to support for families across Kent.

3.5.9 Virtual tours of Family Hubs are also available to help families see the layout, facilities and environment before visiting. This can make the setting more predictable and familiar, helping to reduce uncertainty and build confidence for people who may feel anxious about entering an unfamiliar building.

3.5.10 Between 19 April 2026 when the pages went live on the website and 30 June 2026, the virtual tours received 290 page views from 123 users. User engagement data indicates that visitors actively explored the content, with 428 clicks recorded across desktop and mobile devices. Interactions involved opening information accordions to access additional details about

Family Hub facilities and services, demonstrating that users are engaging with the information provided to better understand what to expect before visiting.

3.5.11 Kent is strengthening its Family Hub website and online directory, online booking, digital parenting and relationship-support resources, translated information and hybrid participation arrangements. Co-located libraries can also provide access to computers, internet connectivity and staff support for families who may otherwise experience digital exclusion. Where a family needs personal support, lacks digital access or confidence, or prefers face-to-face help, staff and partners can provide navigation, outreach or an introduction to local provision.

3.5.12 Further consistency and assurance are provided through the Family Hubs Quality Assurance Framework, overseen and co-ordinated by the Family Hub Practice Development Team within the Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Unit.

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3.5.13 Data on need, uptake and outcomes will be considered in quality assurance activities alongside the experience of families, practitioners and partners to establish whether the core offer is accessible and delivered to a comparable standard across Kent, including in rural and coastal communities. Where barriers or differences are identified, targeted practice development and follow-up assurance activities will test whether improvements have been embedded and variation has reduced.

3.5.14 Kent has established a credible infrastructure for consistent access and quality services while retaining the flexibility to respond to district need. Full assurance will depend on performance and quality information showing that families in different parts of Kent experience equitable access to the core offer and comparable standards of delivery and outcomes.

3.6 Q6. How are Family Hubs meeting the needs of children aged over eight and young people, and what services are specifically targeted at these age groups?

3.6.1 Family Hubs are not a building-only or early-years-only model but are part of a wider integrated local offer for children, young people and families. Kent's model includes a specific 11-19 offer alongside the early years and network offer. Support includes:

- Youth activities and targeted youth provision.
- Support for parents and carers of adolescents.
- Online-safety programmes for children, young people and families.
- SEND information, guidance and routes to support up to age 25.
- Mental health information, signposting and referral pathways.
- Youth participation through Youth Voice and Speak Out Youth.
- Targeted interventions reflecting local need, including Compass and substance-misuse support.

3.6.2 The previous Youth Hub model provided substantial support for young people aged 11 and over. The improvement under Family Hubs is stronger integration across age groups, an enhanced 5–11 offer, wider parenting support for families with older children and a more clearly defined, evidence-based youth offer, including targeted programmes such as Compass.

For the period from 1 January 2026 to 30 June 2026, data for specific activities for the 8+ age group demonstrates meaningful reach and repeated engagement:

- 5,386 attendances by 1, 479 children accessing ‘activities for older children and young people’
- 149 attendances by 59 young people (aged 11-19) at online safety sessions
- 57 attendances by 27 children (aged 7-11) at online safety sessions
- 16 interventions for young people with substance misuse
- 414 interventions ‘support for parents/carers of adolescents’
- 1,373 attendances by 107 children and young people for Kent Youth Voice sessions
- 255 attendances by 60 children in ‘Speak Out Youth’ sessions
- Six Your Direction completions, all with improved wellbeing scores.

3.6.3 The Youth Peer Mentor Programme provides young people with structured, positive volunteering opportunities and training that support their personal development and education and career goals. It empowers young people aged 14–18, and up to 25 for those with SEND, to play an active role in their communities by supporting other young people and providing peer support through Family Hubs and the wider community.

3.6.4 Youth Peer Mentors receive comprehensive training and volunteering experience designed to improve learning outcomes and develop resilience, confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills.

3.6.5 There are currently 33 active or onboarding Youth Peer Mentors across Kent.

3.7 Q7. Where support cannot be provided directly through a Family Hub building, what outreach arrangements are in place and how effective have they been in reaching families?

3.7.1 Family Hub support is delivered beyond the main hub estate through network sites, libraries, schools, community and faith venues, partner-led groups, targeted outreach and digital services. These routes bring support closer to where families live, provide access in familiar settings and reduce barriers associated with travel, working hours, childcare, unfamiliar buildings and mistrust of statutory services. Supported introductions, including joint visits or a trusted worker accompanying a family, can also help people move from outreach into the wider offer.

3.7.2 Available evidence illustrates both the range of outreach and, in some cases, the practical response it has generated.

3.7.3 Family Hub staff worked with residents at the Brotherhood Wood Traveller site through community events delivered with health, education, Citizens Advice, Fire and Rescue and voluntary-sector partners. This relationship-based approach generated identifiable follow-up: requests for parenting support, interest in a weekly stay-and-play group, support with a school admission and home-safety visits. This provides practical evidence that outreach in a trusted setting can identify unmet need and create routes into support.

3.7.4 Communication boards in parks using pictures, symbols and words make early-language and communication support available in everyday community spaces without requiring an appointment or attendance at a Family Hub. They are intended to support children with speech, language or additional communication needs, children who use visual prompts and families who use English as an additional language. The Family Hub Board has recognised their contribution to accessibility and awareness.

3.7.5 To maximise impact, speech and language data was used to identify areas of greatest need and inform the placement of the communication boards across Kent. A dedicated webpage to support the communication boards launched in August 2026 and has already received 180 views, demonstrating early interest and engagement with the resource. This targeted approach helps ensure that resources are available within communities where they are most likely to benefit children and families.

3.7.6 Locations of 13 boards: Ashford: Victoria Park, Noakes Meadow, Bulleid Place; Folkestone and Hythe: Randor Park, Cheriton Park, Canterbury Road Recreation Ground; Gravesham: Gordon Promenade, Rosherville Recreational Space, Woodlands Park; Tonbridge and Malling: Taddington Valley; Tunbridge Wells: Sherwood Road Play Area, Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, Oak Road playground.

3.7.7 Libraries, network sites, schools and community venues extend the physical reach of the offer beyond the main Family Hub estate. They provide familiar, accessible and less formal settings, can reduce travel barriers and enable families to connect with support through organisations they already know. Library co-location can also provide access to computers, internet connectivity and staff assistance. For example, Read, Play, Grow (a group to support Peri-natal Mental Health and Speech and Language) is delivered monthly at Folkestone Library and has led to an increase in families accessing Family Hub services, particularly those from Eastern European backgrounds. Compass, a course to support emotional well-being for 11-19 year olds, is delivered in all secondary schools across Folkestone and Hythe, ensuring young people from across the district can access this service even if they are unable to attend the hubs.

3.7.8 Kent Family Hub continues to strengthen its digital offer, with the Family Hub website providing a central access point for information, advice and support for families across Kent, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Between September 2025 and September 2026, the website recorded 91,512 sessions and 150,218 page views, representing increases of 17,580 sessions and 24,502 page views compared with the previous year, demonstrating growing awareness and engagement with online Family Hub content. The website continues to support families by improving access to information, services and local support through a single, accessible online platform.

3.7.9 Online information, booking, parenting and relationship-support resources provide access outside standard opening hours and can reduce barriers associated with travel, work and childcare. Continuing to improve access to services through the online booking system, enables families to search for and reserve places on activities, courses and support sessions at a time convenient to them. The online booking landing page has received 7,638 views, demonstrating significant use of the digital platform.

3.7.10 Virtual tours allow families to see the layout and facilities before attending, helping to make an unfamiliar setting more predictable and build confidence, please see data above.

3.7.11 Kent Family Hub has expanded its digital parenting offer through its YouTube channel, increasing support for families across the county. The channel hosts a range of resources designed to improve parental confidence, promote positive family relationships and support children's development.

3.7.12 The YouTube channel includes the *Dad Chat* podcast series, which provides honest, real-life conversations about becoming a dad, life with a new baby, mental health, relationships and accessing support. By tackling topics that can often be difficult to discuss, the series encourages engagement with support services, promotes family wellbeing and increases awareness of the wider Family Hub offer.

3.7.13 The channel also features the *Tiny Triumphs* playlist, a collection of short animations that help parents and carers recognise the importance of everyday interactions in supporting children's development. Through child-led storytelling, the animations demonstrate how talking, playing, listening and responding to children can strengthen communication, confidence, wellbeing and learning outcomes and a lasting impact on a child’s development.

3.7.14 In addition, infant feeding animations provide accessible and practical guidance to families during the early years, supporting parents to make informed decisions and access appropriate help when needed.

3.7.15 Together, these digital resources extend the reach of Family Hub services beyond physical locations, providing flexible, on-demand support that helps families access trusted information, builds parental confidence and promotes positive outcomes.

3.7.16 The digital offer has expanded its programme of virtual delivery in August 2026, including evening sessions, to improve accessibility for families who may be unable to attend support during traditional daytime hours. This flexible approach helps reduce barriers to participation, particularly for working parents and carers, families with mobility difficulties or disabilities, those without access to transport, and families living in rural areas where travel to services may be more challenging. Virtual delivery also enables parents and carers to access support from their own home, supporting increased participation and extending the reach of the Family Hub offer.

3.7.17 The digital offer includes a digital engagement tool *Let's Talk Kent About Kent Family Hub* to ensure that the voices of young people, parents, carers and partners help shape Family Hub services. The platform supports co-production and continuous improvement by gathering feedback on services, resources, environments and future developments, helping to ensure that support remains responsive to the needs of families.

3.7.18 Several districts introduced monthly Saturday dad groups and father-focused stay-and-play sessions in response to feedback that weekday provision could be difficult to attend. This adapts the timing and identity of the offer around working patterns and creates a space specifically designed for fathers and male carers to attend with their children.

3.7.19 These examples show that outreach has adapted the location, timing and method of delivery to increase the reach to as many families in Kent as possible.

3.8 Q8. How is the Council encouraging and increasing engagement with families who would benefit from Family Hub services but are not currently accessing them?

3.8.1 Kent’s engagement approach is informed by research, parent and carer participation, partner intelligence and analysis of who is and is not using services. The independent 31Ten review, finalised in December 2025, drew on 42 Early Help and Children’s Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey. It found that families were more likely to engage where staff were trusted, support fitted their circumstances, introductions were gradual and information was clear. It also identified barriers including limited awareness of the offer, fear of judgement, language, digital exclusion, working hours and a lack of confidence entering unfamiliar services.

3.8.2 Kent has used this evidence to change how the offer is promoted, accessed and shaped. Two Participation and Engagement Officers lead focused work with fathers and male carers and with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Their role is to build relationships, gather intelligence about barriers and work with communities and partners to adapt communications, referral routes and provision. The wider approach includes a clearer core offer, consistent branding and local communications, digital translation, simpler booking, improved website and directory information, parenting drop-ins, peer and volunteer approaches, and better navigation between Family Hubs, Early Help, health, schools and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations.

3.8.3 Parent Carer Panels provide an established route for parents and carers to identify barriers, test communications and influence service design. Over the last three quarters, 411 people engaged with the Panels; 36.36% of participants whose ethnicity was recorded were from groups other than White British. Hybrid and online participation reduces barriers associated with travel, childcare and scheduling. However, Panel members are generally already connected to Family Hubs or related services, so this evidence is considered alongside targeted engagement, community intelligence and independent research to understand the experience of families who are not currently accessing support.

3.8.4 Targeted engagement is also used to shape the offer for groups who may be under-represented. Work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has informed Home Learning Environment packs, culturally sensitive outreach materials, translated information, books reflecting these communities and links with specialist resident and health services. Work with fathers and male carers has informed dedicated website information, antenatal and parenting support, Fathers Matter, Dad's Space and provision outside the standard working week. These developments show how feedback about barriers is translated into changes to the content, presentation and timing of services.

3.8.5 Engagement is also strengthened through professional and partnership networks. The Making Connections – Best Start in Life Conference (July 2026) brought together more than 80 professionals, partners and community voices across infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent–infant relationship services. It improved awareness of professional roles and available support and helped strengthen referral relationships, while the Family Hub Board identified the need to maintain links between Healthy Babies, Family Hubs and Families First.

3.8.6 Kent's approach is therefore not limited to promoting existing services. It uses research, participation and partner intelligence to understand why families do not engage and to change communications, referral pathways and service design in response. Available evidence demonstrates purposeful activity and increasing diversity of participation, although further cohort-level data are needed to show whether families who were previously not engaged subsequently access, remain involved with and benefit from Family Hub services.

3.9 Q9. What impact has population growth had on demand for Family Hub services, and how has service provision adapted to respond to any increased demand?

3.9.1 Population growth is one factor affecting demand, but changes in the number and complexity of families needing support are also shaped by deprivation, migration, housing development, SEND, health needs and local access barriers.

3.9.2 Kent’s population increased by approximately 13,700 people, or 0.8%, between 2024 and 2025, compared with growth of 0.6% across the South East and 0.4% across England [ref: kent.gov.uk]. Net migration was the principal driver, with Maidstone and Thanet recording the highest net migration and Dartford the highest natural population increase. These trends do not translate directly into Family Hub demand, but they indicate where local capacity and patterns of need may change.

3.9.3 The district-based operating model enables Family Hubs to respond directly to changing need. Staff are deployed across districts rather than being permanently attached to individual buildings, allowing resources to move between hub sites, network locations, community venues, outreach and digital delivery. District plans use community profiles, service activity, partner intelligence and Local Children’s Partnership Groups to identify priorities and adjust the location, timing and type of provision. The countywide core offer provides consistency, while local deployment responds to population change, deprivation, rurality, housing growth and emerging demand.

3.9.4 This flexible model is particularly important where new housing is not close to an existing Family Hub. Kent’s infrastructure planning assesses the effect of development on local service capacity and can seek developer contributions for expansion, equipment, outreach capacity or mobile delivery. Large strategic developments may require an extension or new facility, considered alongside opportunities for co-location.

3.9.5 The Council can therefore demonstrate that the operating model is needs-led and capable of adapting to population and housing growth. The current evidence does not yet quantify the direct effect of growth on Family Hub attendance, staffing or outcomes, and this will require district-level demand and capacity data over time.

3.10 Q10. What impact is Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) expected to have on the future delivery, accessibility and sustainability of Family Hub services?

3.10.1 Family Hubs remain a national and local strategic priority aligned with Department for Education policy and Kent’s Best Start arrangements. The Council continues to deliver the programme and meet current grant and reporting requirements.

3.10.2 Detailed future arrangements under Local Government Reorganisation have not yet been determined and given the government's announcement on 7 September 2026 work has been paused.

3.11 Q11. In relation to the decision to accept the Best Start Family Hub Grant Award, what is now known about the financial and operational implications that were uncertain at the time, particularly where the decision report referred to "delivery expectations not yet known"? Decision - 25/00109 - Best Start Family Hubs Programme - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy

3.11.1 At the point the grant was accepted, the detailed delivery expectations had not been fully specified. These are now substantially clearer. The award supports a three-year programme and requires Kent to maintain a Best Start Local Plan setting out local priorities, planned activity and intended outcomes.

3.11.2 Kent as other recipients of the grant must submit quarterly Department for Education management information returns (covering sites, workforce, service activity, reach, demographic information, parent participation and available outcomes), complete grant returns, programme maturity assessments, Best Start Local Plan updates and annual delivery plans. Kent maintains governance and assurance arrangements so that plans, performance information and statutory returns are reviewed before submission. Kent needs to report on service delivery and outcomes, with evidence of reach, quality and progress against agreed priorities.

3.11.3 The grant mandates Kent to deliver workforce development across relevant Family Hub and partner services and involve parents and carers in service design and review, including through Parent Carer Panels. Additionally, the Council needs to coordinate delivery across Council services, health, commissioned providers and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations.

3.11.4 Financial expectations are also now much clearer than they were at the point of grant acceptance. The Department for Education has confirmed the annual grant profile across the three-year programme, enabling spend to be planned and monitored against agreed workstreams. Kent has established detailed budgets for each workstream and identified the staffing resources required to deliver the programme. Robust financial monitoring arrangements are in place to oversee expenditure, ensure compliance with grant conditions and provide assurance that funding is being used to support delivery of agreed outcomes.

3.11.5 Since the grant was accepted, the Department for Education has also provided significantly more detail about the specific delivery requirements expected of local authorities. These requirements have informed programme design and the allocation of funding across workstreams.

3.11.6 Key delivery expectations now include:

- Delivering evidence-based parenting and home learning environment programmes to improve child development, school readiness and family outcomes.
- Delivering the Healthy Babies Offer, including enhanced infant feeding support, perinatal mental health services and parent-infant relationship interventions for families during pregnancy and the early years.
- Establishing and maintaining a network of Best Start Family Hub sites and wider Network Sites, providing accessible locations for families to access support within their local communities.
- Developing and implementing an outreach strategy to increase awareness, engagement and participation amongst families, particularly those less likely to access services through traditional routes.
- Establishing a Best Start Inclusion Practitioner (BSIP) workforce to strengthen support for children with additional needs, improve early identification of need and enhance pathways between universal, targeted and specialist services.
- Embedding parent and carer participation through Parent Carer Panels and other engagement mechanisms, ensuring that families' lived experiences inform service design, commissioning and continuous improvement.
- Delivering multi-agency workforce development and training across Family Hubs, health services, early years settings and partner organisations to support a consistent and joined-up approach to family support.
- Improving digital access, information sharing and the use of data and insights to help families navigate support, improve service integration and inform continuous service improvement.

3.11.7 These requirements are broader and more detailed than what was known at the time of the original decision and have informed the annual grant profile, expenditure across programme workstreams and the programme management, delivery and support posts funded through the grant.

3.11.8 The operational implications are therefore more extensive than the delivery of individual services. The grant requires programme management, partnership coordination, workforce development, participation, data collection, quality assurance and regular reporting throughout the three-year period. Kent has put these arrangements in place and now has substantially greater clarity about the Department for Education’s milestones, assurance requirements and expected outcomes than was available when the decision was taken.

Funded Strand	**% of Grant**	**2026-27**	**2027-28**	**2028-29**

Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant (programme)	21%	£1,186,800	£970,500	£996,600
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant (capital)	5%	£237,400	£242,100	£246,800
Parenting support	23%	£1,165,500	£1,180,000	£1,231,800
Home learning environment support	17%	£839,600	£850,000	£887,400
Perinatal mental health & parent-infant relationships	24%	£1,237,900	£1,237,900	£1,237,900
Infant feeding support	10%	£504,400	£504,400	£504,400
Healthy Babies Offers & Parent Carer Panels	1%	£31,000	£31,000	£31,000
Total		**£5,202,600**	**£5,015,900**	**£5,135,900**

3.11.9 The delivery requirements have also informed the staffing resources required to support the programme. Of the current financial year's total grant to date, £3.3m has been allocated to existing staff costs, which has resulted in a direct saving to Kent County Council.

3.12 Q12. The original proposals noted that Department for Education Best Start funding may be used to support the delivery of existing services. What decisions were subsequently taken regarding the use of this funding, and what impact has this had on service delivery and outcomes? (para 5.3 Executive Decision)

3.12.1 Grant funding has supported delivery of:

- Parenting programmes.
- Home Learning Environment work.
- Infant feeding support.
- Parent Carer Panels.
- Perinatal Mental Health activity.
- Workforce development.
- Data and quality assurance arrangements.
- Partnership and participation functions.

3.12.2 The programme is intended both to enhance existing services and expand delivery in priority areas identified by the Department for Education Best Start framework.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The available evidence indicates that Kent has implemented a broader whole-family model than the former Children's Centre arrangements, extending support beyond the early years and providing a clearer countywide framework for access, quality and outcomes. The model has strengthened workforce and partnership capacity and introduced more targeted approaches to outreach and inclusion.

4.2 Programme-level measures, the Reducing Parental Conflict evaluation and feedback from children, parents and carers provide encouraging evidence of reach, engagement and practical benefit.

4.3 The evidence on population-level impact, remains under development regarding comparison with the former Children's Centre model, demand for statutory services, consistency between districts, value for money and sustained outcomes for underserved groups. Some of these questions also involve inherent attribution challenges: Family Hubs operate within a wider system, and their contribution cannot always be separated reliably from that of other services or wider social and economic factors. The developing performance framework should strengthen assurance by bringing together activity, quality, demographic reach and outcomes and establishing clearer county, district and cohort trends.

4.4 Members can therefore take assurance that the operating model, governance and improvement infrastructure are in place and that selected interventions are demonstrating positive results. Further assurance will depend on validated trend data, clear baselines, stronger follow-up, financial and value-for-money evidence, and transparent reporting that distinguishes the contribution of Family Hubs from the impact of the wider system.

5. Recommendation

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and note the report.

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By: Anna Taylor, Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny)

To: Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Work Programme

Summary: This report gives details of the proposed work programme for the Scrutiny Committee and gives members some.

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1. Introduction

a) Any Member of the Council is entitled to give notice that they wish an item relevant to the functions of the Committee (which is not an excluded matter) to be included on the agenda for the next available meeting. On receipt of such a request the item will be included for discussion at the next available agenda setting meeting.

b) The definition of an excluded matter referenced above is:

a. Any matter relating to a planning or licensing decision,
b. Any matter relating to a person in respect of which that person has a right of recourse to a review of right of appeal conferred by or under any enactment,
c. Any matter which is vexatious, discriminatory or not reasonable to be included in the agenda or discussion at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

c) The Scrutiny Committee has the ability to 'call-in' decisions made by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members. Any two Members from more than one Political Group may give notice within five clear working days from the publication of a decision taken of their intent to call-in the decision along with their reasons.

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2. Recommendation

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and note the report.

Contact Details

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Scrutiny Work Programme

Meeting date	Item	Work Type	Presenter
21 October 2026	Group Based CSE in Kent	Placed on agenda for discussion	TBC
21 October 2026	SEND Reform Plan and High Needs Sustainability Grant	Placed on agenda for discussion	TBC
21 October 2026	Kent Flood Risk Management Committee Annual Report	Annual item	Chairman of Flood Risk Committee
21 October 2026	Q1 Budget Monitoring	Placed on agenda for discussion	Deputy Leader
09 December 2026	Kent Education Provision Plan - impact of VAT and Business Rates on KCC….	Placed on agenda for discussion	TBC
09 December 2026	Selective Education - Cost of Kent Test selection process to KCC	Placed on agenda for discussion	TBC
09 December 2026	Initial Draft Budget and MTFP	Report	Deputy Leader
27 January 2027	Final Draft Budget and MTFP	Annual item	Deputy Leader
*June 2027	Budget Monitoring Year End	Annual item	Deputy Leader
*July 2027	Scrutiny Committee meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee	Annual item	KCSP
*November 2027	Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee Annual Report	Annual item	Chairman of Flood Risk Committee
*January 2028	Final Draft Budget and MTFP	Annual item	TBC
TBC	VAT & Business Rates on private school fees	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC
TBC	Following OPRN discussion – Relative cost of market-provided versus KCC-owned care homes under the new contract.	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC
TBC	Speed Management and Road Safety	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC
TBC	Further contingency planning in relation to ASC pressures be undertaken	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC
TBC	Capital Projects that must continue and those that may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC
TBC	Household Waste Recycling Centres - inc. decision to cease accepting refrigerators and freezers	Suggested for Future meeting	TBC

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