



Summons to and
Agenda for a
Meeting on
**Thursday, 13th March,
2025**
at **10.00 am**



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
SESSIONS HOUSE
MAIDSTONE

Wednesday, 5 March 2025

To: All Members of the County Council

A meeting of the County Council will be held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ on Thursday, 13th March, 2025 at **10.00 am** to deal with the following business. **The meeting is scheduled to end by 4.30 pm.**

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2025 and, if in order, **(Pages 1 - 14)** to be approved as a correct record
4. Corporate Parenting Panel - October 2024 and December 2024 **(Pages 15 - 30)** Minutes for noting
5. Chairman's Announcements
6. Questions
7. Report by Leader of the Council
8. Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-39
See supplement pack published alongside the main agenda
9. Review of Decision 24/00093 - Commissioned Family Hubs **(Pages 31 - 190)**
10. Armed Forces Covenant - Annual Report **(Pages 191 - 222)**
11. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Update **(Pages 223 - 244)**

12. Treasury Management - Mid-Year Update 2024-25 **(Pages 245 - 266)**
13. Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee - Terms of Reference update **(Pages 267 - 274)**
14. Governance & Audit Terms of Reference update **(Pages 275 - 284)**
15. Governance Updates **(Pages 285 - 334)**
16. Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 **(Pages 335 - 340)**
17. Motion for Time Limited Debate **(Pages 341 - 342)**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Watts', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel
03000 416814

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 13 February 2025.

PRESENT: Mr B J Sweetland (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mr M Baldock, Mr P Bartlett, Mr D Beaney, Mrs C Bell, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr A Booth, Mr A Brady, Mr D L Brazier, Mr S R Campkin, Miss S J Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs S Chandler, Mr N J D Chard, Mr I S Chittenden, Mrs P T Cole, Mr P Cole, Ms K Constantine, Mr G Cooke, Mr P C Cooper, Mr M C Dance, Ms M Dawkins, Mr M Dendor, Mrs L Game, Mr R W Gough, Ms K Grehan, Ms S Hamilton, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr A R Hills, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr A Kennedy, Rich Lehmann, Mr B H Lewis, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr R A Marsh, Ms J Meade, Mr J Meade, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mr J M Ozog, Mr C Passmore, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson, Mr D Robey, Mr D Ross, Mr A Sandhu, MBE, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr R J Thomas, Mr D Watkins, Mr S Webb, Mr M Whiting, Mr J Wright and Ms L Wright

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager), Mr B Watts (General Counsel) and Mr J Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

286. Apologies for Absence (Item 1)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Mr Paul Barrington-King, Mr Conrad Broadley, Mr Tom Cannon, Mr Nigel Collor, Mr Derek Crow-Brown, Mrs Trudy Dean, MBE, Ms Jenni Hawkins, Mrs Sarah Hudson, Mr Jeremy Kite, MBE, Mr Thomas Mallon, Mrs Margot McArthur, Mr James McInroy, Mr Mike Sole, Ms Lottie Parfitt and Mr Charlie Simkins.

287. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda (Item 2)

- (1) The General Counsel advised that Members' Register of Interests detailed their main declarations and it was not necessary to declare any of those at the meeting. However, Members may wish to declare any specific interest in relation to the agenda.
- (2) Ms Meade declared an interest that she was a carer.

- (3) Miss Carey declared a pecuniary interest that she was a Trustee of the Turner Contemporary and would leave the Chamber during any relevant discussions.

288. Minutes of the meetings held on 19 December 2024 and 9 January 2025 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 19 December 2024 and 9 January 2025 be approved as a correct record.

289. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 4)

With the deepest regret the Chairman advised Members of the sad passing of Mr Matthew Balfour and said tributes would be heard at the March County Council meeting.

290. Section 25 Report
(Item 5)

Mr John Betts, Interim Corporate Director Finance, was in attendance for this item.

- (1) Mr John Betts, Interim Corporate Director Finance, as the Section 151 Officer, provided an overview of the Section 25 Assurance Statement. He said there were considerable risks facing the authority in delivering a balanced budget due to a number of factors including the current economic environment, the single year finance settlement for local government, the scale of savings required, and the growing demands on core statutory services. He said all the budget resolutions had undergone extensive scrutiny and reminded Members that the Section 25 Assurance Statement covered the Administration's proposed budget and all the amendments. He noted that the total of all the revenue amendments for 2025/2026 amounted to 0.4% of the overall budget. Mr Betts explained that provided all the measures set out in the draft budget and the medium term plan were implemented, including the delivery of savings, managing growth, minimising borrowing, and maximising council tax increases and precepts, the Council would continue to demonstrate financial sustainability over the medium term. The assessment was that the overall budget estimates were robust and the levels of reserves were adequate.
- (2) Mr Oakford proposed, and Mr Gough seconded the motion that:
- "Pursuant to section 25 of the Local Government Act, County Council is asked to consider and note this report and agree to have due regard to the contents when making decisions about the proposed budget."

- (3) The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 2 to the vote and the voting was as follows:

For (57)

Mr Baker, Mr Baldock, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brady, Mr Brazier, Mr Campkin, Miss Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Chittenden, Mr Cole, Mr Cooper, Ms Constantine, Mr Cooke, Mr Dance, Ms Dawkins, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Grehan, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lehmann, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Ms Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mr Passmore, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Rayner, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Shonk, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Whiting, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Against (0)

Abstain (2)

Mr B Lewis, Mr D Ross

Motion carried.

- (4) RESOLVED that pursuant to section 25 of the Local Government Act, County Council noted the report and agreed to have due regard to the contents when making decisions about the proposed budget.

291. Capital Programme 2025-35 and Revenue Budget 2025-26 (including Council Tax Setting 2025/26)
(Item 6)

- (1) The Chairman reminded Members that any Member of a Local Authority who was liable to pay Council Tax, and who had any unpaid Council Tax amount overdue for at least two months, even if there was an arrangement to pay off the arrears, must declare the fact that they are in arrears and must not cast their vote on anything related to KCC's Budget or Council Tax.
- (2) The Chairman drew Members' attention to the Section 25 Assurance Statement, as considered under the previous item, reminding them of the agreement by Council to give it due regard while considering the Budget.
- (3) The Chairman explained that a document setting out the procedure for the meeting and the proposed amendments to the draft budget were circulated to Members prior to the meeting.
- (4) Mr Oakford proposed and Mr Gough Seconded the following motion:

“County Council, having given due regard to the s25 Report (published for consideration as agenda item 5 of this meeting), is asked to agree the following:

2025-35 Capital Programme

- (a) The 10-year Capital programme and investment proposals of £1,419m over the years from 2025-26 to 2034-35 together with the necessary funding and subject to approval to spend arrangements.
- (b) The directorate capital programmes as set out in appendices A & B of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

2025-26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

- (c) The net revenue budget requirement of £1,530.9m for 2025-26.
- (d) The directorate revenue budget proposals for 2025-26 and the medium term financial plan as set out in appendices D (high level county 3 year plan) E (high level 2025-26 plan by directorate), appendix F (individual spending, savings, income and reserves variations for 2025-26) and G (2025-26 key services) of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

2025-26 Council Tax

- (e) To increase Council Tax band rates up to the maximum permitted without a referendum as set out in section 6.4 (table 6.1) of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.
- (f) The total Council Tax requirement of £994,287,655 to be raised through precepts on districts as set out in section 6.6 (table 6.2) in the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.

Kent Pay Scheme 2025-26

- (g) Note the transition of all Kent Scheme staff to the new pay structure agreed by County Council in May 2024
- (h) Agree to the recommendations on the uplift to Kent Pay Scheme as set out in section 7.9 of the final draft budget published on 5th February 2025

Key Policies and Strategies

- (i) Fees and charges to continue to be reviewed in line with the policy agreed in the 2023-24 budget approval
- (j) The Capital Strategy as set out in appendix O of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025 including the Prudential Indicators.
- (k) The Treasury Management Strategy as set out in appendix M of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025
- (l) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement as set out in appendix P of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025
- (m) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in appendix Q of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.
- (n) The Reserves Policy as set out in appendix H of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

In addition:

- (o) To delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree any other non-pay related changes to the Kent Scheme through the conclusion of pay bargaining.
 - (p) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Finance (after consultation with the Leader, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate & Traded Services and the political Group Leaders) to resolve any minor technical issues and structural changes for the final budget publication which do not materially alter the approved budget or change the net budget requirement and for any changes made to be reflected in the final version of the Budget Book (blue combed) due to be published in March 2025.
 - (q) To note the information on the impact of the County Council's share of retained business rates, business rate pool and business rate collection fund balances on the revenue budget will be reported to Cabinet once it has all been received.
 - (r) To note the ongoing and escalating cost pressures on the Council's budget alongside insufficient funding in the local government finance settlement and knock on requirement for savings and income in the final draft 2025-26 budget and medium term financial plan.
 - (s) To note potential changes to local authority funding system from 2026-27 onwards and consequential uncertain financial outlook for later years until a multi-year settlement from government is reintroduced.
 - (t) To note that fundamental changes to social care are unlikely until after Baroness Casey enquiry concludes.
 - (u) To note that the planned use of reserves still ensures sufficient reserves are available in the short term with no immediate concerns triggering a S114 notice provided the use of these reserves is replaced with sustainable savings over the medium term.
 - (v) To note the rate of recent drawdown from reserves and potential drawdown to balance 2024-25 outturn is still cause for serious concern and reserves will still need to be maintained ahead of changes under Devolution White Paper. Further unplanned drawdowns would weaken resilience and should only be considered as a last resort with an agreed strategy to replenish reserves at earliest opportunity."
- (5) Mr Brady (Leader of the Opposition), Mr Hook (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) and Mr Lehmann (Leader of the Green & Independent Group) gave their responses to the recommendations.
- (6) Following a general debate, the Chairman called for cross-directorate amendments.
- (7) Mr Brady proposed, and Ms Meade seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

“To amend the budget proposed by the Administration in line with the Labour Group’s Alternative Budget in accordance with sections 8.10 – 14 of the Constitution.”

Proposed Amount:

“See revised budget appendices D and F. Please also refer to the Labour Group’s alternative budget covering report, which includes the revised recommendation as proposed by the Labour Group.”

Proposed Funding Source:

“See revised budget appendices D and F. Please also refer to the Labour Group’s alternative budget covering report, which includes the revised recommendation as proposed by the Labour Group.”

Post meeting note – A covering report along with the revised budget appendices D and F can be accessed [here](#).

- (8) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 7 above and the voting was as follows:

For (12)

Mr Baldock, Mr Brady, Mr Campkin, Ms Constantine, Ms Dawkins, Ms Grehan, Mr Hood, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Stepto, Dr Sullivan

Against (42)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooper, Mr Cooke, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (7)

Mr Chittenden, Mr Hook, Mr Passmore, Mr Ross, Mr Shonk, Mr Streatfeild, MBE, Mr Whiting

Amendment lost.

Children, Young People and Education Directorate

- (9) The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills introduced the budget for this directorate prior to general debate and the taking of directorate specific amendments.

(10) Following the general debate, the Chairman called for directorate specific amendments.

(11) Mr Hood proposed, and Mr Lewis seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

“Allocate up to £75k from the money earmarked for general reserves to fund a comprehensive feasibility study into cost effective ways of providing home to school transport by exploring (among other things) in-house options and practices used outside of the UK. This study would solely be to look at Home to School transport for children in mainstream education.”

Proposed Amount:

“£75k”

Proposed Funding Source:

“Reduce Contribution to General Reserves”

(12) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 11 above and the voting was as follows:

For (16)

Mr Baldock, Mr Brady, Mr Campkin, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mr Chittenden, Ms Constantine, Ms Dawkins, Ms Grehan, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE

Against (41)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Cooper, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mr Hills, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Ross, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Whiting, Mr Wright,

Abstain (0)

Amendment lost.

Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate

(13) The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, the Cabinet Member for Environment, the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development introduced the budget for this Directorate prior to general debate and the taking of directorate specific amendments.

(14) Following the general debate, the Chairman called for directorate specific amendments.

(15) Mr Hook proposed, and Mr Streatfeild seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

“This amendment seeks to reduce the amount of capital allocated to the Strategic Estate Programme and allocate to the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) capital project. With the future of KCC uncertain, we believe that other than any urgent repair works, no further capital should be spent on the Invicta House refurbishment. With the proposed restructure to local government, a new unitary authority may decide not to include Invicta House as part of its strategic estate. We believe this funding should be used on important assets needed by residents right now rather than for investment in buildings KCC may not require in the future. With the looming ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles, many Kent residents will be making the switch to electric vehicles. However, not every resident has access to their own driveway or garage and park their cars on the street. The amendment proposes to ‘top-up’ the LEVI grant so that more Kent residents benefit from additional EV charging infrastructure.”

Proposed Amount:

“£2.149m to ‘top-up’ the LEVI capital project funding.”

Proposed Funding Source:

“Cancelling the reconfiguration of the 3rd and 4th floor of Invicta House, including provision of Member and CMT spaces.”

(16) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 15 above and the voting was as follows:

For (9)

Mr Baldock, Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto

Against (41)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr

Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Ross, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (8)

Mr Brady, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Ms Constantine, Mr Cooper, Ms Dawkins, Ms Meade, Mr Shonk, Mr Whiting

Amendment lost.

(17) Mr Streatfeild proposed, and Mr Hook seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

“This amendment seeks to reduce the amount of capital allocated to the Strategic Estate Programme and allocate to the Highways Asset Management/Annual Maintenance capital project. With the future of KCC uncertain, we believe that other than any urgent repair works, no further capital should be spent on the Invicta House refurbishment. With the proposed restructure to local government, a new unitary authority may decide not to include Invicta House as part of its strategic estate. We believe this funding should be used on important assets needed by residents right now rather than for investment in buildings KCC may not require in the future. Potholes and poorly maintained roads continue to inconvenience Kent’s Road users. This extra funding will provide additional support to tackle the ongoing challenges of road maintenance to create long-lasting repairs to Kent’s highways network.”

Proposed Amount:

“£5.6m to increase the Highways Asset Management/Annual Maintenance capital project.”

Proposed Funding Source:

“Cancellation of the Scope 2 enhanced works to Invicta House.”

(18) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 17 above and the voting was as follows:

For (8)

Mr Baldock, Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Mr Hook, Mr Lewis, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE

Against (40)

Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Hood, Mr

Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Ross, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (10)

Mr Baker, Mr Brady, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Ms Constantine, Mr Cooper, Ms Dawkins, Mr Lehmann, Ms Meade, Mr Shonk, Mr Whiting

Amendment lost.

(19) Mr Passmore proposed, and Mr Chittenden seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

“Fly tipping in Kent was reported to have increased in Kent and Medway by 10% with 27,000 incidents reported in 2022- 23 there is no reason to believe that it is not continuing to rise due to the increasing costs of commercial waste disposal. For Districts clearing up the mess is difficult, time consuming and expensive stretching our budgets further and with very low levels of prosecution there is no effective deterrent. It is proposed provide additional funds to Districts including but not limited to strategically placed movable ANPR Cameras located in the vicinity of fly tipping hot spots which will aid the work of District staff who are working to reduce this disgusting treatment of our environment.”

Proposed Amount:

“£1m”

Proposed Funding Source:

“Reduce the £12m waste reserve to £11m and use this unringfenced EPR income to fund these ANPR Cameras.”

(20) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 19 above and the voting was as follows:

For (13)

Mr Brady, Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Ms Constantine, Ms Dawkins, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE

Against (39)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (3)

Mr Ross, Mr Shonk, Mr Whiting

Amendment lost.

Adult Social Care and Health Directorate

- (21) The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health introduced the budget for the Adult Social Care and Health Directorate prior to general debate. No amendments were proposed.

Corporate Functions (Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department)

- (22) The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services and the Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services introduced the budget for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department prior to general debate and the taking of directorate specific amendments.
- (23) Following the general debate, the Chairman called for directorate specific amendments.
- (24) Mr Lehmann proposed, and Mr Hood seconded the following amendment:

Proposed Purpose:

"Reverse the proposed £1.75m cut to the grant paid to districts for Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) support for the 2025-26 financial year (using money earmarked for general reserves) to allow for a thorough investigation of the underlying causes of the estimated £5million gap in council tax base between the KCC estimate and the estimates reported by districts for 2025-26."

Proposed Amount:

"£1,750k"

Proposed Funding Source:

“Reduce Contribution to General Reserves”

(25) Following the debate, the Chairman put to the vote the amendment set out in paragraph 24 above and the voting was as follows:

For (15)

Mr Brady, Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Ms Constantine, Ms Dawkins, Ms Grehan, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE, Mr Whiting

Against (43)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Cooper, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr D Ross, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (1)

Mr Shonk

Amendment lost.

(26) Mr Gough and Mr Oakford summarised the debate. As all the amendments had either been determined or withdrawn, the Chairman put to the vote the substantive motion as set out in Item 6, paragraph 4 above and the voting was as follows:

For (41)

Mr Baker, Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Cooper, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mrs Game, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, OBE, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Love, OBE, Mr Marsh, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Ozog, Mrs Prendergast, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Sandhu, MBE, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Against (10)

Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, MBE, Mr Whiting

Abstain (7)

Mr Brady, Ms Constantine, Ms Dawkins, Ms Grehan, Ms Meade, Mr Ross, Mr Shonk

Substantive Motion Carried.

(27) RESOLVED that:

County Council, having given due regard to the s25 Report (published for consideration as agenda item 5 of this meeting), is asked to agree the following:

2025-35 Capital Programme

- (a) The 10-year Capital programme and investment proposals of £1,419m over the years from 2025-26 to 2034-35 together with the necessary funding and subject to approval to spend arrangements.
- (b) The directorate capital programmes as set out in appendices A & B of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

2025-26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

- (c) The net revenue budget requirement of £1,530.9m for 2025-26.
- (d) The directorate revenue budget proposals for 2025-26 and the medium term financial plan as set out in appendices D (high level county 3 year plan) E (high level 2025-26 plan by directorate), appendix F (individual spending, savings, income and reserves variations for 2025-26) and G (2025-26 key services) of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

2025-26 Council Tax

- (e) To increase Council Tax band rates up to the maximum permitted without a referendum as set out in section 6.4 (table 6.1) of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.
- (f) The total Council Tax requirement of £994,287,655 to be raised through precepts on districts as set out in section 6.6 (table 6.2) in the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.

Kent Pay Scheme 2025-26

- (g) Note the transition of all Kent Scheme staff to the new pay structure agreed by County Council in May 2024
- (h) Agree to the recommendations on the uplift to Kent Pay Scheme as set out in section 7.9 of the final draft budget published on 5th February 2025

Key Policies and Strategies

- (i) Fees and charges to continue to be reviewed in line with the policy agreed in the 2023-24 budget approval
- (j) The Capital Strategy as set out in appendix O of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025 including the Prudential Indicators.
- (k) The Treasury Management Strategy as set out in appendix M of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025
- (l) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement as set out in appendix P of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025

- (m) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in appendix Q of the final draft report published on 5th February 2025.
- (n) The Reserves Policy as set out in appendix H of the final draft budget report published on 5th February 2025.

In addition:

- (o) To delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree any other non-pay related changes to the Kent Scheme through the conclusion of pay bargaining.
- (p) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Finance (after consultation with the Leader, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate & Traded Services and the political Group Leaders) to resolve any minor technical issues and structural changes for the final budget publication which do not materially alter the approved budget or change the net budget requirement and for any changes made to be reflected in the final version of the Budget Book (blue combed) due to be published in March 2025.
- (q) To note the information on the impact of the County Council's share of retained business rates, business rate pool and business rate collection fund balances on the revenue budget will be reported to Cabinet once it has all been received.
- (r) To note the ongoing and escalating cost pressures on the Council's budget alongside insufficient funding in the local government finance settlement and knock on requirement for savings and income in the final draft 2025-26 budget and medium term financial plan.
- (s) To note potential changes to local authority funding system from 2026-27 onwards and consequential uncertain financial outlook for later years until a multi-year settlement from government is reintroduced.
- (t) To note that fundamental changes to social care are unlikely until after Baroness Casey enquiry concludes.
- (u) To note that the planned use of reserves still ensures sufficient reserves are available in the short term with no immediate concerns triggering a S114 notice provided the use of these reserves is replaced with sustainable savings over the medium term.
- (v) To note the rate of recent drawdown from reserves and potential drawdown to balance 2024-25 outturn is still cause for serious concern and reserves will still need to be maintained ahead of changes under Devolution White Paper. Further unplanned drawdowns would weaken resilience and should only be considered as a last resort with an agreed strategy to replenish reserves at earliest opportunity.

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL– 29 October 2024

MINUTES of the meeting held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Paul Bartlett (Vice-Chair), Gary Cooke, Dylan Jeffrey, David Brazier, Lesley Game, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Caroline Smith, Tom Byrne, Tony Doran, Tracy Scott, Nancy Sayer and Brian Horton

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.

IN ATTENDANCE: James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Christy Holden (Assistant Director for CYPE Commissioning), Robin Cahill (Senior Commissioner), Jason Read (Youth Justice Service Manager), Gavin Swann (Service Manager Safeguarding, Quality Assurance & Professional Standards), Natalia Merritt (Co-Chair Kent Housing Options Subgroup), Amy Coombs (Head of Adoption Partnership South East) and Maureen Robinson (MI Service Manager)

Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr R Love OBE, Ms K Leonard, and Ms A Farmer.

Ms L Game, Ms S Chandler and Ms T Scott were in attendance virtually.

Chairman's Announcements

(Item 2)

1. RESOLVED that Mr P Bartlett be duly elected Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. The Chair agreed to write to group leaders to remind Members of their duty as a Corporate Parent, and to extend an invitation to attend Panel meetings.

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024 were a correct record of the meeting.

Participation Team update

(Item 4)

1. Joanne Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, introduced the report. She highlighted a few key areas:
 - a. Ms Carpenter shared that the recruitment of six apprentices had taken place over the summer. Additionally, two were shortlisted for Apprentice of the Year and one had won the award.
 - b. Furthermore, Ms Carpenter shared that positive feedback had been received from events that had taken place over the summer and from the CPP Takeover Day that took place earlier in the year. Panel members were invited to attend the Children in Care Council meetings.
 - c. There were 21 activity days run throughout the summer, with 408 places booked. The annual picnic was held in collaboration with Adoption Partnership South East, this was a family day held for children with SEND alongside an 18+ Care Leaver Event held in collaboration with 18+ Care Leaver Service. All events were met with positive feedback. Additionally, the Virtual School Kent award celebrations were held over the summer; one celebration for pre-16 and one for post-16, where many awards were given out.
2. The Chair and Members shared their congratulations for the nominees and winners of the awards, and the success of the events held over the summer.
3. In response to a question surrounding children who do not participate in the events, Ms Carpenter shared that:
 - a. Mental health had been a contributing factor as to why some children did not participate, there had been pilots tested for virtual meetings which would carry on into the winter months. She assured members that there had been consistent work to find diverse ways to encourage participation.
 - b. Children had the opportunity to have an independent visitor and a mentor through the Young Care System, which had been helpful for those who did not want to come to events held.
4. A Member questioned the timeline for outcomes of the Big Listen Consultation. Joanne Carpenter offered to follow up with Members when the results become available.
5. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Participation Team Update.

Verbal updates by the Cabinet Member

(Item 5)

1. Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. The Virtual School Kent held its annual awards event, where 479 nominations were received for children. 53 Children and Young People's Council Members were presented with awards in recognition of their contributions.
 - b. National Adoption Week had seen the publication of the 'Adopter Journey Standards,' which acted as guidance for adopters detailing what they could expect from their adoption journey. Furthermore, the results of the 'You Can Adopt' survey revealed the diversity of adoption journeys.
 - c. Ms Chandler shared that she had attended the National Agenda and Reforms Conference and Kent Academy Social Care Awards.
 - d. There had been support from train companies, such as Southeastern Railway, to encourage more people to start their own adoption journey. There has been an offer of free tickets to adoptive families and digital signage at train stations in support of existing or prospective adoptive families.
 - e. The Everything Project, a collaboration between a partnership of councils and children's trusts, worked to create a film for the Kent Fostering Service. Its purpose was to highlight the importance of fostering and to see how life changing and rewarding the experience was.
2. The Chair shared how powerful and moving she found the film and extended congratulations to the appointment to the Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.
3. During a prospective Councillor event, it became clear that some potential candidates for the 2025 election had misconceptions about the council's duty to UASC. Recent High Court judgements had made the councils duty very clear, and this responsibility would be incorporated into the new members induction package following the 2025 elections. It was important to challenge misinformation and Mrs Chandler offered to circulate links to the Council's website that detailed the care offered to children arriving from overseas.
4. RESOLVED that the Panel note and make comment.

Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023/2024

(Item 6)

1. Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East, introduced and summarised the content of the report:
 - a. During National Adoption Week a conference was held, with over 200 people attending online. The author Sarah Nash spoke regarding

- therapeutic parenting and taking a trauma informed approach. There was a radio interview with Radio Kent and a story run on BBC South East, helping to highlight the importance of adoption.
- b. There had been work done to strengthen the adoption community through working collaboratively, which resulted in 11 community groups across the region.
 - c. To update the figures from the report: 31 children had been adopted, 26 children were matched with adopters, 18 children had a placement order and a continued plan for adoption but were not yet matched with adopters, 39 adopter households were approved and there were 24 approved and available adopters.
 - d. The participation team ran various events over the summer and would continue to do so for the remainder of the year, Ms Coombs extended an invite to Members to the Christmas event.
2. A film was shown which highlighted the importance of the strong adoption community across Kent, Medway, and Bexley. The Chair shared how important the message behind the video was.
 3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Ms Coombs acknowledged that disruptions had taken place, children placed for adoption were the most vulnerable children who can have extremely complex needs. Sometimes there can be a need for children to return to the local authority for additional support. Since April 2024 there had been a sibling group of two that had been returned to foster care after 2 months of adoption. There was acknowledgement of how traumatic these disruptions can be for all parties and Disruption Meetings always took place to properly analyse and learn from the causes and outcomes.,
 - b. Most children place for adoption were between 0 to 2 years of age, Ms Coombs offered to provide Members with further details about the number of adoptions by age, outside of the meeting.
 - c. Elected Members were welcome to sit on adoption panels.
 4. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023/2024.

Youth Justice Annual Report

(Item 7)

1. Jason Read, Kent Youth Justice Service Manager, introduced the work of the Youth Justice Service and highlighted the report:
 - a. HMYOI Cookham Wood was closed in April 2024, and the majority of the children housed there were moved to HMYOI Feltham.
 - b. There were significant pressures on the juvenile estate and adult secure estate due to the limited number of secure establishments for

young people. A pilot project at the Oasis Restore School would help elevate the pressure, as it was a dual registered secure school and children's home. The school had been taken over by a new trust, it had significant funding and oversight invested into it. The school was on stage one of taking in children and had plans to reach stage two in January 2026.

- c. The closure of HMYOI Cookham Wood led to issues in accessing children due to location, youth justice practitioners and social workers had been essential in managing these challenges.
- d. Community interventions had been successful, and reoffending rates were below the national average.
- e. It was important to try and diverted children away from the justice system were possible through support.

2. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:

- a. The Chair shared that she had been a member of the Youth Justice Board and therefore had seen the challenges present at HMYOI Cookham Wood. It was agreed that children should be placed as close to home as possible to limit issues with access and cost of travel for families. Two practitioners were placed in HMYOI Cookham Wood to offer support, but the closure of that unit increased pressure on families and professionals.
- b. A Member asked for confirmation as to within which stage of the Oasis Restore School were Kent youth offenders to be placed. Mr Read shared that the placement of youth offenders had been set to take place in stage two.
- c. A Member questioned to what extent the Youth Justice Service has engaged with district authorities. The focus of the work with local districts had been through Community Safety Partnerships which had helped to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- d. A Member questioned the impact of Outcome 22. Mr Read shared that it would take a full year of tracking before success levels could be determined and offered to come back to the panel with the data in the future.
- e. Mr Read advised that children in care were a priority group as they were disproportionally over represented within the justice system. He added that Outcome 22 was available to all children whose offences who met the criteria.
- f. A Member questioned the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to speed up the process within the judicial courts. Mr Read confirmed that he was not aware of the use of AI, and he believed that there were no plans in the immediate future to implement the use of it.

3. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Youth Justice Annual Report.

Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 8)

1. Gavin Swann, Service Manager in Safeguarding and Quality Assurance presented the Corporate Parenting Scorecard report which had been shared as a part of the agenda pack.
2. Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education added the following points:
 - a. The Deputy Prime Minister stated that care leavers were among the group of people that would be allocated priority housing. The cost of this priority housing would be substantial; therefore, it would be important to work with District Council colleagues to look at a new set of regulations for care leavers and social housing.
 - b. There have been a number of foster beds that are ring fenced for UASC arrivals, however, from June 2025 it was expected that less beds would be needed for UASC which would result in more being available for foster children.
 - c. There was a large cohort of UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) care leavers with no official status, meaning they could not access employment, education, or training. The Home Office had shown positive moves to prioritise these care leavers, however, they remained the responsibility of KCC until their status was confirmed.
3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Members referred to the statistics and asked what KCC planned to do to improve the ones in the red.
 - b. Sarah Hammond noted that court delays, particularly those in Kent and Medway, were often caused lengthy timeframes for children to become looked after. Delays were also exacerbated by parents being allowed to repeatedly challenge assessments.
 - c. In response to a question on care plans, reviews took place twice a year. Gavin Swann added that every case that did not achieve Good or Outstanding would be looked at by a social worker to find improvements.
 - d. Amy Coombs stated that the adoption figures within the report were 12 months old, and the children referred to in this measure had been adopted.
 - e. In response to a suggestion of variable targets, Natalia Merritt agreed that there could be other mechanisms in place to manage cases affected by the court delays, but not necessarily variable targets.
4. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Performance Score Card.

The Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

(Item 9)

Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's), Natalia Merritt Co-Chair Kent Housing Options Subgroup (KHOG) and Brian Horton, Chair Kent Housing Group (KHG)

1. Brian Horton summarised the role of KHG by saying that it worked in partnership across Kent and Medway. In this case with KCC, the districts and boroughs to join up to add value, the Joint Housing Protocol for KCC Care Leavers.
2. Natalia Merritt highlighted that a disproportionate number of care leavers were likely to become homeless. This concern was raised by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in Kent specifically. With the change to KCC's policy for care leavers to be accommodated until the age of 19, now was a suitable time for the protocol to be reviewed.
3. The Care Leaver Panels, improving skills of staff and for foster carers, and preparing people to live independently, were the key processes changed.
4. A leaflet detailing housing options would be produced with the help of individuals with care experience.
5. The government announced that there was a need to sign off decisions for care leavers who were believed to have become homeless intentionally up to the age of 25.
6. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. The formation of sub-groups being created from the CPP was discussed.
 - b. It was suggested that the local housing offers in each of the 12 districts were different and potentially confusing. This was an opportunity to achieve greater consistency and clarity for Care Leavers.
 - c. The distribution of Care Leavers was also questioned, it was suggested that if each area took on their even share of care leavers, it would work out that there was an average of three for each location.
 - d. Care Leavers continued to have access to support until they were 25 years old.
7. RESOLVED – to note the report, the proposed Joint Working Protocol for Care Leavers, and that the governance and monitoring arrangements would be considered and brought back to a future meeting of the Panel.

Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2027

(Item 10)

1. Christy Holden, Head of Children's Commissioning and Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's) introduced the Sufficiency Strategy.
2. It was that the updated document would be published this year, and a new, more concise document would be presented in 2025.
3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. It was suggested that Kent should not have almost double the foster care needed, this over provision encouraged other authorities to place their children in Kent and this applied additional pressure on services such as the youth justice service. The new sufficiency strategy should ensure that there is the correct level of provision to meet the needs of the Authority.
4. RESOLVED to endorse the Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2027.

Kent CiC in the statutory school years with an EHCP - Access to Education

(Item 11)

1. Tony Doran, Headteacher - Virtual School Kent and Alice Gleave, Interim Assistant Director SEN Operations, introduced the report
2. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Members questioned the VSK tracker and the annual review process. Specifically, the figures in the review showed that the prioritisation of Children in Care (CiC), and that of the children not in care, were very similar. The effectiveness of prioritisation for CiC was therefore questioned. In response, Alice Gleave stated that she had recognised the narrowing of the gap between the two groups, and that phase two of SEN review, taking place this year, would focus on tribunals and annual reviews.
 - b. The number of children waiting for a change of provision was also questioned. In response, Ms Gleave confirmed that Claire Ledger was appointed as the designated social care worker and has been working with those children without placements.
 - c. The reason for reduced timetables was questioned. Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's) reduced timetables were used for a number of reasons but should not be used indefinitely as a way to manage challenging behaviour. Reduced timetables should only be used for a fixed period of time to manage a child's time of crisis

- d. A member stated that there was an ongoing issue with SEN officers not communicating well with foster carers. Ms Gleave offered to raise the matter with the appropriate service.
3. RESOLVED that the Panel note the work of the Virtual School and Kent SEN in supporting its young people.

Work programme

(Item 12)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.

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CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 10th December 2024

MINUTES of the meeting held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Paul Bartlett (Vice-Chair), David Brazier, Lesley Game, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Tony Doran, Kayleigh Leonard, Caroline Smith and Tracy Scott

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.

IN ATTENDANCE: Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Ingrid Crisan (Director of integrated Children's Services), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Roxanne Hills (Designated Nurse for Looked after Children), Hayley Bodiam (Service Manager Quality Assurance and Professional Standards), Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer) and Ashlie Gash (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Dylan Jeffrey, Rory Love, Stephen Gray and Nancy Sayer who was substituted by Roxanne Hills.

Sarah Hamilton, Lesley Game and Dan Bride were in attendance virtually.

Chairman's Announcements

(Item 2)

1. The Chair reminded the Panel of the Corporate Parenting Christmas campaign asking that those who could contribute and publicise.
2. The Chair shared that she would send message to group leaders to remind Members of the importance of their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

Participation Team Update

(Item 4)

1. Jo Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, Kayleigh Leonard, Participation Support Assistant, and Tom Byrne, Participation Support Officer, presented the report.
2. Following questions and comments from the members of the panel, it was noted that:
 - a. A Member requested suggestions from the team for activities to organize for the children before his visit to the Ashford Children's Home for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young Adults. The team had recommended considering cricket and football, as well as activities that would allow the young people to express themselves.
 - b. Leemya McKeown thanked the team for their support in presenting the QA Unit Practice Framework Roadshow. She mentioned her intention to report on the corporate parenting aspect of the practice framework to the panel at a later date.
 - c. Sarah Hammond praised the high quality of the social media accounts and requested the panel to share the content on their own accounts. Find the social accounts on X: @VirtSchl_Kent and Instagram: @participation_team.
 - d. The Chair highlighted the eagerness of young people to attend future panel meetings. This was agreed by the panel.
3. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Challenge Cards Update

(Item 5)

1. Jo Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, introduced the update, providing an overview of the content.
2. KCC had the opportunity to review young people's opportunities to be involved in the recruitment and selection process of staff, to ensure that it is inclusive and accessible.
3. There was a desire to widen the training offer that Officers within the team deliver to young people. Additionally, there was work done with Practice Development to produce guidance to recruitment managers as to how to involve young people positively.
4. Hayley Bodiam, Service Manager Quality Assurance and Professional Standards, added that the service had used feedback from children and young people to inform future practices.
5. In response to comments and questions it was said:

- a. A Member questioned the scope for utilizing technology for the interviews to help to include young people. Jo Carpenter added that the children and young people had experience with and were comfortable with online processes. However, for some posts in person interviews were needed.
6. RESOLVED that the Panel notes the challenge card progress to date and to support the actions being taken to meet the challenges.

Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

(Item 6)

1. Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, presented the update
2. The Chair requested that a copy of the Policy Statement regarding Provision for Independent Providers be shared with the minutes.
3. A Member inquired about the children's routines and support in the centre. Sarah Hammond invited Members to visit the centres, explaining there are two types: registered children's homes for under 16s and registered supported accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds. These centres served as temporary homes, with most children staying only two to three days before moving to permanent placements. The transfer wait times had significantly decreased. Besides leisure activities, the children had opportunities to learn English, socialize, and familiarize themselves with UK customs. Citizenship work includes focusing on the role of women in UK culture and equal opportunities. It was also noted that the young people had their own rooms and bathrooms.
4. A Members highlighted a song recorded by 'Ashford Sings!' a group led by two foster carers. The song aimed to promote foster care and assist in recruiting more foster carers. A link to this song had been shared with these minutes.
5. RESOLVED that the update was noted.

Virtual School Kent Head Teacher 6 monthly update

(Item 7)

1. Tony Doran, Headteacher of Virtual School Kent, presented the report to the panel.
2. Caroline Smith questioned whether the low number of young people entering university was due to unaccompanied young people not obtaining legal status

in time to transition to care leavers at university age. Tony Doran explained that several factors contribute to this issue. Firstly, few young people took Level 3 courses at seventeen or eighteen, opting to take them later. Secondly, tuition fees deterred young people due to concerns about accumulating debt. Additionally, alternative opportunities, such as degree-level apprenticeships, also played a role.

3. Caroline Smith questioned whether the support offered was sufficient, highlighting available bursaries and the ability to connect with universities and apply for funding. Tony Doran agreed that awareness was crucial. He mentioned a specialist team within the Care Legal Service that works closely with the sixteen-plus team. Additionally, there was a dedicated website for sixteen and seventeen-year-olds and a Care Leaver app was in development.
4. A Member noted the absence of school exclusions but questioned the number of pupils placed in Managed Moves. Tony Doran clarified that children in care were not subject to the Managed Moves protocol, which was for hard-to-place pupils. He emphasized that there were coordinated exit opportunities to secure appropriate provisions for young people instead of permanent exclusion.
5. The Chair expressed concerns about the conflicting areas in the report regarding Key Stage Four and the low number of young people achieving five GCSEs. Tony Doran stated that his team works closely with the Education Directorate to address this issue. Sarah Hammond added that, despite facing barriers to learning, these children do not have learning disabilities and should be able to achieve five GCSEs. She noted that if the special schools' offerings were effective, the children would spend less time in special schools and achieve according to their cognitive abilities.
6. RESOLVED that the work update was noted.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024

(Item 8)

1. Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and gave an overview of the main points within it.
2. It was noted that a significant challenge for the services in 2024 was the increase in unaccompanied children, there was work being done to adapt the service as the reception centres opened to ensure there were enough provisions.

3. It was a priority to ensure that the health, housing and education departments had a local offer for Kent care leavers, following the publication of the Keeping Children Safe and Helping Families Thrive document.
4. Caroline Smith reiterated the desire for Members to help to get the Corporate Parent Christmas Campaign to the target of £25,000.
5. Panel Members and Officers had joined the Chair in congratulating to Nathan Moody, a care leaver who recently won Apprentice of the Year.
6. RESOLVED that the Panel to note and comment the report and to note Members responsibility as Corporate Parents.

Looked after Children's Integrated Care Board (IBC) Annual Report

(Item 9)

1. Roxanne Hills, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, introduced the report and gave an overview of the main points within it.
2. The commissioning group's goals for 2025 included free prescription offers for care leavers who were otherwise exempt and working on and supporting a primary care provision around the new accommodation sites for the UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) population.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. A Member questioned how far geographically out of Kent were those young people who could not be placed in Kent. Sarah Hammond shared that the young people could be placed at a significant distance if there were no available placements in Kent.
 - b. The challenge of Kent was that due to system in place, local authorities had the opportunity to bid for beds in Kent. Therefore, in some cases so don't have local beds for Kent, there can be specialists needs to place children in certain areas. Majority of looked after children are in Kent.
 - c. Panel Members discussed the opportunity to lobby local MPs to exemplify the struggle Kent faces in not being able to place their own young people within the county.
 - d. Tony Doran added that the Virtual School had a responsibility to Kent students regardless of where they were placed. Noting that 20% of Kent children and young people were placed outside of Kent, 50% of those not placed in Kent were placed in Medway.

Work programme

(Item 10)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.

By: Anna Taylor - Scrutiny Research Officer

To: County Council - 13 March 2025

Subject: **County Council review of Decision 24/00093 - Future of Commissioned Services at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs**

Summary: Full Council is required, in accordance with the call-in arrangements detailed in section 17.73 of the Constitution, to review or scrutinise Executive Decision 24/00093.

In considering the Executive decision, in response to the referral of the decision by the Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2025, the Council may:

- (a) Agree that the decision be implemented
 - (b) Express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision, or
 - (c) Require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the Cabinet, taking into account the Council's comments
-

Introduction

1. Decision 24/00093 – Future of Commissioned Services at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs was taken on 17 January 2025.
2. A call in request was submitted by Mrs Meade (Labour Group) and Mr Barry Lewis (Green and Independents Group) prior to the call-in deadline.
3. The reasons for the call-in were duly assessed by Democratic Services, including an investigation into whether any issues raised in the call-in were adequately addressed by the decision paperwork, committee reports, responses to written questions or committee debate. The call-in was determined to be valid under the arrangements set out in the Constitution. Call-in reasons must be clear, correct and align to one or more of the following criteria under s17.67 of the Constitution: Members can call-in a decision for one or more of the following reasons:
 - a. The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework,
 - b. The decision is not in accordance with the Council's Budget,
 - c. The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision making set out in 8.5, and/or
 - d. The decision was not taken in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 12.
4. The full call-in request is set out in the attached document (a), submitted by Ms Meade and Mr Lewis. Whilst not all aspects of the call-in were considered valid, Reasons 1 and 5 put forward in the call-in were assessed as valid. The reasons

for this determination made by Democratic Services are set out below and were presented to the Scrutiny Committee during the initial call-in consideration.

Call-in Reason one: Best Value Duty

As it is set out in the call-in document, this reason highlights the requirement for decisions to evidence consideration of best value. This is addressed to a significant degree as the reports explore detailed consideration of various options and financial implications along with considering needs assessment comparisons across other Wards. However, recognising the significant public interest in the community value aspect for this particular decision, more explicit explanations relating to how Community Value was considered would provide clarity.

Reason five: Explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions

As it is set out in the call-in document, this reason highlights a range of arguable information gaps and technical queries. While the majority of these do not necessarily meet the call-in criteria, the assertion that further clarification is needed on the consideration around potential use of Year 4 Family Hub funding and the materiality of the legal or procurement risks on alternative options are best explored by the Scrutiny Committee, recognising the prior Cabinet Committee recommendation.

5. As some elements of the call-in were deemed valid, the full call-in process was triggered.
6. In determining the validity of any call-in, no judgment is made by Democratic Services as to whether the decision itself is flawed, inappropriate or invalid. Where some individual reasons submitted for an overall valid call-in are not assessed as valid, this does not mean they merit no consideration as part of any subsequent call-in meeting. Call-in is a procedural tool to safeguard against the implementation of decisions which meet the criteria in section 17.67 and where further discussion by Members to clarify the decision is required. The call-in reasons were assessed as valid on the basis that further information was required, pursuant to section 17.67, to evidence compliance.
7. In accordance with the requirements for progressing a valid call-in, the Scrutiny Committee considered the matter within 10 working days of the confirmation of validity.

Scrutiny Committee consideration of the call-in

8. On 29 January 2025, the Scrutiny Committee met to consider the call-in. The Scrutiny Committee was advised in the papers that Members should consider the reasons set out by the Members calling-in the decision, the documentation already available and the response from the Executive given at the meeting, giving due regard to the information made available during questioning and discussion on the item.

9. The Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in reasoning, with explanations provided by both Members responsible for the call-in. Members debated the issues, including usage figures of the Family Hubs, gaps in information provided and further clarification on the potential use of the Year 4 Family Hub funding and the materiality of the legal or procurement risks of alternative options.
10. Following the debate, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously agreed the following motion:
 - a. That implementation of Decision 24/00093 be postponed pending review by the full Council.

Comments from the Scrutiny Committee

11. Comments expressed during the debate are summarised below (these represent the views put forward by Members of the Committee):
 - a. Members claimed that the decision was inconsistent with the Council's Policy Framework in relation to Best Value Duty, in so far as it was argued that the high footfall and positive support for the Commissioned Hubs indicated they offered good and popular services, making them best value when compared with the less popular alternative Hub facilities.
 - b. Members considered that Seashells and Millmead provided the best value and served the community effectively, particularly vulnerable families, and it was important to consider community impact when decisions were made.
 - c. Members raised concerns about the financial analysis, including the lack of funding plans and lack of detailed costings for alternative service provisions.
 - d. Clarification was sought over differing usage figures available for the Family Hub buildings and the data on which this decision was based on, with queries arising based on information collected and shared by an individual member of the Committee.
 - e. Concerns raised about the lack of detail surrounding the savings made by not renewing the contracts.
 - f. Further information sought about existing contracts and contract extension requirements – confirmation was requested around legality of a contract extension.
 - g. Further information sought about what the Year 4 additional family hub funding from central government could be used for.
 - h. Clarification over whether the family hub funding could be used for 0-25years, not only early years.
 - i. Concerns over accuracy of the EqIA
 - j. Differing accounts of engagement with Swale Borough Council over the potential move of Family Hub services to the Sheppey Gateway.
12. After the debate, the Committee resolved, with a unanimous vote, to refer the matter to full Council for review.

Consideration by Cabinet

13. As a consequence of the Scrutiny Committee's decision, section 17.73 of the Constitution applies:

"If the Scrutiny Committee refers a decision to the full Council, it shall be considered at the next meeting of the Council when the Council may either:

- (a) Agree the decision be implemented
- (b) Express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision, or
- (c) Require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the Cabinet, taking into account the Council's comments."

14. Section 17.74 of the Constitution requires that before a decision is reviewed by full Council, it must be formally reconsidered by Cabinet, in light of the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee. That provides an opportunity for the Executive to confirm, amend or rescind the decision before it is subject to any further debate by the wider Council membership.

15. Cabinet met on 4 March 2025 where the decision was formally reconsidered on the basis of a report which set out the comments expressed by the Scrutiny Committee (paragraph 10 above).

16. Cabinet resolved the following:

- a. NOTE the comments and views expressed by Scrutiny when agreeing to refer the matter to Full Council
- b. CONFIRM the decision will be progressed to Full Council unchanged at this time.
- c. AGREE to present further information to support Full Council consideration of the call-in

17. Key points from the Cabinet discussion are summarised below:

- a. The Cabinet Member had been considering carefully the questions raised by the Scrutiny Committee, whilst keeping in mind the policy context set by the Council and the requirement to deliver Family Hub Services to families, children and young people consistently across Kent.
- b. Particular reference was made to points raised by stakeholders about co-location of services and potential reach. The original decision had therefore been amended to include the option of delivery of outreach services by the KCC Family Hub Team, in recognition of the consultation responses which expressed considerable concern about those two issues.
- c. Careful consideration had also been given to the issues raised over the available data. It was noted that data relating to delivery of Family Hub Services as determined by the Department for Education had to be the key data as part of consideration of the proposals but the Cabinet Member

confirmed that other information being provided by relevant stakeholders was being also being taken into account.

18. The Cabinet expressed a view that given the resolution by Scrutiny, further debate and discussion should be reserved for the County Council meeting. Cabinet therefore resolved to note the comments expressed by Scrutiny and confirm that the decision be progressed to Full Council without amendment to allow review and consideration of the original decision.

County Council review or scrutiny

19. As per the Cabinet consideration on 4 March 2025, a response to the points made by Scrutiny has been provided and is included as Appendix 1 for this item.
 20. The call-in request is provided in full as Appendix 2 to ensure Members have clear sight of the formal reasons this matter was progressed to the Scrutiny Committee via the official call-in process. This report, at section 4, outlines which elements of the call-in were assessed as valid.
 21. In addition, the original decision documentation is provided as appendices to support the due consideration of the matter. These are Appendices 3 to 8.
 22. Members are invited to debate the matter, giving due consideration to the specific issues raised in the call-in, the points raised by the Scrutiny Committee as part of their debate and the comments made by Cabinet as part of its reconsideration of the decision.
-

Recommendation:

The Council may, having reviewed Executive Decision 24/00093, resolve one of the following:

- a. Agree that the decision be implemented
 - b. express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision, or
 - c. require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the Cabinet, taking into account the Council's comments
-

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Executive Response

Appendix 2 – Full call-in submission

Appendix 3 – [24-00093 - Decision Report](#)

Appendix 4 – [24-00093 - Record of Decision](#)

Appendix 5 – [Service Offer Comparison](#)

Appendix 6 – [Commissioned Family Hub Contracts Consultation Report](#)

Appendix 7 – [Draft Responses to Consultation Feedback](#)

Appendix 8 – [Commissioned Family Hub Contracts Decision EqlA](#)

Background documents

- a) [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 4th March, 2025, 10.00 am](#)
- b) [Agenda for Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 29th January, 2025, 10.00 am](#)
- c) [Agenda for Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on Thursday, 21st November, 2024, 2.00 pm](#)
- d) [Agenda for County Council on Thursday, 7th November, 2024, 10.00 am](#)

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From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services
Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director – Children, Young People and Education

To: County Council – 13 March 2025

Subject: **Commissioned Family Hubs – Millmead and Seashells – Supplementary paper.**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: Discussion of Key Decision 24/00093 taken 17 January 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is a supplementary paper (Appendix 1) to accompany the Covering Report regarding the Key Decision 24/00093 taken 17 January 2025 relating to not recommissioning the Children's Centres/Family Hubs at Millmead and Seashells. This paper provides further information relating to the questions and requests that were made in Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2025.
- 1.2 The future of the two commissioned Children's Centres/Family Hubs was presented to the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee in November 2024. This followed a contractual communication to the two providers: Millmead and Seashells, in July 2024 advising them that their contracts were due to expire in March 2025 and the Council will not be procuring replacements due to the delivery of Family Hubs being sufficient from the in-house service, subject to consultation and Key Decision.
- 1.3 The local communities who use these services reacted negatively to this news and exercised their right to petition. Protests were held outside of County Hall, and this prompted a debate at County Council on 7 November 2024 due to the numbers of signatures collected. Council resolved the following:

Council recognises that this petition represents significant local opinion regarding the proposed decision to not recommission Family Hub Services at Seashells and asks the Cabinet Member to take that into consideration in addition to the consultation report, and detailed financial analysis, before taking the decision.

- 1.4 The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee received a report at its meeting on 21 November 2024 and representations were made by local Members of Swale and Thanet. The Cabinet Committee resolved to make a specific recommendation to the Cabinet Member as follows:

The committee recommends that the decision be delayed until the new

government funding is confirmed and that there be a temporary extension of contract, subject to it being legally viable; That a valuation of the buildings be undertaken; and, that an update be brought to the next meeting.

- 1.5 The Cabinet Member reported on the proposed decision during the Cabinet Member updates at the CYPE Cabinet Committee meeting on 16 January 2025 and the decision was taken by the Cabinet Member on 17 January 2025. The decision included an additional clause:

'DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services to explore the option for Kent County Council to deliver outreach Family Hub services from Seashells and Millmead centres when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.'

in recognition of the significant concern expressed in the consultation and at CYPE Cabinet Committee about the value of the co-location of the services already delivered by the centres and targeted Family Hub services. [Decision - 24/00093 - Future of Commissioned Services at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs](#).

- 1.6 Following the decision being taken, the call-in request was submitted by Ms Jackie Meade (Labour Group) and Mr Barry Lewis (Green and Independent Group), thus meeting the requirement for any call-in to be requested by two Members from different political groups.
- 1.7 The Decision was discussed at Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2025. The options for the Scrutiny Committee were:
- a) make no comments
 - b) express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision
 - c) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee's comments; or
 - d) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council

1.7 Option d) was agreed.

2. Background

- 2.1 The tendering of two Children's Centre Contracts took place in 2020, with contracts awarded for 12 months from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.
- 2.2 The two successful providers were awarded a contract by way of Direct Award under Covid rules to cover 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 to support Covid recovery, discussed at an All Member Briefing in October 2021, with the Key Decision taken as follows: [Decision - 21/00086 - Commissioned Open Access Provision for Youth Services and Children's Centres](#). This was further discussed at Scrutiny Committee on 24 November 2021.

- 2.3 In 2023, the County Council was identified as a Family Hub Trailblazer and work commenced on reviewing the provision of Children's Centres across the County, both commissioned and delivered in-house. This meant that services needed to be clearly identified against the Department for Education (DfE) model of Family Hubs and any commissioning of services could not be undertaken without a clear specification of service delivery needed. To protect the services, the two incumbent providers were awarded a contract by way of Direct Award, under the existing Children's Centre terms and conditions of contract, to cover 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, following discussion at the Children's Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 29 November 2022. [Decision - 22/00108 - Commissioned Children's Centre Provision - Direct Award.](#)
- 2.4 In November 2023, the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee received a report regarding the Family Hub Programme. This set out the services defined by DfE to be delivered in order to qualify for Family Hub status. This identified that Millmead and Seashells would need to be used as independent test sites to trial the concepts needed to roll out across the Programme. To be part of the Family Hub model, the sites needed to use the Family Hub branding. The services commissioned utilised a variation to the original Children's Centre contract and received additional funding of £10,000 for Millmead and £10,000 for Seashells to trial the Family Hub model. Following the refreshed rules on Spending the Council's Money, a contract waiver was sought acknowledging that by directly awarding contract, under the existing Children's Centre terms and conditions of contract without competition, was outside of the Council's spending rules. This was approved and the providers were notified in February 2024, following the publication of a VEAT (Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency Notice). This is a notice published by a contracting authority when they have chosen a supplier without a public tender.
- 2.5 The two providers were notified that in order for them to deliver Family Hubs services revised specifications and Key Performance Indicators would be required but these were not issued as the in-house Family Hubs offer was assessed to be sufficient and did not require the additional service delivery from the two providers. The funding from the two centres was identified to contribute to the savings needed as part of the wider Council budget pressures.

3. Current Situation

- 3.1 The two providers officially have Children's Centre contracts which means their delivery has not kept up with the targeted nature of Family Hub delivery. KCC has taken the strategic decision to move towards the Family Hub model, removing the need for the Children's Centre contracts. In order for the provision to continue, the authority would need to procure Family Hub provision, which to date has not been tested through a procurement process and would need to be run through an open competition, with no guarantee that the incumbent providers would be successful in their bid.
- 3.2 The two services are valued locally by those attending for universal services and do not agree with the ending of the contracts.

- 3.3 Additional information was circulated by a Member at Scrutiny Committee, which the Cabinet Member for Integrated Services had not seen and it was subsequently claimed that not all of the information was available when the Decision was taken. This data was focused on what would previously have been considered open access Children's Centre provision, rather than the targeted Family Hub approach that has been adopted by the internal model.
- 3.4 Millmead in Margate has accepted funding from Public Health to become a Health Living Centre. The funding commenced on 1 January 2025 and is paid via a Strategic Grant. The business decision of Millmead has been made for the centre to no longer be a Children's Centre/Family Hub and expand its provision as a Healthy Living Centre.
- 3.5 Seashells has not had the same offer due to Sheppey Matters being the established Healthy Living Centre in Swale.
- 3.6 Through Scrutiny Committee, it became apparent that staff at Seashells had been running reports from KCC's systems and shared this information with external individuals. KCC wrote to Seashells and raised that they have a duty to investigate any breach.

4. Information Requests

- 4.1 A range of questions and information requests were made, as detailed in 1.3 and 1.4 above, and also in Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2025. These are detailed in full below with the responses.

Issue raised	Response
Cabinet Member to take into consideration the petition and the significant local opinion in addition to the consultation report, and detailed financial analysis, before taking the decision.	<p>The Cabinet Member listened carefully to the local views and considered fully the petitions and the consultation responses before making the decision.</p> <p>The report for the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held on 21 November 2024 notes at 4.10 the breakdown for the Family Hubs' budget for each of the districts.</p> <p>Thanet and Swale receive the highest proportion of funding from the Family Hub budget (£741k and £719k respectively) and the contract value for the two centres represent another £222k (Millmead, Thanet) and £204k (Seashells, Swale). Therefore, in the current configuration the total for each District is £963k for Thanet annually and £923k for Swale. That is more than £300k higher than the District with the third highest proportion of the annual budget.</p>
Government funding is confirmed and that there be a temporary extension	The Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held on 21 November 2024 requested valuations be made on the KCC Family Hub sites in Margate:

of contract, subject to it being legally viable; That a valuation of the buildings be undertaken; and, that an update be brought to the next meeting.	<div>1. Margate Family Hub</div> <div>2. Northdown Road Family Hub</div> <div>3. Cliftonville Family Hub</div> <div>Cliftonville Family Hub is not a building owned by KCC and is occupied under a lease that costs circa £54k per year.</div> <div>Desktop valuations have been provided by officers within Infrastructure for both Margate Family Hub and Northdown Road Family Hub.</div> <div>Margate Family Hub: £250k - £450k (depending on use class)</div> <div>Northdown Road Family Hub: £200k - £400k (depending on use class)</div>																												
When people go from Millmead to Seashells to their nearest Family Hub, where would the extra staffing costs come from to accommodate?	<div>Kent County Council had held vacancies in the staffing establishment to allow for the TUPE of staff from Millmead and Seashells if the contracts are not re-procured.</div> <div>The staffing establishment is fully costed and includes the staff wages, various contributions, pensions, etc.</div> <div>The additional staff and the current compliment of Family Hubs staff in Thanet and Swale will meet the needs of families who required support from Family Hubs.</div> <div>Current vacancies in Thanet are:</div> <table><tr><th>Role</th><th>FTE</th><th>Grade</th><th>Total Spend</th></tr><tr><td>Family Hub Support Worker</td><td>1.87</td><td>KR4</td><td>£56,996</td></tr><tr><td>Family Hub Practitioner 11-19</td><td>0.82</td><td>KR7</td><td>£29,456</td></tr></table> <div>Current vacancies in Swale are:</div> <table><tr><th>Role</th><th>FTE</th><th>Grade</th><th>Total Spend</th></tr><tr><td>Family Hub Support Worker</td><td>0.1</td><td>KR4</td><td>£3,048</td></tr><tr><td>Family Hub Practitioner 11-19</td><td>0.62</td><td>KR7</td><td>£22,272</td></tr><tr><td>Family Hub Practitioner 0-11</td><td>1</td><td>KR7</td><td>£35,922</td></tr></table>	Role	FTE	Grade	Total Spend	Family Hub Support Worker	1.87	KR4	£56,996	Family Hub Practitioner 11-19	0.82	KR7	£29,456	Role	FTE	Grade	Total Spend	Family Hub Support Worker	0.1	KR4	£3,048	Family Hub Practitioner 11-19	0.62	KR7	£22,272	Family Hub Practitioner 0-11	1	KR7	£35,922
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Can the extra £4.1m be used for Seashells and Millmead?	<div>On 20 December 2024, representatives from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education wrote to Kent County Council to advise of the allocation of Year 4 grant money for Family Hubs which totals £4,099,400. The two</div>																												

	<p>departments provided KCC with a formula on how the money needs to be distributed.</p> <p>Table 1: Distribution of your funding allocation across the relevant programme strands</p> <table> <tr> <th>Strand</th><th>%²</th></tr> <tr> <td>Family hubs programme</td><td>14.7</td></tr> <tr> <td>Family hubs capital</td><td>6.5</td></tr> <tr> <td>Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships</td><td>30.7</td></tr> <tr> <td>Parenting support</td><td>20.9</td></tr> <tr> <td>Infant feeding support</td><td>12.5</td></tr> <tr> <td>Home learning environment services</td><td>14.0</td></tr> <tr> <td>Publishing 'Start for Life' offers and Parent and Carer Panels</td><td>0.8</td></tr> </table> <p>Over 42% of the grant needs to be spent through Public Health programmes on perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships, and infant feeding support. Additionally, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education specified that capital spend should only be used on capital activities.</p> <p>For Kent County Council to be able to accept and use the money, we must sign a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise the agreement to the programme's expectations for the 2025-26 financial year.</p> <p>Expenditure of the grant funding needs to be used for activities that are in line with the MOU.</p> <p>The MOU will detail the activities and the programmes that need to be delivered against the grant money and at this time, this has not been provided to Kent County Council. Until the Department of Health & Social Care and the Department for Education provide Kent County Council with the Memorandum of Understanding we won't know specifically what activities, programmes, etc can be funded from Year 4 grant funding.</p>	Strand	% ²	Family hubs programme	14.7	Family hubs capital	6.5	Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	30.7	Parenting support	20.9	Infant feeding support	12.5	Home learning environment services	14.0	Publishing 'Start for Life' offers and Parent and Carer Panels	0.8
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What was the legal advice on extending contracts and why has KCC been able to extend other contracts in the past? What are the exact limitations?	Legal advice has been provided by external legal advisors that confirms it is not possible for KCC to unilaterally extend the current contracts as there is no power to do so.																
What is the planned outreach provision?	<p>If the decision to not re-procure the two children's centres contracts goes ahead, KCC officers will reach out to Millmead and Seashells and rent rooms to deliver focused and targeted Family Hubs intervention from those centres.</p> <p>The exact number of sessions and the dates for these sessions are dependent on the need in the area.</p>																
Where is the risk analysis	An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken																

<p>for the proposals?</p>	<p>in advance of the consultation. The EqlA has been updated following the review of consultation feedback paying particular attention to any equalities concerns raised within consultation response. The full Equalities Impact Assessment has been included at Annex 4.</p> <p>Broadly, the equalities impact of the proposal falls on those residents with the following protected characteristics: gender, age and disability. The full EqlA sets the analysis out in detail for these, and other, protected characteristics. The most significant impact identified is the requirement under the proposals for residents to travel (particularly related to Millmead) further to access services and the impact of attending unfamiliar locations.</p> <p>Of the six options (set out in section 6 of the report for the Cabinet Committee) the highest impact will be felt from Option 1 (the proposal) and Option 5. Options 2, 3, 4 and 6 will have lesser impact on these communities, but that must be balanced by the fact that these options require further actions that will have impacts elsewhere across the county.</p> <p>Mitigations have been suggested in response to the feedback, including potentially providing subsidised bus fares for residents accessing a new Family Hub when previously they have used Millmead. Our network of Community Development officer will also be utilised to help residents that require additional support to navigate the transition.</p> <p>The impacts, when considered alongside the mitigation measures detailed within the EqlA and considered within the overarching policy priority context in which the Council operates, are considered to be justified.</p>
<p>With the information seen on footfall and comparing that to the other Family Hubs, why is Cliftonville not being considered for closure?</p> <p>If KCC are saying the information is not correct, how can the proposals be developed on incorrect information?</p>	<p>The reports from Core Plus were run by a staff member at Seashells without knowledge from KCC. The report focuses on sessional data only, not interventions. It displays summary figures for children and families reached, attendance and sessions held. Users can choose to display either summary figures with sessional and pupil data or summary figures only. The reports in the spreadsheet have all been run with summary figures and pupil data. Depending on the parameter selected, there may have been no output.</p> <p>KCC officers from the Management Information and Intelligence Service run data on the delivery for targeted Family Hubs intervention: Triple P, Making it Real, Home Learning Environment programmes (Little Talkers/The Communication Tree) and Focussed Support Interventions where the origin of the intervention was a Focussed Support Referral for a family who is opened to either Early Help or statutory Children</p>

Services, (attached as Annex 1).

The following definitions support the understanding of the data:

- interventions are targeted 1-1 work that have taken place with an individual client or family, or with another professional in relation to the client or family.
- sessions are any activity, event or service that is delivered to a group of people.
- Client Reach is the number of individuals who have attended at least one Intervention\Session within a specified range, therefore an individual will only be counted once.
- Family Reach is the number of families who attended at least one Intervention\Session within a specified range, therefore a family will only be counted once
- Number of Attendances is the total 'attendance' at the sessions, not the total of Clients seen.

The data is evidenced against the delivery point. The following context is relevant to understand the data: KCC Family Hubs staff co-deliver at Seashells and Millmead (example, currently delivering Compass), but the data only counts as Seashells and Millmead. Thanet District have deployed KCC staff for several months to deliver at Millmead due to Millmead having no frontline staff in post

The sessions recorded are those within the Family Hub model that is funded by the DfE. The data does not include sessions which are not part of the model, and that the DfE is not funding such as Aquatots, general public 'footfall,' and other sessions that are funded by families or from other sources.

When comparing like for like data on the targeted intervention (Triple P, Making it Real, Home Learning Environment programmes (Little Talkers/The Communication Tree) for the period 1 June 2024 to 31 January 2025 we note:

District	Total Clients Reached	Total Families Reached	Total Number of Interventions
Swale	50	32	110
Seashells	16	8	45

Thanet	62	36	144
Millmead	17	9	1

The analysis of data for Focussed Support Interventions where the origin of the intervention was a Focussed Support Referral for a family who is opened to either Early Help or statutory Children Services for the period 1 June 2024 to 31 January 2025 indicates:

District	Total Families Reached	Total Focus Support Interventions
Swale	115	1159
Seashells	0	0
Thanet	97	774
Millmead	11	77

While Seashells has offered many other activities and shows higher numbers of other activities and general footfall these are not included in the count as these are not funded through the DfE Family Hubs grant.

A specific analysis regarding the targeted service delivery at Cliftonville when compared with Millmead for the period 1 June 2024 to 31 January 2025 indicates:

Cliftonville

Cliftonville Centre is a very small building and is predominantly used for health delivery, and the majority of Family Hub services are delivered from nearby Northdown and Margate centres. However, both Northdown and Margate were closed for 3 weeks each in March 2024 and September 2024, for refurbishment.

Interventions	Total Clients Reached	Total Families Reached	Total Focus Support Interventions
Triple P for Baby Total	2	1	4

	<table><tr><td>Little Talkers Total</td><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>The Communication Tree Total</td><td>6</td><td>3</td><td>14</td></tr><tr><td>Number Of Focus Support Interventions</td><td>NA</td><td>3</td><td>8</td></tr></table>	Little Talkers Total	2	1	2	The Communication Tree Total	6	3	14	Number Of Focus Support Interventions	NA	3	8								
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	<p>Millmead</p> <p>As from January, KCC Thanet District staff have been deployed to cover some of the sessions delivered at Millmead. This has primarily been due to staff resignations, as the end of the contract was less than three months away the management team felt that they could not replace staff for such a short period. Millmead have maintained their long standing senior worker to offer consistency of support to those families using the provision.</p> <table><tr><th>Interventions</th><th>Total Clients Reached</th><th>Total Families Reached</th><th>Total Focus Support Interventions</th></tr><tr><td>Triple P for Baby Total</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Little Talkers Total</td><td>19</td><td>9</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>The Communication Tree Total</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Number Of Focus Support Interventions</td><td>NA</td><td>8</td><td>77</td></tr></table> <p>KCC Family Hubs alongside Seashells and Millmead provided Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme. Activities provided under HAF are funded from a separated funding stream and not from the Family Hubs base budget or DfE Family Hubs grant. As the HAF funding is a completely different funding stream data comparisons are not provided as part of this report.</p>	Interventions	Total Clients Reached	Total Families Reached	Total Focus Support Interventions	Triple P for Baby Total	0	0	0	Little Talkers Total	19	9	2	The Communication Tree Total	0	0	0	Number Of Focus Support Interventions	NA	8	77
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Have the travel costs and the costs of administering them been factored in?	Yes – the current base budget for Family Hubs in Thanet can be used to refund the cost of the bus tickets.																				
How many hours does Cliftonville have available for 8 people a month?	<p>Please see breakdown of data above regarding the interventions offered in Family Hubs with a detailed breakdown for Cliftonville.</p> <p>Staff in a district are used flexibly and they deliver services in the location that best suits children and families.</p>																				

How long will funding continue for Millmead as a Health Living Centre?	Strategic Grants are issued on an annual basis; the current grant runs from 1 January 2025 to 31 March 2026.
What constitutes consistency if managing a service via a contract?	The suite of training for Family Hub staff can be more consistently delivered and monitored through a direct approach. It is not impossible to manage this through a contract, however you can introduce a third party in their interpretation and potential delay in reporting, depending on the cycle of contract management reporting.
What happens to the contract if Full Council are unable to meet, debate and vote in sufficient time?	<p>The commissioning intentions have been made clear through this process. The contract is for a Children's Centre and was put in place from April 2021. The Family Hub is the agreed model of delivery and can be delivered internally.</p> <p>If the Full Council was unable to meet, debate and vote in sufficient time the contracts will end as planned on 31 March 2025.</p> <p>The matter is scheduled to be considered by Full Council on 13 March 2025.</p>
The EQIA did not include sufficient information on inclusion and community impact. What impact on schools has been considered?	<p>The report prepared for the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held on 21 November 2024 contained an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). Under the Equality Act 2010, there are nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation that need to be considered as part of an Equalities Impact Assessment. Schools are not considered a protective characteristic for the purposes of completing an EqIA.</p> <p>An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken in advance of the consultation. The EqIA has been updated following the review of consultation feedback paying particular attention to any equalities concerns raised within consultation response. The full Equalities Impact Assessment has been included at Annex 4 in the report prepared for the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held on 21 November 2024.</p> <p>Broadly, the equalities impact of the proposal falls on those residents with the following protected characteristics: gender, age and disability. The full EqIA sets the analysis out in detail for these, and other, protected characteristics. The most significant impact identified is the requirement under the proposals for residents to travel (particularly related to Millmead) further to access services and the impact of attending unfamiliar locations.</p>

<p>What is the capital spend for the Sheppey Gateway?</p>	<p>After meetings held with officers from Sheppey Gateway it was determined that no capital spend is required for Family Hubs services to be delivered from the building.</p> <p>There is currently a library operating from the Sheppey Gateway. The library offers parent and children groups and to date no health and safety issues were raised regarding the residents who use this service.</p>
<p>What discussions have been held with the Sheppey Gateway Partnership?</p>	<p>Following an initial site visit to Swale Gateway in August 2024 by the Family Hub Transformation Team, a meeting was held via Microsoft Teams between several Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council officers to discuss the future of Swale Gateway. The discussion set out how all partners currently using the Gateway could have their needs met should the decision be made not to reprocure the commissioned children services at Seashells as this decision would require the relocation of some Family Hub provision to the Gateway to meet the need of the island.</p> <p>Attendees included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCC Representatives from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Infrastructure ○ Family Hub Transformation Team ○ Property ○ Gateway Service Manager • Swale BC Representatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms Eva Harris ○ Ms Carol Sargeant ○ Ms Aziza Kilmister ○ Ms Joanne Johnson <p>Meeting notes indicate that discussions included the current use of the building and how it meets the needs of partners, changing needs, and how the space could be used differently. Following the meeting, the Gateway Service Manager sent out brief notes capturing the discussion and associated actions.</p> <p>On 13 September 2024, the Capital Programme Manager for Swale Borough Council responded to these notes, stating that the meeting and notes were incredibly helpful and that they now felt fully up to up to speed in understanding the various service needs for the space. Swale Borough Council also committed to discussing this further with colleagues and impacted partners (e.g. Sheppey Matters) and to coming back to the team if further clarifications were needed.</p> <p>Kent County Council through its officers engaged with Swale Borough Council regarding the issue of relocating some of the Family Hub outreach work to the Swale Gateway, in the event the decision to not re-commission the children's centre at Seashells was to proceed. Kent County Council officers are not aware of what discussions or actions were taken by Swale</p>

	<p>Borough Council officers to further brief senior managers in leaders in the Borough.</p> <p>To add a further point of clarification, during the Scrutiny meeting, it was suggested that the Gateway is a 50/50 split between Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council. To clarify, the building is owned by Kent County Council and managed through a Partnership Agreement. The building is 80% Kent County Council occupied, and 20% Swale Borough Council occupied. If Kent County Council does not infringe upon the 20% that Swale Borough Council uses, we are free to utilize our space as needed. Given our commitment to partnership working, we have actively engaged with Swale officers and, with the support of the Gateway Service Manager, discussed how the building would need to operate as part of our planning.</p>
A decision has been taken before to extend these contracts, why can it not happen again?	This was referred to in the Background section and also in relation to the commissioning intention of what we want to buy. There is no clause to extend. There is an option to directly award a new contract, however the specification, terms and conditions would be substantially different and therefore a market test would be needed through a full procurement.
What consideration has been made regarding both organisations offering a reduced payment in exchange of the contract?	As before, KCC does not want to buy Children's Centre services.
Additional funding was provided to Millmead and Seashells to make them flagship services; had the Council decided at that point that contracts would not be renewed a year later?	The timeline has been set out at the Background section. Millmead and Seashells were test sites, not flagships.
Infant Feeding – where is the information – talking about parity but when will service be available and get communications out to new mums?	<p>The Specialist Infant Feeding Service is provided by Kent Community Health, NHS Foundation Trust on behalf of KCC.</p> <p>The Specialist Infant Feeding Service works with families whose babies are experiencing feeding problems requiring more intensive or specialist support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty with latch • poor milk supply • sore nipples or other breast problems • slow weight gain or faltering growth • breast refusal • illness or condition

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suspected restricted frenulum (tongue-tie) • induced lactation or re-lactation • advice and guidance in the use of a supplementary nursing system (SNS). <p>The Specialist Infant Feeding Team includes lactation consultants and breastfeeding assistant practitioners. Information about the service can be accessed at: Infant feeding - Kent family About Start for Life - Kent County Council Your local family hub - Kent County Council</p>
Millmead has no management costs, it is a fact that the management do not take wages.	<p>The management structure at Millmead is made up of a board of trustees and then various management and back office staff that all contribute to Management costs.</p> <p>The board of trustees are all volunteers; however, they are supported by a Company Secretary whose main role and responsibility will be to service the board. This role is not voluntary and therefore draws a salary. The provision is further supported by a General Manager, Finance officer, Administrative Support, IT Support and Receptionist all of whom (as they are not part of the direct front line provision) form part of the overall management costs of the service. Recent disclosed figures for 'management costs' show an approximate spend of £101,000 for Millmead</p> <p>For information, similar functions at Seashells total an approximate £100,000.</p>

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Call-in Request for Executive Decision 24/00093 - Future of Commissioned Services at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs

Proposer: Ms Mel Dawkins

Seconder: Mr Barry Lewis

Reasons for calling in the decision:

Reason one: The decision is not in line with Council's Policy Framework.

This decision is not in accordance with the Council's primary Policy Framework, Securing Kent's Future, which states that the 'statutory Best Value duty must frame all financial, service and policy decisions, and services must pro-actively evidence the best value considerations in all decisions.' This decision's report mitigated data relating to service usage within Swale and Thanet, therefore not evidencing all best value considerations as the Best Value Duty is also concerned with 'efficiency and effectiveness.' [OBJ] Best value does not simply mean the cheapest option, it should also focus on maximising public benefit.

Through data provided by CYPE it is clear via footfall that Seashells and Millmead provide the best value to their local communities when compared to the alternative local Family Hubs. Between 1st April 2024 and 30th November 2024, Seashells reached 1,820 clients between 0 – 19 years old, totalling 25% more clients than the surrounding 6 Family Hubs in Swale combined. Within the same period, Millmead reached 731 clients of the same age range, whilst the surrounding 7 Family Hubs reached a combined number of clients of 729. Although the individual contracts for Seashells and Millmead are larger than the neighbouring Family Hubs, the data provided by CYPE, available in the table below, clearly demonstrates that the average cost per client, attendee, and session at Seashells and Millmead are significantly lower than the neighbouring Family Hubs. This demonstrates that, through resident popularity, Seashells and Millmead provide the best value to KCC financially and the best value to residents through the number of families reached.

Swale	Average cost per client per centre	Average cost per attendee per centre	Average cost per session per centre
Surrounding 6 Family Hubs	£666.98	£213.61	£1,829.52
Seashells	£117.58	£31.75	£547.31

Thanet	Average cost per client per centre	Average cost per attendee per centre	Average cost per session per centre
Surrounding 7 Family Hubs	£1,016.46	£349.53	£2,259.15
Millmead	£318.88	£128.86	£1,099.53

Furthermore, KCC has received significant community response to the proposed ceasing of funding for these services with the consultation, receiving 1,016 responses and the *Save our Seashells* petition receiving over 6,000 signatures, triggering a debate at Full Council. During this debate at Council, it was agreed by Members that the:

Council recognises that this petition represents significant local opinion regarding the proposed decision to not recommission Family Hub Services at Seashells and asks the Cabinet Member to take that into consideration in addition to the consultation report, and detailed financial analysis, before taking the decision.

As demonstrated above, the decision report fails to consider Best Value outside of contract value and fails to consider which Family Hub residents believe to provide Best Value to their community. The decision does not actively consider or demonstrate the other methods, such as footfall, which could be used to establish whether a service is providing, or even exceeding, its expected value. To add to this, although the Council agreed that the Cabinet Member should consider the significant local response demonstrated by the petition and consultation responses, this does not appear to have been considered within the Council's evaluation of best value. It is clear how important and valuable both Millmead and Seashells Family Hubs are to their respective local communities, and how effective their work is, yet the decision report fails to adequately take this into account under the statutory best value duty.

Reason two: The decision is not in accordance with the Council's Budget.

This decision is not in accordance with the Council's Budget as although the decision report states that through the ceasing of these individual contracts, the Council will save £426k annually, it does not consider any of the additional financial pressures KCC will incur as a consequence, contradicting the previously mentioned agreed motion for the Cabinet Member to provide a 'detailed financial analysis'. Moreover, the agreed Council budget in February 2024 did not include the ceasing of these commissioned services in Millmead and Seashells and instead stated that the focus would be on the delivery of the Government's Family Hub Programme and services would be 'developed in partnership with parents and young people', which is in contrary to this decision.

The average wage for a Family Hub Support Worker and Practitioner is £26,386, therefore the cost of an additional worker for Cliftonville, Northdown and Six Bells alone in Margate would be £79,157. Based on the figures provided earlier in this document, if those that currently attend Millmead Family Hub move to another Family Hub in Thanet this would create a service pressure that would require extra staff members to manage. Similarly, the surrounding Family Hubs in Swale will require additional staff members to manage the additional pressure these services will incur following the closure of Seashells. Following on from this, although it has been stated that infant feeding support for mothers will be provided for those who are impacted by this proposal, no clear plans regarding this additional support have been outlined. As the comparative services are not ready as demonstrated in the service offer comparison, this could lead to further inequality, pressures on other services and financial impacts to KCC.

Additionally, in response to the concerns expressed during the consultation period regarding the cost of travel being a barrier for those currently attending Millmead, KCC has offered to pay the bus ticket price for those unable to do so themselves. The decision report states that at Millmead, 1,449 clients attended a session in 2023/24 - if the same number of clients attended a session at another centre in Margate following Millmead's closure, this could cost KCC an additional £5,796 (based on a £4 ticket price), plus the administration fee of providing this refund.

Furthermore, an additional grant of £4.1m has recently been provided to KCC by central Government to 'continue delivery of a network of Family Hubs' and to deliver on the governments ambition 'to give all children the best start in life',¹ and could therefore be used to assist with funding this vital service to the local community and achieving the Council's ambitions as set out in the budget agreed in 2024. Should KCC require further detail on the purpose of this funding, this decision should be postponed until certainty can be provided to Members.

Reason three: Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers and presumption in favour of openness.

As previously referenced, during Full Council on the 7th November 2024, the Council agreed that to make an appropriate decision, the Cabinet Member must have 'all of the information before her', which included 'Any of the unknowns that may come forward from government', along with the *Save our Seashells* petition, KCC consultation, the Full Council debate and discussion at CYPE Committee.² However, this information has not been presented in the covering report and associated information. This, as a result, does not provide assurance to the Council that the Cabinet Member has all the information before them to take an informed and transparent decision.

Furthermore, the record of this County Council discussion and proposal is missing from the record of decision, along with its associated request. A brief statement is made in the report to the CYPE Cabinet Committee discussion, but comparison of the paperwork presented on the financial assessments shows no material difference between the Proposed Record of Decision, the Cabinet Committee Report, and the final Record of Decision (ROD) paperwork. It is understood that further financial assessments are available but have not been presented to Members and may require further transparent scrutiny to ensure that the Cabinet Member is informed and that they are taking the decision in line with the constitutional principles of decision-making.

Reason four: The decision is not taken in accordance with the legal arrangements in Section 12 of the constitution:

During the discussions at CYPE Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet Member agreed to review any legal advice in relation to a further extension of contracts to provide greater clarity on this option. However, any advice or reasoning established has not been provided to Members, other than through very minimal reference within the ROD which states, 'it is not possible for KCC to unilaterally extend the current contracts as there is no power to do so.' This is an incomplete statement, which provides no further clarification or reasoning for Members other than a reference to 'no power.' Numerous contracts across KCC Directorates have had extensions in the past,

¹ HM Treasury (2024), *Autumn Budget 2024 – Fixing Foundations to Deliver Change*, pg. 84.

² Kent County Council (2024), *County Council Minutes*. Available at: [Canted Minutes 7th-Nov-2024, County Council](#)

therefore the exact limitations in relation to this contract must be detailed to Members, and shared if possible, to allow for transparency and demonstrate informed decision making.

Reason five: Explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions.

Following on from the concerns discussed above, this call-in seeks further information and clarification on the below queries and asks that these be provided in writing to explain the options considered and the reasoning behind this:

- Complete funding plans and analysis which details the cost of service delivered at the proposed new family hubs for the number of service users at Seashells and Millmead, including the capital spend to make the buildings fit for purpose.
- Full disclosure regarding the existing contracts and contract extension requirements.
- Full details regarding what the £4.1 million additional family hub funding can be used for, including all correspondents.
- Full disclosure regarding all the advice Officers have provided the Cabinet Member, including the risk analysis for the proposal.
- Detailed information regarding what services will be provided, including outreach provision, if this decision is actioned.

This decision and the associated decision report lacks transparency without the above information being clearly provided to Members, and we therefore do not believe that an accurate and informed decision can be made. This is particularly important following the additional funding provided by central government which may result in further options emerging, which have not yet been outlined or fully considered by Members.

Desired outcome of this call-in:

We request that the Scrutiny Committee recommends that the implementation of the decision be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.

From: Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Subject: Commissioned Family Hub Contracts

Decision no: 24/00093

Key Decision : For the reason that:

- *It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions*

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Sheppey
Margate

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: Following wider decisions about KCC's Family Hub model and network of in-house Family Hub locations, officers have explored a proposal which would mean we do not renew KCC's two Commissioned Family Hub contracts when the current contracts come to an end on 31 March 2025.

A public consultation sought the views of service users and partners on the proposal and the suggested alternative arrangements to provide Family Hub services.

Members are asked to consider the balance of the assessed impact of this proposal, the response to the consultation and the overarching priority policy position.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked to:

APPROVE the proposal to not re-commission the Family Hub services that are currently provided at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE any activity requiring capital spend as set out in the report to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, and Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services to explore the option for Kent County Council to deliver outreach Family Hub services from Seashells and Millmead centres when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services, to take necessary actions, including but not limited to finalising, entering into, concluding or managing any relevant contracts and other legal agreements, as required to implement this decision.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 KCC commissions two providers to deliver Family Hub services: Millmead Family Hub in Thanet and Seashells Family Hub on the Isle of Sheppey. The rest of the Family Hub network is delivered by our in-house service which was subject to the previous Family Hub Model Key Decision [23/00092](#).
- 1.2 As part of the wider implementation of the Family Hub Programme, the two remaining commissioned centres, Millmead and Seashells, have transitioned from the Children Centre contracts to Family Hub contracts. Both centres were pilot locations during the implementation of the Family Hub model. The existing contracts end on the 31 March 2025.
- 1.3 Following wider decisions about KCC's Family Hub model and network of in-house Family Hub locations, a public consultation has sought views on a draft proposal to not renew the two commissioned Family Hub contracts when they come to their end on 31 March 2025. The proposal sets out that the Family Hub provision will be delivered from alternative locations for current users of each site.
- 1.4 This report sets out the implications of not reprocurring the commissioned Family Hub contracts. The accompanying debate at committee will inform any eventual decision to be made by the Cabinet Member.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It should be noted that the proposal not to renew the contracts when they end in March 2025 is in no way a reflection of the quality of service delivered by either of the commissioned providers. In the year 2023/24, 1869 families attended sessions at Seashells and 1449 attended sessions at Millmead. The Equality Impact Assessment included within the supporting documentation goes into more detail about the assessed impacts on protected characteristics.
- 2.2 The contracts for the two Commissioned Children's Centres were tendered and awarded in 2020 for a period of 12 months. The services were subject to Directly Awarded contracts from April 2021 to March 2022 under Covid-19 guidance. A Key Decision (21/00086) was taken on 10 November 2021 to directly award contracts to the existing providers for a further year until 31 March 2023. A further Key Decision (22/00108) facilitated an additional 12-month extension, meaning the contracts ended on 31 March 2023.
- 2.3 Both sites have been part of the Family Hub model transformation and have been pilot sites within the implementation of the new model.
- 2.4 To minimise duplication of provision and to ensure that future specifications complimented the Family Hub model being developed, the procurement of new commissioned Children Centres was delayed. In 2024, a further Direct Award was made to the two centres as Family Hubs. The terms and conditions of this contract were continued from the previous contract and require a six-month notice period. Therefore, the current contracts end on 31 March 2025. Indicative notice of the end of the contracts was given to each provider in July 2024, subject to the outcome of the consultation and any resulting Key Decision.
- 2.5 Further extension of these contracts is not possible, other than to cover the period of procurement for new contracts, subject to any decision made by the Cabinet Member.
- 2.6 Any procurement would be open to all potential providers and whilst previous tenders have not received bids from alternative providers, it cannot be guaranteed that the current providers will win any future procurement. Therefore, there would still be a risk in place to both organisations regarding their future viability.
- 2.7 In November 2023, KCC Cabinet took decision 23/00092 to implement the Family Hub model across the County. At the time, that included transformation and efficiency plans for 56 Family Hub locations across Kent not including the two Commissioned centres, Millmead and Seashells (in line with the Kent Communities Programme decision 23/00101, also from November 2023).
- 2.8 Due to the fact that Millmead and Seashells Family Hubs are both externally commissioned, they were not included within the scope of the Kent Communities Programme analysis.

- 2.9 There has therefore been a sequence of decisions about where and how to deliver Open Access (now Family Hub) services, which have realised savings against what was the previous Family Hub budget as set out in the MTFP (more detail in the next section). Firstly, decisions were made that considered the Family Hub model itself and the buildings used to deliver the services in-house. These decisions have been implemented, delivering savings through model redesign, staff restructure and building rationalisation. With the commissioned contracts ending in March 2025, the next consideration in sequence is whether to renew these contracts or whether service provision should be delivered differently.

3. RATIONALE - FINANCIAL AND MODEL CONSIDERATIONS

Financial: Securing Kent's Future

- 3.1 On 17 August 2023, Cabinet agreed the provisions set out in the report 'Securing Kent's Future – Budget Recovery Strategy and Financial Reporting'. This report explained that there has been '*significant deterioration in the financial and operating landscape facing the Council since Framing Kent's Future was adopted.*' It goes on to explain that there needs to be '*a strong focus from elected Members, the Corporate Management Team, Directors, Heads of Service and all our staff to recognise that this spending challenge is now the fundamental policy priority of the council and to respond accordingly.*' On 5 October 2023, Cabinet considered 'Securing Kent's Future – Budget Recovery Strategy'. This report set out the Council's strategy for achieving both in-year and future year savings to assure a more sustainable financial position for the Authority and set out new strategic objectives focused on putting the Council on a financially sustainable footing.
- 3.2 As set out in the Budget Recovery Plan (Cabinet – October 2023), the financial challenge cannot be overstated. Every decision the Council takes needs to be considered in terms of this fundamental policy priority. Failure to do so risks the need for more drastic action in order to balance the Council's budget.
- 3.3 The Securing Kent's Future – Budget Recovery Plan sets out information that is relevant to any decision on the future of the commissioned Family Hub contracts.' The Budget Recovery Strategy sets out a number of objectives including the following: '*Objective 2: Delivering savings from identified opportunity areas to set a sustainable 2024/25 budget and MTFP*'. Point 6.7 of the Strategy sets out that nearly three quarters of the Council's spend is with third party providers and that there is a need to review these contracts in light of 'Securing Kent's Future'. The MTFP, as agreed at Full Council during the Budget meeting on 19 February 2024 set out (in appendix G of the papers for the meeting) that across the 24/25 and 25/26 financial years a target of £2m will be saved as part of a 'Review of open access services in light of implementing the Family Hub model.' With this in mind, any decision by members on the future of the commissioned Family Hub contracts need to give due consideration to the revised policy framework and the financial challenge facing the Council, balancing this consideration against the potential impact of changes on residents and the consultation response.

Model Considerations

- 3.4 As part of the Family Hub Model decision 23/00092 made in November 2023, KCC moved towards a more targeted offer, as opposed to the previous universal offer. There is also currently an imbalance in the Family Hub delivery model in Kent and resultant duplication of costs for the Council. Currently, there are 50 Family Hub sites across the county, including within Swale and Thanet, which are staffed by KCC Family Hub practitioners. These centres provide Family Hub services for families in Kent funded from the CYPE base budget. These two commissioned centres are the only two centres that are externally commissioned. These centres link in with partners such as Health and VCS organisations. However, the links to other KCC ICS/Early Help services are not as strong as within the rest of the KCC in-house network. We are also duplicating cost in terms of management (each District in Kent has a KCC District Manager for example), HR, IT and finance support through the commissioning of the two centres.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposal under consideration is to not renew the two contracts when they reach the end of their current term on 31 March 2025. The table below sets out the annual cost of each of the existing contracts.

Centre	Area	Contract End Date	Contract value per Annum
Millmead	Margate	31/03/2025	£222,127.44
Seashells	Sheerness	31/03/2025	£204,302.16
Totals			£426,429.60

Millmead

- 4.2 Family Hub services would be provided from existing alternative sites within the in-house KCC Family Hub network. In relation to Millmead, there are three alternative sites all within 1.5 miles from the Millmead centre (Cliftonville Family Hub, 1.3 miles away; Margate Family Hub, 1.4 miles away and Northdown Road Family Hub, 1.5 miles away).
- 4.3 All three of these sites were included within the Kent Communities Programme decision as Family Hub locations and are currently operational Family Hubs.
- 4.4 The consultation sets out clearly that while we cannot deliver a 'like-for-like' service offer across the alternative locations, a comparable service will be available within the network of local in-house Family Hubs. Appendix 1 sets out the services currently on offer at Millmead under the Family Hub contract and the services available at the alternative sites proposed.

Seashells

- 4.5 In relation to Seashells the alternative provision would be from with the Sheppey Gateway which is 0.2 miles away from the Seashells centre. The Sheppey Gateway already delivers some sessions within the library space that

are complimentary to the Family Hub offer (for example Birth Registrations) as well as a range of other services from KCC, Swale Borough Council and other partners.

- 4.6 The consultation set out clearly that while we cannot deliver a 'like-for-like' service offer from the Sheerness Gateway, a comparable service will be available. As set out below, analysis shows that the current Family Hub service includes 14 hours of activity per week at Seashells and 9 hours of activity per week at Millmead that are directly commissioned under the contract. These hours can be accommodated at the alternative sites identified (Sheppey Gateway for Seashells and the three nearby in-house Family Hubs in Margate for Millmead). Vacancies held within the Family Hub staff will accommodate the staff eligible for TUPE to deliver these sessions at the alternative locations. Appendix 1 sets out the services currently on offer at Seashells under the Family Hub contract and the services that are proposed at the Gateway.
- 4.7 It is important to note that the Family Hub offer across each District is responsive and will continue to flex in response to the identified service need within each community. This may include outreach provision which the service delivers in the community when it is identified that provision other than at Family Hub buildings is most appropriate.

Need

- 4.8 For benchmarking purposes, a comparison of the number of KCC Family Hub locations per 10,000 people aged 0-19 has been made against other Family Hub authorities. The comparison was only made against authorities with similar scale populations of 0-19 year olds and does not include any authority with a population lower than 290,000 (when rounded to the nearest 10,000). This comparison demonstrates that KCC has 1.3 Family Hubs per 10,000 people aged 0-19. This is the highest proportion of Family Hubs per 10,000 people aged 0-19 when compared to other authorities with similar quantum of 0-19 year olds, as the table below demonstrates:

Authority	0-19 Year Olds (to nearest 10,000)	Total Family Hub Sites	Family Hubs per 10,000 0-19 Year Olds
Kent	370,000	50	1.3
Essex	340,000	35	1.03
Birmingham	330,000	22	0.67
Surrey	290,000	21	0.72

- 4.9 When comparing the number of Family Hubs per 10,000 people aged 0-19 across all Family Hub authorities regardless of 0-19 population size, the average is 1.3 hubs per 10,000 0-19 year olds. This means that, on a county-wide basis, Kent is in line with the average across the country. This does not, however, replace the need for local analysis.

- 4.10 For further context, the table below demonstrates that Thanet and Swale receive the highest proportion of the overall Family Hub budget, in recognition of the levels of need for the service in these locations. Figures quoted are excluding the cost of the current commissioned contracts.

Overall Family Hub Budget across all 12 Kent Districts	£7.3m	100%
Thanet	£741k	10.1%
Swale	£719k	9.8%
Ashford	£624k	8.5%
Canterbury	£671k	9.1%
Dartford	£616k	8.4%
Dover	£623k	8.5%
Folkestone and Hythe	£584k	8%
Gravesham	£591k	8%
Maidstone	£674k	9.2%
Sevenoaks	£452k	6.1%
Tonbridge and Malling	£528k	7.2%
Tunbridge Wells	£470k	6.4%

- 4.11 The section below details the response to the public consultation regarding the future of the provision offered by the two commissioned Family Hubs. One key theme emerging from the feedback received is the high level of deprivation present within each of the wards in which the two centres are located. Millmead is situated in Dane Valley Ward in Thanet and Seashells is within Sheerness Ward in Swale.
- 4.12 There are available data sets that demonstrate the high level of deprivation in these two wards. Data published in the [Kent Analytics Statistical Bulletin \(April 2024\) – Children in Poverty](#) includes the following table which shows that Dane Valley (Millmead) is the ward with the fifth highest percentage of children in relative low-income families in Kent for the 2022/23 year. Table 14 sets out the wards with the highest % of children in relative low-income families.

Table 14: Top ten wards in Kent with highest percentage children in relative low-income families, 2022/23

Ward Name	District	Number	%
Upper Weald	Ashford	150	32.2%
Town & Castle	Dover	489	31.1%
St Radigunds	Dover	527	30.2%
Newington	Thanet	405	28.4%
Dane Valley	Thanet	563	28.2%
Cliftonville West	Thanet	746	27.5%
Folkestone Harbour	Folkestone & Hythe	388	26.9%
Buckland	Dover	442	26.9%
Tower Hamlets	Dover	300	26.5%
Walland & Denge Marsh	Folkestone & Hythe	360	25.9%

Source: DWP Stat Xplore; ONS MYPE

Presented by: Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

- 4.13 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data is available for every ward in the County. The most recent IMD data is from 2019 and therefore is not entirely indicative of the current situation, however the data does reinforce the level of deprivation prevalent in each of the two wards. Sheerness (Seashells) has the second highest IMD score, and Dane Valley (Millmead) has the fifth highest IMD score in the County. The table below sets details the five wards with the highest IMD scores in Kent.

Ward	Score	Rank (out of 290 Kent wards)
Margate Central	64.47	1
Sheerness (Seashells)	58.45	2
Cliftonville West	57.63	3
Newington	52.54	4
Dane Valley (Millmead)	47.21	5

- 4.14 Combined with the response from the consultation (detailed below) the data outlined above shows that the two wards in question experience high levels of deprivation. Patterns of deprivation have been prevalent within these communities consistently for many years. There are additional indicators regarding levels of crime and anti-social behaviour as well as domestic abuse and drug and alcohol dependence. All of which combine to demonstrate the levels of deprivation and social issues faced within these communities.

Members should have appropriate regard to these local factors. However, notwithstanding this we assess that there would be sufficient provision to meet

need in the areas currently serviced by the commissioned centres, taking into account existing and planned alternative provision.

- 4.15 [For additional context](#), the Kent Communities Programme (KCP) decision taken in November 2023 ([23/00101](#)) proposed a network of Family Hub buildings. [Section 3](#) of the KCP report sets out the Needs Framework which assessed the level of need within each ward across the County by considering the following data:

- Deprivation
- % of the population aged 0-15
- Deprivation Affecting Children
- % of reception age children who are overweight or obese
- % of deliveries to teenage mothers
- % of low-birth-weight live babies
- % of people over 65 living alone
- Deprivation Affecting Older People
- Long term unemployment
- Ethnic diversity
- % of pupils achieving a pass in English and Maths at GCSE
- % of people who report a long-term illness or disability
- Population growth
- Population density
- Digital exclusion
- Transport connectivity
- Broadband speed

The available data was combined across each of the metrics listed above and combined to give an overall 'Need Score' for each ward. These scores then informed the modelling with the KCC services (including the Family Hub service) to determine where services should be located to meet the need identified. The Needs Framework was designed to determine which KCC-owned assets were required to meet the need identified in each location.

- 4.16 Analysis shows that the current Family Hub service includes 14 hours of activity per week at Seashells and 9 hours of activity per week at Millmead that are directly commissioned under the contract. These hours can be accommodated at the alternative sites identified (Sheppey Gateway for Seashells and the three nearby in-house Family Hubs in Margate for Millmead). Vacancies held within the Family Hub staff will accommodate the staff eligible for TUPE to deliver these sessions at the alternative locations.
- 4.17 Local transport analysis in relation to Millmead shows that currently 54,189 households are within a 35 minute bus journey from the Millmead centre. All of these households are within a 35 minute bus journey of an alternative, in-house Family Hub location. The Sheppey Gateway is a five-minute walk from the Seashells centre and is serviced by the same public transport network. Given the need identified in through the metrics detailed above, it is important to retain the service for local residents and whilst in relation to Millmead the proposal suggests the use of the alternative Family Hub locations in Margate, no such

provision already exists for Seashells. Therefore the proposal is to make use of the Gateway location to retain the service for residents that need it.

- 4.18 It is also relevant to note that providing sufficient children's centres to meet local need does not require KCC to situate children's centres in specific wards with high levels of need, although needs in those wards must be met. For example, when making comparisons to other areas of deprivation as highlighted in Table 14 above, it is noted that of the four wards identified with higher levels of deprivation than Dane Valley, only two of them (Town and Castle, Dover and Newington, Thanet) have a Family Hub in the ward. Neither Upper Weald or St Radigunds have a Family Hub site directly in the ward.
- 4.19 When considering any potential decision, Members are asked to balance all relevant factors, including the need of the area, the response to the consultation and the overarching priority policy position of the Council as we address the financial challenge that we face.

5. CONSULTATION

Consultation Process

- 5.1 In line with the Childcare Act 2006 and children's centre statutory guidance, KCC has undertaken a public consultation to seek the views of service users, residents, and professional partners on the proposal not to renew the contracts when they end in March 2025. A full consultation report providing an independent analysis of the feedback received is available at Appendix 2.
- 5.2 A public consultation launched on 30 July 2024 and closed on 22 September 2024. The consultation was publicised locally at both Millmead and Seashells, directly to service users. It was also publicised using the Council's standard online promotional platforms and across the Family Hub social media platforms within Thanet and Swale.
- 5.3 There were different options available for people to submit feedback including a paper version of a questionnaire, an online version of the same questionnaire, and easy read version, a separate questionnaire for professionals as well as the consultation email address. Two drop-in sessions were also held for each of the locations. One drop in was held at the Margate Family Hub (one of the proposed alternative locations for Millmead) and one was held at the Millmead Centre itself. Four people attended the drop in at Margate Family Hub, three of whom were elected members. Approximately 50 people attended the session held at Millmead Centre.
- 5.4 In regards to the Seashells centre, a drop in was held at the Sheppey Gateway (the proposed alternative location) and one was held at Seashells itself. 11 people attended the session at the Gateway and approximately 53 people spoke directly to officers at the Seashells centre.
- 5.5 At both sites, further information was collected from members of the public via a 'Post-it Note' feedback display to capture those individuals who did not want to talk to officers directly.

Consultation Response

- 5.6 A total of 1,016 formal questionnaires were returned in response to the consultation. The table below sets out the number of responses for each centre.

Centre	Responses
Millmead	433
Seashells	672
Non-specific/both	99
Total	1,016

- 5.7 We also received letters and representations from partner organisations and residents by email/letter, as well as the verbal feedback from the drop in sessions.
- 5.8 Feedback has been independently analysed and the themes of feedback have been identified within Appendix 2.
- 5.9 Almost all feedback received indicated a strong desire for the contracts to be renewed and the Family Hub services to remain at Seashells and Millmead.
- 5.10 In relation to Millmead specifically, feedback focused on the accessibility of the site for local families, the importance of the centre for wellbeing and safety given the high levels of deprivation, the wider impact that Millmead has, and the inaccessibility of the proposed alternative locations.
- 5.11 In relation to Seashells, the feedback focused on similar themes; the importance of the centre itself to the community, the range of services on offer that may not be replicated at the Gateway, the fact that the centre is welcoming and vital to the development and wellbeing of children and families.
- 5.12 One specific point raised at consultation in relation to Millmead was whether it is justifiable to not renew the Family Hub commission at Millmead (in Dane Valley ward) whilst maintaining three 'in-house' Family Hubs all in close proximity to each other across Margate Central and Cliftonville West wards (Margate Family Hub in Margate Central and Northdown Road and Cliftonville Family Hubs in Cliftonville West). The KCP Need Framework (which KCC used as part of the KCP to review its network of in-house Family Hubs to meet need in each district) showed high levels of comparably high need in all three wards and as the IMD data shows in paragraph 4.13 each of these wards is within the top five most deprived wards in Kent

Ward	Need Score (as part of KCP analysis)	IMD Rank (out of 290 Kent wards)
Dane Valley (Millmead)	69	5
Margate Central	70	1

(Margate Family Hub)		
Cliftonville West (Northdown Road and Cliftonville Family Hubs)	75	3

- 5.13 Whilst there is undoubtedly high need in all three wards, the data suggests higher need in Margate Central and (in particular) Cliftonville West. Additionally, provision will continue to be within reasonable reach of users of Millmead, and support will be provided to help with the transition to new locations. More broadly this is one possible variant of Option 3, which we do not recommend for the reasons set out at paragraph 6.7 below.
- 5.14 One other point that was drawn out of the consultation responses was the claim that the effect of not recommissioning the Family Hub contracts is that the centres would themselves become unsustainable and therefore close. This was a claim made primarily in relation to Millmead. To reiterate, the decision for the Cabinet Member relates only to the Family Hub service commissioned under the contracts. The centres both run nursery provision that is separate from the commissioned contracts and have the ability to bid for additional funding streams. It has also been confirmed that the Millmead Centre has been offered Healthy Living Centre grant money from Public Health under a different funding stream and this has been accepted by the centre, following which they have confirmed that their operations are sustainable.
- 5.15 Officers began giving due consideration to the emerging themes of feedback during the consultation itself; in particular issues around the cost of bus transport. The independent analysis of the feedback confirmed the themes that emerged from the consultation feedback and they have been addressed in Appendix 3, which is a draft consultation response for consideration and approval by members.

Petitions

- 5.16 A petition entitled 'Save Our Seashells' was submitted with over 6,000 signatures. The petition was subject to debate at Full Council on 7 November 2024.
- 5.17 Full Council resolved to recognise the strength of local feeling that the petition represented and asked the Cabinet Member to take this into consideration as well as the consultation report and a detailed financial assessment before taking the decision. The consultation report is included at Appendix 2 and the financial analysis is within section 7 of this report.
- 5.18 The impact of recommissioning the Family Hub services at Seashells is primarily twofold. Firstly, the required saving of £204,302.16 will need to be made elsewhere. Secondly, it would create an imbalance in the system that would not be considered justifiable were members minded to recommission services at one centre and not the other.

- 5.19 It is worth restating here, that the decision by the Cabinet member relates to the recommissioning of the Family Hub services only. It does not relate to the rest of the services available at the two commissioned centres.

Cabinet Committee Motion

- 5.20 On 21 November 2024 the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee considered the proposed decision. The committee passed a motion proposing that:

That the decision be delayed until the new government funding is confirmed and that there be a temporary extension of contract, subject to it being legally viable; That a valuation of the buildings be undertaken; And, that an update be brought to the next meeting.

- 5.21 In relation to the first part of the motion, officers have repeatedly requested confirmation from the Department for Education civil servants as to the amount of grant money that KCC will be awarded to cover the period April 2025 to March 2026. Officers have also requested confirmation as to what, if any additional delivery requirements and constraints will accompany any additional grant award.
- 5.22 At the time of writing, there has been no further detail provided by the DfE on the specific amount of year 4 grant award money, or the delivery requirements.
- 5.23 If theoretically we were able to utilise grant money to recommission the two contracts at their current value, it is still true that the two centres would be out of line with the rest of the Family Hub service mode in Kent, as adopted within decision 23/00092.
- 5.24 Legal advice has been provided by external legal advisors that confirms it is not possible for KCC to unilaterally extend the current contracts as there is no power to do so.
- 5.25 The committee also requested valuations be made on the KCC Family Hub sites in Margate:
- Margate Family Hub
 - Northdown Road Family Hub
 - Cliftonville Family Hub
- 5.26 Cliftonville Family Hub is not a building owned by KCC and is occupied under a lease that costs circa £54,000 annually including maintenance and utilities.
- 5.27 Officers have undertaken detailed desktop valuations given the time available to provide information. No assessment of building condition has been made, but figures are provided using standard market assessment techniques. Margate Family Hub has been valued at between £250k - £350k based on market rental values for office/community use and up to £450k for residential use, subject to planning restrictions. Similarly, Northdown Road Family Hub has been valued at

£200k - £250k based on market rental values for office/community use and up to £400k for residential use, subject to planning restrictions.

6. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 This section sets out which alternative options have been considered prior to and following the consultation.
- 6.2 Initially five options were considered ahead of the public consultation. Given the overarching policy priority of the Council (see paragraph 2.1 of this report) the primary objective when considering any option was the impact of that option on the target to achieve the £426k saving detailed within the MTFP.
- 6.3 The five options considered ahead of the consultation were as follows:
- Option 1: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts and provide services within existing KCC locations.
 - Option 2: Reprocure significantly reduced contracts.
 - Option 3: Reprocure comparable contracts and close other Family Hub locations in other areas (as this would save building costs).
 - Option 4: Reprocure comparable contracts and reduce services in alternative Family Hub locations (as this would save service costs).
 - Option 5: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts but find alternative standalone locations for alternative provision.
- 6.4 As set out in Section 5, one of the themes that emerges from the consultation feedback is the importance of having these services available for the communities within the familiar, existing settings of Millmead and Seashells. In response to this feedback we have attempted to explore a sixth option:
- Option 6: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts, but instead hire space for KCC Family Hub staff to deliver the services from within the two settings.
- 6.5 Each option is summarised below and, where appropriate, the reasons why an option has been discounted are set out. Options 1 to 5 were all included in the consultation documentation for respondents to review. Option 6 has been explored in response to the consultation feedback.
- 6.6 Option 1: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts and provide services within existing KCC locations, including additional alternative provision at the Sheppey Gateway. This option is the proposal for discussion by members and was the basis for the public consultation. It is expected that this option will achieve the £426k saving within the MTFP. As set out above, services would be available to residents from alternative locations. This option would provide consistency across the entire Family Hub service as it would mean that the whole provision is in-house. The consultation report and EqlA set out the impact on service users of this option, however it is expected that this option has the greatest impact on service users of all of the options considered. Whilst the opening hours do vary at the three alternative centres in Margate and at the Sheppey Gateway, this is not considered to be an issue as the core Family Hub

activity hours outlined above (14 hours a week at Seashells and 9 hours a week at Millmead) can be accommodated within the opening hours of the alternative sites.

- 6.7 Option 2: Reprocure significantly reduced contracts. This option would not achieve the full saving within the MTFP. It would mean that savings would need to be identified elsewhere to make up the shortfall as renewing the contracts, albeit on a reduced basis, would still require revenue expenditure. This option would also lead to a reduction in services available in the two locations, given the reduced contract value, requiring service users to access these services from alternative locations. There would also remain an inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as we would retain the two commissioned sites while the rest of the Family Hub model is delivered in-house. Currently there are 50 Family Hub sites across the county, including within Swale and Thanet, which are staffed by KCC Family Hub practitioners. These centres provide Family Hub services for families in Kent staffed and funded from the CYPE base budget. By providing these two commissioned centres there is an imbalance in the delivery model as these are the only two centres that are externally commissioned. These centres link in with partners such as Health and VCS organisations. However the links to other KCC ICS/Early Help services are not as strong as within the rest of the KCC in-house network. We are also duplicating cost in terms of management (each District in Kent has a KCC District Manager for example), HR, IT and finance support through the commissioning of the two centres. This option would theoretically bring the offer available in line with the rest of the county as a reduced commission would necessarily require a more targeted, and less universal approach. This would be more in line with the rest of the county model following the Family Hub Decision 23/00092.
- 6.8 Option 3: Reprocure comparable contracts and close other Family Hub locations in other areas (this saving building costs). Whilst this option could achieve the full MTFP saving of £426k, it would not meet the saving requirement in the timeframe set out in the MTFP. It would also require alternative savings to be made elsewhere across the network. The Kent Communities Programme and Family Hub Model decisions (both November 2023) set out the network of Family Hub buildings in relation to need, including reduction in the number of children's centres across the county whilst retaining the number of centres required to meet the need in each District. This option would mean the re-procurement of the commissioned contracts, however access to services would be impacted elsewhere given the reduction in buildings to meet the £426k saving. This option would continue the inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as explained in paragraph 6.7. This option would retain the imbalance in service offer across the county and would not align with the more targeted model adopted as a result of decision 23/00092.
- 6.9 Option 4: Reprocure comparable contracts and reduce services in alternative Family Hub locations (this saving service costs). This option was not preferred ahead of consultation because whilst it could achieve the full MTFP saving of £426k, it would likely take much longer to do so. It would also require

alternative savings to be made elsewhere across the network. The Kent Communities Programme and Family Hub Model decisions (both November 2023) set out the network of Family Hub buildings in relation to need, including reduction in the number of children's centres across the county whilst retaining the number of centres required to meet the need in each District. This option would mean the re-procurement of the commissioned contracts, however services would be reduced elsewhere to meet the £426k saving. This option would continue the inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as set out in paragraph 6.7. This option would retain the imbalance in service offer across the county and would not align with the more targeted model adopted as a result of decision 23/00092.

6.10 Option 5: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts but find alternative standalone locations for alternative provision. This would not achieve the full saving within the MTFP. This option would mean that savings would need to be identified elsewhere to make up the shortfall despite the fact the commissioned contracts would not be renewed. This is because revenue would be required to provide the service from other non-KCC locations within the communities. The revenue cost of hiring space locally is estimated at between approximately £130k and £180k per year were we to implement this option for both Seashells and Millmead, or between £65k and £90k for one location. This would represent a pressure on potentially both CYPE and Corporate Landlord budgets. As set out under Option 1, alternative provision is available from within existing KCC buildings (current Family Hubs in the case of Millmead and Sheppey Gateway in relation to Seashells). This option would theoretically bring the offer available in line with the rest of the county as a reduced commission would necessarily require a more targeted, and less universal approach. This would be more in line with the rest of the county model following the Family Hub Decision 23/00092.

6.1 Option 6: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts, but instead hire space for KCC Family Hub staff to deliver the services from within the two settings. This option has been developed in response to the consultation feedback (see Section 5). Many respondents expressed the view that the current settings (Millmead and Seashells) are in themselves important to service users and the communities. There is also the view that the cessation of these two contracts may impact the overall sustainability of the centres. As a response to this feedback officers have sought to understand the opportunity to hire space within the existing centres. This option does not negate the requirement to deliver Family Hub services from the identified alternative locations. This option would mean a shortfall in the saving offered against the MTFP target, as rent would be payable. The following table sets out the approximate rental costs to deliver the number of hours of core service at each of the centres.

Centre	Cost Per Hour	Hours Per Week	Estimated Annual Rental Cost
Seashells	£20	14	£14,560
Millmead	£16	9	£7,488

This is not the preferred option as it would not deliver the full savings as set out in the MTFP. However, this option could be delivered if savings of circa £22k (for instance through unfilled vacancies) were identified so that this option could be delivered within the current financial envelope.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The section above sets out the basic financial implication of each of the options. This section looks at more detail into the financial implications of the proposal.
- 7.2 It is identified earlier in this report that in line with the MTFP which supports the overarching policy position of the Council, across the financial years 24/25 and 25/26 a target of £2m will be saved as part of a 'Review of open access services in light of implementing the Family Hub model.'
- 7.3 The saving achieved under this proposal is the £426k annual cost of the commissioned contracts.
- 7.4 The alternative provision would be delivered within existing Family Hub budgets. In relation to Millmead, there is capacity within the existing alternative proposed Family Hubs to provide the service within the budget envelope for the District (£741k). Of the £741k, the budget for staff salaries within Thanet is £717,400
- 7.5 In respect to Seashells, the alternative provision would be delivered from the Sheppey Gateway. Similarly the provision would be delivered within the budget envelope for Swale (£719k). However, this would be done from the new location of the Sheppey Gateway.
- 7.6 Of the £719k for Swale, £705,600 relates directly to staff salaries. Of this figure, based on the current core Family Hub offer that would be delivered at the Sheppey Gateway we would anticipate £37,353 of the total salary cost would cover the staff time to deliver the service at the Gateway. This would be met from within our existing staffing budget and does not represent an increase or additional pressure.
- 7.7 It is important to note that staffing allocation is not fixed and within the overall budget envelope for the district, staff may move around to deliver services from various locations in the district, as needed. Therefore, if additional need was identified in the future, more staff resource can be diverted to the Gateway (or any other Family Hub location) so long as it stays within the budget envelope for Swale.
- 7.8 Public Health services are also delivered from the Seashells location, outside of the Family Hub commissioned contract. They have been quoted a figure of

£39k to rent space should the commissioned contract not be renewed. They currently have use of space rent free.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 KCC has a statutory duty under Section 5 of the Childcare Act 2006 to provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of children's centres (now known as Family Hubs) to meet local need. Local need is the need of parents, prospective parents and young children in Kent. As a service, we are confident that, if adopted, the proposal we have developed would allow KCC to continue to provide sufficient children's centres (now known as Family Hubs) to meet need in the districts affected.
- 8.2 KCC is also required to have regard to the Sure Start children's centre statutory guidance (April 2013). Chapter 2 of the guidance ('Sufficient children's centres') explains that children's centres and their services should be: accessible to all children and families in the area; within reasonable reach of all families, taking into account distance and the availability of transport; targeted at those with a risk of poor outcomes, based on an analysis of local need; meet needs in terms of opening times and availability of services. Furthermore, local authorities should not close an existing children's centre as part of a reorganisation of provision unless they can demonstrate outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected and will not compromise the duty to have sufficient children's centres to meet need. The guidance explains that the starting point should be a presumption against the closure of children's centre.
- 8.3 The same Act requires Local Authorities in England to undertake consultation when considering changes that would result in a Children's Centre (or Family Hub) ceasing to be a Children's Centre (or Family Hub). The consultation process undertaken in relation to this proposal is detail in Section 4.
- 8.4 KCC has a statutory duty under s. 1 of the Childcare Act 2006 to improve the well-being of young children in Kent and reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to certain specific matters¹. Under s. 17 of the Children Act 1989, KCC also has a general duty to safeguard and promote the needs of children in need in Kent and promote the upbringing of children in need by their families, by providing an appropriate level and range of services.
- 8.5 KCC also has a statutory duty under s. 11 of the Children Act 2004 to make arrangements for ensuring that its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any services provided by another person pursuant to arrangements with KCC are provided having regard to that need.
- 8.6 As a service we consider that the proposals are consistent with KCC continuing to fulfil the above statutory duties and with relevant statutory guidance. We

¹ Physical and mental health and emotional well-being; protection from harm and neglect; education, training and recreation; the contribution made by them to society; and social and economic well-being.

assess that there will continue to be sufficient provision to meet local need on the basis of the analysis set out in Section 4 above including, in particular, the outcome of the needs analysis undertaken as part of the Kent Communities Programme, capacity at the sites from which alternative provision will be delivered to provide additional activities, staff capacity, and local transport analysis. For similar reasons we do not anticipate an adverse impact on outcomes, or on KCC's continued compliance with its wider statutory duties. We anticipate that families who currently access Millmead and Seashells will access provision at alternative sites. Support will be provided to aid families' transition to accessing new locations. Additionally, our broader Family Hub service, including outreach provision, will continue to flex in response to identified need within communities.

- 8.7 In regards to meeting requirements linked to safeguarding for the remainder of the contracts, KCC contract management procedures will be used all the way to the end of the contract period to ensure any statutory safeguarding provisions are upheld.
- 8.8 Staff currently employed by the two providers to deliver activity under the Family Hub contract will be eligible for TUPE transfer within the existing Family Hub service. At the time of writing, KCC HR colleagues have begun discussion with one of the two centres and the other has not fully engaged with the conversation around potential TUPE transfer. Currently the service is holding vacancies across the Family Hub workforce and it is anticipated that staff eligible for TUPE will fill these vacancies should they choose to transfer to KCC.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken in advance of the consultation. The EqIA has been updated following the review of consultation feedback (as outlined in section 5) paying particular attention to any equalities concerns raised within consultation response. The full Equalities Impact Assessment has been included at Appendix 4.
- 9.2 Broadly, the equalities impact of the proposal falls on those residents with the following protected characteristics: gender, age and disability. The full EqIA sets the analysis out in detail for these, and other, protected characteristics. The most significant impact identified is the requirement under the proposals for residents to travel (particularly related to Millmead) further to access services and the impact of attending unfamiliar locations.
- 9.3 Of the six options (all set out in section 6) the highest impact will be felt on Options 1 (the proposal) and Option 5. Options 2, 3, 4 and 6 will have lesser impact on these communities, but that must be balanced by the fact that these options require further actions that will have impacts elsewhere across the county.

- 9.4 Mitigations have been suggested in response to the feedback, including potentially providing reimbursed bus fares for residents accessing a new Family Hub when previously they have used Millmead. Officers will explore the cost and feasibility of providing time-limited support but consider, on the basis of transport analysis, that alternative provision is within reasonable reach and that there is no obligation to provide financial support. Our network of Community Development officer will however be utilised to help residents that require additional support to navigate the transition.
- 9.5 The impacts, when considered alongside the mitigation measures detailed within the EqIA and considered within the overarching policy priority context in which the Council operates, are considered to be justified.
- 9.6 Members are asked to consider the Equalities Impacts on residents with protected characteristics alongside the other relevant factors detailed within this report.

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposal provided within this report, if accepted by the Cabinet Member, would not require a Data Protection Impact Assessment as it would effectively mean the cessation of the contracts when they end on 31 March 2025. However, if an alternative decision is made to reprocure the contracts then a DPIA will be completed subject to any re-procurement exercise.

11. OTHER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There may be additional rental costs associated for the continued use of the Seashells and Millmead centres for KCC's commissioned Public Health services.
- 11.2 The level of need that families who access Seashells and Millmead have is below the threshold for statutory intervention. As such we would not expect the families currently accessing these services to be facing issues that qualify for statutory intervention. We are also clear that the service provision at the alternative locations is sufficient to meet the need locally. As a result, we do not expect to see a rise in referrals to our Front Door service as a result of this decision.

12. RISKS

- 12.1 The table below sets out the key risks in relation to the proposal.

Risk	Mitigation
Capacity at existing Family Hubs to accommodate new service users.	Service managers confirm that capacity exists within the in-house Family Hub network.

Ability of service users that currently attend Millmead to access provision at alternative locations in Margate.	We consider the alternative locations to be within reasonable reach. Community Development officers will help families who require additional support navigate the transition. Potential to offer reimbursed public transport vouchers to service users (subject to further consideration by officers).
Suitability of Sheppey Gateway to accommodate Family Hub services.	Capital investment to make amendments to the Gateway in order to increase safeguarding provision and better accommodate the Family Hub services. This work will be funded by DfE Family Hub grant money and potentially by drawing on S106 contributions and does not represent a pressure on capital budgets.
Capital funding required to make necessary alterations at Sheppey Gateway.	Feasibility study and close budget monitoring to control the cost of works and keep within the available grant funding.
Other services will be impacted as the loss of these contracts may force the centres to close entirely.	<p>Officers' assessment is that the two centres are likely sustainable without the commissioned Family Hub contracts, although we acknowledge there is some risk to other services available at each centre outside of the Family Hub contract. As set out above, each centre operates nursery facilities and in the case of Millmead, Public Health colleagues are investigating the potential for a Healthy Living Centre at the site.</p> <p>At Seashells these services include: Food Bank/Community Pantry Health Visiting (including Developmental Checks and Healthy Child clinics) Introducing Solids Midwifery Clinics Nursery One You Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Drop In Playground Project Seashells Strolls Sensory Hub</p>

	<p>At Millmead these services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Book Library Cost of Living Advice Citizens Advice Service Food Bank/Community Pantry Garden Club Health Visiting (including Developmental Checks and Healthy Child clinics) Midwifery Clinics Nursery One You Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Drop In <p>Advice from colleagues within CYPE is that the market for nursery provision is buoyant and that if the centres were to cease operation as a result of a decision not to renew the Family Hub contracts, then other providers would likely fill the gap given market conditions.</p> <p>The NHS and Public Health services are already available at the alternative locations in Margate and can be accommodated within Sheppey Gateway (with enabling building work) should this be necessary.</p> <p>Other non-health related services could be provided at the alternative locations should the need arise.</p>
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13. GOVERNANCE

13.1 Following any decision by the Cabinet Member, any required activity will be delegated to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services.

13.2 Provisional notice of the contract end has been served to each of the providers, however this has been issued subject to the final decision by the Cabinet Member.

- 13.3 Should members recommend renewal of the contracts, then the re-procurement will take in excess of six months. The existing contracts will be extended, for the period of re-procurement only.

14. CONCLUSIONS

- 14.1 Officers have explored a proposal which would mean we do not renew the Commissioned Family Hub contracts when the current contracts come to their end on 31 March 2025.
- 14.2 A public consultation sought the views of service users and partners on the proposal and the suggested alternative arrangements to provide Family Hub services.
- 14.3 Members are asked to consider the balance of the assessed impact of this proposal, the response to the consultation and the overarching priority policy position.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked to:

APPROVE the proposal to not re-commission the Family Hub services that are currently provided at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE any activity requiring capital spend as set out in the report to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, and Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services to explore the option for Kent County Council to deliver outreach Family Hub services from Seashells and Millmead centres when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services, to take necessary actions, including but not limited to finalising, entering into, concluding or managing any relevant contracts and other legal agreements, as required to implement this decision.

15. Background Documents

Appendix 1: Service Offer Comparison
Appendix 2: Consultation Report
Appendix 3: Draft Responses to Consultation Feedback
Appendix 4: Equalities Impact Assessment

16. Contact details

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Mrs Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

DECISION NUMBER:

24/00093

For publication [Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]

Key decision: YES

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

- a) result in savings or expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000); or
- b) be significant in terms of its effects on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions – which will include those decisions that involve:
 - the adoption or significant amendment of major strategies or frameworks;
 - significant service developments, significant service reductions, or significant changes in the way that services are delivered, whether County-wide or in a particular locality.

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Commissioned Family Hub Contracts

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services I agree to:

APPROVE the proposal to not re-commission the Family Hub services that are currently provided at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE any activity requiring capital spend as set out in the report to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, and Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services to explore the option for Kent County Council to deliver outreach Family Hub services from Seashells and Millmead centres when the current contracts reach the end of their term on 31 March 2025.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services, to take necessary actions, including but not limited to finalising, entering into, concluding or managing any relevant contracts and other legal agreements, as required to implement this decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

The financial challenges facing all local authorities is critical. KCC needs to deliver £108.8m (2024-25 published Medium Term Financial Plan) of transformation and efficiency savings over the next two years. Our work to meet these challenges has already meant changes to services across the county.

In October 2023 the KCC Cabinet adopted '[Securing Kent's Future](#)' which set out the scale of the financial challenge and the approach to tackling it. The financial situation means that we have needed to adopt a Recovery Plan which sets out how we plan to meet the challenge. A key part of the Recovery Plan is to make 'further savings and generate income through the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)'. The MTFP sets out precisely what savings are needed to balance the budget and where those savings could be made.

Background

In November 2023 KCC Cabinet took a [decision](#) to implement the Family Hub model across the County. At the time, that included transformation and efficiency plans for 56 Family Hub locations across Kent not including the two Independent centres, Millmead and Seashells (in line with the Kent Communities Programme [decision](#), also from November 2023).

In November 2023 KCC Cabinet took decision 23/00092 to implement the Family Hub model across the County. At the time, that included transformation and efficiency plans for 56 Family Hub locations across Kent not including the two Independent centres, Millmead and Seashells (in line with the Kent Communities Programme decision 23/00101, also from November 2023).

Due to the fact that Millmead and Seashells Family Hub services are both externally commissioned, they were not included within the scope of the Kent Communities Programme analysis.

There has been a sequence of decisions that deliver savings against what was the previous Open Access (now Family Hub) budget as set out in the MTFP (more detail in the next section). Firstly decisions were made that considered the Family Hub model itself and the buildings used to deliver the services. These decisions have been implemented, delivering savings through model redesign, staff restructure and building rationalisation. With the commissioned contracts ending in March 2025, the next consideration in sequence, as we seek to make the remaining saving outlined in the MTFP, is whether to renew these contracts or whether the service provision can be delivered differently, thus saving money for the Council.

The contracts for the two Independent Children's Centres were tendered and awarded in 2020 for a period of 12 months. The services were subject to Directly Awarded contracts from April 2021 to March 2022 under Covid-19 guidance. A Key Decision (21/00086) was taken on 10 November 2021 to directly award contracts to the existing providers for a further year until 31 March 2023. A further Key Decision (22/00108) facilitated an additional 12 month extension, meaning the contracts ended on 31 March 2024.

To minimise duplication of provision and to ensure that future specifications complimented the Family Hub model being developed, the procurement of new commissioned Children Centres was delayed. In 2024, a further Direct Award was made to the two centres as Family Hubs. The terms and conditions of this contract were continued from the previous contract and require a six month notice period. Therefore the current contracts end 31 March 2025. In July 2024 indicative notice of the end of the contracts was given to each provider, subject to the outcome of the consultation and any resultant Key Decision.

Further extension of these contracts is not possible, other than to cover the period of procurement for new contracts, subject to the decision.

It is therefore proposed that KCC will not re-procure these two contracts when they come to their end on 31 March 2025. The Family Hub service will be delivered from within existing Family Hubs in Margate as an alternative to the Millmead Centre. In relation to the Seashells Centre a Family Hub service will be offered from the Sheerness Gateway. Some minor investment may be required at the Gateway to enhance safeguarding provisions given the increased number of children and babies

that may be in attendance.

Financial Implications:

In accordance with the Cabinet decision to support the recommendations in the paper Securing Kent's Future on 5 October 2023, the approach set out makes sure that, in line with the Recovery 'further savings and income for the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)' are realised.

The decision to not reprocore the two contracts will save £426k annually.

Minor capital investment will be required at the Gateway site to facilitate safeguarding and the appropriate use of the space for the Family Hub activities. It is planned that this is funded from the Capital grant award from the DfE to facilitate the Family Hub transformation.

Provider	Area	Contract End Date	Contract value per Annum
Millmead	Margate	31/03/2025	£222,127.44
Seashells	Sheerness	31/03/2025	£204,302.16
Totals			£426,429.60

Legal Implications:

KCC has a statutory duty under Section 5 of the Childcare Act 2006 to provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of children's centres (now known as Family Hubs) to meet local need. Local need is the need of parents, prospective parents and young children in Kent. As a service, we are confident that, if adopted, the proposal we have developed would allow KCC to continue to provide sufficient children's centres (now known as Family Hubs) to meet need in the districts affected.

KCC is also required to have regard to the Sure Start children's centre statutory guidance (April 2013). Chapter 2 of the guidance ('Sufficient children's centres') explains that children's centres and their services should be: accessible to all children and families in the area; within reasonable reach of all families, taking into account distance and the availability of transport; targeted at those with a risk of poor outcomes, based on an analysis of local need; meet needs in terms of opening times and availability of services. Furthermore, local authorities should not close an existing children's centre as part of a reorganisation of provision unless they can demonstrate outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected and will not compromise the duty to have sufficient children's centres to meet need. The guidance explains that the starting point should be a presumption against the closure of children's centre.

The same Act requires that Local Authorities in England to undertake consultation when considering changes that would result in a Children's Centre (or Family Hub) ceasing to be a Children's Centre (or Family Hub). The consultation process undertaken in relation to this proposal is detail in Section 4.

KCC has a statutory duty under s. 1 of the Childcare Act 2006 to improve the well-being of young children in Kent and reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to certain specific matters¹. Under s. 17 of the Children Act 1989, KCC also has a general duty to safeguard and promote the needs of children in need in Kent and promote the upbringing of children in need by their families, by providing an appropriate level and range of services.

KCC also has a statutory duty under s. 11 of the Children Act 2004 to make arrangements for

ensuring that its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any services provided by another person pursuant to arrangements with KCC are provided having regard to that need.

The need analysis above demonstrates that the children and families that access both Seashells and Millmead are considered to be children in need (within the definition of the Children's Act 1989).

As set out above, the modelling which informed the Kent Communities Programme means that Family Hub locations are designed to serve the communities with highest need. The analysis also demonstrates that the hours of provision delivered under the contracts can be provided at the alternative sites proposed. The Family Hub model itself seeks to improve outcomes for our children and families. With that in mind, outcomes for these children and families are considered not to be adversely affected.

In regards to meeting the requirements linked to safeguarding for the remainder of the contracts, KCC contract management procedures will be used all the way to the end of the contract period to ensure any statutory safeguarding provisions are upheld.

Staff currently employed by the two providers to deliver activity under the Family Hub contract will be eligible for TUPE transfer within the existing Family Hub service. At the time of writing, KCC HR colleagues have begun discussion with one of the two centres and the other has not fully engaged with the conversation around potential TUPE transfer. Currently the service is holding vacancies across the Family Hub workforce and it is anticipated that staff eligible for TUPE will fill these vacancies should they choose to transfer to KCC.

Equalities implications

An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken in advance of the consultation. The EqIA has been updated following the review of consultation feedback (as outlined in section 5) paying particular attention to any equalities concerns raised within consultation response. The full Equalities Impact Assessment has been included at Appendix 4.

Broadly, the equalities impact of the proposal falls on those residents with the following protected characteristics: gender, age and disability. The full EqIA sets the analysis out in detail for these, and other, protected characteristics. The most significant impact identified is the requirement under the proposals for residents to travel (particularly related to Millmead) further to access services and the impact of attending unfamiliar locations.

Of the six options (all set out in section 6) the highest impact will be felt on Options 1 (the proposal) and Option 5. Options 2, 3, 4 and 6 will have lesser impact on these communities, but that must be balanced by the fact that these options require further actions that will have impacts elsewhere across the county.

Mitigations have been suggested in response to the feedback, including potentially providing subsidised bus fares for residents accessing a new Family Hub when previously they have used Millmead. Our network of Community Development officer will also be utilised to help residents that require additional support to navigate the transition.

The impacts, when considered alongside the mitigation measures detailed within the EqIA and considered within the overarching policy priority context in which the Council operates, are considered to be justified.

Data Protection implications

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be completed prior to any re-procurement exercise

subject to the decision taken

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

On 21 November 2024 the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee considered the proposed decision.

The committee passed a motion proposing that:

That the decision be delayed until the new government funding is confirmed and that there be a temporary extension of contract, subject to it being legally viable;

That a valuation of the buildings be undertaken;

And, that an update be brought to the next meeting.

New Government Funding

In relation to the first part of the motion, officers have repeatedly requested confirmation from the Department for Education civil servants as to the amount of grant money that KCC will be awarded to cover the period April 2025 to March 2026. Officers have also requested confirmation as to what, if any additional delivery requirements and constraints will accompany any additional grant award.

At the time of writing, there has been no further detail provided by the DfE on the specific amount of year 4 grant award money, or the delivery requirements.

Legal Viability of Extension

Legal advice has been provided by external legal advisors that confirms it is not possible for KCC to unilaterally extend the current contracts as there is no power to do so.

Building Valuations

The committee also requested valuations be made on the KCC Family Hub sites in Margate:

1. Margate Family Hub
2. Northdown Road Family Hub
3. Cliftonville Family Hub

Cliftonville Family Hub is not a building owned by KCC and is occupied under a lease that costs circa £54k per year.

Desktop valuations have been provided by officers within Infrastructure for both Margate Family Hub and Northdown Road Family Hub.

Margate Family Hub: £250k - £450k (depending on use class)

Northdown Road Family Hub: £200k - £400k (depending on use class)

Conclusion

The information provided in response to the Cabinet Committee motion will inform any future decision by the Cabinet Member.

An update on these queries will be provided to the next CYPE Cabinet Committee meeting.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

The six options considered are as follows: Page 83

- Option 1: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts and provide services within existing KCC locations (the decision proposal).
- Option 2: Reprocure significantly reduced contracts.
- Option 3: Reprocure comparable contracts and close other Family Hub locations in other areas (as this would save building costs).
- Option 4: Reprocure comparable contracts and reduce services in alternative Family Hub locations (as this would save service costs).
- Option 5: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts but find alternative standalone locations for alternative provision.
- Option 6: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts, but instead hire space for KCC Family Hub staff to deliver the services from within the two settings.

The options are set out in detail within the full decision report. The table below summarises the reason each option has been discounted.

Option	Discounted because
1	Not discounted – this is the decision proposal.
2	Would not achieve the full MTFP saving agreed by Council. Would require cuts elsewhere to areas that have already been cut. Would retain inconsistency in our delivery model.
3	Would not achieve the full MTFP saving agreed by Council within the financial year. Would require cuts elsewhere to areas that have already been cut. Would retain inconsistency in our delivery model.
4	Would not achieve the full MTFP saving agreed by Council within the financial year. Would require cuts elsewhere to areas that have already been cut. Would retain inconsistency in our delivery model.
5	Would not achieve the full MTFP saving as agreed by Council.
6	Would not achieve the full MTFP saving as agreed by Council.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None.



17/1/2025

.....
signed

.....
date

Appendix 1: Service Offer Comparison

Part 1: Millmead

The Family Hub services on offer at Millmead under this commissioned contract which would no longer run at Millmead include: *booking or referral required.	The sessions available at Cliftonville Family Hub include (as at June 2024 and subject to further timetable amendments): *booking or referral required.	The sessions available at Margate Family Hub include (as at June 2024 and subject to further timetable amendments): * booking or referral required.	The sessions that will be available from Northdown Road Family Hub by the end of March 2025 include: *booking or referral required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Breastfeeding Clinic • Breast Pump Hire • Cygnet* • Healthy Baby Group • Introducing Solids Workshop • Little Explorers • Little Talkers* • Stay and Play • Triple P Parenting Course* • You and Your Baby* • 1-2-1 Family Work* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Beyond the Page* • Breast Pump Scheme* • Cygnet Course* • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Community Pantry (from September 2024) • Healthy Child Clinic • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • My First Year and Me • One You • Sensory Room • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • 1-2-1 Family Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Breastfeeding Support Group • Breast Pump Scheme* • Citizens Advice Clinic • Cost of Living Support Group • Cygnet Course* • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Groups and Services for 8-19yr olds (25yrs with SEND) • Health Visiting and Wellbeing Reviews • Infant Feeding Clinic • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Explorers • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • Midwifery Services • My First Year and Me • One You • Sensory Room • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • 1-2-1 Family Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Breastfeeding Support Group • Breast Pump Scheme* • Citizens Advice Clinic • Community Café Space • Cost of Living Support Group • Cygnet Course* • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Groups and Services for 8-19yr olds (25yrs with SEND) • Healthy Child Clinic • Introducing Solids Workshops • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Explorers • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • Midwifery Services • Outdoor and Indoor Sports Hall/Courts • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • Young Lives Foundation • 1-2-1 Family Work

Part 2: Seashells

<p>The services on offer at Seashells under this commissioned contract which would no longer run at Seashells include: * booking or referral required.</p>	<p>Subject to confirmation of a specific timetable, we would expect to offer the following services at the Sheppey Gateway site for residents: * booking or referral required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Baby and Toddler Sing and Sign • Breastfeeding Clinic • Breast Pump Hire • Little Talkers* • Sensory Hub • Solihull Antenatal Class • Solihull Parenting* • Stay and Play • Triple P Parenting Course* • 1-2-1 Family Work* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Birth Registrations (Library and Registration Service) • Citizens Advice Clinic • Infant Feeding Support • Little Talkers* • Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Drop In • Playground Creative Play (Libraries and Registration Service) • Stay and Play • Triple P Parenting Course* • 1-2-1 Family Work



KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SEASHELLS AND MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB CONSULTATION WRITTEN REPORT

PREPARED BY LAKE MARKET RESEARCH



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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Background

Millmead and Seashells are the only two externally commissioned Family Hubs in Kent. The rest of the Family Hub provision is run directly by KCC. KCC are proposing not to get new contracts in place and instead provide services that people can access from other locations, ensuring a consistent approach in all areas of Kent.

This consultation is about the future of two commissioned Family Hubs contracts in Kent: Millmead Family Hub in Margate and Seashells Family Hub in Sheerness. Currently, Kent County Council (KCC) pay for external providers to run Family Hub services in these locations and their contracts are due to end on 31 March 2025. This consultation focuses only on the commissioned Family Hub services and does not include any of the other activities such as the nursery provision, food banks or multiple other services at each site.

KCC must decide whether to put new contracts for delivery of Family Hub services in place (re-procure the contracts) or not. If KCC do get new contracts in place, they would be required to run a new process which would be open to the current providers and any new providers to bid for the contracts.

Consultation process

On 30 July 2024, a public consultation was launched, lasting just under 8 weeks until 22 September 2024. The consultation invited responses from all those interested in the proposals, including those that use / have used family hub services at either of the two commissioned family hubs.

Feedback was captured via a consultation questionnaire which was available on the KCC engagement website (www.kent.gov.uk/familyhubsconsultation). Hard copies of the consultation material, including the questionnaire, were made available at Millmead and Seashells Family Hubs were also available on request. Consultation material and the webpage included details of how people could contact KCC to ask a question, request hard copies or an alternative format. A Word version of the questionnaire was provided for people who did not wish to complete the online version. An easy read version of the consultation document and questionnaire was also available.

To raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation, the following was undertaken:

- Email sent to stakeholders.
- Email sent to those registered with Let's talk Kent (KCC's engagement platform) who had expressed an interest in being kept informed of consultations about 'children and families' and 'schools and education' in Thanet and Swale (2,152 people).
- Additional email sent to Let's talk Kent participants about the drop-in sessions.
- Media release issued: [Have your say on the future of commissioned Family Hub services - News & Features - Kent County Council](#).
- Promoted via social media on KCC's corporate channels (X, Facebook, Instagram, Nextdoor, LinkedIn).
- Article in KCC's residents e-newsletter.

- Posters and promotional postcards available at Millmead Family Hub and other local hubs (Cliftonville Family Hub, Margate Family Hub, and Northdown Road Family Hub).
- Posters and promotional postcards available at Seashells Family Hub and Sheppey Gateway.
- Information added to relevant pages on kent.gov.uk.

There were also some face-to-face engagement events:

- Millmead Family Hub
- Margate Family Hub
- Seashells Family Hub
- Sheppey Gateway

A summary of interaction and supply of consultation material can be found below:

- 6,257 visits to the consultation webpage by 5,627 visitors during the consultation period.
- Organic posts via KCC's corporate channels had a reach of 28,881 on Facebook and Instagram. There were 48,909 impressions on X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Instagram. Reach refers to the number of people who saw a post at least once and impressions are the number of times the post is displayed on someone's screen. The posts generated 725 clicks through to the consultation webpage. (Not all social media platforms report the same statistics).
- The number of document downloads from the website are show in the table below:

Document name	Downloads / views
Consultation document	632
Equality Impact Assessment	145
Residents questionnaire (Word version)	47
Millmead Consultation Document - Easy Read version	38
Seashells Consultation Document - Easy read version	29
Seashells Consultation Questionnaire - Easy read version	9
Millmead Consultation Questionnaire - Easy read version	5

Points to note

- Consultees were invited to comment on each aspect of the consultation and were given the choice of which questions they wanted to answer / provide comments. The number of consultees providing an answer is shown on each chart / table featured in this report.
- 672 consultees chose to answer questions regarding Seashells Family Hub in Sheerness, Swale, and 433 consultees chose to answer questions regarding Millmead Family Hub in Margate, Thanet. 99 consultees chose to answer questions about both Family Hubs.
- Consultees were given a number of opportunities to provide feedback in their own words throughout the questionnaire. This report includes examples of verbatims received (as written by those contributing) but all free text feedback is being reviewed and considered by KCC.
- This report includes feedback from residents and professionals / organisations and the consultation contained a separate questionnaire for each stakeholder group. Feedback for each stakeholder group has been reported separately.
- Participation in consultations is self-selecting and this needs to be considered when interpreting responses.
- Response to this consultation does not wholly represent the individuals or stakeholders the consultation sought feedback from and is reliant on awareness and propensity to take part based on the topic and interest.
- Additional feedback received during the consultation in the form of emails, letters and verbal conversations at drop-in events has been summarised and is available within the appendices.
- KCC was responsible for the design, promotion, and collection of the consultation responses. Lake Market Research was appointed to conduct an independent analysis of feedback.

Profile of **resident consultees** responding

1,016 consultees took part in the consultation questionnaire.

The table below shows the profile of consultees responding to the consultation questionnaire only. The proportion who left this question blank or indicated they did not want to disclose this information has been included as applicable.

RESPONDING AS...	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
A Kent resident	887	87%
On behalf of a friend or relative	25	2%
A resident from somewhere else	3	0%
Other	18	2%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	83	8%

GENDER	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Male	134	13%
Female	653	64%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	229	23%

GENDER SAME AS BIRTH	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	760	75%
No	1	0%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	255	25%

AGE	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
0-15	21	2
16-24	57	6
25-34	275	27
35-49	256	25
50-59	74	7
60-64	40	4

AGE	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
65-74	45	4
75-84	19	2
85 & over	2	0.2%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	227	22%

PRESENCE OF CHILDREN	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
I/we have children	641	63%
- 0-1 year old	225	22%
- 2-5 years old	319	31%
- 6-10 years olds	187	18%
- 11-19 years old	177	17%
I am / we are expecting a child	62	6%
I/we do not have children	79	8%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	234	23%

RELIGION / BELIEF	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	228	22%
- Christian	185	18%
- Hindu	5	0.5%
- Jewish	3	0.3%
- Muslim	11	1%
- Sikh	2	0.2%
- Other	15	1%
No	502	49%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	286	28%

DISABILITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	186	18%
- Physical impairment	71	7%
- Sensory impairment (hearing, sight or both)	17	2%
- Longstanding illness or health condition, such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease, diabetes or epilepsy	82	8%
- Mental health condition	87	9%
- Learning disability	39	4%
- Other	10	1%
No	553	54%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	277	27%

CARER	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	178	18%
No	569	56%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	269	26%

ETHNICITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
White English	665	65%
White Scottish	5	0.5%
White Welsh	4	0.4%
White Northern Irish	3	0.3%
White Irish	6	1%
White Irish Traveller	3	0.3%
Asian or Asian British Indian	5	0.5%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	5	0.5%
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	3	0.3%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	10	1%
Mixed White & Black African	6	1%
Mixed White & Asian	5	0.5%

ETHNICITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Black or Black British Caribbean	1	0.1%
Black or Black British African	9	1%
Other	41	4%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	245	24%

SEXUALITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Heterosexual/Straight	686	68%
Bi/Bisexual	29	3%
Gay man	3	0.3%
Gay woman/Lesbian	10	1%
Other	3	0.3%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	285	28%

Profile of **professionals / organisation** consultees responding

95 consultees took part in the consultation questionnaire.

The table below shows the profile of consultees responding to the consultation questionnaire only. The proportion who left this question blank or indicated they did not want to disclose this information has been included as applicable.

RESPONDING AS...	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Community-based midwifery staff	3	3%
Health Visiting staff	12	13%
Staff from another health-related organisation	10	11%
As any other professional working in an organisation that supports children, young people or families	22	23%
On behalf of a Parish / Town / Borough / District Council in an official capacity	3	3%
As a Parish / Town / Borough / District / County Councillor	3	3%
On behalf of a charity, voluntary or community sector organisation (VCS)	17	18%
Other (current / previous volunteers / employees at Family Hubs, work in public sector)	11	12%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	14	15%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESIDENT FEEDBACK – SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB

- 672 consultees chose to answer questions about the Seashells Family Hub. Just under two thirds of consultees answering (63%) indicated they use services at Seashells Family Hub. 20% do not currently services at the Hub but have done so in the past; 16% of consultees answering have not used services at the Hub.
- When asked to detail the impact that accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on themselves and / or their family, the common themes reported are as follows:
 - A desire for Seashells Family Hub not to close as it an integral part of the local community / used by many families and closing it would have a huge impact (32%)
 - The Sheppey Gateway will not be able to offer the same level of service / its not able to house all of the services offered at the Seashells Family Hub (25%)
 - The Seashells Family Hub is invaluable for the children who use it in terms of their development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising opportunities (23%)
 - The staff at Seashells are welcoming and supportive / concerned they will lose their jobs (21%)
 - Seashells offers key support to parents / babies / new mums and is invaluable for parents raising their children (17%)
- When asked to comment on the Equality Analysis put forward for the Seashells Family Hub proposal and if there was anything that should be considered relating to equality and diversity, the common themes reported are as follows:
 - Reiterated points / reasons consultees believe the Seashells Family Hub should not close (35%) and the Sheppey Gateway should not be used (23%)
 - Perceptions that Seashells Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality and is an environment where everyone is welcome (20%)
 - Seashells Family Hub serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived residents / areas and that the proposed move discriminates against these demographic groups / people living in Sheerness (14%).

RESIDENT FEEDBACK – MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB

- 433 consultees chose to answer questions about the Millmead Family Hub. Just under three quarters of consultees answering (73%) indicated they use services at Millmead Family Hub. 18% do not currently services at the Hub but have done so in the past; 10% of consultees answering have not used services at the Hub.
- When asked to detail the impact that accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on themselves and / or their family, the common themes reported are as follows:

- Millmead Family Hub is local / accessible / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access and that many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to afford the bus / alternatives are uphill / inaccessible to mums on foot (53%)
- Millmead Family Hub must not be closed / it's a much-needed resource / relied upon by many families / offering lots to local families and believing closure would be devastating (37%)
- Perceptions lots of deprived children attend Millmead Family Hub / it is invaluable for their development / enjoyment / wellbeing / socialising skills (22%)
- Staff at Millmead Family Hub are welcoming / supportive / they trust them and they / their children have developed close relationships with them (16%)
- When asked to comment on the Equality Analysis put forward for the Millmead Family Hub proposal and if there was anything that should be considered relating to equality and diversity, the common themes reported are as follows:
 - Reiterated points / reasons consultees believe the Millmead Family Hub should not close (36%)
 - Requests for considerations for those who cannot use or pay for transport (20%)

PROFESSIONAL / ORGANISATION FEEDBACK – SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB

- When asked to detail the impact that accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on children, young people and families, the most common themes expressed are consistent with feedback received from the residents component of the consultation. They include:
 - Concern about leaving a well-established place / environment that is well used and trusted by local community, which is particularly important in an area of deprivation
 - Concern services and available parking offered at Sheppey Gateway would be more limited than at Seashells Family Hub / valued services would reduce
 - Concern about appropriateness of Sheppey Gateway in terms of safety / comfort for its users, location and sharing the building with other organisations / services
- When asked to describe the impact they think accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on other services and organisations, the most common themes expressed include the following:
 - Concern for impact on Seashells Family Hub services / other services currently in Seashells Family Hub building resulting in further loss of services and inability for services to work together
 - Concern for impact on residents / service users needing to use other statutory services / health and care services / other services that are already stretched

- When asked to express any views on the equality analysis undertaken and whether there is anything else that should be considered, the most common themes expressed include the following:
 - Concern about the impact on travelling to Sheppey Gateway / physical access to Sheppey Gateway in terms of public transport / users with disabilities
 - Concern that proposals do not consider the relationship and trust that users have with the Seashells Family Hub / services offered / staff

PROFESSIONAL / ORGANISATION FEEDBACK – MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB

- When asked to detail the impact that accessing services at a different Family Hub, like Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road, would have on children, young people and families, the most common themes expressed are consistent with feedback received from the residents component of the consultation. They include:
 - Concern about leaving a well-established place / environment that is well used and trusted by local community, which is particularly important in an area of deprivation
 - Concern current users / residents local to Millmead Family Hub would not travel to visit other centres / services due to lack of available income to travel / deprivation / having to use public transport to get there
 - Concern about impact on local area / already an area that has lost services / is in need of Millmead Family Hub / an area of significant deprivation
- When asked to describe the impact they think accessing services at a different Family Hub, like Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road, would have on other services and organisations, the most common themes expressed include the following:
 - Concern for impact on Millmead Family Hub services / other services currently in Millmead Family Hub building resulting in further loss of services and inability for services to work together
 - Concern for impact on using other statutory services / health and care services / other services already stretched
- When asked to express any views on the equality analysis undertaken and whether there is anything else that should be considered, the dominant theme expressed is concerns for access to alternative services / alternative hubs / family hubs / children's centres¹ amongst vulnerable groups.

¹ Verbatim comments refer to Family Hubs and Children's Centres. Children's centres now operate within Family Hubs.

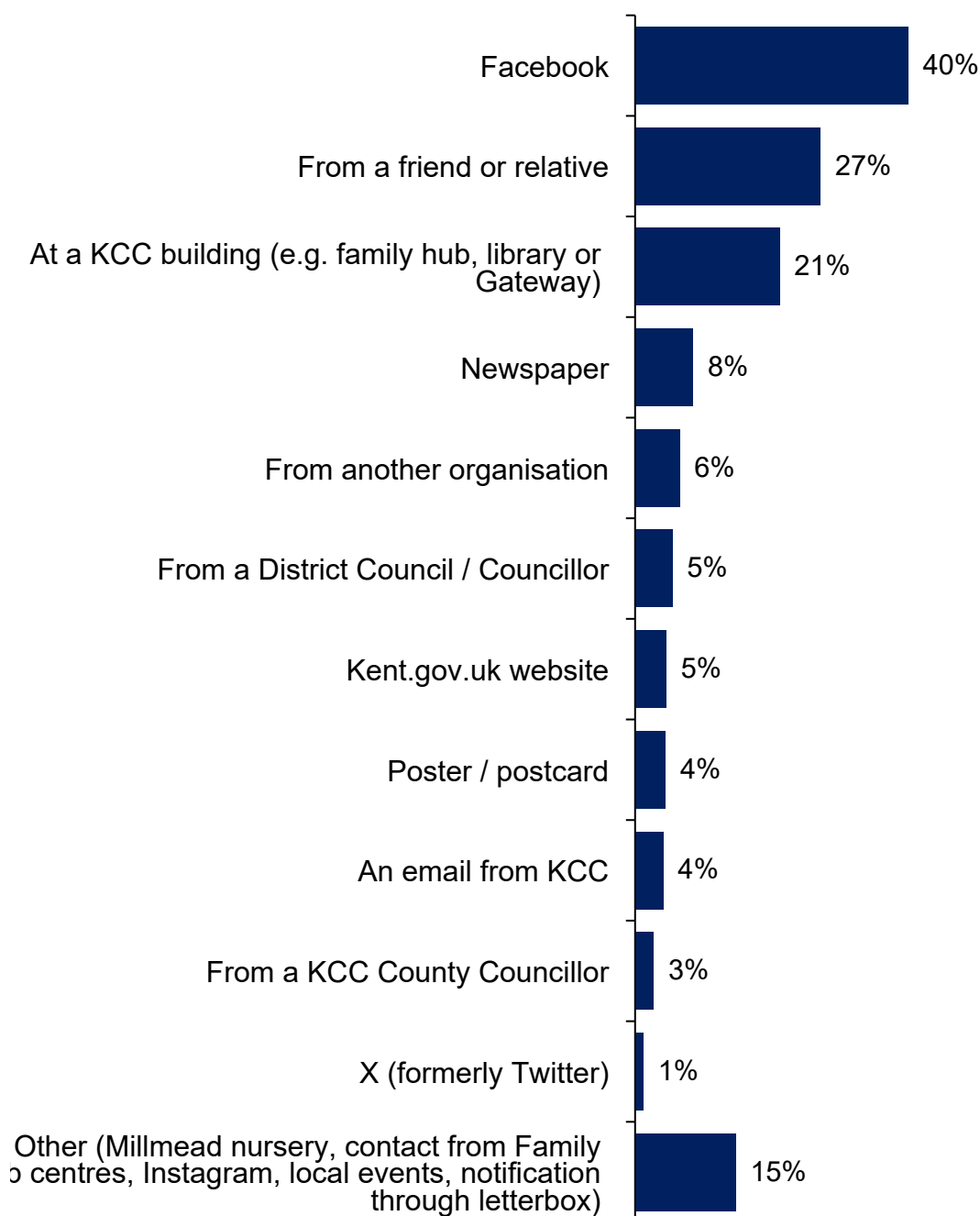
RESIDENT FEEDBACK

CONSULTATION AWARENESS

- The most common route to finding out about the consultation is via Facebook (40%), followed by a friend or relative (27%) and a KCC building (e.g. family hub, library or Gateway) (21%).

How did you find out about this consultation?

Base: all answering (926), consultees had the option to select more than one response.



SUPPORTING DATA	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Facebook	367	40%
From a friend or relative	249	27%
At a KCC building (e.g. family hub, library or Gateway)	194	21%
Newspaper	78	8%
From another organisation	60	6%
From a District Council / Councillor	50	5%
Kent.gov.uk website	42	5%
Poster / postcard	41	4%
An email from KCC	38	4%
From a KCC County Councillor	25	3%
X (formerly Twitter)	11	1%
Other (Millmead nursery, contact from Family Hubs, Instagram, local events, notification through letterbox)	135	15%

There are significant differences by demographic subgroup and current users and non-users of the two Family Hubs:

- A higher proportion of female consultees found out through Facebook (44%) compared to male consultees (22%).
- A higher proportion of consultees aged 25-34 found out at a KCC building (e.g. family hub, library or Gateway) (26%) compared to consultees aged 35-49 (24%) and consultees aged 50 and over (15%).
- A higher proportion of consultees who use services at Seashells Family Hub or have used the Hub in the past found out via Facebook (51% / 49%) compared to non-users (20%).
- A higher proportion of consultees who use services at Millmead Family Hub found out at a KCC building ((e.g. family hub, library or Gateway) (34%) compared to consultees who have used the Hub in the past (14%) or non-users (10%).

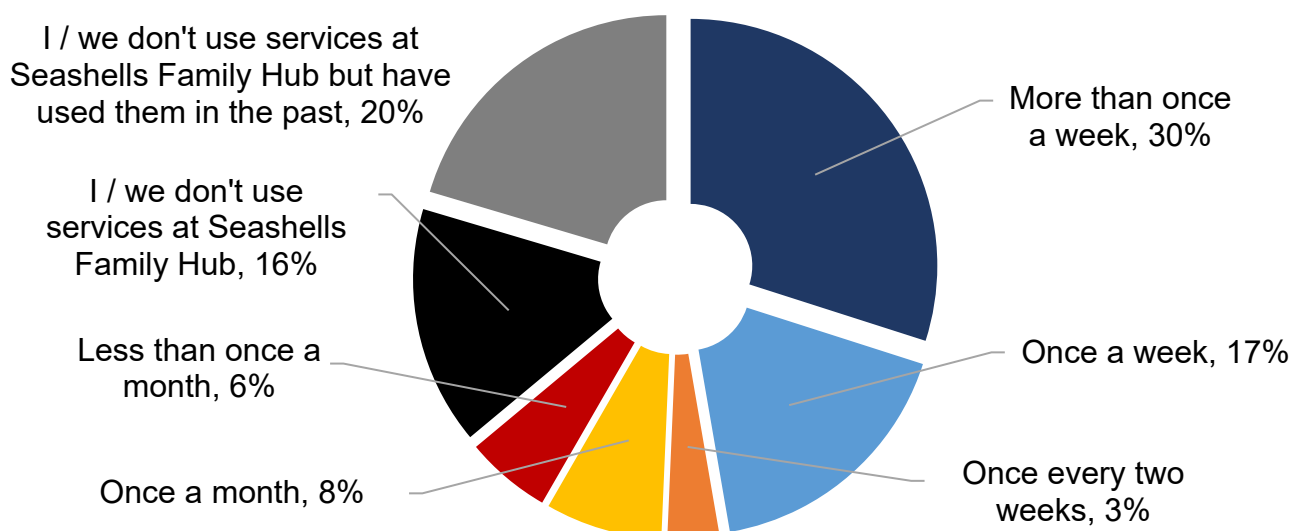
RESIDENT FEEDBACK

SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB

This section of the report summarises responses to the questions posed surrounding the Seashells Family Hub in Sheerness, Swale, as reported by consultees. 672 consultees chose to answer questions regarding this Hub.

FREQUENCY OF USING SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB

- Just under two thirds of consultees answering (63%) indicated they use services at Seashells Family Hub. 47% use services there at least once a week (30% more than once a week, 17% once a week).
- A fifth of consultees answering (20%) do not currently services at Seashells Family Hub but have done so in the past. 16% of consultees answering have not used services at the Hub.



SUPPORTING DATA TABLE	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Net: Use Seashells currently (any frequency)		64%
More than once a week	176	30%
Once a week	102	17%
Once every two weeks	20	3%
Once a month	45	8%
Less than once a month	33	6%
I / we don't use services at Seashells Family Hub	92	16%
I / we don't use services at Seashells Family Hub but have used them in the past	120	20%

There are significant differences in the proportion who currently use services at the Seashells Family Hub by age group: a higher proportion of consultees aged 25-34 and 35-49 currently use services at the Hub (74% and 68%) compared to consultees aged 50 & over (47%).

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ACCESSING FAMILY HUB SERVICES AT THE SHEPPEY GATEWAY ON FAMILY

- Consultees were asked to detail the impact they think accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on themselves and / or their family, in their own words.
- For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. These are reported in the table below.
- 75% of consultees who chose to answer questions about the Seashells Family Hub provided a comment at this question.
- The most common theme noted is a desire for Seashells Family Hub not to close as it an integral part of the local community / used by many families and closing it would have a huge impact (32%).
- Just under a quarter of consultees answering (23%) commented that the Seashells Family Hub is invaluable for the children who use it in terms of their development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising opportunities. 21% commented the staff at Seashells are welcoming and supportive / concerned they will lose their jobs. 17% commented that Seashells offers key support to parents / babies / new mums and is invaluable for parents raising their children.
- A quarter of consultees answering (25%) noted they believe the Gateway will not be able to offer the same level of service / it's not able to house all of the services offered at Seashells. 15% of consultees believe the move to Gateway will encounter safeguarding issues for the children who use it as it is on the high street / accessible to passers-by / non-users.
- There are also some concerns over access to services at the Sheppey Gateway with 13% of consultees commenting that the Seashells Family Hub is local / accessible on foot for all (including those with pushchairs / users with a disability) and many wouldn't be able to access other centres nor afford to use transport. 13% also commented that Seashells has a free accessible car park and the Shepway Gateway does not.

Please tell us what impact you think accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on you / or your family? Base: all answering (505)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Seashells must not close: vital to / an integral part of the community, used by many families; closing it would have a significant impact	160	32%
Gateway will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at Seashells	126	25%
Seashells is invaluable for children; their development, enjoyment, wellbeing, socialising, soft play, nursery	114	23%
Seashells / the staff are welcoming, supportive, make you feel part of a family / concern staff will lose their jobs	105	21%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Seashells offers key support to (new) mums / parents and babies, postpartum support and invaluable for parents raising their children	85	17%
Gateway will have safeguarding issues; for children, being on the high street / possibility of passers-by / non-users / strangers walking in	76	15%
Seashells is local, accessible on foot, with pushchairs / for the disabled; many wouldn't be able to access other centres, nor afford to use transport	68	13%
Seashells has a free accessible car park, Gateway does not	65	13%
Seashells provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation	64	13%
Seashells is a warm, safe, secure, trusted, reliable space	60	12%
Gateway is not family friendly	60	12%
If Seashells closed, we / many would be unable to attend anywhere else	51	10%
Seashells is good for mental health support, has mental health session	50	10%
Gateway is used by too many other services: banking, library, clubs	48	10%
Seashells is a lifeline to many	42	8%
Seashells has outdoor space / we have no garden / children can play outside	40	8%
Seashells is an information resource / they provide advice and signposting	38	8%
This is an area of recognised high deprivation; closing it would impact the most vulnerable / in need, pushing them further into deprivation	35	7%
Seashells is safe for children, has door release button / children can play safely / away from the busy high street	33	7%
We / many have been using Seashells for years, many regular users	26	5%
Seashells has health clinics, baby weigh clinics, health visitors	25	5%
Gateway is only open 4 days a week	23	5%
Seashells has the food bank which many rely on	22	4%
There are lots of (free) clubs, activities, sessions, groups, invaluable to many who couldn't afford otherwise	22	4%
There is no private space at the Gateway	18	4%
Taking it away will cause more social problems, including an increase in referrals to family support services	17	3%
Seashells has sensory rooms, used by many	14	3%

Some example verbatims underpinning consultees desire for Seashells Family Hub not to close as it an integral part of the local community / used by many families and closing it would have a huge impact can be found below:

“Seashells was put where it is because that is where the greatest community need is for a group of people that struggle to access services. This may not be due just to distance but because of trust of "outsiders" and "officials". Will the building remain viable after losing £200k funding? If we lose the building other services currently in there will have nowhere to go so even more services will be lost to those communities. Seashells Centre, it is open 8:30am to 5:30pm Monday-Friday. You rightly point out that the other centres do not support their communities as robustly. There is currently a sensory hub at Seashells, and you cannot provide straight away at the Gateway. Given the financial position of KCC how will you ever be able to duplicate something already available elsewhere, particularly if this proposal is driven in part to reduce duplication? Vulnerable children need easy access to sensory support and stimulation to reduce the impact difficulties can have on them, it is a vital resource that will negatively impact outcomes for children if not appropriately supported by KCC.”

“All my children and myself have accessed the amazing support groups they have on offer at seashells including the baby and toddler sing and sign, breastfeeding clinic and Solihull parenting group. Seashells is an amazing asset of a building to children and families, the building is always immaculate with bright colours and welcoming as well as the staff being one large family who welcome you with open arms at the front door. Many people including myself do not like going into the high street to access certain services and feel that seashells is a safe place and a place where you can attend to seek support. Unless you yourself who are completing this consultation have had to access food banks which is embarrassing and humiliating as a parent or adult, then moving this to the middle of a high street will make it even more humiliating for us to go to. Seashells knows most people by their first name and that personal touch will not be available in the gateway due to it being one large free for all building. Sheerness does not have much at all that impacts on people's lives, and you are taking away the only thing that they do have.”

“The impact of losing this facility would be great. Not only to myself and family but also to other local families. I currently access the stay and plays, mental health drop in's as well as my daughter attending the nursey based in the building. The children's centre offers a huge overview of options and facilities for all families in the local area, no matter their background. In particular, sheerness is a deprived area with not a lot of places offering the facilities, social gatherings and supports that Seashells does. The loss of the building will mean the loss of maternity and health visitor facilities (not everyone can get to the local hospital), the support to new mothers by offering health visitor and breastfeeding drop ins and the ever as important stay and play and children's groups. Each child should be given the opportunity to access these facilities for the help of socialising and Learning. The centre also offers the use of food banks and money help which many access. No other building in the local area would be big enough to hold all these facilities. To lose this for the local community would be a huge issue and would show that once again, no one cares for the area or the people of Sheerness. We should be able to access the same full services as other towns.”

Some example verbatims underpinning consultees comments regarding the Hub being invaluable for children / the staff being welcoming and supportive and offering support to parents / babies / new mums / parents raising their children can be found below:

“It would isolate single/new parents. These facilities enable parents to meet up with other people in the same situation. It enables a support network to be formed. They help with mental health issues surrounding being a parent and help ease the burden. They also help babies and children through all early year’s developmental stages. They allow these children to socialise with others of similar ages and to meet other children where perhaps no other children are in their family network. These centres provide a wealth of opportunities for children that may not be fortunate enough to have much at home. They allow interaction, messy play which isn’t always suitable for home, outside play for children in homes without gardens and much needed support and advice for parents. Without these centres the quality of life for countless children and babies would be greatly affected. These centres provide an affordable opportunity for parents and children to have quality, fun time together in a safe environment.”

“During my first pregnancy I was struggling to get out the house as I didn’t have friends that had a young baby as well. My mental health was struggling. The health visitor suggested Seashells to me. I struggle with social anxiety, but my husband encouraged me to go and came with me. Whilst there I met a group of 4 women all with babies of a similar age. 2 year later we are all still friends and our babies; now toddlers are still friends. We still use seashells as much as we are able to. I have since had twins, and again Seashells has saved my mental health postpartum. I honestly don’t know what I would have done without them and the groups.”

“Seashells are an absolute lifeline. Without the breastfeeding support, the access to Introduction to Solids workshop or the Stay and Play sessions I do not know where I’d be - they’ve kept me sane and helped me to be a better parent. I also think that moving it to the Gateway where there is no parking or the Toddler Sing and Sign would be a real shame - both of these things are incredible for accessibility. Especially the Sing and Sign class, I cannot afford to pay for these classes which is the case elsewhere, but signing has provided me and my child invaluable communication to better our relationship and his development and autonomy.”

Some example verbatims underpinning consultees comments regarding the Gateway not being able to offer the same level of service / house all of the services offered at Seashells and the move to Gateway encountering safeguarding issues for the children who use it can be found below:

“There is no privacy and too many other services being offered to a variety of people. Families need consistent and tailored support, which Seashells offer. It would be criminal to take this away from our community.”

“Sheppey Gateway has less space than the Seashells building. It is suggested that Services will be reduced. Partner services may continue at Seashells but will be disassociated from the hub making them more inconvenient to access . Sheppey Gateway opens directly onto the High street and there is no parking, meaning parents having to find money for parking fees. It is clear through looking at education on Sheppey that much more needs to be done to support children and families to raise expectations, to improve preschool educational

opportunities, to instil a love of learning and ambition at a young age. KCC should be looking to expand its offering to young families and so reduce the spending on dealing with older children and young adults in the future.”

“The Sheppey Gateway is not suitable for as there are many drug users, drunk people, homeless people using it. It's not the right environment for children. I'm sure the library figures have been less as since being part of the gateway and we don't go there anymore because of the safeguarding risk. The gateway also has no parking, it won't be manned when we need it and discriminates against people living in Sheerness as this will be an outreach venue only. It is completely impractical for a family hub service and all KCC is doing is being driven by a very small cut to their budget rather than putting people first.”

“Seashells is wonderful setting that everyone feels safe in. There's big grounds for outdoor play and it's separate to the gate way - the gate way is already squashed? The children's library there is inadequate, there's a lot of dodgy people around the high street - it is not welcoming and we'd also worry about our children running out onto a main road.”

Response filtered by current users of services at Seashells Family Hub only

- When filtering responses to the key themes by consultees who indicated they currently use services at the Seashells Family Hub, response is broadly consistent but a higher proportion comment on the Seashells Family Hub being invaluable for the children who use it in terms of their development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising opportunities (29%).

Please tell us what impact you think accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on you / or your family? Base: all answering (343)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Seashells must not close: vital to / an integral part of the community, used by many families; closing it would have a huge impact	93	27%
Gateway will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at Seashells	83	24%
Seashells is invaluable for children; their development, enjoyment, well-being, socialising, soft play, nursery	99	29%
Seashells / the staff are welcoming, supportive, make you feel part of a family (includes staff will lose their jobs)	77	22%
Seashells supports (new) mums / parents and babies, postpartum support, invaluable for parents raising their children	54	16%
Gateway will have safeguarding issues; for children, being on the high street, strangers walking in	53	15%
Seashells is local, accessible on foot, with pushchairs / for the disabled; many wouldn't be able to access other centres, nor afford to use transport	46	13%
Seashells has a free accessible car park, Gateway does not	51	15%
Seashells provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation	52	15%
Seashells is a warm, safe, secure, trusted, reliable space	38	11%
Gateway is not family friendly	40	12%
If Seashells closed, we / many would be unable to attend anywhere else	41	12%
Seashells is good for mental health support, has mental health session	40	12%
Gateway is used by too many other services: banking, library, clubs	30	9%
Seashells is a lifeline to many	30	9%
Seashells has outdoor space / we have no garden / children can play outside	33	10%
Seashells is an information resource / they provide advice and signposting	24	7%
This is an area of recognised high deprivation; closing it would impact the most vulnerable / in need, pushing them further into deprivation	14	4%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Seashells is safe for children, has door release button / children can play safely / away from the busy high street	25	7%
We / many have been using Seashells for years, many regular users	21	6%
Seashells has health clinics, baby weigh clinics, health visitors	14	4%
Gateway is only open 4 days a week	13	4%
Seashells has the food bank which many rely on	13	4%
There are lots of (free) clubs, activities, sessions, groups, invaluable to many who couldn't afford otherwise	20	6%
There is no private space at the Gateway	7	2%
Taking it away will cause more social problems, including increase in referrals to family support services	8	2%
Seashells has sensory rooms / used by many	8	2%

Differences in response by resident demographic

- Further to likely usage patterns, there are some significant differences in impact perceptions by resident demographic:
 - A higher proportion of female consultees comment on the staff at Seashells being welcoming and supportive / concerned they will lose their jobs (24%) and that Seashells offers key support to parents / babies / new mums and is invaluable for parents raising their children (20%).
 - A higher proportion of consultees aged 35-49 note a desire for Seashells Family Hub not to close as it an integral part of the local community / used by many families and closing it would have a huge impact (39%).
 - A higher proportion of consultees with children 0-1 years old comment the Seashells Family Hub is invaluable for the children who use it in terms of their development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising opportunities (34%), Seashells offers key support to parents / babies / new mums and is invaluable for parents raising their children (25%) and Seashells provides a social aspect / place for making friends / prevents social isolation (20%).
 - A higher proportion of consultees with children 2-5 years old comment the Seashells Family Hub is invaluable for the children who use it in terms of their development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising opportunities (32%) and the staff at Seashells being welcoming and supportive / concerned they will lose their jobs (26%).

EQUALITY ANALYSIS FOR SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB PROPOSAL

- Consultees were asked to comment on the Equality Analysis put forward for the Seashells Family Hub proposal and if there was anything that should be considered relating to equality and diversity in their own words.
- For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. These are reported in the table below.
- 45% of consultees who chose to answer questions about the Seashells Family Hub provided a comment at this question.
- A significant proportion of comments noted at this question reiterate points / reasons consultees believe the Seashells Family Hub should not close (35% of consultees commenting) and the Sheppey Gateway should not be used (23% of consultees commenting).
- 20% of consultees made reference to perceptions of Seashells Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality and is an environment where everyone is welcome. 14% commented that the Seashells Family Hub serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived residents / areas and that the proposed move discriminates against these demographic groups / people living in Sheerness.
- Comments include requests for consideration of specific demographic groups:
 - Children (without the safety / support / familiarity of Seashells) – 14%
 - Users with a disability / mums with pushchairs (access concerns) – 10%
 - Users with Special Educational Needs (SEN) needs / the neurodivergent – 8%
- 9% of consultees answering request consideration of accessibility re parking, lack of parking at Gateway.
- 9% of consultees answering requested consideration of safeguarding concerns / perceptions of the Gateway not being safe for children due to building location / use by others.

Please tell us your views on our equality analysis and/or if you think there is anything we should consider relating to equality and diversity for the Seashells Family Hub proposal?

Base: all answering (301)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Comments / reasons for not closing Seashells / Seashells should not be closed / it's vital	105	35%
Comments / reasons for not using Gateway / Gateway should not be used	70	23%
Seashells is inclusive / equality is all they know / everyone is welcome	60	20%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Seashells serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived residents / areas / plans discriminate against those people / people living in Sheerness	43	14%
Consider the children / the impact on their lives and their futures without the safety, support, familiarity, importance of Seashells	41	14%
Consider accessibility for users with a disability / mums with pushchairs	31	10%
Consider accessibility re parking, lack of parking at Gateway	26	9%
Consider safeguarding - Gateway is not safe for children – location / building nor from other users	26	9%
Discriminates against those who are losing access to services, e.g. especially mums and babies	25	8%
Consider those with SEN needs, the neurodivergent, discriminates against those if no longer able to access services	24	8%
You should consider the desperate situations of those who use Seashells / the impact on them if Seashells was to close	24	8%
Consider those who cannot use or pay for transport (public or private)	17	6%
Consider those with mental health issues	16	5%
Not representative of the area, needs to be a local / community assessment	16	5%
Looks fine, covered everything	12	4%
No need to label or categorise people, take everyone for who they are	6	2%
Discriminates against those not on benefits, who also rely on these services	3	1%
Don't understand the question	12	4%

Some example verbatims underpinning perceptions of Seashells Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality / the proposed move discriminates against vulnerable and deprived residents / users can be found below:

“Seashells show equality in every service or group they do , showing anyone is welcome to come and join a group or seek help if they need too .”

“Seashells welcomes the whole community. They welcome everyone and make suitable adaptations where needed. People who use Seashells do not feel judged and are treated with kindness and respect. Sheppey Gateway, however, is not like this. When I have been there with my autistic child who sometimes makes sounds, they ask me to manage his behaviour or leave. The Gateway is not inclusive for someone with anxiety or autism how can you expect them to walk through a busy high street to access Seashells? How can people with physical disabilities access the centre? Where will they park? How is it safe?

The doors to the Gateway are always open? Anyone can walk in. How will you address child safeguarding? How will you stop photos being taken? Children watched?."

"Seashells has always offered services to support equality and diversity. In particular, the staff are supportive of neurodivergent families and their specific needs."

Some example verbatims underpinning consideration for specific demographic groups (children, users with a disability / mums with pushchairs / users with SEN needs / the neurodivergent) can be found below:

"The Isle of Sheppey is greatly lacking in services such as Seashells. Without this centre, there is nothing for the catchment age group to do in a structured setting with peers until they reach nursery age. Thus, depriving these children of much needed development skills such as interacting with peers and fine motor skills. These hubs allow new parents to the area to get to know what is available and to meet people. Without these centres those less fortunate could easily become forgotten about. They provide a wealth of information and support for parents of all ages and backgrounds."

"Those of working and lower class who are struggling to access employment or manage the cost of living should have centres available to them where support on raising children can be found; it is a huge concern that the poorest and most vulnerable in our society have the hardest time in seeking support and being able to achieve a good quality of life."

"I had surgery from pregnancy. I need to park close to centre. Gateway has no parking. I have little money to pay for parking. My children like to play outside. Where can they do this at the Gateway? My child will have limited learning. Limited play with other children. My child are not the same as other children."

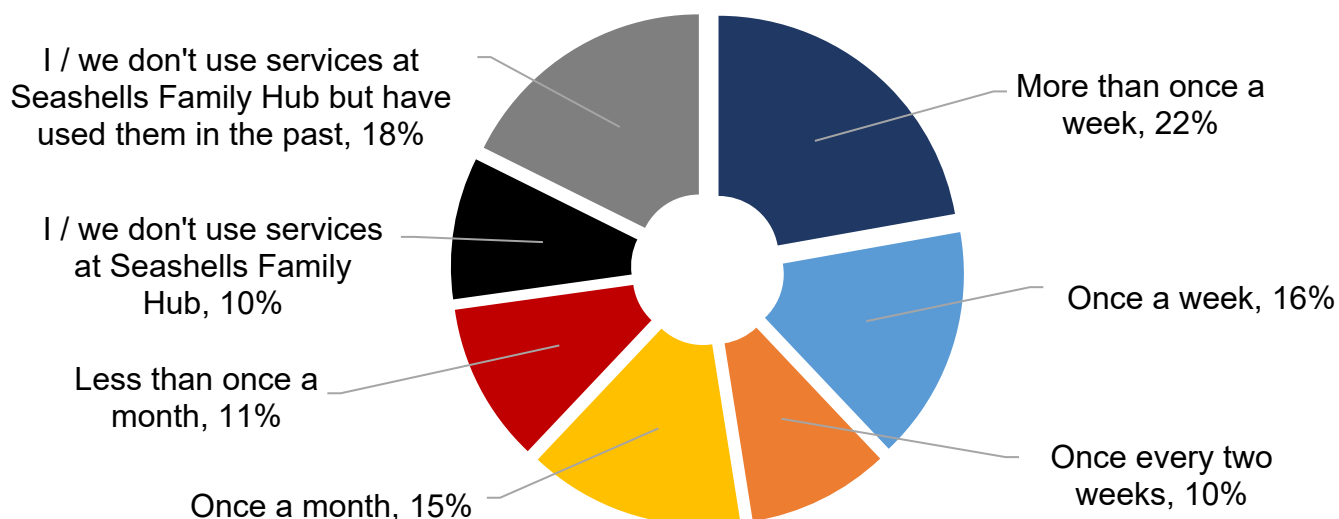
RESIDENT FEEDBACK

MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB

This section of the report summarises response to the questions posed surrounding the Millmead Family Hub in the consultation, as reported by consultees. 433 consultees chose to answer questions regarding this Hub.

FREQUENCY OF USING MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB

- Just under three quarters of consultees answering (73%) indicated they use services at Millmead Family Hub. 38% use services there at least once a week (22% more than once a week, 16% once a week).
- Just under one in five consultees answering (18%) do not currently services at Millmead Family Hub but have done so in the past. 10% of consultees answering have not used services at the Hub.



SUPPORTING DATA TABLE	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Net: Use Millmead currently (any frequency)	305	73%
More than once a week	93	22%
Once a week	66	16%
Once every two weeks	40	10%
Once a month	61	15%
Less than once a month	45	11%
I / we don't use services at Millmead Family Hub	40	10%
I / we don't use services at Millmead Family Hub but have used them in the past	74	18%

There are significant differences in the proportion who currently use services at the Millmead Family Hub by age group: a higher proportion of consultees aged 25-34 and 35-49 currently use services at the Hub (90% and 69%) compared to consultees aged 50 & over (48%).

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ACCESSING FAMILY HUB SERVICES AT A DIFFERENT FAMILY HUB, E.G. MARGATE (SIX BELLS), CLIFTONVILLE OR NORTHDOWN ROAD

- Consultees were asked to detail the impact they think accessing Family Hub services at a different Family Hub (e.g. Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road) would have on themselves and / or their family, in their own words.
- For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. These are reported in the table below.
- 87% of consultees who chose to answer questions about the Millmead Family Hub provided a comment at this question.
- The most common theme noted is that the Millmead Family Hub is local / accessible / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access and that many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to afford the bus / alternatives are uphill / inaccessible to mums on foot (53%).
- 37% of consultees commenting believe that Millmead Family Hub must not be closed / it's a much-needed resource / relied upon by many families / offering lots to local families and believing closure would be devastating.
- Just under a quarter of consultees (22%) commented they believe lots of deprived children attend Millmead Family Hub / it is invaluable for their development / enjoyment / wellbeing / socialising skills. In addition, 10% commented that the current Hub is in an area recognised for deprivation levels and that removing Millmead could push these families further into deprivation.
- 16% of consultees commented that the staff at Millmead Family Hub are welcoming / supportive / they trust them and they / their children have developed close relationships with them. 13% also commented that Millmead is a safe, warm, secure, comforting, familiar, welcoming environment.
- 12% also commented that Millmead Family Hub has a free accessible car park, and the alternatives do / may not.

Please tell us what impact you think accessing services at a different Family Hub, like Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road, would have on you and / or your family? Base: all answering (376)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Millmead is local / accessible / many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to even afford the bus fare / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access / others are uphill and inaccessible to mums on foot	201	53%
Millmead must not be closed: is much needed resource, relied upon by many families, offering lots to local often deprived families, closing it would be devastating, save money elsewhere	140	37%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Lots of deprived children attend Millmead: is invaluable for their development, enjoyment, well-being, socialising, soft play, nursery, Sure Start	84	22%
The staff at Millmead are welcoming / supportive / we trust them and we and the children have developed close relationships with them	62	16%
Millmead is a safe / warm / secure / comforting / familiar / welcoming environment	50	13%
Millmead has a free accessible car park / others do / may not	46	12%
Recognised area of deprivation / removing Millmead could push these families further into deprivation	37	10%
There are lots of clinics attended / health visitor / baby weigh / healthy child clinic	36	10%
Millmead is relied upon by new mums, provides postpartum support, breastfeeding support, used by lots of mums / parents with babies	35	9%
Many families would no longer be able to attend, use services if Millmead closed	34	9%
Others will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at others	29	8%
Clubs, events, activities are free, couldn't afford to pay for such like, we attend lots of activities we wouldn't be able to otherwise	28	7%
Change not good for those with anxiety - places, people, surroundings, means they would not be able to attend elsewhere	24	6%
Other hubs would be stretched	21	6%
Millmead has baby sensory rooms / classes	18	5%
Millmead provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation	17	5%
We / lots use Millmead regularly, have done for years	15	4%
Millmead is accessible for the disabled, all on one level	15	4%
Others are not family friendly , not set up for families and children	14	4%
Millmead is a lifeline for many families	13	3%
Millmead provides lots of information and advice, signposting	10	3%

Some example verbatims underpinning comments regarding the Millmead Family Hub being local / accessible on foot (including for mums with pushchairs / mums postpartum) and that many wouldn't be able to go alternatives can be found below:

"I believe that any cut to the service would be detrimental. The fact that these other hubs are around 1.5 miles further away for these families will inevitably make it more difficult for

them to travel. As an area of high deprivation, they may not have access to their own vehicle or the funds for public transport. Therefore, making it more difficult to access the services available.”

“Millmead Children’s Centre serves a deprived local area where many parents don’t drive, accessing a family hub further from town will reduce the chance of a visit for many parents in the area and adversely affect the development and wellbeing of children in the area.”

“Accessing different family hub services would ruin the sense of community and trust that we have built up here at Millmead. We are confident and safe here and would not use an alternative hub due to lack of community and distance to travel.”

Some example verbatims underpinning comments about not wanting Millmead Family Hub to close / perceptions it’s a much-needed resource and staff are welcoming / supportive can be found below:

“The closure of Millmead Family Hub would have a profound and negative impact on my family and the wider community. Millmead is located in the Dane Valley area of Margate, which is one of the most deprived wards in Kent. The centre serves as a critical resource for over 62 families who rely on its services for necessities such as midwifery, child development support, and social services. For my family, Millmead has been more than just a place for services—it has been our lifeline during some of our most challenging times. The loss of Millmead would mean that many vulnerable families would lose access to essential services, potentially leading to an increase in social isolation and a deterioration in child and family health outcomes. The staff at Millmead have built strong, trusting relationships with local families, providing personalized support that would be difficult to replicate at other hubs. Moving these services would not only disrupt these critical relationships but also potentially lead to a decrease in service usage, as the new locations are not as accessible or familiar to the community. The unique role that Millmead plays in the lives of local families cannot be overstated—its closure would be a significant blow to the community’s well-being.”

“I have built a good relationship with staff and feel welcome and safe, my child whom is 2 years recognises the building, staff and lay out and feels comfortable, the services are so helpful for my son because he doesn’t talk yet so it’s helpful for him to have interaction with other children his own age in a safe and welcoming environment. I also enjoy socialising with other parents and talking to staff there.”

“Millmead is the best family hub in the area. It is closest to my house. And easy to reach on foot. As a single parent the support and help I’ve received from Millmead has been invaluable. And I would be gutted for myself and the wider community if it went. Frankly it is way better than the other centres, in the services it offers but also the building and facilities. Its spacious, clean and the staff are incredible.”

Some example verbatims underpinning comments regarding the impact on deprived children who use the Hub / the concern for further deprivation can be found below:

“I think that having a community space that is central to your neighbourhood can only benefit all that live there. Millmead is home to some of the poorest people in Thanet and as

such they continue to be affected by the long-term effects of poverty and its issues that are passed down generations. With the closure of Quarterdeck, there is an astounding lack of provision for youth on the Isle. This will only mean a rise in antisocial behaviour and crime on the estate. Those with limited mobility might struggle in accessing the services at other hubs should this centre shut down. Not to mention, the fostering of a community within Millmead will just disappear. Will these services still be as effective absorbing all these people from the Millmead Centre?"

"The Millmead Centre now stands as an important community hub that helps many poor and deprived households connect with services that can help them. If you remove the services from this hub, I strongly doubt any significant number would reengage with other outposts. Furthermore, you are proposing to move services 1.5 miles to Cliftonville which, if anything, is more deprived and needy. As a result, Cliftonville has something of a reputation as somewhere not to go. Even assuming that the Millmead residents do in part take advantage of the Cliftonville hubs, you run the risk of overburdening those hubs by forcing them to service two areas of notable poverty and need. In practice, I believe that what you will find is that the removal of a community lifeline from Millmead would only serve to reinstate the disenfranchisement the Millmead team has worked so hard to undo. I am fully confident that most families will see this as taking away services from them. I am equally confident that very few if any will engage with hubs that can be more than half an hour away depending on bus reliability and traffic conditions. I believe that these changes could save KCC a significant amount of money but at the cost of ceasing to serve a vulnerable and isolated community. There is a very real human cost component to this recommendation that is not reflected in the consultation report."

"Dane Valley itself is one of the most deprived areas in Kent, this centre is a lifeline for many families. To remove these services is an entirely false economy. From a capital perspective, the centre is only 20 years old and provides excellent facilities. In the longer term - the true cost of closure will almost certainly come back to haunt KCC via increased pressures on the NHS, Social Care and our schools. Early years support for families is vital to our economy and has proven positive impact on family functioning and emotional development of our young people. It has also been found that in areas supported by SureStart, there were significant reductions in the number of hospital admissions for children 0-15 years old. Withdrawing services to Millmead will not only be an act of cruelty - severing a lifeline for communities who need it most but will be an act of economic incompetence that must be fought at every step."

Response filtered by current users of services at Millmead Family Hub only

- When filtering response to the key themes by consultees who indicated they currently use services at the Millmead Family Hub, response is broadly consistent across all themes.

Please tell us what impact you think accessing services at a different Family Hub, like Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road, would have on you and / or your family? Base: all answering (278)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Millmead is local / accessible / many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to even afford the bus fare / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access / others are uphill and inaccessible to mums on foot	147	53%
Millmead must not be closed: is much needed resource, relied upon by many families, offering lots to local often deprived families, closing it would be devastating, save money elsewhere	93	33%
Lots of deprived children attend Millmead: is invaluable for their development, enjoyment, well-being, socialising, soft play, nursery, Sure Start	61	22%
The staff at Millmead are welcoming / supportive / we trust them and we and the children have developed close relationships with them	46	17%
Millmead is a safe / warm / secure / comforting / familiar / welcoming environment	40	14%
Millmead has a free accessible car park / others do / may not	38	14%
Recognised area of deprivation / removing Millmead could push these families further into deprivation	22	8%
There are lots of clinics attended / health visitor / baby weigh / healthy child clinic	30	11%
Millmead is relied upon by new mums, provides postpartum support, breastfeeding support, used by lots of mums / parents with babies	27	10%
Many families would no longer be able to attend, use services if Millmead closed	28	10%
Others will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at others	23	8%
Clubs, events, activities are free, couldn't afford to pay for such like, we attend lots of activities we wouldn't be able to otherwise	24	9%
Change not good for those with anxiety - places, people, surroundings, means they would not be able to attend elsewhere	21	8%
Other hubs would be stretched	19	7%
Millmead has baby sensory rooms / classes	18	6%
Millmead provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation	16	6%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
We / lots use Millmead regularly, have done for years	13	5%
Millmead is accessible for the disabled, all on one level	9	3%
Others are not family friendly , not set up for families and children	13	5%
Millmead is a lifeline for many families	9	6%
Millmead provides lots of information and advice, signposting	8	3%

Differences in response by resident demographic

- Further to likely usage patterns, there are some significant differences in impact perceptions by resident demographic:
 - A higher proportion of consultees aged 35-49 comment that the Millmead Family Hub is local / accessible / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access and that many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to afford the bus / alternatives are uphill / inaccessible to mums on foot (63%).
 - A higher proportion of consultees aged 50 and over comment that Millmead Family Hub must not be closed / it's a much-needed resource / relied upon by many families / offering lots to local families and believing closure would be devastating (49%).
 - A higher proportion of consultees with children 2-5 years old and 6-10 years old comment that the Millmead Family Hub is local / accessible / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access and that many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to afford the bus / alternatives are uphill / inaccessible to mums on foot (64% / 64%).

EQUALITY ANALYSIS FOR MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB PROPOSAL

- Consultees were asked to comment on the Equality Analysis put forward for the Millmead Family Hub proposal and if there was anything that should be considered relating to equality and diversity in their own words.
- For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. These are reported in the table below.
- 39% of consultees who chose to answer questions about the Millmead Family Hub provided a comment at this question.
- A significant proportion of comments noted at this question reiterate points / reasons consultees believe the Millmead Family Hub should not close (36% of consultees commenting).
- 16% of consultees made reference to perceptions of Millmead Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality and is an environment where everyone is welcome. 24% commented that the Millmead Family Hub serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived residents / areas and that the proposed move discriminates against these demographic groups / people living in Thanet.
- 20% of consultees answering request consideration of those who cannot use or pay for transport.
- Comments include requests for consideration of specific demographic groups:
 - Children (without the safety / support / familiarity of Millmead) – 17%
 - Users with a disability / mums with pushchairs (access concerns) – 16%

We have completed an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on the proposal for the Millmead Family Hub. Please tell us your views on our equality analysis and/or if you think there is anything we should consider relating to relating to equality and diversity for this proposal? Base: all answering (167)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Comments / reasons for not closing Millmead / Millmead should not be closed / it's vital	60	36%
Millmead serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived / proposed move discriminates against those people / the people of Thanet	40	24%
Consider those who cannot use or pay for transport	34	20%
Consider the children / the impact on their lives and their futures without the safety, support, familiarity of Millmead	28	17%
Millmead is inclusive / equality is all they know, everyone is welcome	27	16%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Consider accessibility for disabled, mums with pushchairs - Millmead is very accessible	26	16%
You should consider the desperate situations of those who use Millmead, the impact on them if Millmead was to close	21	13%
Discriminates against those who are losing access to services, e.g. mums and babies	15	9%
Looks fine / covered everything	10	6%
Not representative of the area / needs to be a local / community assessment	9	5%
No need to label or categorise people, take everyone for who they are	6	4%
Consider those with SEN needs, the neurodivergent, discriminates against those if no longer able to access services	6	4%
Comments / reasons for not using others	5	3%
Consider accessibility re parking, lack of parking at others	3	2%
Consider those with mental health issues	2	1%
Consider safeguarding - others are not safe for children – location / building nor from other users	2	1%

Some example verbatims underpinning perceptions of Millmead Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality / the proposed move discriminates against vulnerable and deprived residents / users can be found below:

“The centre serves a range of families and individuals in one of the most deprived areas of Margate, they have an amazing approach when it comes to inclusion and accessibility.”

“Millmead Hub covers a deprived area and the poorest and most vulnerable people will be really affected by losing these services.”

“The Millmead Family Hub serves a specific community and is well-attended by low-income parents. Closing this will create further inequality as those parents may struggle to cope with the added travel demands. Also putting pressure on the other hubs will lead to parents + children being excluded from activities / opportunities.”

Some example verbatims underpinning perceptions of Millmead Family Hub being inclusive / focused on equality / the proposed move discriminates against vulnerable and deprived residents / users can be found below:

“Please consider the access for those who cannot walk long distances and for those with communities that would mean getting to another service would be an impossible mission.”

“Some people may struggle to get to other centres. Millmead is a very deprived area and lots of people rely on it especially for the food bank and social aspects.”

“Very poor and does not understand the problems of residents using this facility. It may be fine for people in West Kent to get in their cars to access these services but would not work for the majority of families in need in Millmead.”

RESIDENT FEEDBACK

ANY OTHER PROPOSAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS

- Consultees were asked to make any other comments or suggestions for the proposals put forward in their own words.
- For the purpose of reporting, we have reviewed respondents' comments and have grouped common responses together into themes. These are reported in the table below.
- 65% of consultees taking part in the consultation provided a comment at this question.
- The most common theme noted at this question reiterates points / reasons consultees believe the current Hubs are a much-needed resource as they are / relied upon by many / offering a lot to local families and that closing them would have a significant impact (70% of consultees commenting).
- Deprivation is also top of mind with 24% of consultees commenting that lots of deprived children attend the current Hubs and that they are invaluable in their development. 14% of consultees answering comment on the plans being made in areas of deprivation / removing the Hubs could push families further into deprivation.
- 14% of consultees answering comment on the Hubs being accessible and many not being able to go elsewhere / to alternatives due to personal circumstances (financial, practical and personal reasons).

Please tell us if you have any other comments or suggestions about the proposals in this consultation. Base: all answering (657)

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
The Hub(s) is/are a much-needed resource(s) / relied upon by many families / offering lots to local often deprived families / makes no sense to close it/them / save money elsewhere / closure would be devastating / already had others closed	458	70%
Lots of deprived children attend the Hub(s) / invaluable for their development / enjoyment / wellbeing / socialising	159	24%
The staff at the Hub(s) are welcoming, supportive / we trust them and we and the children have developed close relationships with them	106	16%
The Hub(s) is/are local / accessible / many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to afford bus fare / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access / others are uphill and inaccessible to mums on foot	93	14%
Comments on plans made in areas of deprivation / removing the Hub(s) could push these families further into deprivation / make them even more vulnerable	89	14%

	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Others will not be able to offer the same level of service / it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at others, no privacy, would be stretched	83	13%
The Hub(s) is/are relied upon by new mums / provides postpartum support / breastfeeding support / used by lots of mums / parents with babies	74	11%
The Hub(s) provide(s) a social aspect / making friends / prevent social isolation	68	10%
The Hub(s) is/are a safe / warm / secure / comforting / welcoming / familiar environment	65	10%
Many families would no longer be able to attend / use services	61	9%
The Hub(s) is/are a lifeline for many families	57	9%
Clubs, events, activities are free, couldn't afford to pay for such like	51	8%
The services the Hub(s) provide(s) is/are good for my mental health / has mental health drop in sessions	47	7%
Lots of clinics attended / health visitor / baby weigh / healthy child clinic	43	7%
Alternatives to Seashells are not family friendly / not set up for families and children / other users / unsuitable hours / wrong location / unwelcoming / no pushchair parking	42	6%
The Hub(s) provide(s) lots of information and advice, signposting	32	5%
There would be an increase in family services referrals, disengagement, social problems (Surestart was invaluable in helping to prevent this), cost more down the line	31	5%

Some example verbatims underpinning comments regarding the Hub(s) being much-needed resources / relied upon by many families can be found below:

“Millmead family hub has helped me beyond belief. The outreach has gotten me through mental health crisis’. They improved my sons social and emotional wellbeing. I have gained more confidence in the services they have provided. Their food bank has kept me fed at times when I have had no food. They are detrimental to the community.”

“Millmead is a highly deprived area, most living in borderline or absolute poverty. Young families and especially teenage mothers need this service to survive! Those without a vehicle need the centre for midwife visits, help and support. The nursery...the food pantry...food bank and baby clubs are vital to such a deprived area of Margate. Closing this centre will result in major issues in the local community, mainly child poverty.”

“Keep Seashells open! There is a need for Seashells and what is offered at Sheppey Gateway is only a fraction of what Seashells offer. Sheppey Gateway have no facilities for SEN children or anything to offer families during the six-week holiday like Seashells offer,

After School Clubs will be lost for working parents and it will be harder to get any appointments to see the health visitor, finances, etc. There is too much to lose if Seashells is closed as a family hub just to save some money. It's clear Sheppey Gateway is a bad decision."

"Seashells has been a trusted and integral part of the local community for the past 20 years, offering services in a safe and supportive environment for families. It provides a warm, welcoming atmosphere where families are greeted with a friendly reception and their needs are promptly addressed by knowledgeable, well-trained staff. Over time, Seashells has built a strong reputation and deep trust within the community, with word-of-mouth playing a vital role in bringing new families to its services. Ending the Seashells funding will hugely impact the good work that can be done for the very vulnerable local community that it serves. By proposing to stop the funding and move just a handful to the Sheppey Gateway will result in an inferior service and in the longer term increasing the demand for other services down the line."

Some example verbatims underpinning comments regarding the impact on deprived children who use the Hub(s) / the concern for further deprivation can be found below:

"Families need these centres to socialise their babies and toddlers. For a lot of mums these classes will be their only opportunity. It's very important for a deprived community as also a chance for parents to see and learn how to care for their babies from others."

"Seashells is the hub of an already deprived community. It provides a place for many parents/families to come to daily. Staff are friendly, knowledgeable and welcoming."

"Closing Millmead will be a disaster for everyone. The little centres won't be able to cope with the sheer amount of people who use Millmead. Millmead is a deprived area and there for the hub is a massive help to lots of family's taking it away will leave the youth without a place to go and the babies and parents will have to travel to get the baby's weighed and seen so likelihood is they won't get seen as not many people can afford to drive."

Some example verbatims underpinning comments regarding accessing the Hubs / not being able to access on foot can be found below:

"Being a parent and Carer who has always made use of sure start Millmead, I feel the centre would be a HUGE loss to the residents, who would be unlikely to travel to the other venues. Depriving children & families of vital support that's been available for over 20 years."

"Sheerness and the Isle of Sheppey is predominantly a poor and deprived area. Removing essential family and children services hub from our area will have such a negative effect on so many young families that aren't able to travel to access advice and support."

"Seashells is used by people from all over the Island. It is accessible from all areas either by car, train, bus, or walking. Its opening hours and the facilities suit most people. Sheppey Gateway will not be able to offer this."

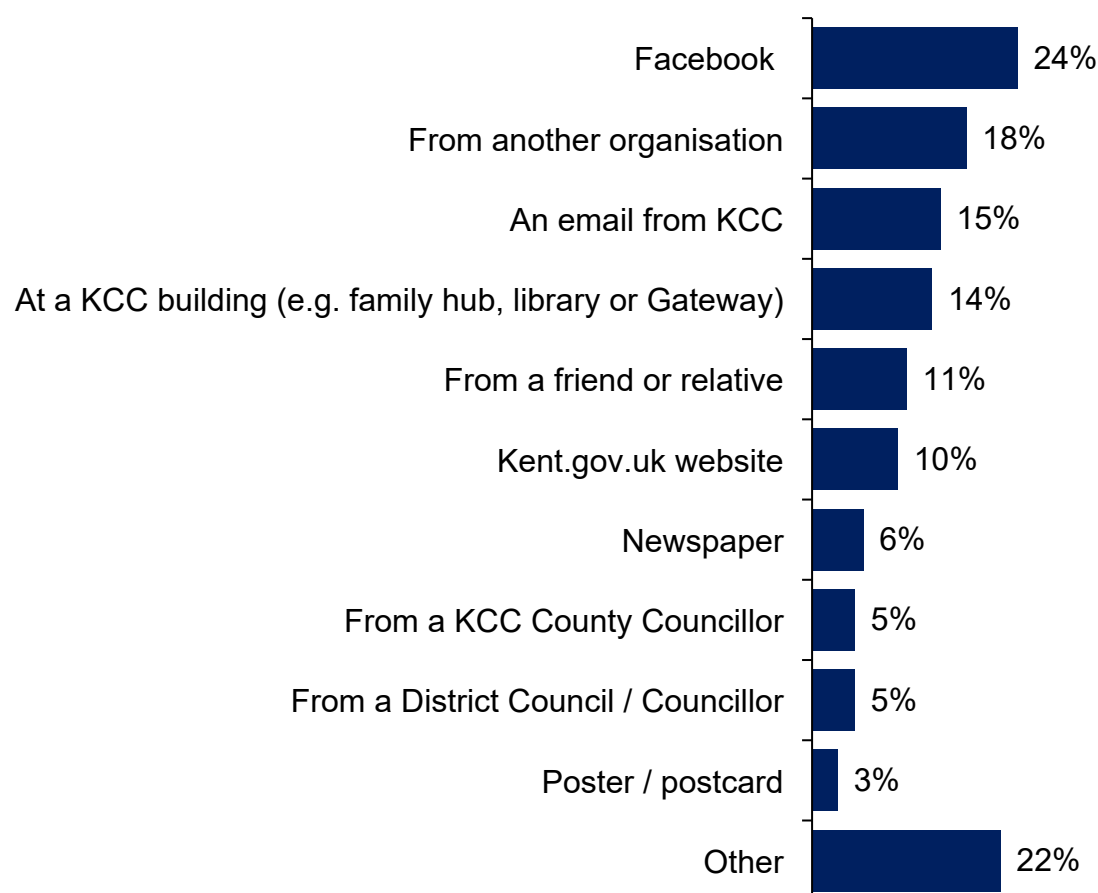
PROFESSIONALS / ORGANISATION FEEDBACK

CONSULTATION AWARENESS

- The most common routes to finding out about the consultation are via Facebook (24%), from another organisation (18%) and an email from KCC (15%).
- 14% found out at a KCC building (e.g. family hub, library or Gateway).

How did you find out about this consultation?

Base: all answering (95), consultees had the option to select more than one response.



SUPPORTING DATA	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Facebook	23	24%
From another organisation	17	18%
An email from KCC	14	15%
At a KCC building (e.g. family hub, library or Gateway)	13	14%
From a friend or relative	10	11%
Kent.gov.uk website	9	10%

SUPPORTING DATA	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Newspaper	6	6%
From a KCC County Councillor	5	5%
From a District Council / Councillor	5	5%
Poster / postcard	3	3%
Other	21	22%

PROFESSIONALS / ORGANISATION FEEDBACK

SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB

This section of the report summarises response to the questions posed surrounding the Seashells Family Hub in Sheerness, Swale, as reported by consultees. 67 consultees chose to answer questions regarding this Hub.

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ACCESSING FAMILY HUB SERVICES AT THE SHEPPEY GATEWAY ON CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Consultees were asked to indicate what impact they think accessing Family Hub services at the Sheppey Gateway would have on children, young people and families. All 67 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concern about leaving a well-established place / environment that is well used and trusted by local community, which is particularly important in an area of deprivation:

“I am very concerned that asking families to leave a known and trusted centre is a retrograde step for an organisation that wants to build positive relationships with their communities. Families in this area are often extremely difficult to engage, taking this provision away will negatively impact this.”

“Engaging families in Swale is difficult enough. For a lot of families, it has taken professionals years to encourage engagement; building trust, familiarity etc. They are hard to reach families. The position of Seashells is informal and out of the way. There's an element of discretion and all these little things gives professionals a chance to build the trust and increase engagement.”

“Seashells is a very well valued, trusted service on Sheppey. Sheppey Gateway does not appear to have the same trust. The Isle of Sheppey is quite unique in Kent, the Islanders are in an area of high deprivation, lifespan is less than on mainland Kent. Seashells is a trusted provision, giving a good start to young people and their families. Not all listed services at Seashells are on the list for Sheppey Gateway. Residents will not be able to easily travel off the Island to access these services - cost, lack of public transport eg buses, congestion on the roads.”

“Though the Sheppey Gateway is a five-minute walk from Seashells, the move of the services only fuels the historic distrust that the most vulnerable communities have of statutory services. Seashells has been providing services for families and have built up a significant reputation and trusted relationships for families and people who have high and complex needs. Removing the services from this location demonstrates a failure of the system once more to provide consistency for this community, and the risk of adverse effects across Health and Care should be carefully considered and suitable mitigations in place.”

Concern services and available parking offered at Sheppey Gateway would be more limited than at Seashells Family Hub / valued services would reduce:

“After reading how the services will compare to what is available to young families now and what will be available. I feel that there will be a massive gap to support our young babies and their parents. Sheerness is in one of the most deprived areas and we need to have support and services in place to help these young babies' and their carers to help break this cycle. Stopping services such as Singing and signing will massively impact the already very low speech, language and communication skills of toddlers when starting nursery/preschool. Taking away support with Antenatal care, Breastfeeding and support with parenting will also have a huge impact on how our families begin their role as parents. These services need to stay be it at Seashells or moved to the Gateway.”

“The Sheppey Gateway is fine as it is but will never have the time or facilities that Seashells offers to local residents . There is so much more to Seashells than just a few groups and so many people use this amazing place each and every day.”

“The reduced hours, and number of services would be detrimental to all users. If a service disappears it will be very difficult to get users back. Those with special needs require an in iron meant that is familiar and consistent. This area and its residents constantly feel like they are second best and loosing services they will feel let down and under-valued.”

“This would have an impact on the numbers of families that attend groups and activities because the gateway is not as accessible as Seashells. Families will have to pay for parking because there is limited parking down the high street and for a limited time. The environment within the gateway is different and you have a different variety of customers, whereas in Seashells the environment is set for children and families and has a welcoming atmosphere.”

Concern about appropriateness of Sheppey Gateway in terms of safety / comfort for its users, location and sharing the building with other organisations / services:

“Seashells is a purpose-built building to provide a huge variety of services that are needed for the local community in a very bright and friendly welcoming environment, the gateway is a cold dark building that is mainly a vast open space inside and it opens directly onto the high street. I do not feel it's a safe environment for children or vulnerable adults it's also a few doors away from a pub that's open very early in the morning.”

“Car Parks around the Sheppey Gateway cost £1.40 per hour. We are in a deprived area and under a cost of living crisis, families will not be able to afford to pay to park in order to access the Gateway. There are no child/family parking spaces in the car parks around the Sheppey Gateway. Child safety concerns there is no perimeter fencing/gates, the Gateway opens directly onto Sheerness High Street. Mixing of groups within the Gateway, is not consider as a safe environment for children and families. The Gateway is a library and offices, Seashells is a Family Hub. Services should remain under 'one roof'.”

“The Sheppey Gateway is a multi-agency building, it can get very busy and users are often angry or confrontational. Also, it isn't always clear from the entrance lobby where services are situated and whether they are staffed. It could be intimidating and off-putting to families, particularly new parents. There doesn't appear to be any clarity as to how the breast pump loan scheme will be operated from the Gateway, there may be issues regarding storage and accessibility due to restricted opening hours.”

“The Sheppey Gateway was developed as a building to enable people to access public and voluntary services which has proved to be an asset for the community. However, this building is not a purpose build children’s centre and therefore the suitability of this is limited for children, young people and families to access. The Sheppey Gateway will continue to function as is currently, and there is a risk that if vulnerable families do not feel that the space is fit for purpose and does not provide a safe and confidential space for children, young people and families that people may disengage with the services. The opening times of the Sheppey Gateway are also restricted in comparison to Seashells, which may cause an inequality in access for families who need to use the facilities and services in the times that the Sheppey Gateway is not open.”

PERCEIVED IMPACT FOR PROPOSAL FOR SEASHELLS FAMILY HUB ON OTHER SERVICES AND ORGANISATIONS

Consultees were asked to indicate what impact they think the proposal would have on other services and organisations. 65 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concern for impact on Seashells Family Hub services / other services currently in Seashells Family Hub building resulting in further loss of services and inability for services to work together:

“I think this has a huge potential to be damaging to other services as this is a huge amount of funding you are proposing to remove from children's services which may force the building to close or push up costs for other users making it no longer a viable option for service provision which will see other services leave effectively ending the provision. there has been so much lost through the family hubs transition already. Ironically this site was used as a pilot for the family hubs model and the successes in this site was rationale for the roll out across Kent. This would surely signal a significant risk to the model adopted by Kent and undermine public trust further.”

“Seashells work under the ethos of the previous SureStart programmes, which means they are a true hub of partnerships from health, public health, voluntary and third sector organisations, removal of the funding puts the centre at risk and therefore the ability of these services to work in partnership from the hubs. Seashells also run a nursery, there is a risk this may not be able to continue if the centre has to close due to lack of funding, in an area where the majority of the parents are eligible for the FF2 Early Years funding and with nursery places across Kent diminishing this would be a great loss.”

“Other organisations use the hub to support users of the hub, and this would not probably be possible at the Gateway to provide space alongside the family hub which would be a barrier to users of the hub accessing other services for support.”

“The proposals do not into account the added value provided by additional services offered at Seashells. This breadth and depth of services, coupled with the staff’s deep knowledge of the local families from a variety of angles, ensures a more holistic approach to meeting community needs. Removing Seashells from the equation threatens to fragment the community-based work and reduce the effectiveness of local service delivery. There is also

the risk to the sustainability of Seashells itself, which may put other local services at risk. Although not directly affected by the proposed changes the daily midwifery and health visiting services co-located at Seashells are well established and have been integral to the services provided for local families. The trust and understanding that has been established through regular contact ensure good relationships and information sharing between professionals, which is crucial in improving outcomes. These changes will fragment services, reduce family engagement in service and undermine their effectiveness.”

“With the community midwifery venue access difficult in the area the removal of the ability to use Seashells will impact on clinic capacity, access to families who cannot drive and confidence in our service.”

“Splitting the current services across two locations could have an impact on both. There is likely to be some loss in users. A single location has the benefit of being able to provide information and support that goes beyond what they already offer. While two locations could provide users with the same information, it's not likely to be as effective. For example, antenatal classes will be at Gateway, but midwifery at Seashells. These go hand in hand, why split it up? A sensory hub is being proposed at Gateway, but one will remain at Seashells.”

“The proposal assumes that some services will remain, this is a huge assumption and shows lack of awareness of what is currently being funded by KCC. Following the removal of the core funding Seashells would need to explore other sources of income to replace the loss and would potentially need to charge for the room hire which is currently provided free of charge for social services, family time meetings, health visiting clinics, development reviews and appointments. This could result in a huge unplanned cost to KCC that again would mitigate any savings made by ending the contract. Less service users in the building may mean this is a less desirable location for other service who use the seashells service to meet their service requirements.”

Concern for impact on residents / service users needing to use other statutory services / health and care services / other services that are already stretched:

“If Seashells loses its services this will have a detrimental impact on families and children and is likely to result in more families using statutory services which are already stretched. This will result in families being isolated as many see seashells as a lifeline. In reducing services at Seashells this will reduce good outcomes for children. The area is one of the most deprived in Kent and Seashells offers free services for families to use. There is a well-used food bank and Community Pantry with a family finance worker to help families. I think this will result in more poverty for children and poor outcomes, short and long term.”

“The proposed changes could see an increase in provisions provided by other partners in health and care. With the times of the Sheppey Gateway being restricted compared to the current provision, if children, young people and families are in need there is potential that they will resort to other statutory provision and therefore increase the demand for these services.”

“If the cuts are made, more children will be taken into care, there will be a detrimental impact on mental health, families will go back to drugs and alcohol to cope, early intervention will fail. Lives will be lost, and families torn apart. Many are aware of the

dangers of long-term stress, addiction and chaos on your general health. Increase risk in heart disease, cancer, diabetes among others. This will have an impact on the NHS service. This will end up costing the NHS service more money and will add demand to an already stretched service. Some of the families using the Hub services have alcohol/ betting addictions. Accessing the gateway means that they have to pass pubs and betting shops on every occasion. This could mean a relapse is more likely and this will be detrimental to families, causing a ripple effect for any professional involvement.”

“Social services would see a huge rise in referrals and have to deal with even higher amounts of caseloads as the preventative work that Seashells does will be gone.”

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EQUALITY ANALYSIS

Consultees were asked to express any views on the equality analysis and/or if you think there is anything KCC should consider relating to equality and diversity for the Seashells Family Hub proposal. 47 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concerns about the impact on travelling to Sheppey Gateway / physical access to Sheppey Gateway in terms of public transport / users with disabilities:

“The equality analysis carried out by KCC fails to recognise the impact of children, families and young people choosing not to access the service at all due to the many concerning factors of the Sheerness Gateway. There will be poorer outcomes for an already deprived area which will later result in bigger financial impacts to society. The Sheppey Gateway is only listed as a Community Hub, not a Family Hub therefore the nearest Family Hub will be in Leysdown, 9 miles away from Seashells. The area in which the actual Family Hub will be is incredibly isolated due to poor public transport. The journey is 20 minutes in the car, 3 hours on foot with very few buses travelling to that area. The Community Hub at the Sheppey Gateway will not be delivering a full family hub offer therefore, residents will be forced to also travel to Leysdown for services.”

“A lot of people needing accessibility use Seashells services as they can park on the premises or the road outside the high street has three disabled parking bays along the length of the high street therefore not making it accessible for all. My mum is wheelchair bound and sit in the passenger seat of the car, due to the way the parking bays are set in Sheerness high street I am unable to safely get her out of the car and into her wheelchair, we are not the only family to have this issue so I feel it will stop a vast amount of users from using the services due to safety reasons.”

“Health inequalities and the inequalities that exist within the wider determinants of health should be considered within the proposal, for example, employment rates, proportion of those who have access to a car/van and fuel poverty. The EqIA does not consider blue badge parking for children, young people and families with disabilities. Though Sheerness high street does have on-street parking for blue badge holders, this is not specifically for those using the Sheppey Gateway and therefore there may be issues with availability. Sheerness High Street is also a road with no restrictions for vehicles, and therefore in times

with high traffic volume, there is a safety consideration for families when getting themselves and their children from their vehicles. Consideration will need to be made for the safety of these families.”

Concerns for proposals impacting users’ mental health and comfort / ability to use services at Sheppey Gateway:

“Residents with poor mental health and disorders will be hugely impacted by the proposed change. In an area where trust and relationships are built through the staff and services that are delivered from Seashells this will be compromised by the change. Families will be distressed; they consider Seashells to be a safe haven that they can access support and guidance when they need. The Sheppey Gateway has reduced opening times, and the Community Workers will not be based there, it’s only an outreach venue so those who need help will not be able to access this at certain times of the week. residents with poor mental health and disorders need consistent face to face support, something that the proposal will not be able to offer. Disabled residents will be impacted - there is only one disabled parking bay outside the Sheppey Gateway. and how do those clients with disabilities / wheelchairs / double buggy’s access services provided upstairs?”

“People suffering with their mental health, anxiety, depression would not feel comfortable and many not able to access the Gateway as its environment is not welcoming and too overwhelming for many.”

“Young children with neuro-diversity would have created an attachment to Seashells and will prefer that site over the Gateway. Changing this element of routine for neuro-diverse children could impact their social skills & behavioural education. Additionally, having 2 hubs can create a quieter and more relaxed venue for families to visit.”

Concerns that proposed plans do not consider the relationship and trust that users have with the Seashells Family Hub / services offered / staff:

“The assessment does not take into account the unique value of Seashells’ long-standing relationship with the community, which ensures vulnerable families access services tailored to their needs. Sheerness and the surrounding area face high levels of deprivation and child poverty. Many of these families are also coping with additional challenges, such as SEND, disabilities, and mental health issues making it essential that services are easily accessible and free from barriers. Changes to the location, staff, or structure of services would place further strain on those who may experience increased distress from having to access services in a new, unfamiliar location with unfamiliar staff. Without careful management, there is a risk that some families may stop accessing these essential services altogether, leading to a worsening of existing conditions and greater long-term consequences for both parents and children. The closure of Seashells Family Hub and the proposed relocation of services to the Sheppey Gateway does not adequately take into account the deep feeling of loss that would be experienced by families in the local community and the significant barriers this change would create for those who rely on these vital services.”

“While the Sheppey Gateway has all the amenities the families will need. Young children with neuro-diversity would have created an attachment to Seashells and will prefer that site

over the Gateway. Changing this element of routine for neuro-diverse children could impact their social skills & behavioural education. Additionally, having two hubs can create a quieter and more relaxed venue for families to visit.”

“The importance of the trust and respect that the dedicated professionals at Seashells have built up over two decades must be acknowledged as a prime reason for the 40,000 people to visit Seashells for support. Moving to the Gateway would immediately reduce the interaction of all those who feel a lack of trust in Council provided services (they feel more formal than Seashells) or feel they would not fit in because of their differences- even though these feelings may only be perceived and not reality.”

This section of the report summarises response to the questions posed surrounding the Millmead Family Hub in the consultation, as reported by consultees. 36 consultees chose to answer questions regarding this Hub.

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ACCESSING FAMILY HUB SERVICES AT A DIFFERENT FAMILY HUB ON CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Consultees were asked to indicate what impact they think accessing services at a different Family Hub, like Margate (Six Bells), Cliftonville or Northdown Road, would have on children, young people and families. All 36 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concern about leaving a well-established place / environment that is well used and trusted by local community, which is particularly important in an area of deprivation:

“Millmead Children’s Centre has been there for 20 years supporting families, families are familiar with staff and feel comfortable attending, sending families elsewhere would be detrimental to these families engagement.”

“A lot of the families who use Millmead suffer a variety of social and wellbeing problems such as anxiety. They have made bonds with the MCCPL staff over years and taking these services away from them will have a hugely detrimental effect on their wellbeing and ability to function in society. They have come to know and trust our staff and for some of the families they rely on our staff to help them with day-to-day problems that they wouldn't feel comfortable asking a new person to help with.”

“Millmead is in the centre of a large estate in an area of high deprivation. Communities stick to what they know, and trust and much time will have been spent by staff building relationships with the local community and gaining their trust. If Millmead loses funding and is unable to deliver their current services, families are unlikely to go to the other Family Hubs where they don't know the staff, the hubs or the services, meaning families and most importantly children are likely to miss out on much needed support.”

“I think that families on Millmead would not generally access services at other Family Hubs as they would lose all confidence in KCC if through their funding cuts to Millmead they would lose their building. KCC has a very low level of confidence with residence on the Millmead estate and this was acknowledged by KCC who led on the development of the Sure Start Millmead programme.”

“It was evident that the staff and services that Millmead provides have had a transformational effect upon many individuals and families over many years. The local community that currently utilises Millmead may not feel confident in accessing services at a new location and having to build new relationships and trust.”

Concern current users / residents local to Millmead Family Hub would not travel to visit other centres / services due to available income / deprivation / having to use public transport to get there:

“Thanet Millmead is one of the most deprived areas in Thanet. Loss of this service may mean that those people who currently access services will not be able to travel to other children's centres.”

“The children, young people and families of Millmead, one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the whole of Kent, would find it very difficult to travel over a mile to the next nearest Family Hub. Many families do not have access to cars to make this journey, moreover, families would struggle to afford the additional cost of bus travel and even if they could the area is not served well by reliable public transport. That leaves only the option of walking which would be difficult as this is along busy roads and uneven surfaces. Young families would especially struggle making this journey with children and even more so if they have buggies, prams or are affected by disabilities or mobility issues. Furthermore, this journey would be made even more challenging during winter months marked by short days, rain, ice and cold temperatures.”

“Families, children and young people do not necessarily have the means to travel to different family hubs. Your narrative with regards to distance is misleading as for a family you are actually expecting them to travel near as a 3-mile round trip. Clearly there is also a disconnection of understanding between the information KCC analytics recently published and the people who have decided to move forward on this consultation. Millmead is rated as a highest area for child poverty and deprivation, it is quite obvious what comes with these statistics- financial difficulty, anxiety, low mood, isolation, low energy due to lack of food- therefore not travelling nearly 3 miles to another hub. Millmead was an original Sure start building for a reason, positioned in a place it was needed to serve those families in most need this has not changed. Perhaps you should be considering to close another one of the KCC Thanet hubs and ensure families who live in the area of highest child poverty and deprivation can continue to access these services within a realistic accessible proximity to where they live.”

“A massive impact, this is in a very deprived area and many families would not be able to afford to access the other family hubs by public transport, many do not have cars, and it would not be acceptable to expect them to walk such a distance with babies and young children, especially in the long winter months. The families would therefore not be accessing these vital services that Millmead offer. It offers so much more than those listed in the document, it is a place of safety for many, a place of warmth and a LOCAL community place to seek friendship and support.”

Concern about impact on local area / already an area that has lost services / is in need of Millmead Family Hub / an area of significant deprivation:

“There will be absolutely nothing left in Dane Valley. This is a lifeline, and the other centres are just too far away for the families who have nothing.”

“I think it would have a huge and negative impact on the number of families accessing essential services for 0-5s, due to the distance and accessibility of other Family Hub buildings. Dane Valley (where Millmead is located) is one of the highest need communities

in Kent, with one of the highest rates of child poverty and poor early learning outcomes, and this should be reflected in the continued presence of a Family Hub.”

“Vital to understand the level of poverty experienced by many of the families served by the Children’s Centre. The IMD 2019 headline findings for Kent highlights the position of the Dane Valley ward in the league table as one of the most deprived LSOAs in Kent and Nationally. KCC published their Strategic Commissioning Stats bulletin in January 2020, so this provided an accurate and highly relevant backdrop to this Consultation. So, we have so many families in the ward who are below the poverty line, have very limited access to their own transport and are served by a poor public transport system, have young children who need to be accompanied to school at critical times, where family life creates its own pressures, where mental health issues are experienced significantly. Many of the service users place immense reliance on the support of the Millmead Children’s Centre because staff and volunteers are from the Dane Valley ward, understand the challenges of modern day living, are able to access a number of wrap around services and for whom the withdrawal of the such accessible services are bound to create additional pressures and realistically would mean for many service users of the Dane Valley ward they simply would not be able to access the services provided by Hubs at least a mile from their homes.”

PERCEIVED IMPACT FOR PROPOSAL FOR MILLMEAD FAMILY HUB ON OTHER SERVICES AND ORGANISATIONS

Consultees were asked to indicate what impact they think the proposal would have on other services and organisations. All 36 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concern for impact on Millmead Family Hub services / other services currently in Millmead Family Hub building resulting in further loss of services and inability for services to work together:

“It would have a massive impact on all the services that run from the centre. It will mean more missed appointments because the centres are not accessible to them. Social services workload will double, the outreach team help in supporting the families to prevent social service action and work closely with social services with safeguarding issues. By closing this centre you are putting more children at risk, more vulnerable people at risk!”

“Other partner agencies who are based at The Centre include the Health Visiting Service, Midwifery Community Clinic, Adult Speech and Learning service, Antenatal services and Family Nurse Practitioner. Additionally, so many partner organisations locally provide help and support on a year-by-year basis. The outstanding reputation of the Centre is a main reason why these organisations can utilise the facility and more importantly work in a 'wrap around' way to avoid missed appointments and view families holistically. The closure of the Millmead hub would have a highly damaging impact on their services.”

“Millmead work under the ethos of the previous SureStart programmes, which means they are a true hub of partnerships form health, public health, voluntary and third sector organisations, removal of the funding puts the centre at risk and therefore the ability of these services to work in partnership from the hubs. Millmead also run a nursery, there is a

risk this may not be able to continue of the centre has to close due to lack of funding, in an area where the majority of the parents are eligible for the FF2 Early Years funding and with nursery places across Kent diminishing this would be a great loss.”

“The question is would Millmead Family Hub be able to function without the funding from KCC? I think it would probably have to close down. It has been managing on a very low budget with the previous cuts in funding. I think if the building closed it would have huge implications on other services as it is through the Millmead Family Hub that organisation access local residents. Meetings are held at the centre with other organisations and residents will agree to attend. I think we maybe back to 2000 where residents told me 'nobody cares about Millmead'. The Hub is a focal point for the community. The Hub is where community was developed. This was achieved by people meeting up and getting to know each other and understanding that they had a commonality through shared experiences. This would not be possible without the Hub. There is a lack of understanding on the issue in relation to this consultation. The Hub on Millmead is central to the maintaining of community on the estate. KCC would lose all credibility if they closed the Hub. The levels of need would increase especially Domestic Violence and Safeguarding, SEND, teenage pregnancies, unemployment and others. These would cost KCC far more than they would save on a closure scenario.”

Concern for impact on using other statutory services / health and care services / other services already stretched:

“Yes, increased Safeguarding and Social Services cases due to families not accessing support services that they need due to distance. This will reduce the 'savings' outlined in the proposal.”

“Impact on Safeguarding and Child Protection as referrals will have to go through local teams. Unavailability of emergency service for local community. Impact on Thanet District Council and local Social Services, Police and Health. Already deprived area this would make it more difficult.”

“Further strain would be placed on health and care services in the years ahead. It is likely that a significant proportion of current Family Hub service users at the Millmead Children Centre, which is currently accessed by over 1000 children aged 0-5 per year, would no longer be able to benefit from the services provided as they would be unable to undertake the journey to other Family Hubs which are all over a mile away. Many service users would find this journey too challenging so may not engage in the future or do so infrequently. It is anticipated that this would lead to worse health outcomes for children, young people and families in the Millmead area and as a result would put a further strain on health and care services in the years ahead. Risk of an increase in anti-social behaviour. It's expected that the cessation of Family Hub services in Millmead would directly contribute to an increase in anti-social behaviour. Millmead is a very deprived and challenging area and the Children's Centre itself has been vandalised in the past. Therefore, we would expect that a further strain would be placed on police and community safety services in the future should the Family Hub services be removed from Millmead.”

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EQUALITY ANALYSIS

Consultees were asked to express any views on the equality analysis and/or if you think there is anything KCC should consider relating to equality and diversity for the Millmead Family Hub proposal. 25 consultees provided a comment. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the dominant theme expressed regarding concerns of access to alternative services / alternative hubs / children's centres amongst vulnerable groups:

“Where's the quality and diversity for the people living in severe poverty? Where's the equality and diversity for disabled people and those with young children in prams? They may not be able to afford the bus, or the bus may be too full to take them, or they may not be able to walk long distances or walk at all. Have you looked at the route? Is it pram and wheelchair accessible? I doubt it. I think you need to consider the area Millmead Children Centre is placed, the community it's within. Stop taking away their lifeline.”

The EqlA states - "The ability for residents to access the full (age) range of Family Hub services on offer, as opposed to the limited age-range activities at the commissioned centres represents a benefit to service users" is inaccurate as the likelihood is families will access fewer services. The document already states services are underutilised elsewhere; families would access them if they were what they needed in a place they could easily get to.”

“Unrealistic and short sighted. Millmead has continued to serve the community for 20+ years to a very high standard. The justification from KCC that families can access services with 1.5 (3 miles round trip) is ridiculous. The equality data is unrealistic and out of touch with regards to what it is really like to live in poverty.”

“The EqlA notes that the withdrawal of Family Hub services from Millmead will have an impact on age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity however the mitigation is centred on the provision of alternative services at Family Hubs located over a mile away. As stated previously, it is not feasible for many families to make this journey due to a lack of access to private transport, money for public transport and lack of safe walkable routes. The effect is especially prevalent for those families with disabilities or mobility issues. The EqlA needs to consider alternative mitigations to ensure that the closure of Millmead Family Hub does not result in worse health, social, physical and educational outcomes for young children in the area.”

PROFESSIONALS / ORGANISATION FEEDBACK

ANY OTHER PROPOSAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS

Consultees were asked to make any other comments or suggestions for the proposals put forward in their own words. 74 consultees made a comment at this question. The core themes expressed are consistent with feedback observed at Hub specific free text questions. Example verbatim comments are shown below and highlight the key themes expressed:

Concern for the impact closure of the Hubs will have on local communities due to levels of deprivation and trust in local services:

“We understand that cuts may need to be made due to lack of funding, but closing the Seashells support services will only have a detrimental effect on hundreds of vulnerable adults and children in an already deprived area.”

“Millmead has been the centre of the Community for over 20 years and has a massive footfall. Moving more services into Millmead would have had a bigger positive impact on the most poverty-stricken area of Thanet. Families who are already struggling financially will now have to pay for travel to get to services that once would have cost them nothing. You will be adding to the financial strain of families already struggling to meet day to day costs.”

“This area is very deprived, and the service users have taken a long time to grow confident in their children’s centre and its workers, this change which obviously saves money will knock that confidence and once again they will feel like they don’t matter.”

“Millmead children’s centre was created by the families in Millmead for the families in Millmead. I know decisions are made on outcomes and data, but Millmead is the essence of community spirit, families helping families and this is hard to measure and quantify. I worry that without KCC funding Millmead families will be isolated and unsupported, and this will impact the health, social and emotional well-being of the next generation. As a children’s social worker in Thanet, it is my view that the outreach staff and the centre are key to children’s safety and well-being in this neighbourhood.”

“Working within family support for over 20 years, I have grave concerns about the current proposal by Kent County Council to end the funding they provide to Children & Families for Seashells Family hub services in April 2025. I believe, from the early intervention and preventative work I have witnessed, been a part of and evidenced on hundreds of occasions there will be a hugely detrimental effect to children’s educational attainment, wellbeing, and most importantly safety if this funding ends. Thereby resulting in a sharp increase in emergency and crisis situations, putting further strain on the already overstretched local authority funded health, social and public services.”

Concern for the perceived safety of alternative locations and whether they are suitable for the services that are proposed to move:

“Trying to cram high quality existing services into much lower quality existing spaces that are not fit for purpose is a poorly thought-out plan that will simply reduce quality of much needed services in an already struggling deprived area.”

“Sheppey Gateway will not be a safe space for many families like seashells currently is. Many families reach out to the staff as a lifeline. Security purposes, gateway building is not as secure as Seashells building and that poses higher risks for children.”

Concern for the perceived safety of alternative locations and whether they are suitable for the services that are proposed to move:

“Further comments refer to the impact on families who do not own their own transport and where there is a very poor bus service. Removal of the contract and the services Millmead currently delivers will mean immense difficulty for any local family needing to escort their children to more widespread locations especially in winter darkness and poor weather. The combined impact of this proposal will only exacerbate pressures that local families already experience.”

“We have serious concerns that many of the most vulnerable families will not feel confident and comfortable accessing new and different facilities, especially given that Millmead and Seashells have been so successful in transforming the lives of vulnerable and diverse families.”

“Sheppey Gateway is a cold building and unwelcoming space; Seashells is not and has built a positive reputation in a difficult to engage community.”

NEXT STEPS

This consultation report, along with a Cabinet Committee report and the Equality Impact Assessment, is due to be presented to Members of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee in November 2024. Following this meeting, a decision will be made on whether or not to implement the proposals. The consultation website will be updated once a decision has been taken: www.kent.gov.uk/familyhubsconsultation.

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DRAFT VERSION

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK DRAFT RESPONSES

The formal responses to the consultation have been independently analysed. The tables below draw out the themes from the consultation feedback as identified by the independent analysis.

Also provided in the table below is the draft response to the feedback themes.

The first section relates to feedback on Seashells.

The second section related to feedback on Millmead.

The third section relates to relevant feedback provided across both sites.

The draft KCC responses are provided for consideration by the Cabinet Member.

Section 1: Seashells.

Consultation feedback relating to Seashells (as detailed in the Consultation Report)	
Consultation Feedback	Draft KCC Response
Seashells must not close: vital to / an integral part of the community, used by many families; closing it would have a significant impact	<p>It is acknowledged that Seashells plays an important role for the local community.</p> <p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the centres.</p>
Gateway will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at Seashells	<p>It is acknowledged that the Seashells centre was purpose built. However, the services which are funded under this contract can effectively be delivered from many different locations and utilising the Gateway means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local families.</p> <p>Some capital investment can be made available from existing agreed budgets to make amendments to the Gateway location with regards to safeguarding and appropriate use of space.</p>
Seashells is invaluable for children; their development, enjoyment, wellbeing, socialising, soft play, nursery.	<p>The Family Hub offer across the whole county, including the proposed offer at the Gateway, will continue to assist with the development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising for children.</p> <p>The nursery provision is not one of the services commissioned under the Family</p>

	<p>Hub contract and therefore is not one of the services that would end if the contracts were not re-commissioned.</p>
<p>Seashells / the staff are welcoming, supportive, make you feel part of a family / concern staff will lose their jobs</p>	<p>The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and a supportive place for whole families to come and receive support, advice and guidance.</p> <p>Staff that are currently delivering the Family Hub commissioned services at Seashells and Millmead are eligible for TUPE transfer. KCC HR colleagues are engaging with the providers on this issue.</p>
<p>Seashells offers key support to (new) mums / parents and babies, postpartum support and invaluable for parents raising their children</p>	<p>The Family Hub model across the county provides precisely this support for all mums, including new mums and mums-to-be. This service will be available at Gateway if the contract is not recommissioned.</p>
<p>Gateway will have safeguarding issues; for children, being on the high street / possibility of passers-by / non-users / strangers walking in</p>	<p>Funding is available through the DfE Family Hub Transformation grant to undertake capital works to facilitate the safe and appropriate use of the Gateway site.</p> <p>This may include safeguarding the access following this specific concern being raised. This will not interfere with the universal access of the building but will alleviate concerns that children may be able to run out into the road.</p> <p>The site is used by other agencies, including Children's Services and it is considered beneficial for service users to be able to access the wide range of services on offer in the one location.</p>
<p>Seashells is local, accessible on foot, with pushchairs / for the disabled; many wouldn't be able to access other centres, nor afford to use transport</p>	<p>The Sheppey Gateway is a level access site and is situated in the middle of the town, approximately 0.2 miles away from the Seashells Centre.</p>
<p>Seashells has a free accessible car park, Gateway does not</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that parking is not available at the Gateway, however many Family Hubs across the county do not have dedicated parking for service users.</p> <p>Parking is available a short distance from the Gateway. However, users do need to pay for this.</p>

	<p>It is therefore acknowledged within the Equality Impact Assessment that the impacts of this change may be particularly felt by those with a disability that affects their ability to walk.</p>
<p>Seashells provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation</p>	<p>The network of Family Hub locations across the county are designed to be places that families can attend and meet other families. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing Family Hub services at Seashells and support their transition. We are also developing a network of peer mentors and Family Coaches that will help build the sense of community.</p>
<p>Seashells is a warm, safe, secure, trusted, reliable space.</p>	<p>The role that the centre plays in its own right is acknowledged. However, the Family Hub network across the county is designed to be a safe and welcoming place where parents can access a range of support and guidance. Since Kent County Council rolled out Family Hubs we have received positive feedback from families and children about how welcome and supported they feel.</p>
<p>Gateway is not family friendly</p>	<p>Our Gateway and Library spaces are universally accessible and welcoming for all residents of Kent.</p> <p>Funding is available through the DfE Family Hub Transformation grant to undertake capital works to facilitate the safe and appropriate use of the Gateway site.</p>
<p>If Seashells closed, we / many would be unable to attend anywhere else</p>	<p>Our network of Community Development Workers will help families with the transition to using the alternative site.</p> <p>The current proposals only affect the recommissioning of the Family Hub element delivered at Seashells and do not impact on the other services offered from there. Families and children will be able to access all the other services i.e. nursery, health services, food bank, etc offered from Seashells.</p> <p>The proposed alternative location at Sheppey Gateway is 0.2 miles away.</p>

Seashells is good for mental health support, has mental health session	Subject to continued need and timetabling, the Family Hub service at the Gateway could provide sessions focused on mental health, particularly Perinatal Mental Health, as well as more generally focused on assisting overall wellbeing for families.
Gateway is used by too many other services: banking, library, clubs	The site is used by/for other services and other agencies, and it is considered beneficial for service users to be able to access the wide range of services on offer in the one location.
Seashells is a lifeline to many	<p>It is acknowledged that the centre plays an important role for local communities.</p> <p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the centre and families can continue to access those services, if they choose to do so.</p>
Seashells has outdoor space / we have no garden / children can play outside	It is acknowledged that the Gateway does not benefit from a secure open space. There are however other facilities locally where free open space is available for families.
Seashells is an information resource / they provide advice and signposting	The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for whole families to come and receive support, advice and guidance. This includes signposting or referral to other available advice and support.
This is an area of recognised high deprivation; closing it would impact the most vulnerable / in need, pushing them further into deprivation	<p>The level of deprivation in the ward is acknowledged. Patterns of deprivation have been present consistently within this community for a long time.</p> <p>A comparative Family Hub service (although not like-for-like) can be delivered from the Gateway setting, subject to specific timetable arrangements.</p>
Seashells is safe for children, has door release button / children can play safely / away from the busy high street	<p>Gateway is a structurally a safe building.</p> <p>Funding is available through the DfE Family Hub Transformation grant to undertake capital works to facilitate the safe and appropriate use of the Gateway site for the work with children and families.</p>

	<p>This may include safeguarding the access following this specific concern being raised. This will not interfere with the universal access of the building but will alleviate concerns that children may be able to run out into the road.</p>
<p>Seashells has health clinics, baby weigh clinics, health visitors</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the centres.</p> <p>The decision will not impact on the continuation of these services from Seashells.</p>
<p>Gateway is only open 4 days a week</p>	<p>We will have the opportunity to review the opening of the Gateway considering the additional services that will be provided.</p> <p>The provision of activity under the Family Hub contract at Seashells is approximately 14 hours a week. The provision of at least 14 hours Family Hub activity per week can be accommodated at the Sheppey Gateway.</p>
<p>Seashells has the food bank which many rely on</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as the food bank which are run from Seashells are not within the scope of the decision.</p> <p>Families may continue to avail themselves of this service, should they choose to do so.</p>
<p>There are lots of (free) clubs, activities, sessions, groups, invaluable to many who couldn't afford otherwise</p>	<p>Free sessions and activities are a key part of the Family Hub offer across the county and would be included within any timetable for services at the Gateway.</p> <p>Families across the county who access our Family Hubs' free services have offered positive feedback about the activities that are offered.</p>
<p>There is no private space at the Gateway</p>	<p>There are spaces at the Gateway that can be used for private sessions and confidential conversations.</p>
<p>Taking it away will cause more social problems, including an increase in referrals to family support services</p>	<p>The level of need that families who access Seashells have is below the threshold for statutory intervention and so we would not expect current families accessing these services to be facing issues that qualify for statutory intervention. As a result, we do not</p>

	<p>expect to see an increase in families requiring referral to the Front Door team.</p> <p>The duty to provide statutory services under Children Act 1989 or 2004 is not part of the current contract in place for Seashells and it is not a function that Local Authorities can commission out to voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSEs).</p>
Seashells has sensory rooms, used by many	The sensory room at Seashells was put in outside of the commissioned contract for Family Hubs and is therefore unaffected by this proposal.
Comments / reasons for not using Gateway / Gateway should not be used	The proposal to use the Gateway means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local residents whilst the Council works to address the significant financial challenges that it faces.
Seashells is inclusive / equality is all they know / everyone is welcome	The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for all families across all parts of our community to come and receive support, advice and guidance. This includes signposting or referral to other available advice and support.
Seashells serves some of the most vulnerable and deprived residents / areas / plans discriminate against those people / people living in Sheerness	The level of deprivation in the ward is acknowledged. A comparative Family Hub service (although not like-for-like) can be delivered from the Gateway setting, subject to specific timetable arrangements.
Consider the children / the impact on their lives and their futures without the safety, support, familiarity, importance of Seashells	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the centres</p> <p>The Family Hub offer across the whole county, including the proposed any offer at the Gateway will continue to assist with the development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising for children.</p>
Consider accessibility for users with a disability / mums with pushchairs	The Gateway site has level access and whilst it is across two floors, the site benefits from a lift for those users that require it.
Discriminates against those who are losing access to services, e.g. especially mums and babies	It is acknowledged within the Equality Impact Assessment that most users of the services are mums, children and babies. Therefore, the impact of these changes may be disproportionately felt by those groups.

	<p>However, the proposal to use the Gateway means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local residents whilst the Council works to address the significant financial challenges that it faces.</p>
<p>Consider those with SEN needs, the neurodivergent, discriminates against those if no longer able to access services</p>	<p>The proposal to use the Gateway means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local residents whilst the Council works to address the significant financial challenges that it faces.</p> <p>We acknowledge that changing locations presents challenges for families coping with additional SEND needs. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Seashells and support their transition, linking in with our SEND service as required.</p>
<p>Not representative of the area, needs to be a local / community assessment</p>	<p>The Gateway is a local space used to deliver services to the community.</p>
<p>If the funding is withdrawn, it is likely that Seashells would face no alternative other than to charge room rates, at the moment all room space is free of charge.</p>	<p>This is a commercial decision for the independent company running the centre.</p> <p>There are national funding streams available for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector that the company running the centre can apply for, if interested.</p>
<p>Families will not access Sheppey Gateway as it is seen as a negative place to go (i.e. you only go there if you have a problem with housing or benefits).</p>	<p>Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Seashells and support their transition to Gateway.</p> <p>Sheppey Gateway also houses a library. KCC Libraries are universally accessible and all residents in Kent are welcome. There is positive feedback from residents related to KCC libraries.</p>

Section 2: Millmead

Consultation feedback relating to Millmead (as detailed in the Consultation Report)	
Consultation Feedback	Draft KCC Response
<p>Millmead is local / accessible / many wouldn't be able to go elsewhere / unable to even afford the bus fare / mums with pushchairs can walk there / mums postpartum can access / others are uphill and inaccessible to mums on foot</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the current Millmead site is accessible for local families.</p> <p>The Family Hub model across Margate includes three other centres all within 1.5 miles. It is acknowledged that this may present a barrier for some and that travel on foot is not possible for all.</p> <p>As a result of this feedback, KCC will provide parents and children bus tickets for those that previously accessed services from Millmead and now can't afford the bus fares to access the other Family Hubs from Margate.</p> <p>We maintain that there is sufficient provision to meet local need. Time-limited assistance to cover the cost of transport to the alternative venues would be offered as a means of helping support service users through the transition.</p>
<p>Millmead must not be closed: is much needed resource, relied upon by many families, offering lots to local often deprived families, closing it would be devastating, save money elsewhere</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the centre plays an important role for the local community.</p> <p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the centre and are not funded by Kent County Council through the existing contract.</p> <p>The provision of activity under the Family Hub contract at Milmead is approximately 9 hours a week. The provision of at least 9 hours Family Hub activity per week can be accommodated at the other centres.</p> <p>KCC is required to make savings across a wide range of services to meet the financial challenge currently faced by the Authority. The Statutory Duty on KCC to provide sufficient access to Children's Centres can still be met and as such it is felt that it is acceptable to make these savings. The rest of the in-house Family Hub network was</p>

	<p>subject to similar savings in previous decisions.</p>
<p>Lots of deprived children attend Millmead: is invaluable for their development, enjoyment, well-being, socialising, soft play, nursery, Sure Start</p>	<p>The level of deprivation in the ward is acknowledged.</p> <p>The Family Hub offer across the whole of Margate will continue to assist with the development, enjoyment, wellbeing and socialising for children.</p> <p>There are three alternative Family Hub locations within Margate, all within 1.5 miles of the Millmead Centre.</p> <p>Families across the county who access our Family Hubs' free services have offered positive feedback about the activities that are offered.</p> <p>The nursery provision is not one of the services commissioned under the Family Hub contract and therefore is not one of the services that would end if the contracts were not re-commissioned.</p>
<p>The staff at Millmead are welcoming / supportive / we trust them and we and the children have developed close relationships with them</p>	<p>The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for whole families to come and receive support, advice and guidance.</p> <p>Staff that are currently delivering the Family Hub commissioned services at Seashells and Millmead are eligible for TUPE transfer. KCC HR colleagues are engaging with the providers on this issue.</p>
<p>Millmead is a safe / warm / secure / comforting / familiar / welcoming environment</p>	<p>The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for all families across all parts of our community to come and receive support, advice and guidance. This includes signposting or referral to other available advice and support.</p> <p>There are three alternative Family Hub locations within Margate, all within 1.5 miles of the Millmead Centre.</p>
<p>Millmead has a free accessible car park / others do / may not</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that whilst limited free parking is available at Northdown Road Family Hub, it is not available at all the alternative locations proposed. Many</p>

	<p>Family Hubs across the county do not have dedicated parking for service users.</p> <p>Parking is available a short distance from the other locations, however, users may need to pay for this.</p> <p>It is therefore acknowledged within the Equality Impact Assessment that the impacts of this change may be particularly felt by those that manage a disability that affects their ability to walk.</p>
There are lots of clinics attended / health visitor / baby weigh / healthy child clinic	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the Millmead and are not within the scope of the current contract that is under review.</p> <p>There are national funding streams available for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector that the company running the centre can apply for, if interested.</p>
Millmead is relied upon by new mums, provides postpartum support, breastfeeding support, used by lots of mums / parents with babies	<p>The Family Hub model across the county provides precisely this support for all mums, including new mums and mums-to-be.</p> <p>Infant feeding support and postpartum support are key parts of the service offer available in the other Margate Family Hubs.</p>
Many families would no longer be able to attend, use services if Millmead closed	<p>Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Millmead and support their transition.</p> <p>There are three alternative Family Hub locations within Margate, all within 1.5 miles of the Millmead Centre.</p> <p>Time-limited assistance to cover the cost of transport to the alternative venues would be offered as a means of helping support service users through the transition.</p>
Others will not be able to offer the same level of service, it's not big enough, will not be able to house all the services on offer at others	<p>The Family Hub services provided under the commissioned contract are available at the alternative Family Hub sites in Margate.</p> <p>Capacity within these location exists</p>

Clubs, events, activities are free, couldn't afford to pay for such like, we attend lots of activities we wouldn't be able to otherwise	<p>Free sessions and activities are a key part of the Family Hub offer across the county and would be included within any timetable for services at the other Family Hubs from Margate.</p> <p>The provision of activity under the Family Hub contract at Millmead is approximately 9 hours a week. The provision of at least 9 hours Family Hub activity per week can be accommodated at the other centres.</p> <p>Families across the county who access our Family Hubs' free services have offered positive feedback about the activities that are offered.</p>
Change not good for those with anxiety - places, people, surroundings, means they would not be able to attend elsewhere	We acknowledge that changing locations presents specific challenges for families coping with anxiety or additional needs. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Millmead and support their transition, linking in with our SEND service as required.
Other hubs would be stretched	There is capacity within the other hubs to deliver services to families currently accessing Millmead.
Millmead has baby sensory rooms / classes	The sensory room at Millmead was put in outside of the commissioned contract for Family Hubs and is therefore unaffected by this proposal.
Millmead provides a social aspect / making friends / prevents social isolation	The network of Family Hub locations across the county are designed to be places that families can attend and meet other families. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Millmead and support their transition. We are also developing a network of peer mentors and Family coaches that will help build the sense of community.
Millmead is accessible for the disabled, all on one level	The other Family Hub sites are equally accessible.
Others are not family friendly, not set up for families and children	The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for all families across all parts of our community to come and receive support, advice and guidance.

	Families across the county who access our Family Hubs services have offered positive feedback about the support they received from practitioners.
Millmead is a lifeline for many families	The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the Millmead.
Millmead provides lots of information and advice, signposting	The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for all families across all parts of our community to come and receive support, advice and guidance. This includes signposting or referral to other available advice and support.
Millmead is inclusive / equality is all they know, everyone is welcome	The Family Hub model across the whole county is designed to be a welcoming and supportive place for all families across all parts of our community to come and receive support, advice and guidance. Families across the county who access our Family Hubs services have offered positive feedback about the support they received from practitioners.
Consider accessibility for disabled, mums with pushchairs - Millmead is very accessible	The other Family Hub sites are equally accessible. However, it is acknowledged that the impact of changing service locations is likely to be more challenging for service users managing disabilities. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Seashells and support their transition.
Discriminates against those who are losing access to services, e.g. mums and babies	It is acknowledged within the Equality Impact Assessment that the majority of users of the services are mums, children and babies. Therefore, the impact of these changes may be disproportionately felt by those groups. However, the proposal to use the alternative Family Hub locations means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local residents whilst the Council works to address the significant financial challenges that it faces.

Not representative of the area / needs to be a local / community assessment	The three proposed alternative Family Hubs are all local spaces used to deliver services to the community.
Consider those with SEN needs, the neurodivergent, discriminates against those if no longer able to access services	<p>The proposal to use the alternative Family Hub sites means that the Family Hub service can be retained for local residents whilst the Council works to address the significant financial challenges that it faces.</p> <p>We acknowledge that changing locations presents specific challenges for families coping with additional SEND needs. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Millmead and support their transition, linking in with our SEND service as required.</p>
Consider those with mental health issues	<p>Subject to continued need and timetabling the Family Hub service at the alternative sites proposed, sessions will be provided focusing on mental health, particularly Perinatal Mental Health, as well as more generally focused on assisting overall wellbeing for families.</p> <p>We acknowledge that changing locations presents specific challenges for families coping with mental health concerns. Our network of Community Development Workers will work with families that are used to accessing services at Millmead and support their transition, linking in with our SEND service as required.</p>
Consider safeguarding - others are not safe for children – location / building nor from other users	<p>The proposed alternative Family Hub sites are all safe for children and families to access and are currently operational Family Hub sites.</p> <p>There are no health and safety concerns in any of the Family Hubs buildings in Margate.</p> <p>All staff who work in the Family Hubs services including those in Margate are Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checked and pose no risk of harm to children. All the staff working in the Family Hubs estate have receive comprehensive training to offer safe and evidence-based support to children and families.</p>

<p>In Margate, there are three Family Hubs close to each other. One of those should be closed to save Millmead.</p>	<p>The revenue saving (running costs) of closing one of the other three Family Hubs in Margate is approximately £41,000 and therefore would not meet the saving target.</p> <p>Millmead have been approached to ascertain the potential costs of hiring space to provide a KCC run Family Hub service from the centre (as opposed to a commissioned contract under which the provider provides the service from their own building). Hire costs have been estimated as between £65k and £85k per year.</p> <p>If KCC cease services at the location that costs £41k a year and hired space, the impact on the KCC revenue budget would therefore be an additional pressure of at least £25k (£65k minimum hire charge minus £41k saving at the closed centre). These are property costs, not staffing costs.</p>
<p>The variety of services available at Millmead is important and this cannot be replicated elsewhere.</p>	<p>The wider Family Hub network of services available to residents at the alternative sites is equally beneficial. The wider service offer available will adapt over time in response to the need of the community accessing the Family Hub network.</p>
<p>Important health concerns might go unnoticed due to lack of proximity to medical facilities since Millmead is the only place families go to.</p>	<p>Health services are outside of the scope of the commissioned Family Hub services and are therefore not part of Kent County Council's proposals to move out of Millmead should the commissioned contracts not be renewed.</p>

Section 3: Feedback relevant across both sites

Consultation feedback relevant across both sites	
Consultation Feedback	Draft KCC Response
<p>The loss of this significant revenue will result in the closure of both centres, with community midwifery being displaced.</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract. Other services such as nurseries and health provision would remain at the two centres and are not within the scope of the current contract that is under review.</p> <p>The extent and value of the commercial relationship between the two companies running the two centres and the various Health providers is unknown to Kent County Council; however, that commercial relationship is not within to scope of the current contract review.</p>

	<p>There are national funding streams available for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector that the companies running the two centres can apply for, if interested.</p>
<p>Limited availability of alternative clinical spaces should the Family Hubs in Seashells and Millmead close.</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract.</p> <p>The extent and value of the commercial relationship between the two companies running the two centres and the various Health providers is unknown to Kent County Council; however, that commercial relationship is not within the scope of the current contract review.</p>
<p>Most of the alternative locations that may be suitable for relocation of community midwifery services from Millmead and Seashells are already full given the outcome of the communities services consultation.</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract.</p> <p>Health Visiting and Midwifery services, whilst a part of the wider Family Hub network, are not within the scope of the current commissioned contracts. It is up to the companies that run Millmead and Seashells to negotiate their commercial relationship with the Health providers should they choose to do so.</p>
<p>Whilst the consultation document states that the proposals set out in the consultation do not directly impact Kent Community Health Foundation Trust (KCHFT), there are concerns that the services KCHFT deliver will indirectly be affected.</p>	<p>The proposal is only related to the services that are commissioned under the Family Hub contract.</p> <p>Health Visiting and Midwifery services, whilst a part of the wider Family Hub network, are not within the scope of the current commissioned contracts and therefore could stay in place at Millmead and Seashells if required.</p> <p>Service delivery requirements for Kent Community Health Foundation Trust (KCHFT) can be reviewed regularly to determine whether additional capacity is required. This can be monitored through the KCC Public Health Commissioning team. Additional spaces can be made available if required on Sheppey at either the Queenborough Library co-location site or at the Sheppey Gateway. Clinical space is</p>

	<p>already available in Thanet at all three alternative sites – Northdown Road Family Hub, Cliftonville Family Hub and Margate Family Hub.</p>
<p>KCHFT is mindful that this could potentially result in both Family Hubs charging KCHFT for delivery space which has previously been provided free of charge as a way to secure additional funding streams.</p>	<p>This may present an additional cost pressure (approx £30k per annum) for the Public Health commissioned contracts to KCHFT.</p> <p>The commercial relationship between KCHFT and the two companies running Millmead and Seashells is not within the scope of the contract that is under review.</p>
<p>Concerns that the purpose of moving services is that KCC hopes to wind the services down?</p>	<p>KCC is not intending to wind down the Family Hub service. Investment from the Department for Education over the last three years has facilitated the transformation from our previous Open Access service to the new Family Hub model. Part of the funding is to ensure the service is operationally sustainable.</p>
<p>Families may not wish to access services in the building with children's social services creating a barrier.</p>	<p>A strength of the whole Family Hub network is that it draws on the links across the wider Early Help system, including our social services support to assist families where needed.</p>
<p>Concerns that there has been a distinct lack of communication on KCC's part to fully investigate the impact of the changes and a more thorough options appraisal should have been carried out to seek options that do not create such huge disparity in the level of service being proposed to what is required</p>	<p>An options appraisal was carried out in advance of the consultation, and this was detailed within the information available for residents.</p> <p>Following the consultation response, an additional option has been considered which assesses the possibility of not renewing the commissioned contracts, but instead renting space within the centres for Kent County Council to deliver the Family Hub services.</p>
<p>Safeguarding and child protection issues will increase if the centres close – lives will be lost.</p>	<p>Our Family Hub service provides a wide range of services for all families across universal and targeted levels of need (as the term 'need' relates to the Kent County Council children's services offer). The universal and targeted levels of need sit under the threshold for statutory Children Services intervention who assess and support children in need, children who suffer or are at risk of suffering significant harm and children in care.</p>

	<p>The duty to provide statutory services under Children Act 1989 or 2004 is not part of the current contract in place for the two children's centres and it is not a function that Local Authorities can commission out to voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSEs).</p> <p>Families that have a higher level of need and where children are in need or are at risk of or suffer significant harm receive support from Children Social Work Teams and intensive Early Help. The statutory duties provided by Kent County Council in regards service delivery under the various Children Act provisions remains unchanged as a result of this proposal. These services are still available through existing channels and partnerships across the wider Early Years network.</p>
The community pantry and clothes bank are vital for the community and should not be lost.	These services are not part of the commissioned Family Hub contract and therefore fall outside of this proposal.
If contracts not renewed, community midwifery will be displaced alongside other services	<p>The community midwifery service sits outside of the commissioned Family Hub services at Millmead and Seashells and therefore the service delivery is not within the scope of the current contract.</p> <p>Despite this, in Margate all three Family Hub locations already include clinical space for use by community midwifery. The Sheppey Gateway can be adapted to include clinical space for community midwifery if required.</p>
Impact on single dads and their mental health will be impacted.	<p>Our Family Hub network across the county is a welcoming and supportive place for all parents and carers. Through our Start for Life insights work we have developed z-cards and one-minute interaction guidance for all Family Hub staff to help boost engagement with dads.</p> <p>Our continued work with Dadspace is developing our offer to fathers, with a focus on their mental health and the relationship with their children. If needed this is something that can be broadened to deliver specific sessions for dads in these areas.</p>

<p>There will be a large impact on schools having to take in children that have not had the early intervention that Millmead and Seashells Family Hubs offer.</p>	<p>The Family Hub service will still be available to local people online (for example the free Easy Peasy app) and at the alternative sites proposed.</p> <p>Any families in Margate and on the Island of Sheppey have several opportunities to engage with the Family Hubs services should they choose to do so.</p>
<p>Both of these locations were pilot Family Hub sites, how can they now be closed?</p>	<p>Both Millmead and Seashells have played an important role in the transformation of the Family Hub model in Kent.</p> <p>However, the financial challenges that the Council face are significant and all options for easing the pressure on the budget are being explored.</p> <p>The contracts for these two centres have always been time limited and they end in March 2025. It is therefore timely and appropriate to consider whether the services can be delivered to families locally in a way that meets their needs while helping to address the Council's financial challenges.</p>

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Submission Draft Working Template

If required, this template is for use prior to completing your EQIA Submission in the EQIA App. You can use it to understand what information is needed beforehand to complete an EQIA submission online, and as a way to collaborate with others who may be involved with the EQIA. Note: You can upload this into the App when complete if it contains more detailed information than the App asks for and you wish to retain this detail.

Section A

1. Name of Activity (EQIA Title):	Commissioned Family Hub Contracts
2. Directorate	Children, Young People and Education
3. Responsible Service/Division	Integrated Children's Services

Accountability and Responsibility

4. Officer completing EQIA Note: This should be the name of the officer who will be submitting the EQIA onto the App.	Ben Sherreard Programme Manager – Family Hubs
5. Head of Service Note: This should be the Head of Service who will be approving your submitted EQIA.	Dan Bride, Director of Youth Justice, Adolescent Response
6. Director of Service Note: This should be the name of your responsible director.	Ingrid Crisan Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services

The type of Activity you are undertaking

7. What type of activity are you undertaking?	
Tick if Yes	Activity Type
Yes	Service Change – <i>operational changes in the way we deliver the service to people.</i>
	Service Redesign – <i>restructure, new operating model or changes to ways of working</i>
	Project/Programme – <i>includes limited delivery of change activity, including partnership projects, external funding projects and capital projects.</i>
Yes	Commissioning/Procurement – <i>means commissioning activity which requires commercial judgement.</i>
	Strategy /Policy – <i>includes review, refresh or creating a new document</i>
	Other – Please add details of any other activity type here.

8. Aims and Objectives and Equality Recommendations – Note: You will be asked to give a brief description of the aims and objectives of your activity in this section of the App, along with the Equality recommendations. You may use this section to also add any context you feel may be required.

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

This EQIA is intended to assess the potential impact of our decisions on persons with different protected characteristics. In particular, this EQIA has been prepared to help us have due regard to the need to: (i) eliminate discrimination; (ii) advance equality of opportunity; and (iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, in the exercise of our public functions. These issues are relevant considerations to be taken into account whenever a new policy, function, or system change is being proposed in the exercise of our public functions. This EQIA is also intended to evidence that these considerations have in fact been taken into account, and the weight given to them as part of our decision-making process.

The Case for Change

The Department for Education (DfE) has selected Kent County Council (KCC) as a Family Hub and Start for Life Transformation Authority. Family Hubs are about bringing together and integrating support services for children, young people, and families so that they are easier for people to access. The services within the Family Hub model include, but are not be limited to:

- KCC Children's Centres
- KCC Youth Hubs and community youth provision
- KCC Commissioned Health Visiting Services
- Community-based Midwifery care
- Other community organisations

In November 2023 KCC Cabinet took [decision 23/00092](#) to implement the Family Hub model across the County. At the time, that included transformation and efficiency plans for 56 Family Hub locations across Kent not including the two Commissioned centres, Millmead and Seashells (in line with the Kent Communities Programme [decision 23/00101](#), also from November 2023).

Due to the fact that Millmead and Seashells Family Hub services are both externally commissioned, they were not included within the scope of the Kent Communities Programme analysis.

There has been a sequence of decisions that deliver savings against what was the previous Open Access (now Family Hub) budget as set out in the MTFP (more detail in the next section). Firstly decisions were made that considered the Family Hub model itself and the buildings used to deliver the services. These decisions have been implemented, delivering savings through model redesign, staff restructure and building rationalisation. With the commissioned contracts ending in March 2025, the next consideration in sequence, as we seek to make the remaining saving outlined in the MTFP, is whether to renew these contracts or whether the service provision can be delivered differently, thus saving money for the Council.

The Council is facing very significant financial pressures, for a number of reasons as set out in 'Securing Kent's Future' (August 2023 and October 2023). The document sets out the urgent steps needed to return the Council to financial sustainability, by reducing overspend in its budget to avoid further need to use limited reserves to fund revenue overspends. This would weaken the financial resilience of the authority and limit the scope for the use of reserves to invest in transformation necessary to address the structural deficit.

The financial challenges faced by the Council cannot be ignored. The Council has statutory duties to deliver a balanced budget, provide statutory services, including adult social care and children's services, and secure value for money in all spending decisions.

There is a clear financial driver for this decision. The second driver of this decision is the current imbalance in the Family Hub delivery model across Kent and the resultant duplication of costs for the Council. Currently there are 50 Family Hub sites across the county, including within Swale and Thanet, which are staffed by KCC Family Hub practitioners. These centres provide Family Hub services for families in Kent staffed and funded from the CYPE base budget. By providing Family Hub services from these two independent centres there is an imbalance in the delivery model as these are the only two centres where services are externally commissioned. These centres link in with partners such as Health and VCS organisations. However the links to other KCC ICS/Early Help services are not as strong as within the rest of the KCC in-house network. We are also duplicating cost in terms of management (each District in Kent has a KCC District Manager for example), HR, IT and finance support through the commissioning of the two centres.

The commissioned Family Hub contracts cost the council £426k per annum. Analysis shows that the current Family Hub service delivers 14 hours of activity per week at Seashells and 9 hours of activity per week at Millmead that are directly commissioned under the contract. These hours can be accommodated at the alternative sites identified (Sheppey Gateway for Seashells and the three nearby in-house Family Hubs in

Margate for Millmead). Vacancies held within the Family Hub staff will accommodate the staff eligible for TUPE to deliver these sessions at the alternative locations.

Public Consultation

A proposal to not renew the two commissioned service contracts when they end in March 2025 was put to public consultation between 30 July 2024 and 22 September 2024. The consultation set out the rationale for the proposal, a summary of other options considered, and the detail of alternative arrangements for the delivery of Family Hub services for the impacted communities.

A consultation version of the Equalities Impact Assessment was also provided for review during the consultation and feedback was sought from respondents to highlight any additional considerations that should be made in regard to equalities.

Consultation Proposals for the Cessation of the Commissioned Family Hub Contracts

The proposal on which we consulted was to not retender the two commissioned contracts when they come to an end on 31 March 2025.

This will affect the following two contracts:

Children and Families Ltd	Seashells Family Hub, Sheerness
Millmead Children's Centre Partnership Ltd	Millmead Family Hub, Margate

Seashells

In relation to Seashells the proposal to not renew the contract when it ends in March 2025 would mean the end of KCC funded Family Hub services at the Seashells centre.

The services currently on offer at Seashells under the commissioned Family Hub contract include (*denotes booking or referral required):

- Baby Massage*
- Baby and Toddler Sing and Sign
- Breastfeeding Clinic
- Breast Pump Hire
- Little Talkers*
- Sensory Hub
- Solihull Antenatal Class
- Solihull Parenting*
- Stay and Play
- Triple P Parenting Course*
- 1-2-1 Family Work*

It is the proposal that a comparable (although not 'like-for-like') Family Hub service will be offered at the Sheppey Gateway as an alternative. The Gateway is less than a 5-minute walk from the current Seashells centre and subject to a specific timetable, the expected service offer would include:

- Baby Massage*
- Birth Registrations (Library and Registration Service)
- Citizens Advice Clinic
- Infant Feeding Support
- Little Talkers*
- Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Drop In
- Playground Creative Play (Libraries and Registration Service)
- Stay and Play
- Triple P Parenting Course*

- 1-2-1 Family Work

Millmead

In relation to Millmead, the proposal to not renew the contract when it ends in March 2025 would mean the end of KCC funded Family Hub services at the Millmead Centre.

The services currently on offer at Millmead include (*denotes booking or referral required):

- Baby Massage*
- Book Library
- Breastfeeding Support
- Breast Pump Hire*
- Cost of Living Drop in
- Citizens Advice Clinic
- Cygnet Programme*
- Garden Club
- Health Visiting Checks (delivered by Health Visiting team)
- Healthy Baby Group
- Introducing Solids Workshop
- Little Explorers
- Little Talkers*
- One You Service (delivered by East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust)
- PCSO Drop In
- Stay and Play
- Triple P Parenting Course*
- You and Your Baby*
- 1-2-1 Family Work*

Thanet has the largest network of Family Hub locations available to residents, in line with the higher levels of need as set out in the [Kent Communities Programme \(KCP\) decision](#). In consultation with the relevant local practitioners, we believe that the in-house Family Hub network is sufficient to meet the needs of residents currently served by the Millmead Centre due to current underutilisation of the services on offer across the rest of the network. Alternative Family Hub locations are within travel distances that were accepted for wards with comparable need in the KCP decision. Cliftonville Family Hub is 1.3 miles away while Margate Family Hub is 1.4 miles away and Northdown Road Family Hub is 1.45 miles away. Millmead is located in Dane Valley Ward which has an identified need score of 69/100 (KCP data analysis). In the KCP decision, it was agreed to close the Ladybird CC in Queenborough and Halfway Ward which had a need score of 66/100. The nearest alternative location for Ladybird CC was 3.3 miles away.

The services available at the three alternative locations include (*denotes booking or referral required):

The sessions available at Cliftonville Family Hub include (as at June 2024 and subject to further timetable amendments): *booking or referral required.	The sessions available at Margate Family Hub include (as at June 2024 and subject to further timetable amendments): * booking or referral required.	The sessions that will be available from Northdown Road Family Hub by the end of March 2025 include: *booking or referral required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Beyond the Page* • Breast Pump Scheme* • Cygnet Course* • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Community Pantry (from September 2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Breastfeeding Support Group • Breast Pump Scheme* • Citizens Advice Clinic • Cost of Living Support Group • Cygnet Course* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Massage* • Breastfeeding Support Group • Breast Pump Scheme* • Citizens Advice Clinic • Community Café Space • Cost of Living Support Group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Child Clinic • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • My First Year and Me • One You • Sensory Room • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • 1-2-1 Family Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Groups and Services for 8-19yr olds (25yrs with SEND) • Health Visiting and Wellbeing Reviews • Infant Feeding Clinic • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Explorers • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • Midwifery Services • My First Year and Me • One You • Sensory Room • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • 1-2-1 Family Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cygnet Course* • Family Fun Time / Stay and Play • Food Bank • Groups and Services for 8-19yr olds (25yrs with SEND) • Healthy Child Clinic • Introducing Solids Workshops • Kent Adult Education Courses • Little Bookworms • Little Explorers • Little Talkers* • Managing Behaviour Strategies* • Midwifery Services • Outdoor and Indoor Sports Hall/Courts • Triple P Baby Course* • 'Understanding You, Understanding Your Child' Parenting Programme • Young Lives Foundation • 1-2-1 Family Work
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Consultation Feedback: Overview

In total 1,016 consultees provided a formal response using the questionnaire. 672 consultees chose to answer questions in relation to Seashells and 433 answered in relation to Millmead. 99 respondents provided comments that addressed the proposals for both sites. The demographic breakdown of the responses is provided in a later section.

64% of consultees responding to the consultation currently use the Seashells centre, whilst 20% indicated they had used the centre in the past. 16% indicated that they do not use, nor have they used the Seashells centre.

73% of consultees responding to the consultation currently use the Millmead centre, whilst 18% indicated they had used the centre in the past. 10% indicated that they do not use, nor have they used the Millmead centre.

Responses to the consultation did not focus on specific impacts for individual protected characteristic. Instead, commentary on equalities was most commonly used to reiterate the general sense of overall impact that the loss of the services at these centres may have on residents generally.

Of those answering questions relating to Seashells, the most common themes of feedback arising were that the centre is vital to the community (32%) and that the Gateway site proposed as an alternative will not be suitable and will not offer the same service (25%).

Of the specific issues linked to equalities that were identified by respondents commenting on Seashells, impact on children (14%), accessibility (10%), impact on mums (8%) and impact on those with SEND or that are neurodivergent (8%) were most commonly raised. However, these issues do not appear to have been raised in order to make a point about the impact on protected characteristics, but more to demonstrate the overarching sense of loss for the community as a whole.

Of those answering questions relating to Millmead, the most common themes of feedback arising were that Millmead is accessible locally and that the alternatives sites are not accessible on foot or by bus (53%) and that Millmead is a much-needed resource for deprived families locally (37%).

Of the specific issues linked to equalities that were identified by respondents commenting on Millmead, difficulties accessing public transport (20%), impact on children (17%), accessibility for those who are disabled or mums with pushchairs (16%) and impact on those with SEND or that are neurodivergent (4%) were most commonly raised. However, these issues do not appear to have been raised in order to make a point about the impact on protected characteristics, but more to demonstrate the overarching sense of loss for the community as a whole.

Consultation feedback relevant to individual protected characteristics is considered in more detail below.

Summary of Options

Five options were considered as part of the options appraisal ahead of the consultation:

- Option 1: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts and provide services within existing KCC locations.
- Option 2: Reprocure significantly reduced contracts.
- Option 3: Reprocure comparable contracts and close other Family Hub locations in other areas (as this would save building costs).
- Option 4: Reprocure comparable contracts and reduce services in alternative Family Hub locations (as this would save service costs).
- Option 5: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts but find alternative standalone locations for alternative provision.

One of the main themes that emerges from the consultation feedback is the importance of having these services available for the communities within the familiar, existing settings of Millmead and Seashells. In response to this feedback, we have explored a sixth option:

- Option 6: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts, but instead hire space for KCC Family Hub staff to deliver the services from within the two settings.

Option 1: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts and provide services within existing KCC locations. This option is the proposal for discussion by members and was the basis for the public consultation. It is expected that this option will achieve the £426k saving within the MTFP. As set out above, services would be available to residents from alternative locations. This option would provide consistency across the entire Family Hub service as it would mean that the whole provision is in-house. The consultation report and EqIA set out the impact on service users of this option, however it is expected that this option has the greatest impact on service users of all of the options considered.

Option 2: Reprocure significantly reduced contracts. This option would not achieve the full saving within the MTFP. It would mean that savings would need to be identified elsewhere to make up the shortfall as renewing the contracts, albeit on a reduced basis, would still require revenue expenditure. This option would also lead to a reduction in services available in the two locations, given the reduced contract value, requiring service users to access these services from alternative locations. There would also remain an inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as we would retain the two commissioned sites while the rest of the Family Hub model is delivered in-house. Currently there are 50 Family Hub sites across the county, including within Swale and Thanet, which are staffed by KCC Family Hub practitioners. These centres provide Family Hub services for families in Kent staffed and funded from the CYPE base budget. By providing these two commissioned centres there is an imbalance in the delivery model as these are the only two centres that are externally commissioned. These centres link in with partners such as Health and VCS organisations. However the links to other KCC ICS/Early Help services are not as strong as within the rest of the KCC in-house network. We are also duplicating cost in terms of management (each District in Kent has a KCC District Manager for example), HR, IT and finance support through the commissioning of the two centres.

Option 3: Reprocure comparable contracts and close other Family Hub locations in other areas (this saving building costs). Whilst this option could achieve the full MTFP saving of £426k, it would not meet the saving requirement in the timeframe set out in the MTFP. It would also require further cuts to be made, when the Kent Communities Programme and Family Hub Model decisions (both November 2023) set out the network of Family Hub buildings in relation to need, including reduction in the number of children's centres across the county whilst retaining the number of centres required to meet the need in each District. This option would mean the re-procurement of the commissioned contracts, however access to services would be impacted elsewhere given the reduction in buildings to meet the £426k saving. This option would continue the inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as explained above.

Option 4: Reprocure comparable contracts and reduce services in alternative Family Hub locations (this saving service costs). This option was discounted ahead of consultation because whilst it could achieve the full MTFP saving of £426k, it would likely take much longer to do so. It would also require further cuts to be made, when the Kent Communities Programme and Family Hub Model decisions (both November 2023) set out the network of Family Hub buildings in relation to need, including reduction in the number of children's centres across the county whilst retaining the number of centres required to meet the need in each District.. This option would mean the re-procurement of the commissioned contracts, however services would be reduced elsewhere to meet the £426k saving. This option would continue the inconsistency in our approach to Family Hub provision as set out above.

Option 5: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts but find alternative standalone locations for alternative provision. This would not achieve the full saving within the MTFP. This option would mean that savings would need to be identified elsewhere to make up the shortfall despite the fact the commissioned contracts would not be renewed. This is because revenue would be required to provide the service from other non-KCC locations within the communities. The revenue cost of hiring space locally is estimated at between approximately £130k and £180k per year were we to implement this option for both Seashells and Millmead, or between £65k and £90k for one location. This would represent a pressure on potentially both CYPE and Corporate Landlord budgets. As set out under Option 1, alternative provision is available from within existing KCC buildings (current Family Hubs in the case of Millmead and Sheppey Gateway in relation to Seashells).

Option 6: Do not renew the two commissioned contracts, but instead hire space for KCC Family Hub staff to deliver the services from within the two settings. This option has been developed in response to the consultation feedback (see Section 5). Many respondents expressed the view that the current settings (Millmead and Seashells) are in themselves important to service users and the communities. There is also the view that the cessation of these two contracts may impact the overall sustainability of the centres. As a response to this feedback officers have sought to understand the opportunity to hire space within the existing centres. This would mean a shortfall in the saving offered against the MTFP target, as rent would be payable. This is currently paid by the Corporate Landlord budget, not the CYPE budget. Early indications suggest that the combined rental costs to hire space at both centres would be between approximately £130k and £180k per year. This would leave a shortfall in the MTFP saving as only between £246 and £296k would be achieved under this option. It should be noted however that this would be subject to formal process and at this time scoping conversations have not taken place due to the providers resistance to enter into any conversations ahead of a decision. The rental cost represents the main pressure on the revenue budget. As explained above staffing increase as a result is TUPE is not expected to increase revenue pressure as vacancies are held currently across the network. It is suggested that this option is discounted as it would not deliver the full saving set out in the MTFP.

Summary of Impact and Justification

Within the consultation, a significant majority of responses were received by women (64%) compared to men (13%). The rest of the respondents marked that they would prefer not to provide their gender. There is a clearly identified crossover between sex and age as demonstrated in the consultation response where over 50% of respondents were between 25 and 49 years old (25-34: 27%, and 35-49: 25%). It is acknowledged that generally women bear the greater responsibility for childcare and as such the protected characteristics for sex and for age require careful consideration.

18% of respondents also identified that they manage a disability, with 27% of respondents preferring not to answer, leaving that question blank. Therefore, careful consideration must be given for the protected characteristic of disability, particularly where that intersects with sex and age as highlighted above.

Due to the nature of this service, it is also to be expected that the vast majority of respondents have children that would be impacted by these proposals (63%). Of the responses received, 53% identified that they have children between the ages of 0 and 5.

Option 1 would carry greater impacts for these characteristics as women, children and those with disabilities. They would be required to access the Family Hub services at different locations, in the case of Millmead, that may mean accessing public transport that could present a difficulty for any disabled individuals, anyone managing additional SEND requirements, those with pushchairs or with any additional equipment.

Option 2 would still carry an impact for those residents with protected characteristics given that on a reduced contract the expectation is that some service provision would be discontinued. This would create the necessity to travel to alternative locations to access services that have been displaced, despite some services remaining included at the two centres under a renewed, albeit reduced, contract.

Options 3 and 4 would have the least impact on current service users at Seashells and Millmead as they both provide for re-procurement of comparable contracts at both centres. However, in order to meet the financial challenges, cuts would need to be made elsewhere, thereby creating an impact on other residents.

Option 5 would have an impact on protected characteristics, however the scale of impact is difficult to define as the services would be relocated to as yet unidentified alternative locations. These locations may be less suitable for the provision of Family Hub services than the current alternative options proposed (a reasonable assumption considering they all currently accommodate community services) and therefore may be more impactful for residents with protected characteristics.

Option 6 would have similar impact to Options 3 and 4 as it allows for the continuation of Family Hub service delivery at the current sites. However, as with Options 3 and 4, cuts would need to be made elsewhere, thereby creating an impact for other residents.

The hours of service provision delivered under the contracts (9 hours per week at Millmead and 14 hours per week at Seashells) can be accommodated within the alternative locations. Therefore it is proposed that the provision will remain sufficient to meet local need, and that assistance in accessing the service from alternative locations is the main mitigating factor.

The sections below analyse the impact of the proposal on individuals with each protected characteristic in turn, however the primary impact on groups with protected characteristics centre around any additional difficulty they will have navigating and understanding the changes to the service locations; particularly if required to travel further to access the services offered by the Family Hub network.

This may likely include the need to use public transport. Transport analysis related to Millmead demonstrates that 54,189 homes are within a 35-minute bus journey from the Millmead centre. All of these 54,189 homes are within a 35-minute bus journey of an alternative KCC Family Hub location. The Sheppey Gateway is 0.2 miles from the Seashells centre and is served by the exact same public transport network.

A point to note, is that there are parts of Dane Valley Ward (in which Millmead is located) which are closer to the Margate Family Hub than they are to the Millmead centre. The distance of 1.3 miles quoted is the distance from Millmead to the alternative Margate Family Hub location. Some parts of the community are actually closer to the alternative locations than Millmead and as such are less than 1.3 miles away.

It is also acknowledged that there are likely to be impacts on residents with protected characteristics who already access services from our proposed alternative provisions (Margate Family Hub, Cliftonville Family Hub and Northdown Road Family Hub for Millmead and Sheppey Gateway for Seashells) when we consider that

there will be additional people accessing a Family Hub offer in those locations. The existing services at the alternative locations in Margate are not currently running at full capacity

Where there are crossovers between protected characteristics, the impact may be particularly significant. For example, a young mother with a child that has SEND requirements, or who is also from an ethnically diverse background, may find the changes particularly difficult.

It is worth making the general point here that any barriers to access for those with protected characteristics (such as those set out in the specific sections below) may lead to some residents choosing not to access the service at all. If this is unmitigated, then this would potentially lead to negative outcomes for residents in precisely the areas which Family Hubs are designed to improve. If residents do not access the infant feeding support they require through the Family Hub network, they may end up with poorer health outcomes for their child, greater impact on their own emotional wellbeing and a diminished parent-infant relationship. Therefore, the mitigations listed below are vital.

The proposed mitigations are as follows:

1. *Community Development Workers*

Highlighted below in relation specifically to the group with ethnically diverse backgrounds, our new Community Development Workers across the county will be able to help service users with the transition to the new service access arrangements.

2. *Reimbursement of bus fares for families travelling to new locations*

As a direct response to the consultation feedback, suggesting that we could reimburse bus fares for those attending the Family Hubs that previously attended Millmead Family Hub. Families would present their ticket at the Family Hub location they attend and be reimbursed by the Family Hub staff. This is likely to be a time limited offer with a view to easing the transition phase and mitigating any drop-off of service access as a result. The analysis demonstrates that the alternative locations do ensure sufficient provision for the local need, and this mitigation measure is designed to mitigate against any drop off due to the change of location.

3. *Alternative methods of access.*

As set out in the EqlA for the Family Hub Transformation decision, (available here [23/00092](#)) a range of support and guidance is available online for residents to access at any time. It is acknowledged in that EqlA that groups with protected characteristics may have additional needs when accessing services in alternative ways, including online.

4. *Access to a broader range of services from a single location.*

The use of the alternative locations will mean greater access to wider KCC services, such as SEND support (all proposed alternatives) or birth registrations and library services (Sheerness Gateway).

The two districts in question, Thanet for Millmead and Swale for Seashells, are both areas of high need, as set out in the Kent Communities Programme work. Given this, these two district receive the most funding from the Family Hub budget; 10.1% and 9.8% respectively. This is excluding the cost of the commissioned contracts, therefore, if the decision is taken not to renew the contracts, these two districts will still be the most highly funded.

The Kent Communities Programme (KCP) decision taken in November 2023 ([23/00101](#)) proposed a network of Family Hub buildings across the county. The KCP model was based on a thorough analysis of the need for services prevalent within all communities across Kent.

As highlighted above our analysis shows that the current Family Hub service includes 14 hours of activity per week at Seashells and 9 hours of activity per week at Millmead that are directly commissioned under the contract. These hours can be accommodated at the alternative sites identified (Sheppey Gateway for Seashells and the three nearby in-house Family Hubs in Margate for Millmead). Vacancies held within the Family Hub staff will accommodate the staff eligible for

TUPE to deliver these sessions at the alternative locations. It is therefore proposed that the provision delivered through the retained Family Hub network alternatives is sufficient to meet local need.

As a benchmark, a comparison of the number of KCC Family Hub locations per 10,000 people aged 0-19 has been made against the same metric for other Family Hub authorities. This comparison demonstrates that the KCC has 1.3 Family Hubs per 10,000 people aged 0-19. This is the highest proportion of Family Hubs per 10,000 people aged 0-19 when compared to other authorities with similar quantum of 0-19 year olds, as the table below demonstrates.

Authority	0-19 Year Olds (to nearest 10,000)	Family Hubs per 10,000 0-19 Year Olds
Kent	370,000	1.3
Essex	340,000	1.03
Birmingham	330,000	0.67
Surrey	290,000	0.72

Given the significant financial challenge facing the Council, the mitigation measures outlined, and the analysis provided, it is therefore considered justified to propose making the required saving by choosing not to renew these two contracts.

Section B – Evidence

Note: For questions 9, 10 & 11 at least one of these must be a 'Yes'. You can continue working on the EQIA in the App, but you will not be able to submit it for approval without this information.

9. Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity? Answer: Yes/No

Yes – an analysis of the protected characteristics of the respondents to the consultation is as follows:

GENDER	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Male	134	13%
Female	653	64%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	229	23%

GENDER SAME AS BIRTH	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	760	75%
No	1	0%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	255	25%

AGE	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
0-15	21	2

16-24	57	6
25-34	275	27
35-49	256	25
50-59	74	7
60-64	40	4
65-74	45	4
75-84	19	2
85 & over	2	0.2%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	227	22%

RELIGION / BELIEF	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	228	22%
- Christian	185	18%
- Hindu	5	0.5%
- Jewish	3	0.3%
- Muslim	11	1%
- Sikh	2	0.2%
- Other	15	1%
No	502	49%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	286	28%

DISABILITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Yes	186	18%
- Physical impairment	71	7%
- Sensory impairment (hearing, sight or both)	17	2%
- Longstanding illness or health condition, such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease, diabetes or epilepsy	82	8%
- Mental health condition	87	9%
- Learning disability	39	4%
- Other	10	1%

No	553	54%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	277	27%

PRESENCE OF CHILDREN	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
I/we have children	641	63%
- 0-1 year old	225	22%
- 2-5 years old	319	31%
- 6-10 years olds	187	18%
- 11-19 years old	177	17%
I am / we are expecting a child	62	6%
I/we do not have children	79	8%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	234	23%

SEXUALITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
Heterosexual/Straight	686	68%
Bi/Bisexual	29	3%
Gay man	3	0.3%
Gay woman/Lesbian	10	1%
Other	3	0.3%
Prefer not to answer / left blank	285	28%

ETHNICITY	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
White English	665	65%
White Scottish	5	0.5%
White Welsh	4	0.4%
White Northern Irish	3	0.3%
White Irish	6	1%
White Irish Traveller	3	0.3%
Asian or Asian British Indian	5	0.5%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	5	0.5%
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	3	0.3%

	Mixed White & Black Caribbean	10	1%
	Mixed White & Black African	6	1%
	Mixed White & Asian	5	0.5%
	Black or Black British Caribbean	1	0.1%
	Black or Black British African	9	1%
	Other	41	4%
	Prefer not to answer / left blank	245	24%
	CARER	Number of consultees answering	% of consultees answering
	Yes	178	18%
	No	569	56%
	Prefer not to answer / left blank	269	26%
	We also have the usage data that informed the consultation version of the EqIA.		
10. Is it possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way? Answer: Yes/No	N/A		
11. Is there national evidence/data that you can use? Answer: Yes/No	Yes		
12. Have you consulted with Stakeholders? Answer: Yes/No Stakeholders are those who have a stake or interest in your project which could be residents, service users, staff, members, statutory and other organisations, VCSE partners etc.	Yes		
13. Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with? Please give details in the box provided. This may be details of those you have already involved, consulted and engaged with or who you intend to do so with in the future. If the answer to question 12 is 'No', please explain why.			
A public consultation process was carried out between 30 July 2024 and 22 September 2024. The consultation gave an opportunity for service users, community groups, partners, staff and residents to give feedback on the proposals. During this consultation, face to face consultation events were held in order to ensure that the voice of the service users at each of the two impacted centres was captured.			
Of the 672 respondents that commented in relation to Seashells, 45% opted to provide a response specifically related to equalities.			

Of the 433 respondents that commented in relation to Millmead, 39% opted to provide a response specifically related to equalities.

Almost all of the response would be classified as indicating opposition to the proposal as set out at consultation. Given the demographic data above shows a high percentage of respondents were women, were parents and were between the ages of 25 and 49 it is reasonable to infer that individuals with those protected characteristics were opposed to the proposals.

14. Has there been a previous equality analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years? Answer: Yes/No

Yes – the pre-consultation EqIA.

There was an EqIA for the Family Hub model transformation linked to decision [23/00092](#). However, that EqIA did not consider the two commissioned Family Hubs specifically.

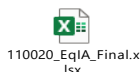
15. Do you have evidence/data that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity? Answer: Yes/No

Yes - user data for each site that has been broken down by age, gender, ethnicity, and SEND requirements.

Demographic data captured through the consultation responses (detailed above).

Uploading Evidence/Data/related information into the App

Note: At this point, you will be asked to upload the evidence/ data and related information that you feel should sit alongside the EQIA that can help understand the potential impact of your activity. Please ensure that you have this information to upload as the Equality analysis cannot be sent for approval without this.



Section C – Impact

16. Who may be impacted by the activity? Select all that apply.

Service users/clients Answer: Yes/No	Yes	Residents/Communities/Citizens Answer: Yes/No	Yes
Staff/Volunteers Answer: Yes/No	Yes		

17. Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing? Answer: Yes/No

Yes

18. Please give details of Positive Impacts

The proposal to not renew the commissioned centre contracts does not itself present any positive impacts for groups with protected characteristics. However, the proposed alternative provision does present some positive benefits:

Millmead

The proposed alternative locations for the service are Cliftonville Family Hub (1.3 miles away), Margate Family Hub (1.4 miles away) and Northdown Road Family Hub (1.5 miles away). The ability for residents to access the full range of Family Hub services on offer, as opposed to the limited age-range activities at the commissioned centres represents a benefit to service users.

Seashells

The proposed alternative location for the service is at the Sheppey Gateway and Library which is approximately a five minute walk from the current location.

The Sheppey Gateway already provides a number of services that residents with protected characteristics may find beneficial, such as advice about facing financial hardship and registering births. Having these services all in one location, reducing the need for residents, particularly those with physical disabilities and young mums with prams, from needing to travel to additional locations to access these services, represents a benefit.

Negative Impacts and Mitigating Actions

The questions in this section help to think through positive and negative impacts for people affected by your activity. Please use the Evidence you have referred to in Section B and explain the data as part of your answer.

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

<p>a) Are there negative impacts for age? Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>b) Details of Negative Impacts for Age</p>	<p>Children Usage data shows that at in 2023, 1449 families accessed Family Hub sessions at the Millmead centre and 1869 families accessed Family Hub sessions at the Seashells centre.</p> <p>As set out above, 54% of consultees indicated that they have children between the ages of 0 and 5 years old.</p> <p>The proposal to not renew the commissioned contracts could disproportionately impact those 0-5 year olds receiving support towards their development milestones associated with health, education, and parent bonding. They will be reliant on their parent/carers being able to access another centre, who may have to travel further to access groups and support, alternatively they may access provision less frequently.</p> <p>14% of respondents commenting on Seashells and 17% commenting on Millmead specifically raised the impact of the loss of the centre on children.</p> <p>An example of the feedback received from consultees is here:</p> <p><i>“The Isle of Sheppey is greatly lacking in services such as Seashells. Without this centre, there is nothing for the catchment age group to do in a structured setting with peers until they reach nursery age. Thus. depriving these children of much needed development skills such as interacting with peers and fine motor skills. These hubs allow new parents to the area to get to know what is available and to meet people. Without these centres those less fortunate could easily become forgotten about. They provide a wealth of information and support for parents of all ages and backgrounds.”</i></p> <p>The transport implications for parents/carers are discussed later but is likely to impact on this age group. If their parent/carer is unable to take them to the nearest alternative Family Hub, they may need to access alternative provision in the community or may stop accessing services. This could have an impact on their social, physical, or educational development.</p>

As set out above, any barrier to access could lead to poorer outcomes for children in families that require support from the Family Hub network, if not suitably mitigated. For example, they may suffer from poorer health outcomes if their parents do not receive infant feeding support when needed. Equally, they may suffer poorer outcomes and diminished social abilities if they do not access the early language support available.

Older Children and Young People – 6-18 Year Olds

Our usage data shows that in 2023, 384 older children aged 6-18 accessed Millmead centre and 759 older children aged 6-18 accessed the Seashells centre. Whilst these figures are significant, there is a noticeable drop off in the number of children aged 5 and over visiting the centres. This is partly due to the children reaching school age and partly due to the fact that the majority of sessions running at the centres under the contracts are aimed at children below the ages of 5. The KCC Family Hub offer covers the full range of ages from 0-19 (25 with SEND).

Of the consultees responding, 2% were 0-15 year olds and 6% were 16-25 year olds. Additionally, 35% of respondents indicated that they had children between the age of 6 and 19.

Similar to the above, the proposal to not renew the Commissioned Centre contracts will mean families with older children and young people will have to travel to different locations and sometimes further to access sessions, support and general advice.

The transport implications for parents/carers are discussed later but is likely to impact on this age group. If their parent/carer is unable to take them to the nearest alternative Family Hub, they may need to access alternative provision in the community or may stop accessing services. This could have an impact on their social, physical, or educational development.

Parent/Carers – 25-39 Year Olds

Our usage data shows that at in 2023 1,034 parents/carers aged 25-39 accessed Millmead centre and 1,407 parents/carers aged 25-39 accessed the Seashells centre.

Of those that responded to the consultation, the largest single group of respondents were 25-24 years old (27%).

We recognise that parents (most likely to be aged between 25 and 39) may need to access services differently, may need to travel to alternative locations and may receive a different type of service than previously offered. Travel costs could become a barrier to access and, if this is the case, this could affect their ability to access the support required when needed.

An example of the consultation responses received is provided here:

“The Millmead Centre now stands as an important community hub that helps many poor and deprived households connect with services that can help them. If you remove the services from this

hub, I strongly doubt any significant number would reengage with other outposts.”

15–19-Year-Old Parents

Our usage data shows that at in 2023, 56 parents aged 15-19 accessed Millmead centre and 151 parents aged 15-19 accessed the Seashells centre.

Making an assumption that all of the 0-24 year olds that responded to the consultation were doing so as parents of young children (as opposed to responding as young people in their own right) then 8% of respondents were parents below the age of 24.

Health outcomes for babies of teenage parents are well acknowledged to be worse than their counterparts, so access to Family Hub services for these parents and their children will be especially important to support good outcomes for their babies and/or children. The impact of further journey times may have a greater impact on this cohort as they are less likely to hold driving licences and will be more reliant on family and friends or public transport and walking to travel to access services.

As teenage parents are likely to be more reliant on the services on offer from Family Hubs, there is likely to be a larger impact on them and their children if they are unable to access a centre, exacerbating existing inequality of outcomes. It was demonstrable in the feedback that many respondents utilise a range of Family Hub services from the current centres, for example they may attend healthy baby clinics as well as the parenting programmes.

Elderly Parents / Carers (65+)

Our usage data from 2023 shows that 15 elderly parents/carers aged 65+ accessed Millmead centre and 15 parents aged 65+ accessed the Seashells centre.

Older parents/carers may be disparately affected as they may have increased mobility needs and experience greater difficulty travelling to alternative provision. They may also face more difficulty engaging with our digital offer making them more reliant on our outreach provision.

c) Mitigating Actions for age

The Family Hub digital offer, as it continues to develop will reduce the need to travel to access some support and guidance, as it provides resources for service users that can be access at any time. It is also true that the Family Hub buildings are all accessible regardless of age.

As set out in the introductory sections the hours of service provision delivered under the contracts (9 hours per week at Millmead and 14 hours per week at Seashells) can be accommodated within the alternative locations. Therefore it is proposed that the provision will remain sufficient to meet local need, and that assistance in accessing the service from alternative locations is the main mitigating factor.

Our Community Development Workers will be of particular benefit in mitigating the change in access arrangements for the service.

	<p>These officers will work with families if necessary to help ease the transition to accessing services in the new area, by helping them navigate to and through the alternative locations and ensuring the understand the session available to them at the new centres.</p> <p>This is considered to be particularly beneficial for the parents aged 15-19 as this group may require additional support in understanding and accessing the full range of services that they may need as young people and as young parents. If the need is considered to be great enough then we may consider looking at specific support groups for parents in this age group.</p> <p>Millmead Alternative provision is proposed at Cliftonville Family Hub, Margate Family Hub and Northdown Road Family Hub (1.3 miles, 1.4 miles and 1.5 miles away respectively). We can manage timetabling and scheduling of activities so that it considers when children, young people and families are available based on their age range and based on the local transport network. This will result in sessions being available for residents that need to travel, ensuring that services remain accessible.</p> <p>The cost of bus fares was raised by numerous consultees as a barrier to accessing the services if they moved to alternative locations. As a specific response to feedback within the consultation about accessibility of the other centres, KCC is considering reimbursing service users for bus fares paid to access the new locations (if they were previously accessing services at Millmead). It is proposed that the provision is sufficient to meet local need, and the mitigation is intended to guard against any drop off in service access as a result of the change of location.</p> <p>Seashells The alternative provision proposed is at the Sheppey Gateway which is approximately a five-minute walk away. This location will be closer than the existing Seashells centre for some residents and further away for others. However, the impact of the short additional distance is considered mitigated by the provision of the services at the Gateway.</p> <p>Parent Carer Panels will seek to engage and include a wide range of parents and carers at the different end of the age range to ensure inclusivity. The feedback from these groups will help continue to shape the service offer as it evolves over time.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age	Family Hub Service Managers.
20. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability	
a) Are there negative impacts for Disability? <i>Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</i>	Yes
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Disability	We recognise that individuals with disabilities may need to access services differently, may need to travel to alternative locations and may receive a different type of service than previously offered.

Travel could become a barrier to access and, if this is the case, this could affect their ability to access the support required when needed.

According to service user data from the year 23/24, there were 217 service users with Special Educational Needs accessing Seashells and 93 service users with Special Educational Needs accessing Millmead.

Of the consultees providing feedback, 18% indicated that they have a disability. 7% indicated that they have a physical impairment, 9% indicated a mental health condition and 4% indicated a learning disability.

10% of respondents commenting on Seashells and 16% commenting on Millmead raised the impact of the loss of the centre on those with physical disabilities.

Physical Disabilities

The proposal to not renew the commissioned contracts may adversely affect children with disabilities living within these catchment areas or children with parents with a disability, where they are required to travel further away to access services. Families with disabilities may find it harder to travel beyond immediate home locality due to having no transport and a greater reliance on public transport. Even where public transport links do exist, those with disabilities may still find it harder to access via public transport. This may be for mobility reasons, in the case of a physical disability where the requirement to travel by public transport is more challenging. Additionally, children with SEND may find increased journey times distressing.

An example of the feedback received during the consultation is as follows:

“Please consider the access for those who cannot walk long distances and for those with communities that would mean getting to another service would be an impossible mission.”

Where accessing a Family Hub is more difficult, families may access support less frequently or not at all, potentially having an impact on both the parent and the child’s wellbeing. The Health Visiting mandated checks are an exception to this where the frequency will not be impacted by accessibility of services.

Given that educational, employment, and wellbeing outcomes are all generally lower for those with disabilities, (outcomes for disabled people in the UK – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)) this existing inequality may be compounded by increased difficulty accessing services, resulting in a disproportionate impact.

Service users with physical disabilities may have different needs from the physical environment such as for accessible toilets, hearing loops, ramps and other accessible features. Whilst the alternative locations are accessible, any lack of these features may

	<p>impact how comfortable residents with disabilities may be accessing services.</p> <p>They may need to travel further or access a toilet within the local community.</p> <p>Changes to buildings, staffing, timings, and the addition of co-located staff may be a challenge for some children young people and adults who struggle with change by the nature of their disability. New environments and the level of activity in those environments (for example, as a result of co-location and integration of services at the Sheppey Gateway) could also adversely affect those groups.</p> <p>Mental Illness / Anxiety Disorders 5% of respondents commenting on Seashells and 1% commenting on Millmead raised the impact of the loss of the centres on Mental Health.</p> <p>Our proposal to not renew the commissioned contracts may adversely impact those struggling with mental health and anxiety issues. They may be more sensitive to change and be more distressed than their counterparts by the need to access services from a different location.</p> <p>Similarly, families with higher levels of anxiety may also find the need to access alternative provision more distressing. If not managed well, it is possible that some families will stop accessing our services, potentially exacerbating existing conditions.</p> <p>SEND Service users with SEND or sensory conditions will likely have different and more complex needs. Our usage data from 2023 shows that 96 people (3.1% of all users) with SEND requirements accessed Millmead centre and 229 people (5.5% of all users) with SEND requirements accessed the Seashells centre.</p> <p>8% of respondents commenting on Seashells and 4% commenting on Millmead raised the impact of the loss of the centre on those with SEND.</p> <p>An example of the feedback received during the consultation is as follows: <i>“Many of these families are also coping with additional challenges, such as SEND, disabilities, and mental health issues making it essential that services are easily accessible and free from barriers. Changes to the location, staff, or structure of services would place further strain on those who may experience increased distress from having to access services in a new, unfamiliar location with unfamiliar staff.”</i></p>
<p>c) Mitigating Actions for Disability</p>	<p>In relation to Millmead, the service offer at the alternative sites proposed (Cliftonville Family Hub, Margate Family Hub and Northdown Road Family Hub) already include SEND focussed sessions. Therefore, the impact of the greater distance to travel is somewhat mitigated by the availability of additional SEND services at these locations.</p>

	<p>The cost of bus fares was raised by numerous consultees as a barrier to accessing the services if they moved to alternative locations. As a specific response to feedback within the consultation about accessibility of the other centres, KCC is considering reimbursing service users for bus fares paid to access the new locations (if they were previously accessing services at Millmead). It is proposed that the provision is sufficient to meet local need, and the mitigation is intended to guard against any drop off in service access as a result of the change of location.</p> <p>In regards to Seashells, the Family Hub offer at the Sheppey Gateway will be able to include SEND focussed sessions as dictated by local need. The alternative venue is close to the existing Seashells location and is accessible.</p> <p>Our Family Hubs, by working as part of the SEND Transformation Programme, will be able to further improve and develop our inclusion practice.</p> <p>The alternative sites proposed are all accessible with ramp access, lifts where required and disabled toilet/changing facilities.</p> <p>Staff within the alternative locations, including staff from other services within the Gateway location can be trained and encouraged to support residents with wayfinding within the new sites to help users that are unfamiliar with the buildings or who may struggle with new settings to access the services they need.</p> <p>Our Community Development Workers will be of particular benefit in mitigating the change in access arrangements for the service. These officers will work with families if necessary to help ease the transition to accessing services in the new area, by helping them navigate to and through the alternative locations and ensuring the understand the session available to them at the new centres.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Disability	Family Hub Service Managers.
a) Are there negative impacts for Sex? Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).	Yes
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Sex	<p>Our usage data shows that in 2023 1,997 females accessed the Millmead centre, while 1,029 males accessed the same centre. Our data also shows that in 2023, 2,861 females accessed the Seashells centre while 1,525 males accessed the same centre.</p> <p>The consultees were 64% female, which lends more weight to the assumption that females may be disproportionately affected as they are most likely to access our services currently. As such we need to recognise that women may be negatively impacted by the proposal to not renew the commissioned contracts.</p> <p>As set out above any barriers to access may lead to poorer outcomes for women. For example, if they do not access the services available at Family Hubs when they need them it could</p>

	<p>lead to diminished parent-infant relationships and perinatal mental health if the change is not mitigated effectively.</p> <p>As the consultation report sets out, there was little in the way of feedback that directly raised the impacts on sex, however the overall perceived loss and the impact generally was raised consistently.</p> <p>An example of the feedback received during consultation is as follows:</p> <p><i>“During my first pregnancy I was struggling to get out the house as I didn’t have friends that had a young baby as well. My mental health was struggling. The health visitor suggested Seashells to me. I struggle with social anxiety, but my husband encouraged me to go and came with me. Whilst there I met a group of 4 women all with babies of a similar age. 2 year later we are all still friends and our babies; now toddlers are still friends. We still use seashells as much as we are able to. I have since had twins, and again Seashells has saved my mental health postpartum. I honestly don’t know what I would have done without them and the groups.”</i></p> <p>Our proposals would require residents to access services at alternative locations. In the case of the Millmead proposal, this would require a journey of 1.3, 1.4 or 1.5 miles to the nearest alternative centres. We would expect that most people would require public transport to make these journeys.</p> <p>At Seashells, the alternative provision is a five-minute walk from the current location.</p> <p>The crossover with other protected characteristics, including age, disability, pregnancy and those with carers’ responsibilities is likely to be greater as the impact on these protected characteristics would combine. For example, a mother with a disability will likely experience greater impact from the proposal given the additional difficulty that accessing the alternative locations may present.</p>
<p>c) Mitigating Actions for Sex</p>	<p>In relation to Millmead, the service offer will be provided at alternative sites, (Cliftonville Family Hub and Margate Family Hub) which will include sessions run by partners. Therefore the impact of the greater distance to travel is somewhat mitigated by the availability of additional services at these locations.</p> <p>The cost of bus fares was raised by numerous consultees as a barrier to accessing the services if they moved to alternative locations. As a specific response to feedback within the consultation about accessibility of the other centres, KCC is considering reimbursing service users for bus fares paid to access the new locations (if they were previously accessing services at Millmead). It is proposed that the provision is sufficient to meet local need, and the mitigation is intended to guard against any drop off in service access as a result of the change of location.</p> <p>In regards to Seashells, the Family Hub offer at the Sheppey Gateway will be able to include other sessions as dictated by local</p>

	<p>need. The Gateway already provides other services, such as birth registrations, allowing women to access services in an area with which they are familiar. The alternative venue is close to the existing Seashells location and is accessible and will be able to accommodate breast feeding areas.</p> <p>Our Community Development Workers will be of particular benefit in mitigating the change in access arrangements for the service. These officers will work with families if necessary to help ease the transition to accessing services in the new area, by helping them navigate to and through the alternative locations and ensuring the understand the session available to them at the new centres.</p> <p>Specific plans as part of the wider implementation of the Family Hub transformation (not specifically linked to this proposals) to increase the Infant Feeding support for mums in Swale and Thanet, due to the higher rates of deprivation and lower prevalence of breastfeeding in these areas, means that additional support will be provided that is accessible for mums impacted by this proposal.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Sex	Family Hub Service Managers.
22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender	
a) Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender? <i>Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</i>	No – consultees did not raise any specific impacts related to this protected characteristic.
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Gender identity/transgender	N/A
c) Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender	N/A
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Gender identity/transgender	N/A
23. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Race	
a) Are there negative impacts for Race? <i>Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</i>	Yes
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Race	<p>Our usage data shows that residents who accessed the services at the two centres in 2023 are by a vast majority white British (62.7% at Millmead and 87.7% at Seashells). However the data shows that there are smaller groups of service users from ethnically diverse backgrounds accessing each centre, although no single group represents over 1% of the total usage of the centres.</p> <p>These statistics are backed up by the consultation response data which demonstrates that of the consultees responding, 66% indicated that they were White British. 24% chose not to answer the questions, while 4% indicated that they were 'Other'. No other identified group had a higher response rate than 1% of all respondents.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, it is still true that people whose first language is not English may find it more difficult to understand the changes being proposed or understand how to access or apply for</p>

	<p>targeted support in the future. They may be more reliant on local access points.</p> <p>We also recognise that some ethnic minority families may not feel that the services are available to cater for their specific cultural needs.</p>
c) Mitigating Actions for Race	<p>As a general principle, the entire service will provide support to residents that will need to access services from different locations.</p> <p>The introduction of the Community Development leads across the county will help assist residents from ethnic minorities to help them access the services they need. The Community Development Workers are responsible for helping to engage traditionally hard-to-reach communities and broadening the network of services available within Family Hubs in line with the needs of the communities. These officers could work with the users within the existing centres to help support their transitions to the new centres.</p> <p>One particular mitigation worth highlighting here is the introduction of specific cultural awareness training related to Gypsy and Roma Traveller communities planned for early 2025. This training will empower the relevant Family Hub staff to better understand and meet the needs of these communities.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Race	Family Hub Service Managers.
24. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief	
a) Are there negative impacts for Religion and Belief? Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).	No – consultees did not raise any specific impacts related to this protected characteristic.
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Religion and belief	N/A
c) Mitigating Actions for Religion and belief	N/A
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Religion and belief	N/A
25. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation	
a) Are there negative impacts for sexual orientation. Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).	No – consultees did not raise any specific impacts related to this protected characteristic.
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Sexual Orientation	N/A
c) Mitigating Actions for Sexual Orientation	N/A
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Sexual Orientation	N/A
26. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity	
a) Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity? Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).	Yes
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity	As identified in earlier sections of this analysis, consultees were 64% female and 54% of consultees indicated that they have

	<p>children between the ages of 0 and 5 years old. The generally accepted assumption is that women that are pregnant or that are in maternity may be disproportionately affected as they are most likely to access our services currently.</p> <p>As the consultation report sets out, there was little in the way of feedback that directly raised the impacts on pregnancy and maternity specifically, however the overall perceived loss and the impact generally was raised consistently. This may be due to the fact that a vast number of users of the centre are typically either pregnant or within maternity and so the impact of the changes on those that are pregnant or in maternity are perceived as the general impacts of the change.</p> <p>We recognise that expectant mothers may need to access services differently. We have set out previously that the services outside of the commissioned Family Hub contracts (including NHS Health Visiting and Midwifery) will be unaffected by the proposal to not renew the commissioned Family Hub contracts. It is worth noting that responses have been received from both NHS Health Visiting colleagues and NHS Maternity services and they have outlined the impact they believe the proposals could have on their services – these are detailed further in the consultation report.</p> <p>Pregnant women, or women in maternity may need to travel to multiple locations if they chose to continue to access NHS support at the existing centres, while attending wider Family Hub services at one of the proposed alternatives.</p> <p>Perinatal mental health and Infant Feeding support is of particular importance for these groups. If the proposals result in a drop in women accessing these services then it is likely that women will suffer poorer outcomes in terms of their perinatal mental health.</p> <p>Travel costs and accessibility could become a barrier to access. For example, if locations do not have sufficient facilities for pregnant women and those with young children (baby change, breastfeeding areas) then these residents may choose not to access the services. If this is the case, then without mitigations this could lead to poorer outcomes for these parents in terms of their own health and wellbeing and that of their children. Equally, the use of public transport for these groups will likely present more of a challenge, with cost already having been acknowledged as a potential barrier.</p>
<p>c) Mitigating Actions for Pregnancy and Maternity</p>	<p>As stated previously, the most relevant services to these groups (those provided by the NHS Health Visiting And Maternity services) are unaffected by the proposal not to renew the Family Hubs commissioned contract. Women will still be able to access these services in the current locations.</p> <p>In relation to Millmead, women will also be able to access these services from the other Family Hub locations in Margate (as they can currently). These locations have benefited from investment through the Family Hub Transformation grant to make them breastfeeding friendly spaces.</p>

	<p>As noted above, costs for public transport have been highlighted as a likely barrier to access. As a specific response to feedback within the consultation about accessibility of the other centres, KCC will consider how we could subsidise bus fares for residents travelling to the alternative locations within Margate.</p> <p>Specific plans to increase the Infant Feeding support for mums in Swale and Thanet, due to the higher rates of deprivation and lower prevalence of breastfeeding in these areas, means that additional support will be provided that is accessible for mums impacted by this proposal.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Pregnancy and Maternity	Family Hub Service Managers.
27. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for marriage and civil partnerships	
a) Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships? <i>Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</i>	No – consultees did not raise any specific impacts related to this protected characteristic.
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	N/A
c) Mitigating Actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	N/A
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Marriage and Civil Partnerships	N/A
28. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities	
a) Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities? <i>Answer: Yes/No (If yes, please also complete sections b, c, and d).</i>	Yes
b) Details of Negative Impacts for Carer's Responsibilities	<p>As set out previously, 63% of consultation respondents indicated that they have children (and therefore caring responsibilities) whilst 18% indicated specifically that they were carers.</p> <p>The proposal to not renew the commissioned services and relocate the services to alternative venues could impact carers and their ability to access provision.</p> <p>Alternative sites may be prohibitive for those with caring responsibilities as they may struggle to access the alternative locations easily. This may be particularly pertinent for young carers that may be more likely to rely on public transport and that have limited other options.</p> <p>An example of the feedback received from the consultation is as follows:</p> <p><i>"Being a parent and Carer who has always made use of sure start Millmead, I feel the centre would be a HUGE loss to the residents, who would be unlikely to travel to the other venues. Depriving children & families of vital support that's been available for over 20 years."</i></p>

	<p>As a result of these proposals carers may need to access services differently, may need to travel to alternative locations and may receive a different type of service than previously offered. Travel costs and accessibility could become a barrier to access and, if this is the case, this could affect their ability to access the support required when needed.</p> <p>The crossover with other protected characteristics, including age, sex and disability, needs considering as the impact on these protected characteristics combined would be greater.</p>
c) Mitigating Actions for Carer's responsibilities	<p>In relation to Millmead, the service offer will be provided at alternative sites, (Cliftonville Family Hub, Margate Family Hub and Northdown Family Hub) which will include sessions run by partners. Therefore, the impact of the greater distance to travel is somewhat mitigated by the availability of additional services at these locations.</p> <p>As noted above, costs for public transport have been highlighted as a likely barrier to access. As a specific response to feedback within the consultation about accessibility of the other centres, KCC will consider how we could subsidise bus fares for residents travelling to the alternative locations within Margate.</p> <p>In regards to Seashells, the Family Hub offer at the Sheppey Gateway will be able to include other sessions as dictated by local need. The Gateway already provides other services, such as birth registrations, library services and Citizens Advice. The alternative venue is close to the existing Seashells location and is accessible and will be able to accommodate breast feeding friendly areas.</p> <p>The introduction of the Community Development leads across the county will help assist residents to make the transition to accessing services from new locations. These officers could work with the users within the existing centres to help support their transitions to the new centres.</p>
d) Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions - Carer's Responsibilities	Family Hub Service Managers.

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From: Oliver Richardson, Armed Forces Champion
Derek Crow-Brown, Deputy, Armed Forces Champion
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: Full Council

Date: 13 March 2025

Subject: 2024 Annual Report on the Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides a briefing on Kent County Council's work to support Kent's Armed Forces community and summarises key achievements during 2024.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to note all that is being done to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent and agree to priorities going forward including promoting Kent County Council's status as the lead MoD Employers Recognition Gold Award Holder.

Members are requested to continue to support the Armed Forces Covenant across the county and to endorse the Council's commitment to this work by engaging locally in Covenant efforts and related events.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. At a local level, Kent County Council (KCC) was one of the first Authorities to sign a Covenant, back in September 2011. In October 2017, a new combined Armed Forces Covenant including KCC, Medway, 11 Infantry Brigade and RSME was re-signed at the Kent and Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Covenant is to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community (AFC) working and residing in Kent and to recognise, remember and honour the sacrifices they have made for us to keep Britain safe and free.
- 1.3 Parts of the Armed Forces Covenant were enshrined in law under the Armed Forces Act 2021. The measures in the Act came into force on 22 November 2022, meaning all Local Authorities and related public bodies are required to show 'due regard' when considering applications from the Armed Forces Community (school places and transport), Healthcare (access to GPs and hospital waiting lists) and Housing (homelessness and Disabled Facilities Grants) thereby ensuring that no one is disadvantaged by their service to the Nation.
- 1.4 KCC worked closely with Civil Service colleagues to inform the content of the Act and supporting guidance and already exceeds the minimum standards it sets out.

Nevertheless, in collaboration with our local partners, KCC continually revisits service processes and pathways to ensure they meet the needs of the armed forces community, and this is reinforced through regular awareness training for front line staff, senior officers and elected Members delivered by the Covenant Lead Officer. Additionally, the Civic Office and the Lieutenancy are well connected into the Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board's work.

1.5 The Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board continues to oversee the implementation of the Covenant and meets twice a year under the chairmanship of the Kent County Council Chairman with the Leader and Armed Forces Champion of Medway Council appointed as vice-chairman, supported by Task Groups covering the following themes:

- Health and wellbeing
- Employment and Skills
- Recognise and Remember
- Unit Welfare Officers – a Joint Task Group involving Kent County Council and Medway Council Lead Officers

2. Highlights of Kent County Council's Activities to support the Armed Forces Community during 2024

2.1 Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board

The Board has been strengthened by the new Membership representation as follows:

- I. The Chairman of the Kent Royal British Legion
- II. The new SERFCA Deputy Chief Executive (East)
- III. 222 Medical Squadron, 256 Multi Role Medical Regiment Reserves – based in Ditton

2.2 10th Kent and Medway Armed Forces Covenant Conference – 1RSME Brompton Barracks in Chatham

2.2.1 The 10th Annual Armed Forces Covenant Conference was held on 4 June 2024 at 1RSME Brompton Barracks in Chatham and was kindly sponsored by MKC Training. The conference attracted 160+ delegates and the theme for 2024 was 'Working Together'.

2.2.2 The conference was opened by Brigadier James Webster-Commandant and Lt Col John Newton — CO—1RSME Speakers included HM Lord-Lieutenant – The Lady Colgrain; Capt Andy Balwah – from the Army Multicultural Network speaking on 'Diversity in the British Army'; Kent Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott and Chief Inspector Gary Woodward on 'Working with Veterans in Policing'. Major Andy Stubbs – 220 Sqn – Ditton spoke on 'Providing Emergency Medical Support out 'in the Field'. Lt Col Tim Petransky – SO1 HQ SE spoke on our Army commitments within Kent and MoD Covenant Team and Canon Peter Bruinvels spoke on the latest developments with the Covenant and how well Kent was responding to them. Delegates were wowed with a fast-moving Gurkha Kukri display at lunchtime.

2.3 MoD Employer Recognition Scheme

- 2.3.1 On the 23 October 2023, Kent County Council received notification that it had successfully retained its MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award following a rigorous re-validation process. On 28 March 2024 the award was presented to Full Council by Lt Col Nathan Horsman with Brigadier Andrew Wood DL.
- 2.3.2 The Annual Gold Awards took place on 3 October 2024 on HMS Warrior in Portsmouth, Kent based EC Safety Solutions and the Royal Engineers Association both received the Gold Award from Maj-Gen Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton TD VR PC Director of Reserves at the MoD.

2.4 Armed Forces and Veteran Community in Kent Needs Assessment

- 2.4.1 In 2024 KCC Public Health published The Armed Forces and Veteran Community Needs Assessment and technical report which focuses on the needs of armed forces and veterans living in Kent. It looks at the Armed Forces Covenant, governance in Kent and Medway, and the support structures that connect various organisations.
- 2.4.2 The Kent veteran population make up over 52,000. A substantial number (58%) are over 65 years of age and reside in the eastern coastal fringes of Kent.
- 2.4.3 Mental health disorders are similar to those rates found in the general population. Kent veterans are statistically more likely to attend substance misuse treatment services for treatment for alcohol rather than opiates or nonopiates compared to non-veterans.
- 2.4.4 The needs assessment identified that 418 applicants expressing a need for local authority housing. Ashford (71) and Dover (70) have the highest numbers whilst Tunbridge Wells (9) and Gravesham (0) have the lowest numbers. There were 19 cases of veteran homelessness in the County over a year in 2024.
- 2.4.5 Veterans in the Kent prison estate range from 2% (Standford Hill) to 5% (Maidstone). Nationally they tend to be male (98%) and within the age ranges 30-39 and 40-49 with almost 7% aged 70+. It should be noted that a number of Prison Officers are also ex-service and veterans across Kent.

2.5 Welfare Support

- 2.5.1 KCC and the Armed Forces Champions continue to provide case work support for both service personnel and ex-service personnel. Cases cover a range of topics such as obtaining a bus pass, school admissions, library fines whilst on active service and housing provision.
- 2.5.2 Initial preparations commenced in 2024 to support the Brunei Gurkha Unit move in Summer 2025. Initial contacts have been made and a number of the Brunei children have now registered with Kent schools and Kent County Council has nominated an officer to support the school admission process. Work to update a schools handbook

also commenced in 2024 ahead of the full move that will take place in 2025, which includes approximately 1500 people.

- 2.5.3 During 2024, KCC's Financial Hardship Programme allocated £46,100.00 to veteran homes via the Household Support fund, 461 awards in total: 236 energy only awards, 201 food only awards, and 24 food and energy awards. In addition, the programme also awarded 6 successful applications from the armed forces for technology via the hardware access scheme. ReferKent continues to actively register organisations that offer support to the Armed Forces.

2.6 The Full 2024 Annual Report - Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent.

- 2.6.1 The full 2024 Annual Report can be found as appendix 1 attached to this report.

3. Looking Ahead to 2025

- 3.1 11th Annual Armed Forces Covenant will be held on 17 June 2025 at Maidstone Campus, University of Medway.
- 3.2 The Recognise & Remember Task Group will continue to publicise the military events calendar (including veterans' activities) in conjunction with the Lieutenancy Officer to celebrate Armed Forces Day 2025 as well as commemorating Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday 2025 and encourage Kent County Council Members to support all the local events.
- 3.3 A second Councillor and Staff Survey at Kent County Council is planned in 2024/25 to help understand better the armed forces community within our own workforce.
- 3.4 Armed Forces Awareness Training will continue throughout 2025 with a special for County Councillors and their senior Officers

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to note all that is being done to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent and agree to priorities going forward including promoting Kent County Council's status as a lead MoD Employers Recognition Gold Award Holder.

4.2 Members are requested to continue to support the Armed Forces Covenant across the county and to endorse the Council's commitment to this work by engaging locally in Covenant efforts and related events.

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2024 Annual Report

Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent

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Report Date: 31 December 2024
Email: ArmedForces@kent.gov.uk

Chairman's Forward

Bryan Sweetland - Chairman of Kent and Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board

When I became Chairman of Kent and Medway CMPB last May, I had no idea just how much I was going to enjoy this new role or just how eventful this year would be for me with so much happening! I would highlight the really successful 10th Annual Kent & Medway Armed Forces Covenant Conference at 1RSME Brompton

Barracks with top speakers and a record attendance of 185+ representatives including the Lord-Lieutenant of Kent. One special highlight of the day was the fast-moving Gurkha Kukri display at lunchtime. An occasion that I will never forget.



Events over Armed Forces Week including our very well-attended AFD Flag-Raising event at County Hall occurred all across Kent. But I was very privileged to be a VIP Guest at Medway Council Official Armed Forces Day 2025 Celebrations. It took place at the Historic Dockyard Chatham on a blazing hot day. Brigadier Andrew Wood represented the Lord-Lieutenant and made a most moving speech on D-Day 80. This was followed by a Military Marchpast by the Royal Engineers, many Veterans and Cadets. It was really special to me to be part of this special day and to then tour all the many stands meeting many Service Charity Volunteers including the RNA, RBL and RBLI as well as SSAFA Kent. During the tour which involved meeting a number of Regulars and Reservists based in Kent, I was really pleased to bump into Craig Mackinlay- then MP for South Thanet on one of his first outings since his serious illness. He was so very positive and that was inspiring to all those who met him there.

The icing on the cake for me was attending the Kent RBL Festival of Remembrance sell-out Concert at Rochester Cathedral. to commemorate Remembrance and the D-Day Landings. It was an awe-inspiring occasion with wonderful music by Eynsford Concert Band and special guest appearances by both the Canterbury for Ukraine Ladies Choir and the Brompton & Invicta Military Wives Choir. The whole evening was brilliantly put together with an outstanding MC in the shape of Vince Maple - Leader of Medway Council. A career on the stage definitely awaits him!

The other military event of note was the 3PWRR Christmas Carol Service in Canterbury Cathedral with the PWRR Band playing wonderful carols sung by school children from

Spring Grove and Wickhambreaux CE Primary Schools, as well as Shorncliffe Military Wives choir. This was followed by a reception in the Chapter House.

Here in Kent, we are most fortunate to enjoy excellent and enduring working relationships with 36 Royal Engineers and especially its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Ryan Castro; 1 Royal School of Mechanical Engineering and Lt Col John Newton - Commanding Officer and 2 Royal Gurkha Regiment and its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Peter Houlton-Hart and of course, Col David Kenny - Commander and Lt Col Tim Petransky - HQ SE as well as now with Lt Col Rod Gray from SERFCA.

We also work closely with 3 Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and its Commanding Officer - Lt Col Nathan Horsman; 579 Field Squadron (EOD) and Major Duncan Wood and more recently with 220 Medical Squadron, 256 Multi Role Medical Regiment Reserves based in Ditton and Major Richard Webber and it has been a real privilege to get to know most of them. In all cases, these are excellent and fruitful partnerships which really underline the fact that Kent is very much a Military County, widely respected by the Ministry of Defence.

As Chairman of Kent County Council, I have been privileged to get out and about in the County and meet many people. One of the undoubted benefits of being Chairman is that I am automatically Chairman of Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board and I must say that it has been one of the most enjoyable parts of the role as I attend and participate in so many Military activities and am really getting to know and to understand the Military. It has made me 'armed forces aware' and given me the confidence to represent them and their interests at the highest level of Government. I am also grateful for the trust that they have put in me and also for the advice that I receive from our officer here at County Hall.

With just three months left, I continue to be filled with pride and with all that has been achieved to date including Kent CC proudly receiving its revalidated Employers Recognition Gold Award in Full Council. It is a privileged role that I have played in working closely with all our partners. Our partners like me as your Chairman stand committed to ensure that no member of the armed forces community is disadvantaged because of their service. If anything, all our partners and our Board Members are now even more aware of the ultimate sacrifice that our armed forces are prepared to pay in an ever more dangerous world to keep Britain and Kent in particular safe and free.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 and Covenant Legislation

The Armed Forces Act 2021 and Covenant Legislation having had a smooth passage through the House of Lords resulted in new Statutory Guidelines being published. To remind Members of Kent County Council - as public bodies, Local Authorities now need to show 'due regard' when considering applications from Service Personnel seeking School Admissions, Housing Accommodation and Healthcare and thereby ensure that no one is disadvantaged because their Service to the Nation.



KCC and Medway are well placed to handle such requests as they already do it as it is "the right thing to do" without the need for any new legislation. A view reinforced by the MoD Covenant Lead at the Kent CC Armed Forces Conference at Brompton Barracks in June 2024. The plan was to 'tighten up' the Armed Forces Covenant having had it enshrined in law - by Statutory Guidelines with Employment, Naturalisation and Social Benefits next for consideration. One recommendation already coming through is that the Armed Forces Community should also be trained along with frontline staff on what the Armed Forces Covenant does and does not do in support of them. 'Managing expectations' has become even more important with an increase in demand from regular and ex-service personnel seeking the best school or one of the best houses in their local area across Kent and Medway.

Read more about the Kent and Medway [Armed Forces Community Covenant document \(PDF, 150.3 KB\)](#).

Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board



Since May 2024 the Kent & Medway CMPB has been chaired by Cllr Bryan Sweetland - KCC Chairman and along with the Vice-Chairman Cllr Vince Maple Leader of Medway supported by their Armed Forces Champions. During 2024 the Board membership has been further strengthened by the new membership of the:

- Royal British Legion Kent Chairman
- 220 Medical Squadron, 256 Multi Role Medical Regiment Reserves - based in Ditton
- new SERFCA Deputy Chief Executive (East)

The Kent & Medway CMPB continues to oversee the implementation of the Covenant and meets twice a year and is supported by Task Groups covering the following themes:

- Recognise and Remember
- Health and wellbeing
- Employment and Skills
- Unit Welfare Officers - a Joint Task Group involving KCC Departmental Lead Officers and Medway Lead Officers

At the 20 February 2024 meeting, the Kent & Medway CMPB said goodbye to Cllr Gary Cook the outgoing Chairman of Kent County Council. Along with, Lt Col Peter Ellis who retired from the position of SERFCA Deputy Chief Executive (East).



On the 20 February 2024 the Kent & Medway CMPB - endorsed Kent & Medway CMPB's Strategic Aims under four key headings:

- I. Increase visibility of the Armed Forces Community to the civilian population
- II. Continue to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant plus the new legislation.
- III. Raise awareness amongst schools of the specific needs of service children and their families.
- IV. Support and promote recruitment of volunteers, Regulars and Reservists.

MoD Employer Recognition Awards Scheme



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

GOLD AWARD 2023

Proudly supporting those who serve.

Kent and Medway are still performing outstandingly well under the scheme. On the 23 October 2023, Kent County Council received notification that it had successfully retained its MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award following a rigorous re-validation process. On 28 March 2024 the award was presented to Full Council Lt Col Nathan Horsman with Brigadier Andrew Wood DL.



Armed Forces Covenant signing

KCC has been very much at the forefront in supporting and mentoring Councils and other bodies wishing to apply for MoD Employers Recognition Gold Awards in 2024 as a 'military friendly' employer of choice. The Kent Covenant Lead Officer is pleased to advise that in June 2024 Ashford Borough Council were awarded the Employers Recognition Silver award and is committed to working towards Gold. The Annual Gold Awards took place on 3 October 2024 on HMS Warrior in Portsmouth and Kent's EC Safety Solutions and the Royal Engineers Association both received the Gold Award from Maj-Gen Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton TD VR PC Director of Reserves at the MoD.



SILVER & GOLD Employer Recognition Scheme Award Holders		
Organisation	Date Awarded	Award Level
Absolute Military	2022	Gold
Ashford Borough Council	2024	Silver
Armoured Engineering Ltd	2023	Silver
BJF Group	2022	Silver
Canterbury City Council	2023	Gold
Challenger Troop	R2023	Silver
Dover District Council	2020	Gold
EC Safety Solutions Ltd	2024	Gold
FM Conway Ltd	2023	Gold
Folkestone and Hythe District Council	2021	Gold
Forces Family Finance	2020	Silver
Gravesham Borough Council	2021	Silver
Henderson Facilities Management Ltd	2023	Silver
InvictaK9	2021	Silver

SILVER & GOLD Employer Recognition Scheme Award Holders		
Organisation	Date Awarded	Award Level
Joint Security Services Ltd	2023	Gold
Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust	2023	Silver
Kent County Council	2018 & 2023	Gold
Kent Fire and Rescue Service	2020	Gold
Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust	2023	Silver
Kent Police	2022	Gold
Laing O'Rourke	R2022	Gold
Lifesaver First Aid Services	2022	Silver
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	2024	Silver
Medway Council	2020	Gold
Medway NHS Foundation Trust	2019	Silver
MKC Training Services Ltd	2023	Gold
MTS Cleansing Services Limited	R2022	Silver
NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board	2022	Gold
NPC Tree Surgery	2021	Silver
Pantera Group	2021	Silver
Priority Freight	R2023	Silver
Royal British Legion Industries Ltd	2020	Gold
Royal Engineers Association	2024	Gold
Royal Engineers Central Charitable Trust (RECCT)	2022	Gold
Securitem Consultancy Ltd	2023	Silver
Thanet District Council	2023	Silver
The Education and Skills Partnership LTD	2021	Silver
The Rift Group	2020	Gold
Vistry Group (formally Bovis Homes Ltd)	2019	Gold

2024 Events

National Armed Forces Covenant Conference 2024

'Crown Copyright, MOD Covenant team'

A delegation from Kent joined more than 240 delegates who gathered at Winchester University on the 23rd and 24th October for the Armed Forces Covenant Conference 2024 where Forces Connect had a stand. The aim of the Conference was to discuss issues affecting the Armed Forces community and build on the opportunities for further co-operation and shared ambitions. The theme of the Conference was 'The Covenant Through Life'.



Col (Retd) Alistair Carns DSO, OBE, MC, MP, Minister for Veterans and People, delivered the keynote speech. The Minister thanked delegates for all their work in supporting the Armed Forces community and took questions from the audience on his vision for the Covenant.



The first day began with a presentation from the Forces in Mind Trust, Rand Europe and Shared Intelligence on their research on Covenant delivery. This was followed by a presentation on Service children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities, with a focus on the challenges encountered during service moves, and then a talk and Q&A with James Greenrod, Deputy Director and Head of Armed Forces People Support at MOD.

For the first time, an evening reception provided an opportunity for informal networking and engagement in a relaxed environment. The highlight of the night was a talk from Mark Ormrod, a Royal Marine veteran and Invictus games athlete. Mark gave an incredible talk on overcoming adversity and rebuilding his life after a near-death experience in Afghanistan.

Guest speakers on the second day included representatives from the NHS and Portsmouth Council, and a serving Army officer spoke about the Commonwealth soldier experience. For the first time ever at the Covenant Conference, a representative of the bereaved community spoke about the pain of losing a loved one. The day also included presenters from the MOD outlining ongoing initiatives on improving mental resilience and tackling suicide. Three breakout sessions were available for attendees. These covered a diverse range of topics, from a discussion on disadvantage in the Commonwealth Armed Forces community, to 'identifying trends of disadvantage', and 'communicating the Covenant'.

The conference concluded with a stirring talk by Sqn Ldr John Peters, who detailed his experience as a POW in the first Gulf War. John spoke about his recovery after the war, the value of a military career, and the transferable skills he developed in uniform which translated into a successful career in the civilian world.

Kent Events



During 2024 a huge array of events took place across the county and included the Armed Forces Day Flag Raising on 25 June at County Hall.

Military children attended the 5-day summer Space Week 2024 event which took place at the University of Kent, Canterbury and was designed to ignite young people's passion for Space Science - A RE Service Children's Team were runners-up.



Kent County Council commemorated all those who lost their lives with the Kent Poppy Appeal launch taking place at County Hall in conjunction with the Royal British Legion on 25 October 2024.

The Festival of Remembrance Conference was held on 2 November 2024 at Rochester Cathedral, with all proceeds from the concert going to the Royal British Legion and military charities. A delegation from Kent attended The Tommy 105 birthday event at the RBLI. 3PWRR's Beating Retreat was held at Dover Castle on Armed Forces Day hosted by their CO - Lt Col Nathan Horsman. 36RE held their Annual Beating Retreat by the Band of Gurkhas in the Walled Garden in Invicta Park Barracks hosted by Lt Col Ryan Castro. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council held a Nuclear Veteran Medal presentation to recognise three local veterans who had received the medal. The Vice Chairman of the Kent & Medway CMPB Vince Maple was awarded honorary membership to the Chatham Branch of the Royal Naval Association during the annual memorial service held on the 3 September 2024 commemorating HMS Pembroke. The year was round off with the 3PWRR Carol Service that took place at Canterbury Cathedral on 3 December attended by the Chairman of KCC.



The Lord-Lieutenant's Awards Night was held on 7 November 2024 at Brompton Barracks with 28 awards being handed out and broken down into: Lord-Lieutenant Certificates of Meritorious Service x 15; Best Reservist x 1; Lord-Lieutenant Cadets of the Year x 12.



Kent & Medway Armed Forces Covenant Conference

Our 10th Annual Armed Forces Covenant Conference was held on 4 June 2024 at 1RSME Brompton Barracks in Chatham and was kindly sponsored by MKC Training. The conference attracted 150+ delegates and the theme for 2024 was 'Working Together'.



The conference was opened by Brigadier James Webster-Commandant and Lt Col John Newton – CO-1RSME. Speakers included HM Lord-Lieutenant - The Lady Colgrain; Capt Andy Balwah - from the Army Multicultural Network speaking on 'Diversity in the British Army'; Kent Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott and Chief Inspector Gary Woodward on 'Working with Veterans in Policing'. Major Andy Stubbs - 220 Sqn - Ditton spoke on 'Providing Emergency Medical Support out 'in the Field''. Lt Col Tim Petrasky - SO1 HQ SE spoke on our Army commitments within Kent and MoD Covenant Team and Canon Peter Bruinvels spoke on the latest developments with the Covenant and how well Kent was responding to them. Delegates were wowed with a fast-moving Gurkha Kukri display at lunchtime.



Great Tommy Sleep Out



On the night of the 21 March 2024, a group of enthusiastic KCC and DWP staff slept out at the WW1 Trenches at Detling Hill, to support the Great Tommy Sleep Out and raised £3,335 for the charity.

Welfare Support

KCC Support

KCC and the Armed Forces Champions continue to provide case work support for both service personnel and ex-service personnel. In Kent there are currently 2170 serving personnel across Kent and Medway and the breakdown is 390 in Medway and 570 in Maidstone and 530 in Folkestone and Hythe, 150 in Dover therefore it is not surprising that KCC receives on average one or two cases a week. Cases cover a range of topics such as obtaining a bus pass, school admissions, library fines whilst on active service and housing requests which tends to be around Folkestone and Hythe, Maidstone, and Medway.

During 2024, KCC's Financial Hardship Programme allocated £46,100.00 to veteran homes via the Household Support fund, 461 awards in total: 236 energy only awards, 201 food only awards, and 24 food and energy awards. In addition, the programme also awarded 6 successful applications for technology from the Armed Forces via the hardware access scheme.

KCC's ReferKent system has been established to enable secure and effective referrals between professionals and support organisations, ensuring no one falls through the cracks

when needing help. ReferKent continues to register organisations that offer support to the Armed Forces. For example, registrations include CAP Enterprise CIC, Mental Health Matters, Canterbury Safe Haven and the RBLI Lifeworks. The Armed Forces Network is also registered and is a multi-organisational group which includes members from the NHS, MoD, Armed Forces Reservists, Mental and Physical Health Clinicians, the Royal British Legion, SSAFA and other interested charities and organisations.

During 2024 initial preparations commenced to support the Brunei Gurkha Unit move. Initial contacts have been made, and a number of the Brunei children have already registered with Kent schools and Kent County Council has nominated an officer to support the school admission process. Work to update a schools handbook also commenced in 2024 ahead of the full move that will take place in Summer / Autumn 2025, which includes approximately 1500 people.



Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy - KCC's resettlement programme has supported 200 ARAP individuals (40 families) to resettle and integrate into communities across Kent since the start of the scheme. Those arriving for resettlement under ARAP include former Afghan military personnel, interpreters who worked with the British military during operations in Afghanistan, as well as other professionals whose lives and those of their families were put at risk through their involvement with the UK Government and military operations. Due to the urgency and scale of the evacuation, a majority of these families were accommodated in temporary bridging hotels until settled accommodation could be found. KCC Refugee Resettlement Team provided the wraparound support in one of the three Afghan bridging hotels in Kent (with Canterbury City Council and Ashford Borough Council delivering support to the other two). All three Kent bridging hotels have now closed, with families moving on to settled accommodation. The support provided by the KCC's refugee resettlement programme helps the families restart their lives in the UK. It includes support to understand life in the UK, understanding their finances, access employment and education, sustain tenancies, improve health and wellbeing, develop social connections and learning English (ESOL).

Kent Police – The Forcer Protocol

Kent Police who are members of the Kent and Medway CMPB, launched The Forcer Protocol on 1 November 2024. The purpose of the protocol is to protect and safeguard vulnerable veterans. The protocol effectively sets up an agreement between Kent Police and partner Safe and Found online to enable Kent Police to get information about veterans and service personnel that are vulnerable so that when they go missing Kent Police have a good chance of putting in quick time actions that can help to find them. [Kent Police The Forcer Protocol](#).

GP Veteran Friendly Practices

There has been a significant improvement over the past year with every Primary Care Network being Veteran Friendly - moving from 67% to 100% over the past year. There has been a steady increase in the number applying for Veteran Friendly accreditation. The target of 40% of practices being accredited has been met. The system is currently at 55% a minimum of 60% and overall aim is of 80%. There is variation across the system with from Dartford, Gravesham and Swale at 45%, through to East Kent at 65%. The Armed Forces Network has been working with Veterans and the community to take their I AM cards to the GP to ensure that they are registered. All Trusts needed to have achieved Veterans Aware Accreditation by March 2024 (Extended to then by NHS England) as part of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan. Part of this includes signing up for Step into Health and working through the Armed Forces Employers Recognition scheme. Kent and Medway have moved forward significantly in meeting the standard. All Trusts are now compliant and have steering groups set up to continue the delivery. All Trusts have stepped up the number of staff who have been trained as Service Champion over the past year except Medway NHS Foundation Trust. A number of care homes have been trained as Service Champions as part of their application to become Veteran Aware Accredited.

Forces Connect APP



Forces Connect APP is a free resource which was first developed in Kent continues to go from strength to strength across the UK 24/7, with over 40k downloads and 32 Regions signed up from Cumbria to Cornwall. During 2024 work begun on making it available for all MoD personnel and it went live on Defence Gateway via MODNet in November 2024. The desktop online version launched in July 2024

www.ForcesConnect.co.uk and Surrey County Council paid £12.5k towards the desktop version development.

Training



KCC through its Covenant Lead Officer supports all its Councils, including their Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers which includes attending Civil-Military Partnership Panels such as Dover and Medway. During 2024 the KCC Covenant Lead Officer continued to ensure that many more front line and contact centre staff, as well as, Adult Social Care Staff were trained, along with middle managers and other senior staff. A training session for Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers took place on 3 December 2024 at 36RE and a later one for Tonbridge & Malling had 42 attending. In total over 5,250 people have been trained by him across Kent & Medway

Training material has now been filmed and has been BSL signed and is available to all Local Authorities and was sponsored by Kent County Council.

Armed Forces Champions

The table below lists the Armed Forces Champions across Kent and Medway

Area	Armed Forces Champions	Contact email
<u>Kent County Council</u> <u>Deputy AFC</u>	<u>Cllr Oliver Richardson</u> <u>Cllr Derek Crow-Brown</u>	Oliver.Richardson@kent.gov.uk ; Derek.crow-brown@kent.gov.uk ;
<u>Covenant Lead</u>	<u>Canon Peter Bruinvels CC</u>	Peter.Bruinvels@kent.gov.uk ;
<u>Officer</u>	<u>Tim Woolmer</u>	Tim.Woolmer@kent.gov.uk ;
<u>Medway Council Lead</u> <u>AFC</u>	<u>Cllr Vince Maple</u> <u>Cllr Chrissy Stamp</u>	vince.maple@medway.gov.uk ; chrissy.stamp@medway.gov.uk
<u>Ashford BC</u>	<u>Cllr Peter Feacey</u>	Peter.feacey@ashford.gov.uk ;
<u>Canterbury CC</u>	<u>Cllr Pip Hazleton</u>	Pip.hazleton@councillor.canterbury.gov.uk
<u>Dartford BC</u>	<u>Cllr Peter Whapshott</u>	Peter.whapshott@dartford.gov.uk ;
<u>Dover DC</u>	<u>Cllr Gordon Cowan</u>	cllr-gordon.cowan@dover.gov.uk ;
<u>Folkestone & Hythe DC</u>	<u>Cllr Jim Martin</u>	Jim.martin@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk ;
<u>Gravesham BC</u>	<u>Cllr Peter Scollard</u>	Peter.scollard@gravesham.gov.uk ;
<u>Maidstone BC</u>	<u>Cllr David Naghi</u>	DavidNaghi@Maidstone.gov.uk
<u>Sevenoaks DC</u>	<u>Cllr Larry Abraham</u>	Cllr.abraham@sevenoaks.gov.uk ;
<u>Swale BC</u>	<u>Cllr Richard Palmer</u>	richardpalmer@swale.gov.uk ;
<u>Thanet DC</u>	<u>Cllr Helen Whitehead</u>	Cllr-helen.whitehead@thanet.gov.uk ;
<u>Tonbridge & Malling BC</u> <u>(Joint AFCs)</u>	<u>Cllr Steve Hammond</u> <u>Cllr Dave Davis</u>	Steve.hammond@tmbc.gov.uk ; Dave.davis@tmbc.gov.uk ;
<u>Tunbridge Wells BC</u>	<u>Cllr Beverley Palmer</u>	Beverley.Palmer@TunbridgeWells.gov.uk

Armed Forces Veterans Hubs

During the past 12 months, an increasing need for new Veterans Hubs and Drop-in centres has been identified with many Ex-Service and Veterans experiencing loneliness and depression.

The Nepalese Community Centre exclusively in Cheriton, Shorncliffe - continues to do well and is especially important because KCC played a part in supporting the local Nepalese Community taking on a lease from KCC to open and run the Community Centre, which is part of Cheriton Library. This Nepalese Community Centre is also supported by Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Veterans Hubs in Kent and Medway are based in:

- Ramsgate
- Sittingbourne
- Sheerness

- Faversham
- Canterbury
- Chatham
- Gillingham
- Ashford
- Tonbridge
- Dartford
- Romney Marsh
- Folkestone Sports Centre
- Shorncliffe Barracks
- Cheriton (Nepalese Community)

Data

Armed Forces and Veteran Community in Kent Needs Assessment

In 2024 KCC published [The Armed Forces and Veteran Community Needs Assessment](#) and [technical report](#) which focuses on the needs of armed forces and veterans living in Kent. It looks at the Armed Forces Covenant, governance in Kent and Medway, and the support structures that connect various organisations.

As well as serving personnel, reservists and cadets, the assessment details the veteran population in Kent, which is over 52,000. Notably, 58% of these veterans are over 65 years old and live in the eastern coastal areas of Kent.

There are 410 serving UK armed forces personnel in the County along with 900 Gurkha soldiers. There are 340 reservists (including Rochester) as well as the cadet community. The Kent veteran population make up over 52,000. A substantial number (58%) are over 65 years of age and reside in the eastern coastal fringes of Kent.

Mental health disorders are similar to those rates found in the general population. Kent veterans are statistically more likely to attend substance misuse treatment services for treatment for alcohol rather than opiates or nonopiates compared to non-veterans. Over the period 2020 to 2023 there have been seven service/veteran recorded suicides in Kent.

Consultations with the veteran community highlights that employment, housing, mental health and finance are the main issues raised by veterans.

The needs assessment identified that 418 applicants expressing a need for local authority housing. Ashford (71) and Dover (70) have the highest numbers whilst Tunbridge Wells (9) and Gravesham (0) have the lowest numbers. There were 19 cases of veteran homelessness in the County over a year in 2024.

Data on service personnel and their circumstances is provided by the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey which cites that more family support is needed.

Veterans who enter the Justice System exhibit similar risk factors to offending as do nonmilitary civilians. Experiences resulting from deployment and mental health issues such as Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcohol misuse can increase the risk of offending. Veterans in the Kent prison estate range from 2% (Standford Hill) to 5% (Maidstone). Nationally they tend to be male (98%) and within the age ranges 30-39 and 40-49 with almost 7% aged 70+.

The Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Service scheme via OpNOVA operates in Kent and all offenders are asked to disclose their veteran or serving member status. Since late 2022 to late 2023 114 veterans/serving members have been listed in Police Custody (92 veterans and 22 serving members) with ages ranging from 18 to 87.

2021 Census figures

Following the publication of the 2021 Census figures, we now know that there were 1,853,112 people in England and Wales reporting that they had previously served in the UK Armed Forces (3.8% of usual residents aged 16 years and over).

- Medway: 8529
- Thanet: 5,765
- Dover: 5,710
- Maidstone: 5,664
- Canterbury: 5,217
- Dartford: 2,328

Table 1: Residents who have previously served in the UK armed forces

	Usual residents aged 16+	Number previously served in UK armed forces	Percentage previously served in UK armed forces
2021 Census: UK Armed forces veterans			
England & Wales	48,566,373	1,853,112	3.8%
South East	7,554,580	317,082	4.2%
Kent	1,276,567	52,545	4.1%
Ashford	106,771	4,962	4.6%
Canterbury	132,774	5,217	3.9%
Dartford	90,698	2,328	2.6%
Dover	96,131	5,710	5.9%
Folkestone & Hythe	91,555	5,211	5.7%
Gravesham	84,555	2,351	2.8%
Maidstone	142,136	5,664	4.0%
Sevenoaks	96,603	3,344	3.5%
Swale	121,998	4,773	3.9%
Thanet	115,414	5,765	5.0%
Tonbridge & Malling	105,526	4,023	3.8%
Tunbridge Wells	92,403	3,194	3.5%
Medway Unitary Authority	222,757	8,529	3.8%

2021 Census - TS071 - Previously served in the UK armed forces

The Office for National Statistics (ONS), Table presented by Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

A full report is available on the Kent County Council website [2021 Census - Veterans](https://www.kent.gov.uk/2021-census-veterans) ([kent.gov.uk](https://www.kent.gov.uk))

Looking to 2025

Kent & Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board's Strategic Aims:

Promoting, publicising and co-ordinating events that increase the visibility of the Armed Forces Community to the civilian population:

- By holding the 11th Annual Armed Forces Covenant contributes to achieving this aim on 17 June 2025 Maidstone Campus, University of Medway.
- Hold twice-yearly meetings with Task Force Commanders, Armed Forces Champions and Covenant Lead Officers.
- Recognise & Remember Task Group: publicise the military events calendar (including veterans' activities) in conjunction with the Lieutenancy Officer to celebrate Armed Forces Day 2025 and Kent Reservists and Cadets Day on 25 February 2025 and as well as commemorating Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday 2025 and encourage KCC Members to support all the local events.
- Support Space Week 2025.

Continue to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant amongst public sector staff, and making it easier for the Armed Forces Community to access information, advice and support:

- Continue to build on the legacy of Forces Connect SE, ensuring the work is embedded and built upon through regular in-person training and e-learning.
- Encourage the wider use of the Forces Connect App.
- Encourage Unit Welfare Officers to be more proactive in ensuring the armed forces community understand what the Covenant is (and what it is not) and how they are being supported across Kent.

Raising awareness amongst schools of the specific needs of service children and their families, including the Gurkha families:

- Work with Headteachers across Kent & Medway with the largest number of service children.
- Extend an invite to a Headteacher Representative to the Unit Welfare Officer meetings.

Maintaining a focus on how the most vulnerable within the Armed Forces Community can be supported to access what they need to thrive in their future civilian life:

- Improve identification of those veterans who have greatest needs, via networking across public services and the voluntary sector and improving signposting to support vulnerable people.
- Increase signposting and support for financial and debt management services - and again, Kent Together and Refer Kent provides a basis for this.

Maintaining a strong focus on Recruitment, Staffing and Training on ex-service personnel:

- Support and promote the benefits of recruiting of Armed Forces Reservists and Military Spouses.
- Continue to monitor Kent CCs HR Policy to ensure that KCC remains 'Military friendly' and does now offer guaranteed interviews to appropriately qualified ex-service personnel and Veterans, as well as offering mentoring.
- Consider giving paid time off for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers who are employed by Kent CC.
- Ensure that KCC continues to offer Armed Forces Awareness Training, especially to Adult Social Care Staff.
- Consider conducting another Councillor and Staff Survey at KCC in late 2025 on whether they served and any links with the Armed Forces.
- Build on the successful Revalidation of KCC's Employers Recognition Gold Award which was received in October 2023.
- Develop a proposal for a Kent-wide campaign to encourage more Adult Volunteers for the Cadets, and case workers for the military charities (including targeting retired veterans).
- The Employment & Skills Task Group to take a lead in promoting the benefits of employing Reservists to the Private Sector and Cadets as Apprentices in conjunction with SERFCA.
- Encourage the appointment of an appropriately qualified service child to be appointed a Lord-Lieutenant Cadet.
- Plan and promote Kent Reserves and Cadet Day 2025.
- Make the most of the benefits of being an Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award holder by sending KCC staff on the Sandhurst / Longmoor Leadership Challenge training and developing the feedback groups to be part of KCC Civil-Military Peer Support Panel.

- Work closely with local partners and the Military to ensure bids for Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund remain of the highest quality, maximising income into the County.

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From: Roger Gough, Leader

To: **County Council – 13 March 2025**

Subject: Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation update

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

Further to the announcement that Kent and Medway has not been selected to be included on the Devolution Priority Programme, and the statutory invitation from the Government to all councils in two-tier areas of England and neighbouring small unitary authorities to submit proposals for local government reorganisation in their area, this paper provides a brief update to County Council.

Recommendations:

County Council is asked to:

- (1) **Note** the update on devolution and local government reorganisation.

1. Background

1.1 On 16 December 2024, Government published the English Devolution White Paper: *Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth*. The English Devolution White Paper sets out an ambitious agenda to reshape local government in England through:

- Broadening devolution so that all areas of England have a devolution settlement
- Deepening devolution, through development of a stronger set of powers and resources available to local areas through the new Devolution Framework published in the White Paper
- Progressing local government reorganisation in two-tier areas to support a move to simpler structures, unlock further devolution and deliver sustainable public services.

1.2 On the same day, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, wrote to council leaders setting out next steps to take the proposals in the White Paper forward, including a deadline of 10 January 2025 for formal requests for areas to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme. Government created the Devolution Priority Programme to manage capacity so that a limited number of areas would be able to benefit from the advantages of devolution as quickly as possible, with these areas being prioritised in terms of Ministerial decision-making, departmental support

and the necessary legislative processes. Where necessary to deliver devolution and reorganisation to the accelerated timescales, local areas were also able to request for Government to consider postponing council elections in May 2025 for a 12-month period.

- 1.3 Informed by extensive discussions with Leaders of the other councils in Kent and Medway, local MPs and other partners, on 9 January 2025, a paper was taken to County Council which recommended that County Council endorse the proposed decision by the Leader of the Council to submit a request to Government, jointly with Medway Council, for Kent and Medway to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme. The recommendation was endorsed by County Council and later that day the recommendation was agreed by Cabinet.
- 1.4 Following this, the Leaders of KCC and Medway Council submitted a joint letter on 10 January to Ministers requesting that Kent and Medway be included in the Devolution Priority Programme. This letter is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.5 On 5 February 2025, Government announced the areas that had been chosen and the Leaders of KCC and Medway Council received a letter confirming that Kent and Medway would not be included in the Devolution Priority Programme. This letter is attached as Appendix 2. The reason given for this is set out in further detail below.
- 1.6 Also on 5 February, the Minister of State wrote to all council leaders in two-tier areas and neighbouring smaller unitaries to formally invite leaders to work together to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation. The letter set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for the process. This letter is attached as Appendix 3.
- 1.7 Since receiving the letters on 5 February, the Leaders of KCC and Medway Council have continued to have conversations with Ministers and MHCLG officials on the implications and next steps for Kent and Medway in terms of both devolution and local government reorganisation. Work is also continuing with the other council leaders in Kent to determine the most appropriate next steps for the area. This paper provides an update on those discussions and looks ahead to the next set of milestones set by Government.

2. Devolution

- 2.1 Government's decision not to include Kent and Medway in the Devolution Priority Programme was unexpected and disappointing, the more so given the number of neighbouring and comparable counties which were included. There is a clear case for bringing the benefits of devolution to the area as soon as possible to reform public services and unlock opportunities for our residents and the wider economy. Kent and Medway leaders had expressed their willingness to work together in the best interests of the area and meet the expected timelines.

- 2.2 The reason given in the letter for why Kent and Medway was not included in the Devolution Priority Programme is as follows:

I was pleased by the enthusiasm in your response to my letter of 16 December. However, I had to make a judgement of the best-placed areas to take forwards on the Programme according to our strict criteria, and, in the round, concluded your proposals could not be taken forward due to concerns about the size of the population disparity between the two proposed constituent members of your proposed Kent and Medway Combined County Authority and the consequential impact on its governance. I believe this will affect your readiness and ability to meet the delivery criteria of the White Paper, and that local government reorganisation would benefit your area before a mayoral institution is established.

- 2.3 KCC and Medway Council have, in different forums, requested further clarity from Government on this statement. It is not clear which criteria the area failed to meet, particularly in comparison to neighbouring two-tier areas with similar population disparities which were included on the Programme. Given our current position, there is a risk that Kent and Medway will be left behind in the journey to devolution and that the area could miss out on funding, powers and influence in the coming years, particularly as it is the only area of the South East that was not included in either the Devolution Priority Programme or fast-tracked to local government reorganisation.
- 2.4 However, the Leaders of KCC and Medway remain committed to working together, with local partners and with Government to secure the benefits of devolution in a way that works for our local area as quickly as possible. The Ministers letter says that he wants to keep building on the enthusiasm and consensus shown in Kent and Medway, and this has been echoed in ongoing conversations with him and MHCLG officials.
- 2.5 One of the main benefits of devolution is a focus on public service reform and a shift in approach towards a focus on prevention and a move towards consolidated and targeted funding on key challenges across public services in an area. Given the coterminosity of Kent and Medway public services and a longstanding track record of partnership working across the county, we remain in a strong position to work with Government to drive a public service reform agenda across the county whilst simultaneously developing plans for both local government reorganisation and devolution. Public service reform must be a golden thread that runs through both LGR and devolution if Kent public services are to be financially sustainable.

3. Local government reorganisation

- 3.1 The invitation to councils to submit reorganisation proposals (Appendix 3) includes a Schedule that sets out the criteria for unitary local government and matters to be taken into account in developing proposals. Councils must have regard to the information in the Schedule when preparing proposals to submit to Government.

3.2 The criteria for unitary authorities are:

- *A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government*
Including covering a sensible economic area and geography (that will create an appropriate tax base and help increase housing supply), and robust evidence on the outcomes to be achieved by the single tier arrangement, evidenced by cost/benefit analysis and local engagement.
- *Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks*
Including the guiding principle of a 500,000 population or more, identification of efficiencies to be achieved, future service transformation opportunities and invest-to-save projects and how the area will seek to manage transition costs.
- *Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens*
Including how proposals will improve service delivery and avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services particularly in 'crucial' services such as social care, children's services and SEND, and opportunities to deliver public service reform.
- *Proposals show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views*
Including evidencing meaningful local engagement, and considering issues of local identity, culture and history.
- *New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements*
Including how the proposal will help unlock devolution and ensuring sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority.
- *New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment*
Including that proposals will need to explain how communities will be engaged in the new structure and how existing arrangements can be built on.

3.3 The matters to be taken into account in developing a reorganisation proposal include where possible using district areas for setting new unitary boundaries (or providing strong justification for boundary changes,) and for local leaders to work together and share information, engage MPs and other private sector providers.

3.4 Councils are asked to submit proposals for reorganisation by 28 November 2025.

- 3.5 There is also an invitation to submit interim plans by 21 March 2025, on which Government will provide feedback. A separate list of the expected issues for the interim submissions to cover is set out in the Schedule and includes identifying options for the size and boundaries of new councils, indicative efficiency saving opportunities and indicative costs of setting up implementation.
- 3.6 Local government reorganisation is a shared responsibility on all principal authorities for two-tier areas, and in Kent and Medway it continues to be progressed in partnership through Kent Council Leaders. KCC is facilitating this work to prepare a joint interim submission for the 21 March deadline, as has been requested by Government.
- 3.7 However, it is clear that there are differing views on the right number of unitary councils for Kent and Medway, and therefore, any initial submission for the 21 March deadline will almost certainly be high level and not restricting the future approach any council may take to the statutory deadline of 28 November. The development of full business cases is a complex matter, which requires a strong and robust evidence base with full engagement of Kent residents and businesses. However, it is already clear that there are three critical issues that will shape the County Councils position going forward:
- **Resident engagement:** Local government exists to serve local residents and their voice should be critical in determining the future council structures that will serve them and their local communities. Whilst there is a need to balance community identity with more efficient and effective service delivery in any local government reorganisation, the world has significantly moved on since the last time LGR in Kent was undertaken at this scale in 1974. Any proposals need to be based on a widespread and meaningful engagement of local residents to understand their priorities for their future councils in a 21st century context.
 - **Financial and service sustainability:** One of the drivers for local government reorganisation is greater efficiency and value for money for the taxpayer. Whilst obvious, proposals for local government reorganisation in Kent must lead to a net financial benefit for the taxpayer that can then be reinvested in front line services to support financial sustainability of services and viability of the new councils. The County Council could not support any proposals which left the Kent residents with a financial liability either in the short or long term, as this would be a breach of our fiduciary duty to them. The challenge of disaggregating a county council the size and scale of KCC into smaller unitary councils is significant, not just financially but also in regard to the potential scale of service disruption to our 1.6m residents. As such, the assessed costs and impacts associated with disaggregating the county council will be a significant factor as plans and thinking develops.
 - **Future boundaries:** Whilst the Government assumption is that existing District and Borough Council boundaries should be the 'building blocks' of unitary council proposals, it is open for proposals to make recommendations that would seek to split existing District and Borough boundaries if there is

strong justification. Given that the existing Districts and Borough boundaries, created in 1974, were arbitrarily drawn, there are a number of communities who would more naturally sit in different authorities if that option were available. If it should become necessary, even though it may lengthen the process of delivering LGR, ensuring future council boundaries are right by cutting across existing District and Borough boundaries should be considered on its merits and its effect on the long-term interests of all Kent residents and communities.

- 3.8 Any proposals developed for the full business case for the November deadline will need to be developed by a new KCC administration post the May elections, and tested through extensive resident and partner engagement. Although engagement with Kent residents, businesses and partners will take place in the development of any business case, should Ministers decide to take forward any proposals for local government reorganisation in the county, there would be further statutory consultation on the proposals ahead of any formal and final decision is made.
- 3.9 Government's indicative timetable for local government reorganisation to be delivered in areas not included in the Devolution Priority Programme, including Kent and Medway, is April 2028, with the aim for new unitary authorities to go live at that time. This is an ambitious deadline and will be subject to departmental capacity and funding requirements. Government has not currently provided any timescales for devolution in areas that are not included in the Priority Programme, making it very difficult for Kent and Medway to plan and prepare for this. Kent and Medway leaders are continuing to press Government for a timeline for devolution to be established. Devolution and local government reorganisation are interconnected processes and Kent and Medway will therefore make a strong case that the timeline for devolution should run in parallel with local government reorganisation, or sooner, to realise the benefits of devolution for Kent and Medway as quickly as possible.

4. Recommendations

4.1 County Council is asked to:

- (1) Note the update on devolution and local government reorganisation.
-

5. Relevant Director:

Amanda Beer, Chief Executive Officer

6. Report Authors:

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance

Jenny Dixon-Sherreard, Strategy Manager, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance

7. Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Joint letter to Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution from Roger Gough, Leader of KCC and Vince Maple, Leader of Medway Council on 10 January 2025, formally requesting that Kent and Medway be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

Appendix 2 – Letter to Leaders of KCC and Medway Council from Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution on 5 February, in response to Kent and Medway's request to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

Appendix 3 – Letter to Leaders of all councils in Kent and Medway from Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution on 5 February 2025, inviting proposals for local government reorganisation.

8. Background documents:

Paper to County Council on 9 January 2025 – **English Devolution White Paper**, available at:

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=113&MId=9639&Ver=4>

Paper to Cabinet on 9 January 2025 – **English Devolution White Paper**, available at:

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=9468&Ver=4>

English Devolution White Paper, Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 16 December 2024 available at [English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth - GOV.UK](#)

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Minister for Local Government and Devolution
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

By email: EnglishDevolutionLGENquiries@communities.gov.uk

10 January 2025

Dear Jim,

Re: Kent and Medway request to be included in Devolution Priority Programme

Further to the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on the 16 December and your letter of the same date, we write in response to your invite for requests to join the Devolution Priority Programme. As the Leaders of Kent County Council and Medway Council, the two upper tier local authorities for Kent and Medway, we formally ask to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

We are grateful for the webinars with your officials following publication of the White Paper, and the subsequent follow up meeting with Baroness Taylor on the 20th December which was very helpful. You will already be aware that we have undertaken significant engagement with District and Borough Council Leaders given the time available over the Christmas and New Year period, as well as briefing Kent & Medway MPs and other key stakeholders.

We are confident that Kent and Medway can meet the timetable set out by the Government for local areas on the Devolution Priority Programme to create the Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and hold the first Mayoral election in May 2026.

Whilst there is some mixed feeling from District and Borough Council Leaders about the speed of moving forward with devolution on this timetable, and a desire to ensure that the period in which the structure of the new Strategic Authority (SA) will be a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA) prior to the completion of local government reorganisation is minimised, there is also general acceptance of the clear direction and expectation on devolution that has been set out by the Government.

We are committed to there being parity of esteem across all councils in Kent and Medway as we progress with devolution, and will continue to work in a collaborative and constructive way to design an MCCA structure in a way that continues to support our collegiate approach.

We also acknowledge that in asking to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, we are accepting a parallel process of local government reorganisation for Kent and Medway. Again, in discussions with the Leaders of District and Borough Councils in Kent, there is general understanding of the clear direction of travel and expectation set out by the Government.

However, there is greater range of views in regard to both the number of unitary councils that could be created, their exact geographies and the speed at which we should seek to implement new structures. These issues are being actively considered through the Kent Leaders Devolution Sub-Group and we are confident that through this collaborative work, a stronger consensus will emerge in the next few months.

It is already clear that there is a stronger leaning from many of the District and Brough Councils, as well as from our own two respective councils, that given the inherent challenge of restructuring 14 councils concurrently, and the wider pressures that KCC (and subsequently successor authorities) must bear given our location at the Gateway to Europe with associated border/asylum issues, getting reorganisation right in Kent, is the greatest priority. Those critical issues will sit alongside a clear desire to ensure recognition of historic place within the new unitary authorities.

On that basis, we will work collaboratively over the next few months to put together a realistic timetable for the implementation date for the new unitary councils in line with the timetable within the White Paper.

We recognise that the framework for devolution set out in the White Paper represents a once in a generation opportunity for Kent and Medway to radically reshape local government and local public service delivery for the benefit of our residents and businesses. We remain ambitious to seize that opportunity in a way that is pragmatic, deliverable and, above all, ensures continuity of the vital services our 1.9m residents rely on every day during a period of significant change.

We look forward to hearing from you and your officials in due course.

Yours sincerely



Roger Gough
Leader, Kent County Council



Vince Maple
Leader, Medway Council



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2025/02944

Cllr Rodger Gough
Leader - Kent County Council

Cllr Vince Maple
Leader - Medway Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders,

In July 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister invited you to partner with this new Government to deliver the most ambitious programme of devolution this country has ever seen. Since that letter, we have published the English Devolution White Paper, setting out further detail on how we will widen and deepen devolution across England, providing mayors with unprecedented powers and funding and hardwiring devolution into the way government works, and our determination to rebuild local government and to reset the relationship between national and local government.

In the White Paper, we also announced our new Devolution Priority Programme and invited areas to come forward and submit proposals for being part of our Devolution Priority Programme. It will provide a fast-track to mayoral devolution for those areas that are ready to come together under sensible geographies which meet the criteria set out in the White Paper. We were incredibly pleased to see such a positive response, showing that the country is ready for change.

I was pleased by the enthusiasm in your response to my letter of 16 December. However, I had to make a judgement of the best-placed areas to take forwards on the Programme according to our strict criteria, and, in the round, concluded your proposals could not be taken forward due to concerns about the size of the population disparity between the two proposed constituent members of your proposed Kent and Medway Combined County Authority and the consequential impact on its governance. I believe this will affect your readiness and ability to meet the delivery criteria of the White Paper, and that local government reorganisation would benefit your area before a mayoral institution is established. I will be writing separately to all Local Authorities in two-tier areas about taking forward reorganisation.

I appreciate that this will be disappointing news, and I want to recognise the hard work and good faith which had gone into developing your proposal to the exacting requirements and timetable of the programme. I want to reassure you that we remain committed to supporting all areas of the country on a path towards devolution and I want to keep building on the enthusiasm and consensus you have shown. We will continue to work with you to provide further feedback for how to strengthen your proposal for consideration later in the Parliament.

Please note that by not progressing with the Devolution Priority Programme, this means that I will not be postponing the May 2025 elections to Kent County Council.

I also want to place on record my appreciation for the leadership you have shown in support of our shared ambition, and I assure you that the decision in no way reflects on the political leadership in this process, in fact I see this as the start of the process and not the end.

I want to thank you again for your interest in the Devolution Priority Programme, and my officials and I look forward to supporting your area with future plans to access greater devolution.

I am copying this letter to Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:

Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils and
unitary council in Kent

Ashford Borough Council
Canterbury City Council
Dartford Borough Council
Dover District Council
Folkstone and Hythe District Council;
Gravesham Borough Council
Kent County Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Swale Borough Council
Thanet District Council
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Medway Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

Developing proposals for reorganisation

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

Supporting places through change

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals

We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 28 November**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007**INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Kent, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



F KIRWAN

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

SCHEDULE

Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

Criteria for unitary local government

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

- a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
- b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
- c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
- d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

- a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
- b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
- c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
- d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
- e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
- f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Developing proposals for unitary local government

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

Boundary Changes

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

Engagement and consultation on reorganisation

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025**. This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

- a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.
- g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

From:	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services Interim Corporate Director – Finance
To:	County Council – 13 March 2025
Subject:	Treasury Management Mid-Year Update 2024-25
Classification:	Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an overview of Treasury Management activity to the end of September 2024. There are no recommended changes to the approved strategy in this report.

Recommendation: County Council is asked to note the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report covers Treasury Management activity up to the end of September 2024 and developments in 2024-25 up to the date of this report.
- 1.2 This report was noted by the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 12 December 2024 prior to its submission to the County Council.
- 1.3 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2024-25 was approved by the County Council on 19 February 2024.
- 1.4 There are no recommended changes to the approved strategy in this report.
- 1.5 The Council has both borrowed and invested substantial sums of money and is therefore exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of risk are therefore central to the Council's treasury management strategy. This report covers treasury activity and the associated monitoring and control of risk.
- 1.6 Treasury risk management at the Council is conducted within the framework of CIPFA's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year and, as a minimum, a semi-annual and annual treasury outturn report. This report fulfils the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to the CIPFA Code.

- 1.7 The Council has nominated the Governance & Audit Committee to be responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies.

2. External context

- 2.1 **Economic Update:** The following economic commentary has been provided by the Council's retained treasury advisor, Link Group.

- 2.2 *"The third quarter of 2024 (July to September) saw:*

- *GDP growth stagnating in July following downwardly revised Q2 figures (0.5% q/q)*
- *A further easing in wage growth as the headline 3myy rate (including bonuses) fell from 4.6% in June to 4.0% in July;*
- *CPI inflation hitting its target in June before edging above it to 2.2% in July and August;*
- *Core CPI inflation increasing from 3.3% in July to 3.6% in August;*
- *The Bank of England initiating its easing cycle by lowering interest rates from 5.25% to 5.0% in August and holding them steady in its September meeting;*
- *10-year gilt yields falling to 4.0% in September*

- 2.3 *The economy's stagnation in June and July points more to a mild slowdown in GDP growth than a sudden drop back into a recession. Moreover, the drop in September's composite activity Purchasing Managers Index, from 53.8 in August to 52.9, was still consistent with GDP growth of 0.3%-0.4% for the summer months. This is in line with the Bank of England's view, and it was encouraging that an improvement in manufacturing output growth could be detected, whilst the services PMI balance suggests non-retail services output grew by 0.5% q/q in Q3. Additionally, the services PMI future activity balance showed an uptick in September, although readings after the Chancellor's announcements at the Budget on 30th October will be more meaningful.*

- 2.4 *The 1.0% m/m jump in retail sales in August was stronger than the consensus forecast for a 0.4% m/m increase. The rise was reasonably broad based, with six of the seven main sub sectors recording monthly increases, though the biggest gains came from clothing stores and supermarkets, which the ONS reported was driven by the warmer-than-usual weather and end of season sales. As a result, some of that strength is probably temporary.*

- 2.5 *The government's plans to raise public spending by around £16bn a year (0.6% GDP) have caused concerns that a big rise in taxes will be announced in the Budget, which could weaken GDP growth in the medium-term. However, if taxes are raised in line with spending (i.e., by £16bn) that would mean the overall stance of fiscal policy would be similar to the previous government's plan to reduce the budget deficit. Additionally, rises in public spending tend to boost GDP by more than increases in taxes reduce it. Our colleagues at Capital Economics suggest GDP growth will hit 1.2% in 2024 before reaching 1.5% for both 2025 and 2026.*

- 2.6 The further easing in wage growth will be welcomed by the Bank of England as a sign that labour market conditions are continuing to cool. The 3myy growth rate of average earnings fell from 4.6% in June to 4.0% in July. On a three-month annualised basis, average earnings growth eased from 3.0% to 1.8%, its lowest rate since December 2023. Excluding bonuses, the 3myy rate fell from 5.4% to 5.1%.
- 2.7 Other labour market indicators also point to a further loosening in the labour market. The 59,000 fall in the alternative PAYE measure of the number of employees in August marked the fourth fall in the past five months. And the 77,000 decline in the three months to August was the biggest drop since November 2020. Moreover, the number of workforce jobs fell by 28,000 in Q2. The downward trend in job vacancies continued too. The number of job vacancies fell from 872,000 in the three months to July to 857,000 in the three months to August. That leaves it 34% below its peak in May 2022, and just 5% above its pre-pandemic level. Nonetheless, the Bank of England is still more concerned about the inflationary influence of the labour market rather than the risk of a major slowdown in labour market activity.
- 2.8 CPI inflation stayed at 2.2% in August, but services inflation rose from a two-year low of 5.2% in July to 5.6%, significantly above its long-run average of 3.5%. Food and fuel price inflation exerted some downward pressure on CPI inflation, but these were offset by the upward effects from rising furniture/household equipment inflation, recreation/culture inflation and a surprisingly large rise in airfares inflation from -10.4% in July to +11.9% in August. As a result, core inflation crept back up from 3.3% to 3.6%. CPI inflation is also expected to rise in the coming months, potentially reaching 2.9% in November, before declining to around 2.0% by mid-2025.
- 2.9 The Bank initiated its loosening cycle in August with a 25bps rate cut, lowering rates from 5.25% to 5.0%. In its September meeting, the Bank, resembling the ECB more than the Fed, opted to hold rates steady at 5.0%, signalling a preference for a more gradual approach to rate cuts. Notably, one Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member (Swati Dhingra) voted for a consecutive 25bps cut, while four members swung back to voting to leave rates unchanged. That meant the slim 5-4 vote in favour of a cut in August shifted to a solid 8-1 vote in favour of no change.
- 2.10 Looking ahead, CPI inflation will likely rise in the coming months before it falls back to its target of 2.0% in mid-2025. The increasing uncertainties of the Middle East may also exert an upward pressure on inflation, with oil prices rising in the aftermath of Iran's missile attack on Israel on 1 October. China's recent outpouring of new fiscal support measures in the latter stages of September has also added to the upshift in broader commodity prices, which, in turn, may impact on global inflation levels and thus monetary policy decisions. Despite these recent developments, our central forecast is still for rates to fall to 4.5% by the end of 2024 with further cuts likely throughout 2025. This is in line with market expectations, however, although a November rate cut still looks likely, December may be more problematic for the Bank if CPI inflation spikes towards 3%. In the second half of 2025, though, we think a more marked easing in inflation will prompt the Bank to speed up, resulting in rates eventually reaching 3.0%, rather than the 3.25-3.50% currently priced in by financial markets.

- 2.11 Our forecast is next due to be updated around mid-November following the 30 October Budget, 5 November US presidential election and the 7 November MPC meeting and the release of the Bank of England Quarterly Monetary Policy Report.
- 2.12 Looking at gilt movements in the first half of 2024/25, and you will note the 10-year gilt yield declined from 4.32% in May to 4.02% in August as the Bank's August rate cut signalled the start of its loosening cycle. Following the decision to hold the Bank Rate at 5.0% in September, the market response was muted, with the 10-year yield rising by only 5bps after the announcement. This likely reflected the fact that money markets had priced in a 25% chance of a rate cut prior to the meeting. The yield had already increased by about 10bps in the days leading up to the meeting, driven in part by the Fed's "hawkish cut" on 18 September. There is a possibility that gilt yields will rise near-term as UK policymakers remain cautious due to persistent inflation concerns, before declining in the longer term as rates fall to 3.0%.
- 2.13 The FTSE 100 reached a peak of 8,380 in the third quarter of 2024, but its performance is firmly in the shade of the US S&P500, which has breached the 5,700 threshold on several occasions recently. Its progress, however, may pause for the time being whilst investors wait to see who is elected the next US President, and how events in the Middle East (and Ukraine) unfold. The catalyst for any further rally (or not) is likely to be the degree of investors' faith in AI."

3. Local context

- 3.1 The treasury management position on 31 March 2024 and the change over the 6 months to 30 September 2024 is shown in the following table. Borrowing and investment activity occurring over the first half of the year is discussed further in sections 6 and 7 below.

	31-Mar-24	2024-25	30-Sep-24	30-Sep-24
	Balance £m	Movement £m	Balance £m	Average Rate %
Long-term borrowing	771.9	-25.1	746.8	4.35
Total borrowing	771.9	-25.1	746.8	4.35
Long-term investments	280.1	32.9	312.9	4.71
Short-term investments	44.4	12.4	56.7	4.96
Cash and cash equivalents	128.9	4.1	133.0	4.99
Total investments	453.4	49.3	502.6	4.82
Net borrowing	318.5	-74.4	244.1	

4. Borrowing Update

- 4.1 CIPFA's 2021 Prudential Code is clear that local authorities must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return and that it is not prudent for local authorities to make any investment or spending decision that will increase the capital financing requirement, and so may lead to new borrowing, unless directly and primarily related to the

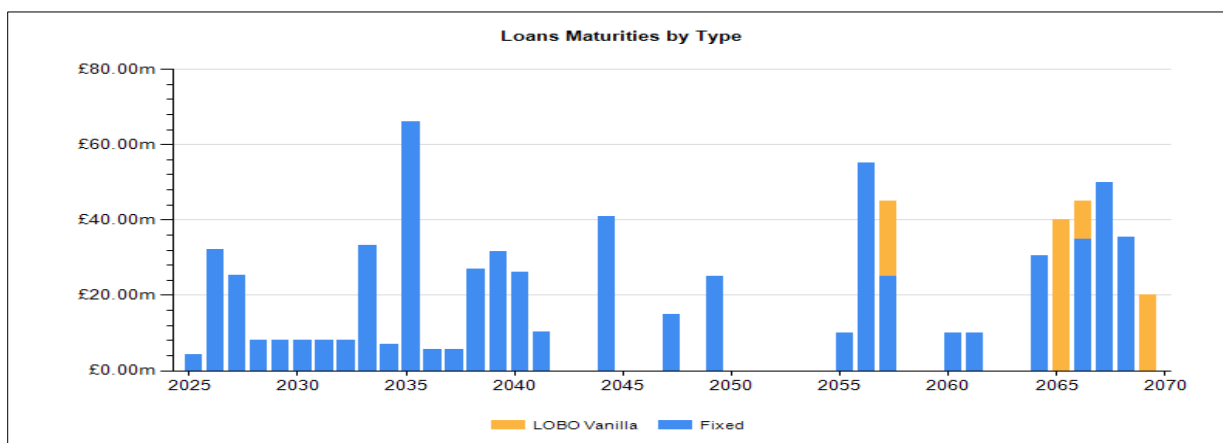
functions of the Authority. PWLB loans are no longer available to local authorities planning to buy investment assets primarily for yield unless these loans are for refinancing purposes.

5. Borrowing Strategy during the period

- 5.1 The Council's chief objective when borrowing has been to strike an appropriately low risk balance between securing low interest costs and achieving cost certainty over the period for which funds are required, with flexibility to renegotiate loans should the Council's long-term plans change being a secondary objective.
- 5.2 At 30 September 2024 the Council held £746.8m of loans as part of its strategy for funding previous capital programmes. No net new borrowing was undertaken in the half-year and £25.1m of existing loans were allowed to mature without replacement.
- 5.3 Interest rates very slightly increased over the first half of the financial year in both the long and short term, with rates at the end of September around 0.07% - 0.09% higher than those at the beginning of April. The PWLB 10-year maturity certainty rate stood at 4.83% at 30 September 2024, 20 years at 5.29% and 30 years at 5.36%.
- 5.4 The Council continues to hold LOBO (Lender's Option Borrower's Option) loans where the lender has the option to propose an increase in the interest rate at set dates, following which the Council has the option to either accept the new rate or to repay the loan at no additional cost. Rising interest rates increases the likelihood of a lender exercising their option although no banks exercised their option during the period.
- 5.5 The Council's borrowing activity in the 6 months to 30 September is as follows:

	31/03/2024	2024-25	30/09/2024	30/09/2024	30/09/2024
	Balance	Movement	Balance	Average Rate	Value Weighted Average Life
	£m	£m	£m	%	yrs
PWLB Loan	456.3	-23.9	432.4	4.33	15.11
Banks (LOBO)	90.0	0.0	90.0	4.15	39.38
Banks (Fixed Term)	216.1	0.0	216.1	4.54	37.73
Streetlighting project	9.5	-1.3	8.2	2.85	15.84
Total borrowing	771.9	-25.1	746.8	4.35	24.59

- 5.6 The maturity profile of the Council's outstanding debt at 30 September 2024 was as follows:



6. Treasury investment activity

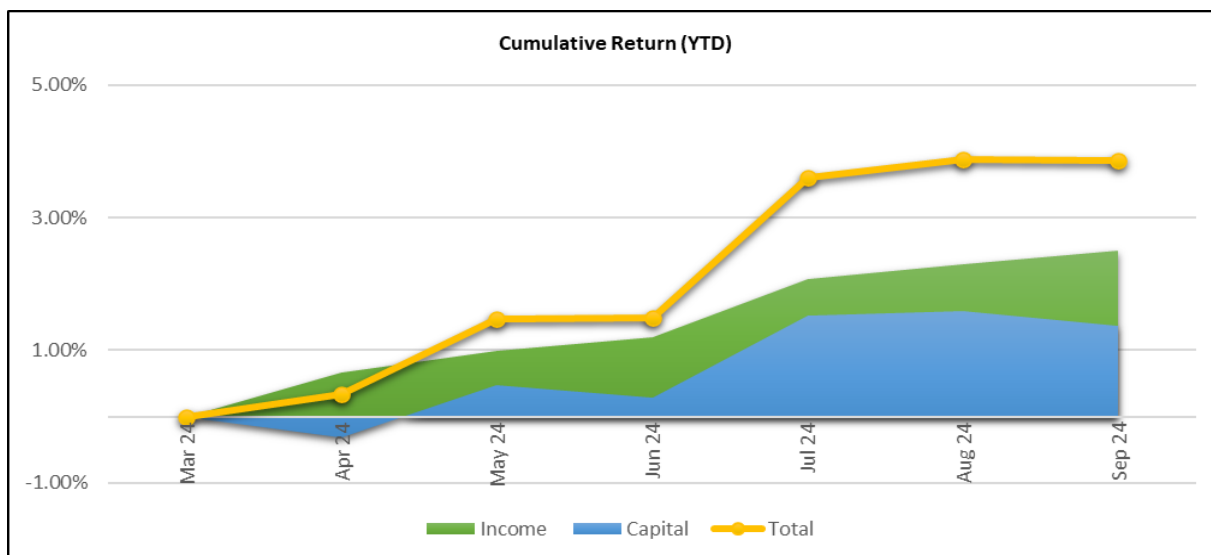
- 6.1 CIPFA published a revised Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes on 20th December 2021. These define treasury management investments as investments that arise from the organisation's cash flows or treasury risk management activity that represents balances that need to be invested until the cash is required for use in the course of business.
- 6.2 The Council holds significant invested funds representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves held. During the period, the Council's investment balance ranged between £443.1m and £622.9m due to timing differences between income and expenditure.
- 6.3 Both the CIPFA Code and government guidance require the Council to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest rate of return, or yield. The Council's objective when investing money is to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income.
- 6.4 Bank Rate decreased from 5.25% at the beginning of the year to 5.00% at the end of September 2024. Short-dated cash rates, which had ranged between 5.08% - 5.25% at the beginning of April, dropped by around 0.25% for overnight/7-day maturities and 0.37% for 6-12 month maturities.
- 6.5 The Council continues to hold significant cash balances in money market funds as well as in bank call accounts which have same day availability. This liquid cash is diversified over several counterparties and money market funds to manage both credit and liquidity risks.
- 6.6 During the 6 months to 30 September, the Council loaned £2.9m to the no use empty loans programme. At 30 September 2024, the Council had outstanding loans totalling £16.8m to the programme now achieving a return of 3.48% which is available to fund general services. A £29.6m net increase in covered bonds in the 6 months brings the total bond portfolio up to £117.9m. These instruments are negotiable and have the benefit of collateral cover.

6.7 The Council's investments during the 6 months to the end of September are summarised in the table below and a detailed schedule of investments as at 30 September 2024 is in Appendix 1.

	31-Mar-24	2024-25	30-Sep-24	30-Sep-24	30-Sep-24
	Balance	Movement	Balance	Rate of Return	Average Credit Rating
	£m	£m	£m	%	
Call Deposits (Banks)	13.6	-7.6	6.0	4.41	A+
Money Market Funds	128.9	4.1	133.0	4.99	AAA
Covered Bonds	88.2	29.6	117.9	4.54	AAA
DMADF Deposits (DMO)	0.0	32.7	32.7	4.94	AA-
Treasury Bills (UK Government)	30.8	-12.8	18.0	5.17	AA-
No Use Empty Loans	16.0	0.8	16.8	3.48	
Equity	1.3	0.0	1.3		
Internally Managed Cash	278.8	46.8	325.6	4.74	AA+
Strategic Pooled Funds	174.6	2.4	177.0	4.97	
Total	453.4	49.3	502.6	4.82	

7. Externally managed investments

- 7.1 The Council is invested in equity, multi-asset and property funds. Because the pooled funds have no defined maturity date, but are available for withdrawal after a notice period, their performance and continued suitability in meeting the Council's investment objectives are regularly reviewed.
- 7.2 Although expected returns are higher over the long term than comparable short term cash instruments, returns on pooled fund investments can be volatile from one year to the next, and therefore the Council only holds long term (strategic) cash balances in the strategic pooled funds' portfolio.
- 7.3 **Performance YTD** The value of our holdings increased to £177.0m at the end of September 2024, showing an unrealised gain of £2.4m (1.36%) over the period since the end of March 2024. The total return (comprised of both income and capital returns) on the pooled fund investments over the 6 months since 31 March 2024 is £6.9m (3.85%), as shown in the table below.

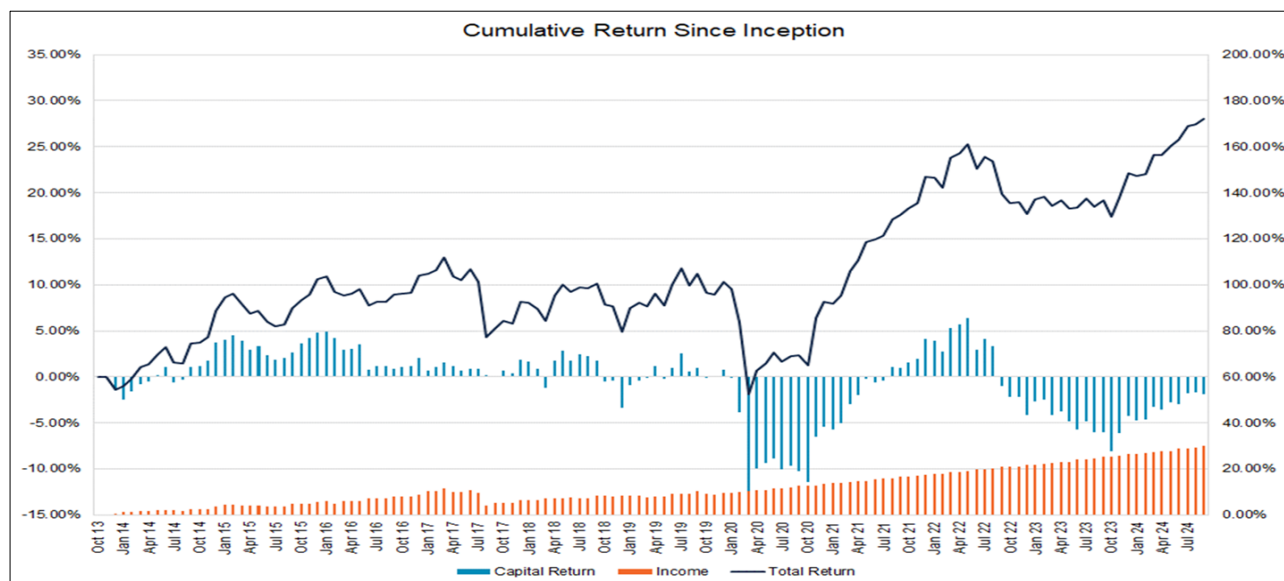


7.4 The market value of the pooled fund investments as at 30 September 2024 compared to the position as at 31 March 2024 is shown in the table below.

		31-Mar-24	2024-25	30-Sep-24	30-Sep-24	
Investment Fund	Book cost	Market Value	Movement	Market Value	6 months return	
					Income	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	%	%
CCLA LAMIT Property Fund	60.0	54.2	-0.2	54.0	2.44	2.12
CCLA Diversified Income Fund	5.0	5.0	0.0	4.9	0.43	0.29
Pyrford Global Total Return Sterling Fund	5.0	5.4	0.1	5.5	1.66	4.07
Fidelity Global Multi Asset Income Fund	25.0	23.0	-0.9	22.1	2.36	-1.25
Ninety-One (Investec) Diversified Income Fund	10.0	9.1	0.1	9.2	2.33	3.69
Aegon (KAMES) Diversified Monthly Income Fund	20.0	18.7	0.5	19.2	2.95	5.60
M&G Global Dividend Fund	10.0	15.1	0.9	16.0	3.12	12.55
Schroders Income Maximiser Fund	25.0	20.5	1.1	21.5	3.07	7.35
Threadneedle Global Equity Fund	10.0	13.0	0.0	13.0	2.06	2.30
Threadneedle UK Equity Income Fund L	10.0	10.7	0.7	11.4	2.23	9.50
Total Externally Managed Investments	180.0	174.6	2.4	177.0	2.49	3.85

7.5 **Performance since inception:** KCC initially invested in pooled funds in 2013. By the end of September 2024 they had achieved a total income return of £54.1m, 29.98%, with a fall in the capital value of the portfolio of £3.0m, -1.69%. Total returns since inception have been far in excess of the returns available from cash and these

instruments are an effective way of managing the Council's longer term cash balances. The following chart tracks the returns earned on the pooled funds over the period from inception.



- 7.6 IFRS 9 Statutory Override:** Under the current accounting requirements governing local authorities, movements in the fair value of pooled fund investments are removed from the general fund and recognised on the Council's balance sheet. This effectively ensures the impact of volatility in the capital value of such investments does not affect the annual revenue outturn. However, the relevant accounting provision (known as the "IFRS 9 statutory override") is temporary in nature and is due to expire on 31 March 2025 and therefore (in the absence of any future regulatory changes), the Council will begin to recognise movements in the fair value of pooled fund investments from 2025/26, including the cumulative position to date. Given the uncertainty surrounding the impact of the expiry of the override, the Council recognises this risk on the Budget Risk Register.

8. Actual and forecast outturn

- 8.1 Forecast net debt costs are lower than budget as yields from short-term and variable long-term cash investments have increased.

9. Treasury Management Group

- 9.1 The Treasury Management group (TMG) is an informal, non-decision-making body whose role is to support the County Council in oversight and assurance of the treasury management strategy and implementation of it. The TMG last met on 13 November 2024, where it reviewed a quarterly activity report, alongside other matters. A summary of the meeting discussion is included at Appendix 3.

10. Compliance

- 10.1 The Interim Corporate Director – Finance reports that all treasury management activities undertaken during the quarter complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

11. Treasury Management Indicators

- 11.1 The Council measures and manages its exposures to treasury management risks using the following indicators:

- 11.2 **Security:** The Council has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to credit risk by monitoring the value-weighted average credit rating of its internally managed investment portfolio. This is calculated by applying a score to each investment (AAA=1, AA+=2, etc.) and taking the arithmetic average, weighted by the size of each investment. Unrated investments are assigned a score based on their perceived risk.

Credit risk indicator	Actual 30/09/2024	Minimum
Portfolio average credit rating	AA+	AA-

- 11.3 **Liquidity:** The Council has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to liquidity risk by monitoring the amount of cash available to meet unexpected payments within a rolling three-month period, without additional borrowing.

Liquidity risk indicator	Actual 30/09/2024	Minimum
Total cash available within 3 months	£215.8m	£100m

- 11.4 **Interest rate exposures:** This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on the one-year revenue impact of a 1% rise or fall in interest rates will be:

Interest rate risk indicator	Actual 30/09/2024	Upper Limit
One-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>rise</u> in interest rates	£3.1m	£10m
One-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>fall</u> in interest rates	-£3.1m	-£10m

- 11.5 **Maturity structure of borrowing:** This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of borrowing will be:

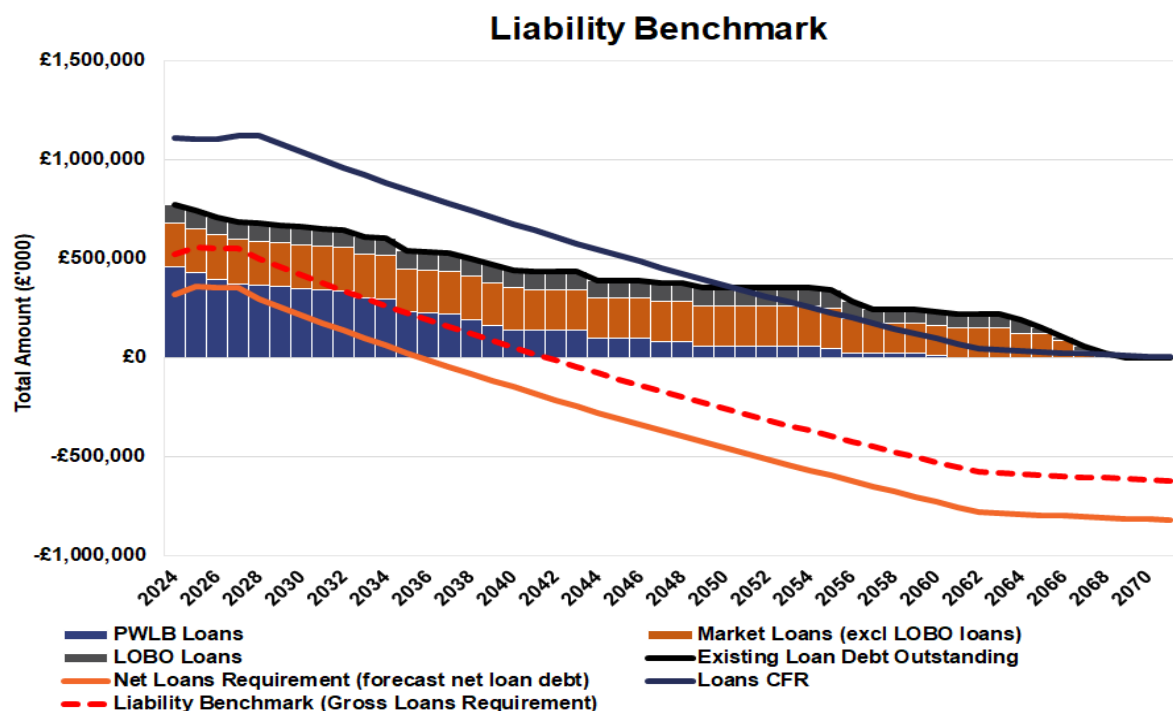
	Actual 30/09/2024	Upper limit	Lower limit
Under 12 months	0.01%	100%	0%
12 months and within 5 years	5.49%	50%	0%
5 years and within 10 years	6.56%	50%	0%
10 years and within 20 years	35.59%	50%	0%
20 years and within 40 years	26.84%	50%	0%
40 years and longer	25.51%	50%	0%

Time periods start on the first day of each financial year. The maturity date of borrowing is the earliest date on which the lender can demand repayment.

- 11.6 **Principal sums invested for periods longer than a year:** The purpose of this indicator is to control the Council's exposure to the risk of incurring losses by seeking early repayment of its investments. The limits on the long-term principal sum invested to final maturities beyond the period end will be:

Price risk indicator	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	No Fixed Date
Limit on principal invested beyond year end	£150m	£100m	£50m	£250m
Actual as at 30 September 2024	£70.7m	£49.8m	£9.5m	£195.1m

11.6 Liability Benchmark



The liability benchmark chart shows the Council should be able to accommodate the movement in Loans CFR through additional internal borrowing given the resources on the balance sheet if it wants to maintain treasury investments at the £200m liquidity allowance. However, this is based on the current assumption with regards to movement in reserves and that the working capital position remains at the 31/03/2024 level of £300m. It also assumes that the liquidity allowance of £200m remains appropriate given the £177.00m of external investments currently invested with fund managers over a long-term investment time horizon.

12. Recommendation

County Council is asked to endorse this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Investments as at 30 September 2024

Appendix 2 – Glossary of Terms

Appendix 3 – TMG Meeting Notes, 13 November 2024

Sangeeta Surana – Pension Fund and Treasury Investments Manager

T: 03000 416738

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13 March 2025

Investments as at 30 September 2024

1. Internally Managed Investments

1.1 Term deposits, Call accounts and Money Market Funds

Instrument Type	Counterparty	Principal Amount £	Interest Rate	End Date
Treasury Bills	UK Government	4,936,737	5.1400%	14/10/24
Treasury Bills	UK Government	4,874,936	5.1400%	21/10/24
Treasury Bills	UK Government	4,874,310	5.2000%	25/11/24
Treasury Bills	UK Government	3,316,591	5.2250%	02/12/24
Total Treasury Bills		18,002,574		
DMADF Deposit	Debt Management Office	10,285,000	4.9400%	01/10/24
DMADF Deposit	Debt Management Office	13,400,000	4.9400%	07/10/24
DMADF Deposit	Debt Management Office	9,035,000	4.9400%	08/10/24
Total DMADF		32,720,000		
Call Account	National Westminster Bank plc	1,000,000	3.25%	
Call Account	Lloyds Bank plc	5,000,000	4.64%	
Total Bank Call Accounts		6,000,000		
No Use Empty Loans		16,754,903	4.25%	
Money Market Funds	LGIM GBP Liquidity Class 4	19,998,420	5.0002%	
Money Market Funds	Aviva Investors GBP Liquidity Class 3	19,994,995	5.0132%	
Money Market Funds	Aberdeen GBP Liquidity Class L3	19,998,397	5.0052%	
Money Market Funds	Federated Hermes Short-Term Prime Class 3	14,997,400	5.0204%	
Money Market Funds	HSBC GBP Liquidity Class F	19,996,293	4.9254%	
Money Market Funds	Northern Trust GBP Cash Class F	19,985,416	4.9839%	
Money Market Funds	Deutsche Managed GBP LVNAV Platinum	17,993,694	4.9981%	
Total Money Market Funds		132,964,615		
Equity	Kent PFI (Holdings) Ltd	1,298,620		n/a

Bond Portfolio

Bond Type	Issuer	Adjusted Principal	Coupon Rate	Maturity Date
		£		
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Bank of Scotland - Bonds	6,265,814	0.4259%	20/12/24
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Bank of Scotland - Bonds	4,124,283	1.7146%	20/12/24
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Bank of Scotland - Bonds	4,990,350	5.2746%	20/12/24
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Lloyds - Bonds	7,022,483	4.8423%	07/03/25
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Bayerische Landesbank - bonds	14,986,497	5.1759%	01/06/26
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Bayerische Landesbank - bonds	299,534	5.2128%	01/06/26
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Santander UK - Bonds	1,542,195	4.5883%	16/02/29
Fixed Rate Covered Bond	Santander UK - Bonds	968,185	4.7154%	16/02/29
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Royal Bank of Canada - Bonds	8,945,148	5.2479%	03/10/24
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Royal Bank of Canada - Bonds	1,786,768	5.4868%	03/10/24
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Royal Bank of Canada - Bonds	5,007,358	4.6054%	30/01/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Bank Of Nova Scotia Bonds	5,019,603	4.4279%	14/03/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Bank Of Nova Scotia Bonds	4,009,717	4.6969%	14/03/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce - Bonds	5,048,167	4.4406%	15/12/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	National Australia Bank - Bonds	5,048,683	4.4320%	15/12/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	National Australia Bank - Bonds	10,070,240	4.1073%	15/12/25
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Bank Of Nova Scotia Bonds	707,868	5.1432%	26/01/26
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Nationwide Building Society - Bonds	500,756	5.4824%	20/04/26
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Nationwide Building Society - Bonds	5,403,642	5.5350%	20/04/26
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Bank Of Nova Scotia Bonds	10,076,845	4.7275%	22/06/26
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Royal Bank of Canada - Bonds	4,035,368	5.0733%	13/07/26
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Yorkshire Building Society - Bonds	3,004,326	5.2020%	18/01/27
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Yorkshire Building Society - Bonds	2,001,980	5.2224%	18/01/27
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Leeds Building Society Bonds	3,998,884	5.3018%	15/05/27
Floating Rate Covered Bond	Leeds Building Society Bonds	3,002,783	5.2392%	15/05/27
Total Bonds		117,867,477		

Total Internally managed investments**325,608,188**

2. Externally Managed Investments

Investment Fund	Book Cost	Market Value at	6 months return to	
	£	30-September-24	30-September-24	
		£	Income	Total
CCLA LAMIT Property Fund	60,000,000	54,025,592	2.44%	2.12%
CCLA Better World Cautious Fund (formerly DIF)	5,000,000	4,948,141	0.43%	0.29%
Pyrford Global Total Return Fund	5,000,000	5,472,888	1.66%	4.07%
Fidelity Multi Asset Income Fund	25,038,637	22,050,771	2.36%	-1.25%
Ninety One (Investec) Diversified Income Fund	10,000,000	9,240,387	2.33%	3.69%
Aegon (KAMES) Diversified Monthly Income Fund	20,000,000	19,240,096	2.95%	5.60%
M&G Global Dividend Fund	10,000,000	16,004,834	3.12%	12.55%
Schroder Income Maximiser Fund	25,000,000	21,541,285	3.07%	7.35%
Threadneedle Global Equity Institutional Fund	10,000,000	13,048,657	2.06%	2.30%
Threadneedle UK Equity Income Fund	10,000,000	11,430,706	2.23%	9.50%
Total External Investments	180,038,637	177,003,356	2.49%	3.85%

3. Total Investments

Total Investments	£502,611,544
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GLOSSARY

Local Authority Treasury Management Terms

Bond	A certificate of long-term debt issued by a company, government, or other institution, which is tradable on financial markets
Borrowing	Usually refers to the stock of outstanding loans owed and bonds issued.
CFR	Capital Financing Requirement. A council's underlying need to hold debt for capital purposes, representing the cumulative capital expenditure that has been incurred but not yet financed. The CFR increases with capital expenditure and decreases with capital finance and MRP.
Capital gain or loss	An increase or decrease in the capital value of an investment, for example through movements in its market price.
Counterparty	The other party to a loan, investment or other contract.
Counterparty limit	The maximum amount an investor is willing to lend to a counterparty, in order to manage credit risk.
Covered bond	Bond issued by a financial institution that is secured on that institution's assets, usually residential mortgages, and is therefore lower risk than unsecured bonds. Covered bonds are exempt from bail-in.
CPI	Consumer Price Index - the measure of inflation targeted by the Monetary Policy Committee.
Deposit	A regulated placing of cash with a financial institution. Deposits are not tradable on financial markets.
Diversified income fund	A collective investment scheme that invests in a range of bonds, equity and property in order to minimise price risk, and also focuses on investments that pay income.
Dividend	Income paid to investors in shares and collective investment schemes. Dividends are not contractual, and the amount is therefore not known in advance.
DMADF	Debt Management Account Deposit Facility – a facility offered by the DMO enabling councils to deposit cash at very low credit risk. Not available in Northern Ireland.
DMO	Debt Management Office – an executive agency of HM Treasury that deals with central government's debt and investments.
Equity	An investment which usually confers ownership and voting rights
Floating rate note (FRN)	Bond where the interest rate changes at set intervals linked to a market variable, most commonly 3-month LIBOR or SONIA
FTSE	Financial Times stock exchange – a series of indices on the London Stock Exchange. The FTSE 100 is the index of the largest 100 companies on the exchange, the FTSE 250 is the next largest 250 and the FTSE 350 combines the two
GDP	Gross domestic product – the value of the national aggregate production of goods and services in the economy. Increasing GDP is known as economic growth.
Gilt	Bond issued by the UK Government, taking its name from the gilt-edged paper they were

	originally printed on.
Income return	Return on investment from dividends, interest and rent but excluding capital gains and losses.
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards, the set of accounting rules in use by UK local authorities since 2010
LIBID	London interbank bid rate - the benchmark interest rate at which banks bid to borrow cash from other banks, traditionally 0.125% lower than LIBOR.
LIBOR	London interbank offer rate - the benchmark interest rate at which banks offer to lend cash to other banks. Published every London working day at 11am for various currencies and terms. Due to be phased out by 2022.
LOBO	Lender's Option Borrower's option
MMF	Money Market Funds. A collective investment scheme which invests in a range of short-term assets providing high credit quality and high liquidity. Usually refers to Constant Net Asset Value (CNAV) and Low Volatility Net Asset Value (LVNAV) funds with a Weighted Average Maturity (WAM) under 60 days which offer instant access, but the European Union definition extends to include cash plus funds
Monetary Policy	Measures taken by central banks to boost or slow the economy, usually via changes in interest rates. Monetary easing refers to cuts in interest rates, making it cheaper for households and businesses to borrow and hence spend more, boosting the economy, while monetary tightening refers to the opposite. See also fiscal policy and quantitative easing.
MPC	Monetary Policy Committee. Committee of the Bank of England responsible for implementing monetary policy in the UK by changing Bank Rate and quantitative easing with the aim of keeping CPI inflation at around 2%.
MRP	Minimum Revenue Provision – an annual amount that local authorities are required to set aside and charge to revenue for the repayment of debt associated with capital expenditure. Local authorities are required by law to have regard to government guidance on MRP. Not applicable in Scotland, but see Loans Fund
Pooled Fund	Scheme in which multiple investors hold units or shares. The investment assets in the fund are not held directly by each investor, but as part of a pool (hence these funds are also referred to as 'pooled funds').
Prudential Code	Developed by CIPFA and introduced in April 2004 as a professional code of practice to support local authority capital investment planning within a clear, affordable, prudent and sustainable framework and in accordance with good professional practice. Local authorities are required by law to have regard to the Prudential Code. The Code was update din December 2021
PWLB	Public Works Loan Board – a statutory body operating within the Debt Management Office (DMO) that lends money from the National Loans Fund to councils and other prescribed bodies and collects the repayments. Not available in Northern Ireland.
Short-term	Usually means less than one year
SONIA	Based on actual transactions and reflects the average of the interest rates that banks pay to borrow sterling overnight from other financial institutions and other institutional investors
Total return	The overall return on an investment, including interest, dividends, rent, fees and capital gains and losses.
Weighted	The weighted average time for principal repayment, that is, the average time it takes for every

average life (WAL)	dollar of principal to be repaid. The time weights are based on the principal payments,
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TMG 14 November 2024

Agenda

1. Market and Regulatory Update (Link)
2. Balance Sheet Analysis Update (Link)
3. Quarterly Report (September)
4. Strategy Check
5. Mid-Year Strategy Review
6. AOB

Attendance:

Harry Rayner – MEM (Chair)
Rosalind Binks – MEM
Paul Stepto – MEM
Alister Brady – MEM
Nick Buckland – KCC

James Graham – KCC
Geoff Hall – KCC
Chris Ellis - KCC
Chris Jones – Link Group
David Whelan – Link Group

Discussion Summary:

- Link Group presented the latest market expectations following the UK Budget and US election including the Bank of England's forecasts for GDP, inflation, wage Growth, interest rates. Link also shared a regulatory update. Information included an update to the latest interest rate forecast following an internal meeting at Link which took place after slides had been prepared and distributed.
- CJ presented Link's projections for KCC's Balance Sheet and Liability Benchmark. The current liquidity allowance (the level of investments the Council has conventionally looked to hold in highly liquidity cash instruments) is £200m and excluding the strategic pooled funds balance (c. £175m). Current projection shows in 2025/26, KCC will dip under this figure as existing external borrowing matures. However, by 2027/28 projection shows liquidity levels would rise above £200m once more, without further action. Link advised that KCC does not have an immediate borrowing need.
- Officers explained that that the analysis provided represented a snapshot at a point in time and real figures may vary. Moreover, the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) has historically been subject to change based on the actual pace of the capital programme. The Group also noted that changes in the Government's local government funding policy will likely have impacts.
- Officers added that the current treasury management strategy is designed to be robust and can be adapted as situations change.
- Link provided a comparison of other councils' CFRs and borrowing. When compared to neighbouring counties who will need to borrow externally, KCC's does not appear as an outlier.
- Officers provided a quarterly update on treasury activity updated as of end of September. External borrowing balances are lower compared to the previous reported position as loans have matured. External borrowing balances are expected to decline further over the medium term as more loans mature. Cash balances are projected to decline over the remainder of this year, which is a normal trend.

The Group asked for a clarification around the aims of having a diversified maturity profile within the debt portfolio and officers confirmed that borrowing maturities are spread across time to avoid the risk posed by having to re-finance large amounts of borrowing in a short period of time.

- Officers updated the group on treasury investment activity including the use of covered bonds and the externally managed strategic pooled funds portfolio.
- The Group noted the change in name for the CCLA 'Better World Caution' Fund (previously the Diversified Income Fund) and officers confirmed that the investment objective remained the same.
- The Group reviewed the appropriateness of the current treasury management strategy for 2024/25 and no changes were proposed. The treasury management consultant agreed that no changes were necessary.

Actions Points:

Ref	Action	Status
1	JG will communicate Link's most recent slides and the Mid Year Review to all members.	Complete

From: Dylan Jeffrey – Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services

To: County Council 13th March 2025

Subject: Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Terms of Reference: Update

Status: Unrestricted

Previous Pathway : Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee(17 December 2024),
Selection & Member Services Committee (27 February 2025)

Summary: This report sets out the changes required to the Terms of Reference for the Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC).

Recommendation:

The County Council is asked to:

- AGREE the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix A; and
 - DELEGATE to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Constitution once Medway Council have agreed the same changes.
-

1. Introduction

- 1.1. NHS bodies must consult their local health scrutiny committee(s) when they are considering a proposal to change health services in the area. Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (HOSCs) are required to determine if the proposed changes represent a substantial variation of service for their residents (there is no statutory definition of a 'substantial variation').
- 1.2. Prior to 31 January 2024, Local Authorities had the power to refer substantial variations to the Secretary of State, who could only intervene once a valid referral had been received and been accepted. The Health and Care Act 2022 removed this referral power from Local Authorities and gave the Secretary of State a new power of intervention in the operation of local health and care services – this is known as a 'call-in'.
- 1.3. Health Scrutiny's status as a statutory consultee on local reconfigurations remains in place, with NHS bodies required to engage as they did in the past. HOSCs also still need to decide if a proposal represents a significant variation of service.

- 1.4. These changes are explained in greater detail in [the report](#) that was presented to Selection and Member Services in February 2024. Changes to the Terms of Reference for HOSC were subsequently agreed by full Council on [28 March 2024](#).

2. Call-in requests

- 2.1. Under the Health and Care Act 2022, any interested party can *request* the Secretary of State call-in a proposed variation to local health services. The decision to issue a call-in rests with the Secretary of State. The guidance states that the purpose of intervention is to unblock local problems and disagreements, which suggests that use of the call-in power to intervene would in most cases be following a call-in request from an interested party.
- 2.2. The Secretary of State can intervene in a proposal at any point during a reconfiguration process, and once called-in, they have the power to make a final decision.
- 2.3. There are no timing requirements for when call-in requests should be submitted - as long as a proposal for reconfiguration exists, a request may be made at any point during that process. However, local attempts to resolve the issue must have been exhausted before this happens.

3. Joint health scrutiny

- 3.1. Under both the old and new regulations, when a responsible body consults more than one local authority on a substantial variation or development, those authorities are required to form a joint scrutiny committee and scrutiny of the proposed change passes to that committee. This does not prevent the home health scrutiny committee from informally scrutinising the proposals, though consideration must be given to the impact on NHS resources this may have.
- 3.2. In order to expedite the scrutiny of variations of service where both Medway and Kent have deemed it substantial, there is a standing joint committee (JHOSC) and its terms of reference as found in the Council Constitution are set out in appendix 2 to this report. In light of the changes to the regulations, paragraph 3 of the Terms of Reference as set out in the appendix needs to be updated with reference to the referral power removed. The proposed changes are set out in Appendix 1.

4. Amendments to the Terms of Reference

- 4.1. The following paragraphs set out the changes that are required to the Kent and Medway JHOSC Terms of Reference along with the options available and their respective advantages and disadvantages.
- 4.2. **Responding to an NHS proposal for substantial change**

4.2.1. [Regulation 30 of the 2013 regulations](#) explains that where a joint overview and scrutiny committee has been appointed to scrutinise a substantial variation, only that committee may respond to the consultation and require attendance and information from the relevant NHS bodies. The guidance expands to say best practice would be for all affected scrutiny committees to be consulted before a joint committee response is made.

4.2.2. There are no changes required to the Terms of Reference.

4.3. Requesting a call-in

4.3.1. Leading on from section 2 of the report, Medway Council and Kent County Council must decide whether to delegate responsibility for submitting call-in requests of jointly scrutinised proposals to the Secretary of State to the JHOSC. This will only apply to proposals that have been subject to scrutiny by the JHOSC.

4.3.2. Table 1: Who will be responsible for submitting call in requests to the Secretary of State: Options

Option	Outline	Advantages	Disadvantages
A	No delegation – The JHOSC conducts the scrutiny of the proposal but each individual local authority health scrutiny committee retains the function of submitting call in requests.	This would mirror the previous system whereby the power to make a referral to the Secretary of State was not delegated to the JHOSC.	The home authorities may not have been involved in scrutiny of the proposal, and rely primarily on the recommendation of the joint committee.
B	Delegation - The JHOSC has delegated powers to request a call in without reference to the HOSC.	<p>The process would be streamlined.</p> <p>A decision will be made by those that have scrutinised the proposals.</p> <p>Should the JHOSC decide not to request a call-in, the option would still be open to the home authority (as any interested party can submit a request under</p>	Member involvement from the home authorities is potentially diminished. This could be reduced if the call in request first has to go through the local health scrutiny committee before being submitted.

		<p>the new regulations).</p> <p>The SoS may give greater weight to requests coming from the Committee which had carried out the scrutiny review (i.e., the JHOSC)</p>	
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4.4. Procedure following the call-in of a decision

4.4.1. Before making a decision on a called in reconfiguration proposal, the Secretary of State must provide the local authority (among others) the opportunity to make representations in relation to the proposal. The guidance strongly encourages a collaborative approach to representations where multiple authorities have been involved, recommending a lead organisation is appointed for the purposes of representation.

4.4.2. Medway Council and Kent County Council must decide who will make representations to the Secretary of State for a called in reconfiguration that was subject to joint scrutiny.

4.4.3. Table 2: Who will make representations to the Secretary of State for a called in reconfiguration

Option	Outline	Advantages	Disadvantages
A	Each local authority reserves the right to make separate representations.	<p>This allows for the involvement of a wider group of elected members.</p> <p>It allows for the option of a lead organisation to make a representation for both.</p>	<p>HASC and HOSC would not have scrutinised the issue in detail.</p> <p>Members would not have been involved over a period of time.</p> <p>Where both Councils make representations, these may conflict and potentially reduce the impact/influence.</p>

B	The JHOSC has delegated powers to respond to the Secretary of State with representations.	<p>As the JHOSC would have been involved in scrutinising the issue in detail, it would arguably be best placed to make representations.</p> <p>Representations coming from a JHOSC comprising two local authorities might have more weight.</p> <p>Mitigation of the risks associated with potentially having two authorities submit conflicting representations.</p>	Member involvement from the home authorities is potentially diminished without a clear route for their comments to be included in any representations.
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5. Recommendations of overview and scrutiny

- 5.1. The above options have been considered by the KCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee ([17 December 2024](#)), the Medway Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HASC) ([16 January 2025](#)) and Selection and Member Services Committee ([27 February 2025](#)).
- 5.2. In relation to requesting a call in, all three Committees agreed their preference for option B, allowing the JHOSC to have call-in request powers. This preference recognised the ability of KCC and Medway Council to request such a call in even if the JHOSC decided against it.
- 5.3. In terms of who will make representations to the Secretary of State for a called in reconfiguration that had been subject to joint scrutiny, again each Committee preferred option B, allowing the JHOSC to respond directly.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. A report similar to this one will be presented to Medway's full Council meeting. The changes to the Constitution can only be enacted once both Councils have agreed.
- 6.2. It is proposed that the Monitoring Officer receives a delegation from full Council to make the necessary changes to the Constitution once Medway Council have agreed the same changes where Kent agrees the changes ahead of Medway. This will ensure both Councils have the same terms of reference at all times.

6.3. Where there are disagreements on the revisions, the clerks and Chairs will meet to discuss and further proposals brought forwards.

7. Recommendation

The County Council is asked to:

- AGREE the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix A; and
- DELEGATE to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Constitution once Medway Council have agreed the same changes.

Report Author and Relevant Director

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Appendices:

1. Proposed new sections - Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Terms of Reference.
2. Current Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Terms of Reference.

Appendix 1 – Proposed Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Terms of Reference (section 3)

(NB: The proposed changes set out in the report require paragraph 3 below replacing the paragraph set out in bold in Appendix 2. Paragraph 4 below would be an additional / new section to the JHOSC terms of reference).

3. To consider whether any proposal for a substantial development of, or variation to, the health service affecting the areas covered by Kent and Medway should be referred for a call in to the Secretary of State under regulation 23(9) of the 2013 Regulations. The JHOSC has delegated powers to request such a call in.

NEW 4. Where the Secretary of State makes contact with the JHOSC to make representations about the call in of a reconfiguration proposal that has been under the previous scrutiny of the Committee, the JHOSC can respond to the request directly.

Appendix 2 – Current Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Terms of Reference

(NB: Paragraph 3, set out in bold, will need to be removed to bring it in line with legislative changes. The proposed change replaces this with paragraph 3 and 4 from Appendix 1).

Membership

Membership: 8 Members: - Kent County Council Members: 4; Medway Council representatives: 4.

Terms of Reference

1. To receive evidence in relation to proposals for a substantial development of, or variation to, the health service which affect both Kent and Medway under consideration by a relevant NHS body or relevant health service provider where both the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Medway Council and Kent County Council have determined proposals to be a substantial development of, or variation to, the health service.

2. To exercise the right to make comments under regulations 23(4) and 30(5) of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 (the 2013 Regulations) on behalf of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Medway Council and Kent County Council on any such proposals under the consideration by the relevant NHS body or relevant health service provider.

3. To consider whether any proposal for a substantial development of, or variation to, the health service affecting the areas covered by Kent and Medway should be referred to the Secretary of State under regulation 23(9) of the 2013 Regulations and to recommend this course of action, if deemed as appropriate by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees of both Medway Council and Kent County Council in line with their respective Constitutions. (Note: the exercise of the power to make a referral to the Secretary of State has not been delegated to the JHOSC).

4. To undertake other scrutiny reviews of health services if requested to do so by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees of both Medway Council and Kent County Council.

5. To report on such other scrutiny reviews to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Medway Council and Kent County Council.

Rules

6. Regulation 30 of the 2013 Regulations states that where a relevant NHS body or a relevant health service provider consults more than one local authority on any proposal which they have under consideration for a substantial development of, or variation to, the provision of a health service in the local authorities' areas, those local authorities must appoint a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) for the purposes of the review.

7. There will be a Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprising of members appointed by Medway Council and Kent County Council. These rules apply to the JHOSC and any Sub-Committee established by it.

8. The JHOSC will appoint a Chair at its first meeting in each municipal year, and that Chair will normally be drawn in rotation from Kent County Council and Medway Council members. Where a review is unfinished at the end of a municipal year, members may agree that the previous year's Chair (if still a member of the Committee) may continue to preside over consideration of matters relating to that review.

9. The formal response of the JHOSC will be decided by a majority vote. If the JHOSC cannot agree a single response to a proposal under consideration for a substantial development of, or variation to, the provision of a health service by an NHS body or a relevant health service provider, then a minority response which is supported by the largest minority, but at least three members, may be prepared and submitted for consideration by the NHS body or a relevant health service provider with the majority response. The names of those who dissent may, at a member's request, be recorded on the main response.

From: Dylan Jeffrey, Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services

To: County Council: 13 March 2025

Subject: **Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference: Update**

Previous Pathway: Governance and Audit Committee, 23 January 2025; Selection and Member Services Committee, 27 February 2025

Status: Unrestricted

1. Overview

- a. It is best practice to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of the Governance and Audit Committee. This should include different aspects, such as terms of reference and work plans.
- b. Given the Council's current operating context (as outlined in the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement), it was timely to review the Committee's effectiveness ahead of the May 2025 elections. The intention was to ensure that the terms of reference, Committee support and work plans assist the Committee in carrying out its role in ensuring that the authority's corporate governance framework meets recommended practice, is embedded across the whole Council, and is operating throughout the year with no significant lapses.
- c. Further to the effectiveness review in December 2024, it was recommended that the Committee's terms of reference be updated to ensure that the Committee is properly constituted and has a clear remit. The Governance and Audit Committee reviewed the proposed changes on 23 January 2025 and agreed to ask the Selection and Member Services Committee to review the proposals. The latter Committee did so on 27 February 2025 and agreed to recommend them to County Council.

2. Proposed Changes

- a. It has previously been highlighted that updating the terms of reference is an iterative revision process based on the need to continuously improve Kent County Council's governance. Further to the review of effectiveness, the proposed revised version of the terms of reference is set out in Appendix A. The current terms of reference with tracked changes are also set out in Appendix B for comparison.
- b. The proposed changes are intended to provide the Committee with a more coherent, strategic, terms of reference. The objective is to improve the

readability of the text whilst ensuring that this does not inadvertently diminish any of the Committee's powers. Therefore, where appropriate, headline phrases have been used to bring together and clarify roles and responsibilities, instead of listing individual reports. This is in response to feedback received via the survey that not all respondents had fully read the Governance and Audit Committee's Terms of Reference. It also helps remove some areas of possible ambiguity.

3. Recommendation

County Council is asked to agree the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix A and ask the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution accordingly.

4. Appendix

Appendix A - Proposed Updated Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Proposed Updated Terms of Reference With Tracked Changes.

5. Background Documents

None.

6. Report Author and Relevant Director

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Appendix A: Proposed Updated Terms of Reference

- 17.2 Membership: 11 Members; plus, 2 (non-voting) co-opted members.
- 17.3 Members may not serve as ordinary or substitute members of the Governance and Audit Committee, or any sub-committees, where any of the following apply:
- a) They have not had the training required for this Committee.
 - b) They are an Executive Member or a Deputy Cabinet Member.
 - c) They are the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.
 - d) They have served as an Executive Member at any time within the two years preceding the date of the meeting.
- 17.4 The Committee may appoint or remove up to two non-voting Co-Opted Members (independent of the elected membership) who may participate in the business of the Committee in accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution.
- 17.5 There is an expectation that Members not on the Committee, and Officers, attend in relation to material matters on the agenda. However, Officers below Senior Manager level are not required to attend meetings except with their agreement and that of the relevant Senior Manager.
- 17.6 The purpose of this Committee is to provide independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk, finance, and control arrangements. Towards this purpose, its role is to:
- a) ensure there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control and provide reports to full Council on the effectiveness and adequacy of these arrangements;
 - b) have oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability,
 - c) through a and b above, give greater confidence to all those charged with governance for Kent County Council that its arrangements are effective and reporting to full Council or other Committees as necessary where the Committee has concerns that these arrangements are not effective; and
 - d) ensure that the County Council is sighted on the activity of the Committee alongside the importance of financial probity, good governance and learning lessons from audit activity through an annual report.
- 17.7 The Governance and Audit Committee is responsible for the following:
- a) monitoring the development and operation of the Council's corporate governance, financial, risk, and assurance frameworks and

arrangements to ensure it meets recommended practice, is embedded across the whole Council and is operating consistently throughout the year,

- b) monitoring the development and operation of the Council's Internal Audit function, including review of the internal audit charter and annual audit plan, and reviewing assurances that it is effective and independent of the activities it audits,
- c) oversight of the appointment and remuneration of external auditors to ensure they are approved in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance, and the function is independent and objective,
- d) monitoring the effectiveness of the external audit process, to help ensure that it is of appropriate scope and depth, gives value for money taking into account relevant professional and regulatory requirements, and is undertaken in liaison with Internal Audit,
- e) considering the external auditor's annual letter/report, and any other specific reports by, and with the agreement of, the external auditors,
- f) monitoring the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met,
- g) receiving reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including Productivity Plans, saving plans, and compliance with the Financial Management Code,
- h) monitoring the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and reviewing assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements,
- i) considering reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions,
- j) reviewing assurances that accounting policies are appropriately applied across the Council,
- k) monitoring the robustness of the Council's counter-fraud arrangements, including the assessment of fraud risks, and reviewing assurances that the Council effectively monitors the implementation of the whistle-blowing policy and Bribery Act policy,
- l) reviewing assurances that the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place to manage the relationship between the Council and significant partnerships or collaborations, as well as any company in which the Council has majority control,
- m) reviewing assurances that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that the commercial opportunities and risks presented through company ownership are managed effectively,
- n) oversight of the Executive's shareholder strategy regarding companies in which the Council has an interest,
- o) Approval of Spending the Council's Money, sending this document to full Council for noting.
- p) review and approval of the Statement of Accounts, with related reports, and the Annual Governance Statement, and

- q) reporting to full Council for assurance on the Accounts and Annual Governance Statement approval.

17.8 The Corporate Director of Finance has delegated authority from the Committee to make minor corrections and updates to Spending the Council's Money where it does not affect the meaning of the Sections.

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Appendix B: Proposed Updated Terms of Reference with Tracked Changes

- 17.2. Membership: 11 Members; plus, 2 (non-voting) co-opted members.
- 17.3. Members may not serve as ordinary or substitute members of the Governance and Audit Committee, or any sub-committees, where any of the following apply:
- a) They have not had the training required for this Committee.
 - b) They are an Executive Member or a Deputy Cabinet Member.
 - c) They are the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. any other formal Committee set out in section 17 or 18 of the Constitution, or any of their sub-committees.
 - d) They have served as an Executive Member at any time within the two years preceding the date of the meeting.
- 17.4. The Committee may appoint or remove up to two non-voting Co-Opted Members (independent of the elected membership) who may participate in the business of the Committee in accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution.
- 17.5. There is an expectation that Members not on the Committee, and Officers, attend in relation to material matters on the agenda. However, Officers below Senior Manager level are not required to attend meetings except with their agreement and that of the relevant Senior Manager.
- ~~17.5.~~17.6. The purpose of this Committee is to provide independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk, finance, and control arrangements. Towards this purpose, its role is to:
- a) ensure there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control and provide reports to full Council on the effectiveness and adequacy of these arrangements;
 - b) have oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability, ~~and~~
 - c) through a and b above, give greater confidence to all those charged with governance for Kent County Council that its arrangements are effective and reporting to full Council or other Committees as necessary where the Committee has concerns that these arrangements are not effective; and
 - d) ~~through an annual report,~~ ensure that the County Council is sighted on the activity of the Committee alongside the importance of financial probity, good governance and learning lessons from audit activity through an annual report.

~~17.6.17.7.~~ The Governance and Audit Committee is responsible for the following:

- ~~a) monitoring the development and operation of governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions in the Council,~~
- ~~b)a) monitoring the development and operation oversight~~ of the Council's corporate governance, financial, risk and assurance frameworks and arrangements to ensure it meets recommended practice, is embedded across the whole Council and is operating consistently throughout the year,
- ~~c) oversight of the Council's framework of assurance, to ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council,~~
- ~~d)b) monitoring the development and operation oversight~~ of the Council's Internal Audit function, including review of the internal audit charter and annual audit plan, and reviewing assurances that it is effective and independent of the activities it audits, ~~is effective, has sufficient experience and expertise and the scope of work to be carried out is risk based, and appropriate,~~
- ~~e) reviewing the annual audit plan and considering reports from the Head of Internal Audit on internal audit's performance during the year, including the performance of any external providers of internal audit services,~~
- ~~f)c) oversight of the appointment and remuneration of external auditors to ensure they are approved in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance, and the function is independent and objective,~~
- ~~g)d) monitoring the effectiveness of the external audit process, to help ensure that it is of appropriate scope and depth, and gives value for money taking into account relevant professional and regulatory requirements, and is undertaken in liaison with Internal Audit,~~
- ~~h)e) considering the external auditor's annual letter/report, and any other specific reports by, and with the agreement of, the external auditors,~~
- ~~i)f) monitoring the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met,~~
- ~~j)g) receiving reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including Productivity Plans, saving plans, and compliance with the Financial Management Code,~~
- ~~k)h) monitoring the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and reviewing assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements,~~
- ~~l)i) considering reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions,~~
- ~~m) monitoring any public statements in relation to the Council's financial performance to help ensure they are accurate, and the financial judgements contained within those statements are sound,~~

- h) reviewing assurances that accounting policies are appropriately applied across the Council,
- i) monitoring the robustness of the Council's counter-fraud arrangements, including the assessment of fraud risks, ~~backed by well designed and implemented controls and procedures which define the roles of management and Internal Audit, and reviewing assurances that the Council effectively monitors the implementation of the whistle-blowing policy and Bribery Act policy,~~
- j) ~~reviewing assurances that the Council monitors the implementation of the whistle-blowing policy and Bribery Act policy to ensure that they are adhered to at all times,~~
- k) reviewing assurances that the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place to manage the relationship between the Council and significant partnerships or collaborations, as well as any company in which the Council has majority control,
- l) reviewing assurances that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that the commercial opportunities and risks presented through company ownership are managed effectively,
- m) oversight of the Executive's shareholder strategy regarding companies in which the Council has an interest,
- n) Approval of Spending the Council's Money, sending this document to full Council for noting.
- o) review and approval of the Statement of Accounts, with related reports, and the Annual Governance Statement, ~~and ensure that they properly reflect the risk environment and supporting assurances of the Council, and~~
- p) reporting to full Council for assurance on the Accounts and Annual Governance Statement approval, ~~and where appropriate on the Committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the Committee in meeting its purpose.~~

17.8. The Corporate Director of Finance has delegated authority from the Committee to make minor corrections and updates to Spending the Council's Money where it does not affect the meaning of the Sections.

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From: Roger Gough, Leader of the Council
Dylan Jeffrey, Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services
Ben Watts – General Counsel

To: County Council, 13 March 2025

Subject: Governance Update

Status: Unrestricted

1. Introduction

- a) The Governance Working Party was established to consider detailed recommendations made by the external auditor in relation to Member roles, behaviour and governance. It provided an opportunity for Members to discuss and consider how the Council might operate differently and specifically to respond to questions posed by the external auditor about the role of Cabinet Committees and the Chairmanship of the Scrutiny Committee.
- b) The outputs of this Working Party, along with potential changes to the Council's Governance, have been considered by the Selection and Member Services Committee. The previous recommendations of the Committee as approved are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- c) Since discussions with the Selection and Member Services Committee in early December, there have been a number of significant developments regarding the future of local government in Kent and across the country.
- d) On 5th February 2025, Kent County Council was notified that it had not been selected to be part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). Nevertheless, the Government continues to seek reform of the sector with future implications for residents of Kent, Members and Officers. The Government continues to explore devolution and local government reorganisation options within Kent and by the time the Council meets for the AGM, it will be important to ensure that governance structures are ready to discuss and debate the implications of devolution and local government reorganisation insofar as the Government determines they should be progressed in Kent and on what timetable.
- e) The Council had previously recognised the limited capacity and a need to prioritise Member and Officer resources onto the most important and strategic activity. Kent County Council holds approximately 150 formal meetings and anything up to 80 informal meetings in each municipal year.

- f) Similarly, Members, Officers, our auditors and our own Annual Governance Statement have commented on the challenging operating environment and the need to focus resources becomes even more acute in the light of the opportunities and challenges presented by an agenda that will seek to balance Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and the delivery of business as usual.
- g) It is not proposed to reduce the number of meetings overall but it is important to avoid duplication of effort for those writing papers and for Members in debating issues.
- h) The Members of the GWP have included Trevor Bond, Neil Baker, Alister Brady (and before him Dr Sullivan), Nick Chard, Mark Hood, Antony Hook, Steve Manion and the Leader of the Council supporting Mr Jeffrey as the Cabinet Member and Chair of the GWP. The Members are thanked for their considerable commitment and for the robust but good-natured discussion. The outcome of that work is now brought together with the recommended changes to reflect the new agenda. This has meant that some of the proposals intended to have an impact over the medium and long term are not being taken forward.
- i) Since the GWP and Selection and Member Services last met, the Leader proposes creating the Devolution and LGR Liaison Committee using the Cabinet Committee governance as a central point for Member engagement, updating and pre-scrutiny of decisions relating to all Devolution and LGR issues. This is to enshrine the commitments he gave to the full Council at their meeting on 9th January 2025.
- j) As such, this report consolidates some of the findings of the GWP with the thinking around how to create capacity to properly manage the necessary discussions. The paper also reflects on discussions about governance, agenda setting and how to maximise the impact of the Council's meeting activity against the realities of the operating and financial position of the Council that have taken place at Governance and Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee and Selection and Member Services.
- k) The paper also addresses the outstanding matters raised by the External Auditor which were brought to the attention of the Governance and Audit Committee and full Council regarding consideration of the chairmanship of Scrutiny which needs discussion and decision before the end of this administrative cycle.
- l) Members across the Council are thanked for their involvement in discussions which results in proposals to make our governance resilient, realistic and ready for the Council term ahead.
- m) This paper provides an opportunity for the full Council to debate and comment on the range of proposals that has been developed, some of which are for decision by the full Council. The decisions relating to both the Liaison Committee and any changes to the Cabinet Committees are for the Leader, who is keen to hear different views and perspectives given the absence of a single view on the way forward in discussions with Members so far.

- n) Attached to this paper at Appendix 2, are the proposed changes to the Constitution, highlighted and tracked for Member's consideration and for which approval is sought.

2. Physical/Hybrid/Remote Meetings

- a) One area of discussion at the GWP were the arguments for and against the different form of meetings. Members will recall that the government ran a consultation to which KCC responded in line with the comments of Members at the December County Council meeting. At the time of writing, no further legislation has been forthcoming and Committees of the Council will always need to operate within the legal framework set out by Parliament. Were there to be changes, or flexibilities allowed, following the consultation and legislative changes, the options will be brought to Selection and Member Services Committee.

3. Committees

- a) Cabinet Committees are advisory committees of the Executive. Pursuant to the Constitution, the membership, terms of reference and number of Cabinet Committees are determined by the Leader. A range of discussions have taken place with the Governance Working Party and others about the future shape and number of Cabinet Committees alongside how they operate.
- b) The GWP felt that a further review of the Terms of Reference for Cabinet Committees would be sensible. Firstly, to re-focus on ensuring that the non-executive voice is able to support, improve and influence decision-making and secondly that agendas concentrate on the most important issues in the subject area.
- c) Members, on balance, wished to retain Cabinet Committees with some changes to ensure that the issues raised by Members, External Auditor and the Annual Governance Statement were resolved to reinvigorate and focus the work of the Committees on effective pre-scrutiny of decisions, expert Member involvement to drive improved decision-making and a lessons learned approach to improving future decisions through reflective work on decisions taken in the recent past.
- d) It is important to now reinvigorate the role of Cabinet Committees in both pre-Scrutiny and updating. In recent years there have been a number of occasions where multiple reports have been taken to a number of different Committees and there needs to be a greater focus, in line with the recommendations of the external auditor, on a more disciplined approach to using our Committee time. It is felt vital to retain Cabinet Committees and to reassert their role in pre-Scrutiny.
- e) Similarly, in an effort to reduce duplication of activity and resource, it is timely to reassert the primacy of Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee as the cross-cutting Committee within the Council's governance.

- f) The role of Scrutiny in the calling in of decisions remains a core part of the governance and that independent view will be important as the Council manages multiple agendas.
- g) It was also felt that a role for Cabinet Committees (alongside the Cabinet, Scrutiny and Governance and Audit) was to review the effectiveness and learning from prior decisions. Again, the review of the Terms of Reference will capture that. The ability of Cabinet Committees to call relevant Cabinet Members and Senior Officers equivalent to some section 101 Committees was also felt to be a sensible step.
- h) The Governance Working Party discussed the current make-up of Cabinet Committees and reflected on whether changes could be made. They felt that the following amendments would be sensible:
 - 1) Consolidate the work of the Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee into the Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee
 - 2) Separate the CYPE into two Cabinet Committees, one for Education and one for Integrated Children's Services
- i) Since the Governance Working Party recommendations were discussed at Selection and Member Services Committee, representations have been made about the work of the existing Committees. The contribution of the Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee and their Members to outcomes in the public health space and strategic policy development was noted. Equally, there have been strong representations that the linkage between different elements of CYPE work would be best secured by keeping one Committee, but with the meeting divided into two parts.
- j) Paragraph 16.7 of the Constitution determines that:

“the Leader may determine the number of Cabinet Committees, the number of places on each Committee and whether the proportionality principles apply. The Leader will also determine any requests from the Chairs of Cabinet Committees to set up Sub-Committees and approve the Terms of Reference, size and duration of those Sub-Committees.”
- k) In the current operating environment, it is also vital that duplication is minimised and clear areas of accountability for Committees are effectively demarcated. Accordingly, the debate also provides an opportunity to reflect on the experience of this administrative period and improvements that can be contemplated to provide a greater focus on the strategic activity of the Council and to avoid duplication of agenda items and discussions.
- l) The debate on this paper will provide an opportunity for all Members to inform the Leader's decision around any future changes. Any changes made by the Leader following the debate will be communicated to Members in writing.

4. Scrutiny Committee

- a) The External Auditor challenged Members to consider whether the Scrutiny Committee should be chaired by a member drawn from the opposition parties. The GWP recognised that there were many views but felt that on balance that the roles of Chairman and Vice-Chairman should be undertaken by members drawn from the opposition parties but that this decision should be put forward to full Council for debate and decision.
- b) To discharge the commitment to discuss this issue, this paper therefore asks the Council to debate and decide the future Chairmanship arrangements.
- c) There is no guarantee that the effectiveness of Scrutiny will or will not be changed being chaired by an opposition Member, and there are different practices in this regard around the Country.
- d) Any change needs to be agreed by full Council. If agreed, the proposed wording in Appendix 2 could be used to amend the Constitution.
- e) One suggestion within the GWP was for an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol to be established around mutual responsibilities and expectations. The current terms of reference is detailed and sets out the additional powers available to the Scrutiny Committee. Mindful of the prior recommendations and current operating requirements, there are also changes proposed to ensure that the Scrutiny Committee's role around call-in is clarified and strengthened.
- f) Reflecting on the challenge laid down by the External Auditor and pressures on capacity, the statutory guidance regarding Scrutiny Committees has been reviewed and this is attached at Appendix 3.
- g) Members' attention is drawn in particular to the following sections:

"Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority."

"Scrutiny works best when it has a clear role and function. This provides focus and direction. While scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects 'the area, or the area's inhabitants', authorities will often find it difficult to support a scrutiny function that carries out generalised oversight across the wide range of issues experienced by local people, particularly in the context of partnership working. Prioritisation is necessary, which means that there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at."

"Different overall roles could include having a focus on risk, the authority's finances, or on the way the authority works with its partners. Applying this focus does not mean that certain subjects are 'off limits'. It is more about looking at topics and deciding whether their relative importance justifies the positive impact scrutiny's further involvement could bring."

5. Full Council

- a) Another area of GWP discussion was different options to potentially improve County Council meetings.
- b) One of these was to formalise the informal arrangements in place regarding time limited motions and debates. The appropriate governance for Member agreement at full Council in March is now drafted and embedded in paragraph 14.60 of the proposed constitution as attached at Appendix 2.
- c) In addition, Selection and Member Services Committee supported a GWP recommendation to amend the arrangements for publishing County Council Questions (CCQs). The change is designed to ensure that all valid questions and answers were published following each Council meeting, regardless of whether the question was put during the meeting. The relevant constitution change requiring approval (s14.21 and 14.22) is included in Appendix 2.
- d) The GWP welcomed a suggestion that Kent County Council introduces an “Annual State of the County” report to go to full Council and be presented by the Leader and debated by all Members. The timing of this would either be the end of the municipal or calendar year, depending on the electoral cycle.
- e) Members also felt that changes should be made to the running order of meetings. Whilst the ordering of the agenda is for the Chairman to agree, Members wished to suggest that changing the order may improve the feel and variety of meetings whilst also improving engagement.
- f) At the early stages of discussions of the GWP, the issue of County Council Questions was discussed. As part of that, the Leader worked with his Cabinet to reduce the length of responses and questioners have moved to punchier and shorter questions. This has significantly increased the number of questions being dealt with in recent meetings and the pace of the item. In light of the fact that all questions were dealt with at the last meeting and the improvements made, the GWP did not feel it necessary to make any recommendations at this time beyond a simple change to ask Democratic Services to publish all questions and answers after a meeting including those where the Member was unable to attend and ask the question.
- g) At present the proposer of the motion gets a right to reply and the proposer of amendments does not. The GWP felt that this should be changed in order to improve the substantive response to debates on amendments and ensure that there was an opportunity to ensure that all Members were sighted before a vote or decision was taken.
- h) Another suggestion was to introduce a way of full Council receiving reports from the Chairs of all Committees and amending the timing based on when the Leader’s report was received. The inspiration for wider reporting from Chairs was the annual report received from the Chair of the Governance and Audit

Committee. This latter report was introduced as part of work carried out over the past several years to improve the way this Committee works, drawing in this instance on a recommendation made following a CIPFA external review in 2022. The Governance and Audit Committee has a specific role in the governance of the Council and the report to full Council is to update them on what is a responsibility shared by all Members as ‘those charged with governance.’

- i) Different Committees have different functions so it is important to ensure that any additional reporting, if adopted, is proportionate and is not an opportunity cost to full Council meetings. Officers will be tasked to give life to the potential arrangements and draft the appropriate governance which will return to the Selection and Member Services Committee in due course for consideration as to how the annual reporting for Committees might work.

6. Training and Induction

- a) The GWP felt that the need for Members to understand their clearly defined roles was important. Role profiles were brought to the previous Committee and will be shared and utilised as part of the Member induction in 2025.
- b) The Council has a number of statutory committees that are core to the effective functioning of the governance system. These include Governance and Audit, Planning, Scrutiny and Regulation Committee who all consider material matters and in some cases have quasi-judicial functions. Mandatory training (valid for five years) is to be required for statutory committees. If Members have not had the relevant training, it was strongly felt that they should not sit on that committee. This accords with findings from the CIPFA discussions with Governance and Audit Committee and good governance that suggests informed and trained membership leads to improved outcomes.
- c) A programme of advisory training is being developed for all Members and will be strongly recommended to ensure that all Members have the requisite skills, experience, knowledge and support. The GWP did recognise occasions where the external auditor’s comments in relation to Member meetings rang true and felt this action and Member involvement in training would improve matters.
- d) Officers are also to work with colleagues in other Councils to try and avoid duplication of training.
- e) Officers are also to work on exploring the accreditation options and a more formal Member Development Plan to bring back to the Council early in the new term.

7. Democratic Engagement

- a) The GWP have asked officers to explore a number of potential actions that would improve democratic engagement and provide the public with greater information on the activities and role of Members.

- b) It is recognised that Members are often unfairly criticised or challenged around operational decisions and work is to be done to explore signposting options in this regard.
- c) Officers have been asked to explore greater visibility around meeting participation and attendance, presentation of Member training records and how information about the work of each Member including Member grant spend can be reflected.

8. Recommendations

The County Council is asked to:

- 1. To NOTE with thanks, the contribution and efforts of the Members of the Governance Working Party**
- 2. To COMMENT on the specific proposals and arrangements relating to Cabinet Committees to inform future changes**
- 3. APPROVE the RECOMMENDATION to the County Council to adopt the amended Constitution at Appendix 2.**
- 4. DEBATE and DECIDE whether the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee should be mandated as an opposition Member.**
- 5. If Recommendation 4 is passed, APPROVE the relevant changes to the Constitution**
- 6. DELEGATE authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader and Opposition Group Leaders authority to make further necessary changes to the Constitution following the debate.**

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Minutes excerpt from Selection and Member Services Committee, December 2024

Appendix 2 – Constitution Changes

Appendix 3 - Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities

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Governance Update Appendix 1 – County Council 13 March 2025

Minutes except from Selection and Member Services Committee – 13 December 2025

Item 6 – Governance Working Party Updates

1. The Governance Working Party Updates paper was presented by the Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services and Chair of Governance Working Party, Mr Dylan Jeffrey.
2. Mr Jeffrey drew Members' attention to an error contained in 1e of the Introduction; Mr Chard and Mr Bond were also Members of the Committee but had not been mentioned.
3. Mr Brady confirmed that he had been on the Governance Working Party since it was first formed.
4. Some of the key highlights were as follows:
 - a) Thanks was given to everyone who took part in the group.
 - b) Cabinet Committees would be retained however, reform was necessary and this topic would need to return for further discussion.
 - c) It was agreed that the Children Young Persons and Education (CYPE) Cabinet Committee would be separated to reflect the individual portfolio holders. This would mean establishing an Education Cabinet Committee and a Children and Young People Cabinet Committee.
 - d) The Health Reform and Public Health Committee would be merged into the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee.
 - e) An Annual State of the County item would be presented by the Leader and then open for debate by all Members. This would be facilitated by the Committee Chairmen, who would provide the Leader's report to the individual Committee and Members could debate in that arena.
 - f) The group were looking at a way to publish written responses to individual Member question asked at full Council.
 - g) Changes to Member training had been looked at, particularly the areas of critical thinking, diversity and the legal framework of the Council which would be fed into the Member Induction Programme.
 - f) The improvement and development of Member interaction and the quality of Committees was also looked at in detail.

- h) Lengthy discussions had been held around the Scrutiny Committee, in particular the external auditor's report which implied that the Committee should be chaired by a Member of the Opposition. The discussions involved thresholds, which Opposition Party and how they should be selected and a model to conduct this had been created.
5. RESOLVED Members to:
- a) NOTE with thanks the contribution and efforts of the Members of the Governance Working Party.
 - b) NOTE and comment on the retention of Cabinet Committees.
6. RESOLVED the Leader to:
- a) CREATE an Education Cabinet Committee.
 - b) CONSOLIDATE the Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee into the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee.
 - c) ASK the General Counsel to carry out a review of the Terms of Reference of Cabinet Committees.
7. RESOLVED Members to recommend to the County Council:
- a) To DEBATE AND DECIDE whether the Constitution be changed so that the Chairman of Scrutiny be an opposition Member.
 - b) To AGREE the introduction of the "Annual State of the County" item at County Council.
 - c) To AMEND the constitution to provide an opportunity for the Proposer of Amendments to have a right of reply before the end of the debate on the amendment they proposed.
 - d) To NOTE the outputs of the Governance Working Party.
 - e) To NOTE ongoing work around further reporting from other Committees.
 - f) To AMEND the constitution to require the publication of all questions received in accordance with the constitution and their answers irrespective of whether the questioner attended County Council.
8. RESOLVED Members to note the recommendations regarding training and induction for May 2025.
9. RESOLVED that discussions around hybrid/physical/remote meetings be paused until the Government determines any changes following the current

consultation, with a further review by the Committee in six months if no changes are forthcoming.

10. RESOLVED to ask the General Counsel to:
 - a) DEVELOP governance to support the annual reporting mechanism for all Committees.
 - b) PROVIDE support to the Governance Working Party to develop and finalise their further activity in time for the March County Council.
 - c) PROVIDE a report to the Committee on Democratic Engagement proposals.
 - d) PROVIDE a report on the changes to report templates.
 - e) REVIEW proposals around the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol and provide advice to the GWP that can be incorporate into future recommendation for the March County Council.
 - f) REVIEW agenda setting protocols.
11. RESOLVED to note the ongoing work of the group and AGREE that a further report come to the Committee ahead of the March County Council.

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Appendix 2 – Proposed Changes to the Constitution

Amendments to Time Limited Motions

14.60 The text of any motion or amendment must be given to the Chairman in writing before the start of the meeting, if it is not the Chairman may rule that the motion or amendment fails. **The following arrangements in relation to amendments proposed to time limited motions shall apply:**

- a) Any proposed amendment to a time limited motion shall be provided to the proposer of the motion and Democratic Services by 10am two days before the meeting**
 - b) Any changes agreed between the proposer of the motion and proposer of the amendment shall be provided to Democratic Services by 4pm the day before the meeting.**
 - c) If a) or b) are not complied with then the Chairman may rule that the amendment fails.**
-

Rights to Speak and Reply

14.73 Members may speak no more than once on each item, motion, or amendment, except to:

- (a) Exercise a right of reply (subject to 14.74).
- (b) Make a personal explanation.
- (c) Raise a point of order.

14.74 The right of reply applies to the proposer of any motion except procedural ones ([14.70\(a-g\)](#)) at the close of debate immediately before the vote on the motion, or on any amendment to it. This right of reply does **not** apply to the proposer of an amendment.

County Council Questions (CCQs)

14.21 An online link to the submitted questions and the answers **given** shall be included in the Minutes of the meeting. ~~where these have been asked before the end of the 30-minutes allowed.~~

- 14.22 ~~Members whose submitted questions have not been asked before the end of the 30 minutes allowed shall receive an answer directly in writing. The published questions and answers will include those not put during the 30 minutes allowed for this item.~~

Scrutiny Committee

IF the Council agrees to make the change to Chairmanship of the Scrutiny Committee, the following changes to the constitution would be proposed.

- 17.43 Members: 13 Members; plus, Church representatives: 3; Parent Governors: 2. (Church representatives and Parent Governors have voting rights for relevant education items only). **The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee shall be an opposition Member who is proposed by opposition groups.**

Scrutiny Committee – Agenda Planning

Agenda Planning

- 17.53 **The Committee, through its agenda planning processes acts in accordance with the relevant statutory Scrutiny Committee guidance in force at any relevant time. The Kent County Council Scrutiny Committee seeks to ensure that scrutiny activity will have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority. The prioritisation necessary to achieve this shall be for the Scrutiny Committee to determine through its agenda setting processes attended by the Chair of the Committee, the opposition spokespeople and Democratic Services.**
- 17.54 Any Member of the Scrutiny Committee or Sub-Committee thereof is entitled to give notice to the proper Officer that they wish an item relevant to the functions of the Committee or Sub-Committee to be included on the agenda for the next available meeting. On receipt of such a request the proper Officer will ensure that it is included **for discussion at the next available agenda setting meeting.**
- 17.55 Any Member of the Council who is not a member of the Scrutiny Committee is entitled to give notice to the proper Officer that they wish an item relevant to the functions of the Committee or Sub-Committee (which is not an excluded matter as set out in 17.55) to be included on the agenda for the next available meeting. On receipt of such a request the proper Officer will ensure that it is included **for discussion at the next available agenda setting meeting. The**

~~Member concerned is entitled to address the Committee or sub-committee.~~

17.56 The definition of an excluded matter referenced in 17.54 is as follows:

- (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 or 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 or Sub-Committee.

17.57 However, notwithstanding 17.55, an allegation that a function for which the authority is responsible has not been discharged, or that discharge has failed or is failing on a systemic basis, does not count as an excluded matter, even if the allegation relates to a planning decision, a licensing decision, or a matter relating to a person in respect of which that person has a right of recourse to a review or right of appeal conferred by or under any enactment.

17.58 In addition to the exclusions in 17.55, a crime and disorder matter will be referred to the Crime and Disorder Committee in the first instance.

17.59 In addition to the items referred to in 17.53-57, the Chair and Group Spokespersons on the Scrutiny Committee shall agree the following, with the Chair being responsible for the final decision where agreement could not be reached:

- (a) Define the role, focus and direction of Scrutiny Committee as to how the work and agenda of the Committee will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority**
- (b) the prioritisation of the work and agenda of the Scrutiny Committee**
- (c) publish a timetabled rolling work programme**
- (d) in accordance with its Terms of Reference which other matters the Committee is to scrutinise,
- (e) ensuring that the work of the Committee does not duplicate activity elsewhere to ensure that resources are appropriately deployed to maximise scrutiny outcomes**
- (f) the amount of time to be allowed for questioning and debate on each of the items,

- (g) identifying the clear lines of inquiry that will be shared with those asked to respond, providing at least four weeks notice ahead of publication for the preparation of papers by responsible Members and Officers that will substantively respond to the lines of inquiry**
- (h) in relation to a Non-Executive matter, whether they request that implementation of the decision is deferred pending the Committee's consideration of the matter where implementation has not already commenced,
- (i) which Members of the Cabinet and Officers it requires to attend (in relation to the consideration of an Executive Decision) or requests to attend (in relation to any other matter) and answer questions,
- (j) which other witnesses it will ask to attend



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Statutory guidance

Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities

Published 22 April 2024

Applies to England

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Ministerial foreword

The role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an authority's decision-makers to account remains fundamentally important to the functioning of local democracy. Effective local authority decision-making is crucial for sector sustainability, and this updated guidance reinforces the role that overview and scrutiny has in making such decisions.

Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the authority itself. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and service failure.

It is vital that councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities know the purpose of scrutiny, what effective scrutiny looks like, how to conduct it and the benefits it can bring. This guidance aims to increase understanding in all four areas.

Authorities with effective overview and scrutiny arrangements in place share certain key traits, the most important being a strong organisational culture. Authorities who welcome challenge and recognise the value scrutiny can bring reap the benefits. But this depends on strong commitment from the top - from senior members as well as senior officials.

This guidance reflects new developments such as the further devolution of powers and funding to local areas and the establishment of combined authorities and combined county authorities. Just as the principles in this statutory guidance apply to the good scrutiny function of councils, they are equally fundamental to that of English institutions with devolved powers. The accountability of these institutions is core to the success of areas with devolution agreements, and they should use this guidance alongside that in the English Devolution Accountability Framework and the Scrutiny Protocol.

Government recognises that all authorities have democratic mandates, are ultimately accountable to local people and that authorities themselves are best placed to know which scrutiny arrangements are most appropriate for their own individual circumstances.

I strongly urge all councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities to cast a critical eye over their existing arrangements and, above all, ensure they embed a culture that allows overview and scrutiny to flourish.

Simon Hoare MP
Minister for Local Government

About this guidance

Who the guidance is for

This document is aimed at councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities in England to help them carry out their overview and scrutiny functions effectively. In particular, it provides advice for senior leaders, members of overview and scrutiny committees, scrutiny officers and any officers with a role in supporting scrutiny committees.

Aim of the guidance

This guidance seeks to ensure councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities are aware of the purpose of overview and scrutiny, what effective scrutiny looks like, how to conduct it effectively and the benefits it can bring.

As such, it includes a number of policies and practices all authorities should adopt or should consider adopting when deciding how to carry out their overview and scrutiny functions.

The guidance recognises that authorities approach scrutiny in different ways and have different processes and procedures in place, and that what might work well for one authority might not work well in another.

The hypothetical scenarios contained in the annexes to this guidance have been included for illustrative purposes and are intended to provoke thought and discussion rather than serve as a 'best' way to approach the relevant issues.

While the guidance sets out some of the key legal requirements, it does not seek to replicate legislation.

Status of the guidance

This is statutory guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Overview and scrutiny committees of local authorities, combined authorities and combined county authorities must have regard to it when exercising, or deciding whether to exercise, any of their functions.

The phrase ‘must have regard’, when used in this context, does not mean that the sections of statutory guidance have to be followed in every detail, but that they should be followed unless there is a good reason not to in a particular case.

Not every authority is required to appoint a scrutiny committee. This guidance applies to those authorities who have such a committee in place, whether they are required to or not.

This guidance has been issued under section 9Q of the Local Government Act 2000 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/22/section/9Q>) and under paragraph 2(9) of Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/schedule/5A>) and under paragraph 2(9) of Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/schedule/1/paragraph/2/enacted>), which require authorities to have regard to this guidance.

In addition, authorities may have regard to other material they might choose to consider, including that issued by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, when exercising their overview and scrutiny functions. Areas with a devolution deal should further consider the Scrutiny Protocol issued by government on 22 November 2023 (see paragraph 7).

Terminology

Unless ‘overview’ is specifically mentioned, the term ‘scrutiny’ refers to both overview and scrutiny^[footnote 1]. Where the term ‘authority’ is used, it refers to councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities. Where the term ‘Council’ is used, it means a county council in England, a district council or a London borough council, this definition includes unitary authorities^[footnote 2].

Where the term ‘scrutiny committee’ is used, it refers to an overview and scrutiny committee and any of its sub-committees. As the legislation refers throughout to functions conferred on scrutiny committees, that is the wording used in this guidance. However, the guidance should be seen as applying equally to work undertaken in informal task and finish groups commissioned by formal committees.

Where the term ‘executive’ is used, it refers to executive members.

For combined authorities, references to the ‘executive’ or ‘cabinet’ should be interpreted as relating to the mayor (where applicable) and all the authority members including non-constituent members and associate members as well as constituent council members.

For authorities operating committee rather than executive arrangements, references to the 'executive' or 'cabinet' should be interpreted as relating to councillors in leadership positions.

Expiry or review date

This guidance was published on 22 April 2024 and replaces guidance published on 7 May 2019.

This guidance will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

1. Introduction and context

Legislative context

1. Overview and scrutiny committees were introduced in 2000 as part of new executive governance arrangements to ensure that members of a local authority who were not part of the executive could hold the executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities.

2. The requirement for councils in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/22/part/1A/chapter/2/crossheading/overview-and-scrutiny-committees>) as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Localism Act amended the Local Government Act 2000 to allow councils to revert to a non-executive form of governance - the 'committee system'. Councils who adopt the committee system are not required to have overview and scrutiny but may do so if they wish. The legislation has been updated since 2000.

3. Requirements for combined authorities are set out in Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/schedule/5A>)^[footnote 3] and those for combined county authorities are set out in Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023^[footnote 4].

What overview and scrutiny committees do

4. Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers^[footnote 5] to scrutinise decisions the executive is planning to take, those it plans to implement, and those that have already been taken/implemented. Combined authority and combined county authority overview and scrutiny committees also have powers to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the mayor of any general (i.e. non-PCC) functions. Overview and scrutiny committees may make reports or recommendations to the authority or mayor about the discharge of their respective functions, and also on matters that affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of the area. Recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented. Overview and scrutiny committees can also play a valuable role in developing policy.

Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge
- amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- be led by independent^[footnote 6] people who take responsibility for their role
- drive improvement in public services and strategic decision-making

5. Current overview and scrutiny legislation recognises that authorities are locally accountable^[footnote 7]. Authorities themselves are best placed to determine which overview and scrutiny arrangements best suit their own individual needs, and so gives them a great degree of flexibility to decide which arrangements to adopt.

6. In producing this guidance, the government fully recognises these authorities' democratic mandate and that the nature of local government has changed in recent years, with, for example, the creation of combined authorities and combined county authorities, and councils increasingly delivering key services in partnership with other organisations or outsourcing them entirely.

7. The ongoing deeper devolution of powers and funding to local areas brings the requirement and provision for greater accountability. It is crucial that the local scrutiny of institutions with devolved powers sets robust standards to hold them to account for delivery, as well as playing a critical role in policy and strategy development. This is particularly important when scrutinising devolved powers. To strengthen the scrutiny for those English institutions with devolved powers, government has published [the Scrutiny Protocol guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-guidance) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-guidance)

for-english-institutions-with-devolved-powers/scrutiny-protocol) which can be considered a supplement to this advice for those institutions.

2. Culture

8. The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.

9. While everyone in an authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by members, including any directly elected mayor, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority.

10. Creating a strong organisational culture supports scrutiny work that can add real value by, for example, improving policy-making and the efficient delivery of public services. In contrast, low levels of support for, and engagement with, the scrutiny function often lead to poor quality and ill-focused work that serves to reinforce the perception that it is of little worth or relevance.

11. Members and senior officers should note that the performance of the scrutiny function is not just of interest to the authority itself. Its effectiveness, or lack thereof, is often considered by external bodies such as regulators and inspectors, and highlighted in public reports, including best value inspection reports^[footnote 8]. Failures in scrutiny can therefore help to create a negative public image of an authority as a whole.

How to establish a strong organisational culture

12. Authorities can establish a strong organisational culture by:

(a) Recognising scrutiny's legal and democratic legitimacy

All members and officers should recognise and appreciate the importance and legitimacy the scrutiny function is afforded by the law. It was created to act as a check and balance on the executive and is a statutory requirement for all councils operating executive arrangements and for all combined authorities and combined county authorities.

Scrutiny committee members have a unique legitimacy derived from their being democratically elected councillors in the first instance. The insights

that they can bring by having this close connection to local people are part of what gives scrutiny its value.

(b) Identifying a clear role and focus

Authorities should take steps to ensure scrutiny has a clear role and focus within the organisation, i.e. a niche within which it can clearly add value. Therefore, prioritisation is necessary to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority – this is one of the most challenging parts of scrutiny, and a critical element to get right if it is to be recognised as a strategic function of the authority (see [chapter 6](#)).

Authorities should ensure a clear division of responsibilities between the scrutiny function and the audit function. While it is appropriate for scrutiny to pay due regard to the authority's financial position, this will need to happen in the context of the formal audit role. The authority's section 151 officer should advise scrutiny on how to manage this dynamic.

While scrutiny has no role in the investigation or oversight of the authority's whistleblowing arrangements, the findings of independent whistleblowing investigations might be of interest to scrutiny committees as they consider their wider implications. Members should always follow the authority's constitution and associated Monitoring Officer directions on the matter. See further [guidance on whistleblowing](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whistleblowing-guidance-and-code-of-practice-for-employers>).

(c) Ensuring early and regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny

Authorities should ensure early and regular discussion takes place between the scrutiny function, the executive and any directly elected mayor, especially regarding the executive's or directly elected mayor's future work programme. Authorities should, though, be mindful of their distinct roles:

In particular:

- The executive or mayor should not try to exercise control over the work of the scrutiny committee. This could be direct, e.g. by purporting to 'order' scrutiny to look at, or not look at, certain issues, or indirect, e.g. through the use of the whip or as a tool of political patronage, and the committee itself should remember its statutory purpose when carrying out its work. All members and officers should consider the role the scrutiny committee plays to be that of a 'critical friend' not a de facto 'opposition'. Scrutiny chairs have a particular role to play in establishing the profile and nature of their committee (see [chapter 4](#)); and

- The chair of the scrutiny committee should determine the nature and extent of an executive member's or mayor's participation in a scrutiny committee meeting, and in any informal scrutiny task group meeting.

(d) Managing disagreement

Effective scrutiny involves looking at issues that can be politically contentious. It is therefore inevitable that, at times, an executive or mayor will disagree with the findings or recommendations of a scrutiny committee.

It is the job of both the executive (including any directly elected mayor) and scrutiny to work together to reduce the risk of this happening, and authorities should take steps to predict, identify and act on disagreement.

One way an authority can achieve this is by setting its own 'executive-scrutiny protocol' (see [annex 1](#)) which can help define the relationship between the parties and mitigate any differences of opinion before they manifest themselves in unhelpful and unproductive ways. The benefit of this approach is that it provides a framework for disagreement and debate, and a way to manage it when it happens. Often, the value of such a protocol lies in the dialogue that underpins its preparation. It is important that these protocols are reviewed on a regular basis to demonstrate the impact of scrutiny and seek ongoing improvement of scrutiny functions.

Scrutiny committees do have the power to 'call in' decisions, i.e. ask the executive or mayor to reconsider them before they are implemented, but should not view it as a substitute for early involvement in the decision-making process or as a party-political tool.

(e) Providing the necessary support

While the level of resource allocated to scrutiny is for each authority to decide for itself, when determining resources an authority should consider the purpose of scrutiny as set out in legislation and the specific role and remit of the authority's own scrutiny committee(s), and the scrutiny function as a whole.

Support should also be given by members and senior officers to scrutiny committees and their support staff to access information held by the authority and facilitate discussions with representatives of external bodies (see [chapter 5](#)).

(f) Ensuring impartial advice from officers

Authorities, particularly senior officers, should ensure all officers are free to provide impartial advice to scrutiny committees. This is fundamental to effective scrutiny. Of particular importance is the role played by 'statutory officers' – the monitoring officer, the [section 151](#) officer and the head of paid

service, and where relevant the statutory scrutiny officer. These individuals have a particular role in ensuring that timely, relevant and high-quality advice is provided to scrutiny.

(g) Communicating scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider authority

The scrutiny function can often lack support and recognition within an authority because there is a lack of awareness among both members and officers about the specific role it plays, which individuals are involved and its relevance to the authority's wider work. Authorities should, therefore, take steps to ensure all members and officers are made aware of the role the scrutiny committee plays in the organisation, its value and the outcomes it can deliver, the powers it has, its membership and, if appropriate, the identity of those providing officer support.

(h) Maintaining the interest of full Council in the work of the scrutiny committee

Part of communicating scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider authority should, in a local authority, happen through the formal, public role of full Council – particularly given that scrutiny will undertake valuable work to highlight challenging issues that an authority will be facing and subjects that will be a focus of full Council's work. Authorities should therefore take steps to ensure full Council is informed of the work the scrutiny committee is doing.

One way in which this can be done is by reports and recommendations being submitted to full Council rather than solely to the executive. Scrutiny should decide when it would be appropriate to submit reports for wider debate in this way, taking into account the relevance of reports to full Council business, as well as full Council's capacity to consider and respond in a timely manner. Such reports would supplement the annual report to full Council on scrutiny's activities and raise awareness of ongoing work.

In order to maintain awareness of scrutiny at the combined authority or combined county authority and provoke dialogue and discussion of its impact, the business of scrutiny should be reported to the combined authority or combined county authority board, and the committee should consider also reporting to the chairs of the relevant scrutiny committees of constituent and non-constituent councils, including councils which nominate non-constituent members.

At those chairs' discretion, particular combined authority or combined county authority scrutiny outcomes, and what they might mean for each individual area, could be either discussed by scrutiny in committee or referred to full Council of the constituent councils and councils which nominate non-constituent members.

(i) Communicating scrutiny's role to the public

Authorities should ensure scrutiny has a profile in the wider community. Consideration should be given to how and when to engage the authority's communications officers, and any other relevant channels, to understand how to get that message across. This will usually require engagement early on in the work programming process (see [chapter 6](#)).

(j) Ensuring scrutiny members are supported in having an independent mindset

Formal committee meetings provide a vital opportunity for scrutiny members to question the executive and officers. Inevitably, some committee members will come from the same political party as a member they are scrutinising and might well have a long-standing personal, or familial, relationship with them (see paragraph 26).

Scrutiny members should bear in mind, however, that adopting an independent mind-set is fundamental to carrying out their work effectively. In practice, this is likely to require scrutiny chairs working proactively to identify any potentially contentious issues and plan how to manage them.

Directly elected mayoral systems

13. A strong organisational culture that supports scrutiny work is particularly important in authorities with a directly elected mayor to ensure there are the checks and balances to maintain a robust democratic system. Mayoral systems offer the opportunity for greater public accountability and stronger governance, but there have also been incidents that highlight the importance of creating and maintaining a culture that puts scrutiny at the heart of its operations.

14. Authorities with a directly elected mayor should ensure that scrutiny committees are well-resourced, are able to recruit high-calibre members and that their scrutiny functions pay particular attention to issues surrounding:

- rights of access to documents by the press, public and authority members
- transparent and fully recorded decision-making processes, especially avoiding decisions by 'unofficial' committees or working groups
- delegated decisions by the Mayor
- whistleblowing protections for both staff and councillors
- powers of Full Council, where applicable, to question and review

15. Authorities with a directly elected mayor should note that mayors are required by law to attend overview and scrutiny committee sessions when asked to do so (see paragraph 45). **Page 313**
In combined authorities and combined

county authorities, mayors typically exercise specified functions; scrutiny functions in such mayoral authorities should consider how best to ensure that both the authority and the mayor are held accountable for the exercise of their respective functions. For example, should there be different committees for each?

3. Resourcing

16. The resource an authority allocates to the scrutiny function plays a pivotal role in determining how successful that function is and therefore the value it can add to the work of the authority.

17. Ultimately it is up to each authority to decide on the resource it provides, but every authority should recognise that creating and sustaining an effective scrutiny function requires them to allocate resources to it.

18. Authorities should also recognise that support for scrutiny committees, task groups and other activities is not solely about budgets and provision of officer time, although these are clearly extremely important elements. Effective support is also about the ways in which the wider authority engages with those who carry out the scrutiny function (both members and officers).

When deciding on the level of resource to allocate to the scrutiny function, the factors an authority should consider include:

- scrutiny's legal powers and responsibilities
- the particular role and remit scrutiny will play in the authority
- the training requirements of scrutiny members and support officers, particularly the support needed to ask effective questions of the executive and other key partners, and make effective recommendations
- the need for ad hoc external support where expertise does not exist in the authority
- effectively-resourced scrutiny has been shown to add value to the work of authorities, improving their ability to meet the needs of local people
- effectively-resourced scrutiny can help policy formulation and so minimise the need for call-in of executive decisions

Statutory scrutiny officers

19. Combined authorities, combined county authorities and upper and single tier authorities are required to designate a statutory scrutiny officer^[footnote 9], someone whose role is to:

- promote the role of the authority's scrutiny committee
- provide support to the scrutiny committee and its members
- provide support and guidance to members (including any mayor) and officers relating to the functions of the scrutiny committee

20. Authorities not required by law to appoint such an officer should consider whether doing so would be appropriate for their specific local needs.

Officer resource models

21. Authorities are free to decide for themselves which wider officer support model best suits their individual circumstances, though generally they adopt one or a mix of the following:

- committee – officers are drawn from specific policy or service areas
- integrated – officers are drawn from the corporate centre and also service the executive and/or mayor
- specialist – officers are dedicated to scrutiny

22. Each model has its merits – the committee model provides service-specific expertise; the integrated model facilitates closer and earlier scrutiny involvement in policy formation and alignment of corporate work programmes; and the specialist model is structurally independent from those areas it scrutinises.

23. Authorities should ensure that, whatever model they employ, officers tasked with providing scrutiny support are able to provide impartial advice. This might require consideration of the need to build safeguards into the way that support is provided. The nature of these safeguards will differ according to the specific role scrutiny plays in the organisation.

4. Selecting committee members

24. Selecting the right members to serve on scrutiny committees is essential if those committees are to function effectively. Where a committee is made up of members who have the necessary skills and commitment, it is far more likely to be taken seriously by the wider authority.

25. While there are political proportionality requirements that must be met^[footnote 10], the selection of the chair and other committee members is for each authority to decide for itself. In a combined authority or combined county authority, the chair must be either an independent person or an appropriate person – both terms are defined in legislation.^[footnote 11]

Members invariably have different skill sets. What an authority must consider when forming a committee is that, as a group, it possesses the requisite expertise, commitment and ability to act impartially to fulfil its functions.

26. Local authorities are reminded that members of the executive cannot be members of a scrutiny committee^[footnote 12]. Authorities should take care to ensure that, as a minimum, members holding less formal executive positions, e.g. as Cabinet assistants, do not sit on scrutinising committees looking at portfolios to which those roles relate. Local authorities should articulate in their constitutions how conflicts of interest, including familial links (see also paragraph 32), between executive and scrutiny responsibilities should be managed, including where members stand down from the executive and move to a scrutiny role, and vice-versa.

27. Members or substitute members of a combined authority or combined county authority must not be members of its overview and scrutiny committee(s)^[footnote 13]. This includes any mayor and any non-constituent members and associate members of the authority. It is advised that Deputy Mayors for Policing and Crime are also not members of the combined authority's or combined county authority's overview and scrutiny committee.

Selecting individual committee members

28. When selecting individual members to serve on scrutiny committees, an authority should consider a member's experience, expertise, interests, ability to act impartially, ability to work as part of a group, and capacity to serve. Combined authorities and combined county authorities may also want to consider the balance of committee members drawn from each constituent council.

29. Authorities should not take into account a member's perceived level of support for or opposition to a particular political party (notwithstanding the wider legal requirement for proportionality referred to in paragraph 25).

Selecting a chair

30. The Chair plays a leadership role on a scrutiny committee as they are largely responsible for establishing its profile, influence and ways of working.

31. The attributes authorities should and should not take into account when selecting individual committee members (see paragraphs 28 and 29) also apply to the selection of the Chair, but the Chair should also possess the ability to lead and build a sense of teamwork and consensus among committee members.

Chairs should pay special attention to the need to guard the committee's independence. Importantly, however, they should take care to avoid the committee being, and being viewed as, a de facto opposition to the executive.

32. Given their pre-eminent role on the scrutiny committee, it is strongly recommended that the Chair not preside over scrutiny of the decisions made by close friends or relatives^[footnote 14]. Combined authorities and combined county authorities should note the legal requirements that apply to them where the Chair is an "independent person"^[footnote 15].

33. The method for selecting a Chair is for each authority to decide for itself, however every authority should consider taking a vote by secret ballot. Combined authorities and combined county authorities whose chair is an "appropriate person" should be aware of the legal requirements regarding the party affiliation of their scrutiny committee Chair^[footnote 16].

Training for committee members

34. Authorities should ensure committee members are offered induction when they take up their role and ongoing training so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively. Authorities should pay attention to the need to ensure committee members are aware of their legal powers, and how to prepare for and ask relevant questions at scrutiny sessions.

35. When deciding on training requirements for committee members, authorities should consider talking to other similar authorities to share learning and expertise as well as taking advantage of opportunities offered by their sector membership bodies and external providers.

Co-option and technical advice

36. While members and their support officers will often have significant local insight and an understanding of local people and their needs, the provision of outside expertise can be invaluable.

37. There are two principal ways to procure this:

- co-option – formal co-option is provided for in legislation^[footnote 17]. Authorities must establish a co-option scheme to determine how individuals will be co-opted onto committees
- technical advisers – depending on the subject matter, independent local experts might exist who can provide advice and assistance in evaluating evidence (see [annex 2](#))

5. Power to access information

38. A scrutiny committee needs access to relevant information the authority holds, and to receive it in good time, if it is to do its job effectively.

39. This need is recognised in law, with members of scrutiny committees enjoying powers to access information^[footnote 18]. In particular, legislation gives enhanced powers to a scrutiny member to access exempt or confidential information. This is in addition to existing rights for members to have access to information to perform their duties, including common law rights to request information and rights to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

40. When considering what information scrutiny needs in order to carry out its work, scrutiny members and the executive should consider scrutiny's role and the legal rights that committees and their individual members have, as well as their need to receive timely and accurate information to carry out their duties effectively.

41. Scrutiny members should have access to a regularly available source of key information about the management of the authority – particularly on performance, management and risk. Where this information exists, and scrutiny members are given support to understand it, the potential for what officers might consider unfocused and unproductive requests is reduced as members will be able to frame their requests from a more informed position.

42. Officers should speak to scrutiny members to ensure they understand the reasons why information is needed, thereby making the authority better

able to provide information that is relevant and timely, as well as ensuring that the authority complies with legal requirements.

While each request for information should be judged on its individual merits, authorities should adopt a default position of sharing the information they hold, on request, with scrutiny committee members.

43. The law recognises that there might be instances where it is legitimate for an authority to withhold information and places a requirement on the executive to provide the scrutiny committee with a written statement setting out its reasons for that decision^[footnote 19]. However, members of the executive and senior officers should take particular care to avoid refusing requests, or limiting the information they provide, for reasons of party political or reputational expediency.

Before an authority takes a decision not to share information it holds, it should give serious consideration to whether that information could be shared in closed session.

44. Legislation stipulates a timeframe for executives to comply with requests from a scrutiny member^[footnote 20]. When agreeing to such requests, authorities should:

- consider whether seeking clarification from the information requester could help better target the request
- ensure the information is supplied in a format appropriate to the recipient's needs

45. Scrutiny committees should be aware of their legal power to require members of the executive, including any directly elected mayor and deputy mayor, and officers to attend before them to answer questions^[footnote 21]. It is the duty of members and officers to comply with such requests^[footnote 22].

Seeking information from external organisations

46. Scrutiny members should also consider the need to supplement any authority-held information they receive with information and intelligence that might be available from other sources and should note in particular their statutory powers to invite other persons to attend meetings of the committee and to access information from certain external organisations.

47. When asking an external organisation to provide documentation or appear before it, and where that organisation is not legally obliged to do

either (see [annex 3](#)), scrutiny committees should consider the following:

(a) The need to explain the purpose of scrutiny

The organisation being approached might have little or no awareness of the committee's work, or of an authority's scrutiny function more generally, and so might be reluctant to comply with any request.

(b) The benefits of an informal approach

Individuals from external organisations can have fixed perceptions of what an evidence session entails and may be unwilling to subject themselves to detailed public scrutiny if they believe it could reflect badly on them or their employer. Making an informal approach can help reassure an organisation of the aims of the committee, the type of information being sought and the manner in which the evidence session would be conducted.

(c) How to encourage compliance with the request

Scrutiny committees will want to frame their approach on a case-by-case basis. For contentious issues, committees might want to emphasise the opportunity their request gives the organisation to 'set the record straight' in a public setting.

(d) Who to approach

A committee might instinctively want to ask the Chief Executive or Managing Director of an organisation to appear at an evidence session, however it could be more beneficial to engage front-line staff when seeking operational-level detail rather than senior executives who might only be able to talk in more general terms. When making a request to a specific individual, the committee should consider the type of information it is seeking, the nature of the organisation in question and the authority's pre-existing relationship with it.

Following 'the tax-payer pound'

Scrutiny committees will often have a keen interest in 'following the tax-payer pound', i.e. scrutinising organisations that receive public funding to deliver goods and services.

Authorities should recognise the legitimacy of this interest and, where relevant, consider the need to provide assistance to scrutiny members and their support staff to obtain information from organisations the authority has contracted to deliver services. In particular, when agreeing contracts with these bodies, authorities should consider whether it would be appropriate to include a requirement for them to supply information to or appear before scrutiny committees.

6. Planning work

48. Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme, i.e. draw up a long-term agenda and consider making it flexible enough to accommodate any urgent, short-term issues that might arise during the year.

49. Authorities with multiple scrutiny committees sometimes have a separate work programme for each committee. Where this happens, consideration should be given to how to co-ordinate the various committees' work to make best use of the total resources available.

Being clear about scrutiny's role

50. Scrutiny works best when it has a clear role and function. This provides focus and direction. While scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects 'the area, or the area's inhabitants', authorities will often find it difficult to support a scrutiny function that carries out generalised oversight across the wide range of issues experienced by local people, particularly in the context of partnership working. Prioritisation is necessary, which means that there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at.

51. Different overall roles could include having a focus on risk, the authority's finances, or on the way the authority works with its partners.

52. Applying this focus does not mean that certain subjects are 'off limits'. It is more about looking at topics and deciding whether their relative importance justifies the positive impact scrutiny's further involvement could bring.

53. When thinking about scrutiny's focus, members should be supported by key senior officers. The statutory scrutiny officer, if an authority has one, will need to take a leading role in supporting members to clarify the role and function of scrutiny, and championing that role once agreed.

Who to speak to

54. Evidence will need to be gathered to inform the work programming process. This will ensure that it looks at the right topics, in the right way and

at the right time. Gathering evidence requires conversations with:

The public

It is likely that formal ‘consultation’ with the public on the scrutiny work programme will be ineffective. Asking individual scrutiny members to have conversations with individuals and groups in their own local areas can work better. Insights gained from the public through individual pieces of scrutiny work can be fed back into the work programming process. Listening to and participating in conversations in places where local people come together, including in online forums, can help authorities engage people on their own terms and yield more positive results.

Authorities should consider how their communications officers can help scrutiny engage with the public, and how wider internal expertise and local knowledge from both members and officers might make a contribution.

The authority’s partners

Relationships with other partners should not be limited to evidence-gathering to support individual reviews or agenda items. A range of partners are likely to have insights that will prove useful:

- public sector partners (like the NHS and community safety partners, over which scrutiny has specific legal powers)
- voluntary sector partners
- contractors and commissioning partners (including partners in joint ventures and authority-owned companies)
- in parished areas, town and parish councils
- in combined authority and combined county authority areas, constituent councils
- in combined county authority areas, councils which nominate non-constituent members
- neighbouring principal councils (both in two-tier and unitary areas)
- cross-authority bodies and organisations, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships^[footnote 23]

The executive

A principal partner in discussions on the work programme should be the executive, including any directly elected mayor (and senior officers). The executive should not direct scrutiny’s work (see [chapter 2](#), but conversations will help scrutiny members better understand how their work can be designed to align with the best opportunities to influence the authority’s wider work.

Information sources

55. Scrutiny will need access to relevant information to inform its work programme. The type of information will depend on the specific role and function scrutiny plays within the authority, but might include:

- performance information from across the authority and its partners
- finance and risk information from across the authority and its partners
- corporate complaints information, and aggregated information from political groups about the subject matter of members' surgeries
- business cases and options appraisals (and other planning information) for forthcoming major decisions. This information will be of particular use for pre-decision scrutiny
- reports and recommendations issued by relevant ombudsmen, especially the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

As committees can meet in closed session, commercial confidentiality should not preclude the sharing of information. Authorities should note, however, that the default for meetings should be that they are held in public (see guidance on [Open and accountable local government](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-and-accountable-local-government-plain-english-guide) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-and-accountable-local-government-plain-english-guide>)).

56. Scrutiny members should consider keeping this information under regular review. It is likely to be easier to do this outside committee, rather than bringing such information to committee 'to note', or to provide an update, as a matter of course.

Shortlisting topics

Approaches to shortlisting topics should reflect scrutiny's overall role in the authority. This will require the development of bespoke, local solutions, however when considering whether an item should be included in the work programme, the kind of questions a scrutiny committee should consider might include:

- Do we understand the benefits scrutiny would bring to this issue?
- How could we best carry out work on this subject?
- What would be the best outcome of this work?
- How would this work engage with the activity of the executive and other decision-makers, including partners?

57. Some authorities use scoring systems to evaluate and rank work programme proposals. If these are used to provoke discussion and debate, based on evidence, about what priorities should be, they can be a useful tool. Others take a looser approach. Whichever method is adopted, a committee should be able to justify how and why a decision has been taken to include certain issues and not others.

58. Scrutiny members should accept that shortlisting can be difficult; scrutiny committees have finite resources and deciding how these are best allocated is tough. They should understand that, if work programming is robust and effective, there might well be issues that they want to look at that nonetheless are not selected.

Carrying out work

59. Selected topics can be scrutinised in several ways, including:

(a) As a single item on a committee agenda

This often presents a limited opportunity for effective scrutiny, but may be appropriate for some issues or where the committee wants to maintain a formal watching brief over a given issue.

(b) At a single meeting

Which could be a committee meeting or something less formal. This can provide an opportunity to have a single public meeting about a given subject, or to have a meeting at which evidence is taken from a number of witnesses.

(c) At a task and finish review of two or three meetings

Short, sharp scrutiny reviews are likely to be most effective even for complex topics. Properly focused, they ensure members can swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations, perhaps over the course of a couple of months or less.

(d) Via a longer-term task and finish review

The 'traditional' task and finish model – with perhaps six or seven meetings spread over a number of months – is still appropriate when scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail. However, the resource implications of such work, and its length, can make it unattractive for all but the most complex matters.

(e) By establishing a 'standing panel'

This falls short of establishing a whole new committee but may reflect a necessity to keep a watching brief over a critical local issue, especially where members feel they need to convene regularly to carry out that oversight. Again, the resource implications of this approach means that it will be rarely used.

7. Evidence sessions

60. Evidence sessions are a key way in which scrutiny committees inform their work. They might happen at formal committee, in less formal ‘task and finish’ groups or at standalone sessions.

Good preparation is a vital part of conducting effective evidence sessions. Members should have a clear idea of what the committee hopes to get out of each session and appreciate that success will depend on their ability to work together on the day.

How to plan

61. Effective planning does not necessarily involve a large number of pre-meetings, the development of complex scopes or the drafting of questioning plans. It is more often about setting overall objectives and then considering what type of questions (and the way in which they are asked) can best elicit the information the committee is seeking. This applies as much to individual agenda items as it does for longer evidence sessions – there should always be consideration in advance of what scrutiny is trying to get out of a particular evidence session.

Chairs play a vital role in leading discussions on objective-setting and ensuring all members are aware of the specific role each will play during the evidence session.

62. As far as possible there should be consensus among scrutiny members about the objective of an evidence session before it starts. It is important to recognise that members have different perspectives on certain issues, and so might not share the objectives for a session that are ultimately adopted. Where this happens, the Chair will need to be aware of this divergence of views and bear it in mind when planning the evidence session.

63. Effective planning should mean that at the end of a session it is relatively straightforward for the chair to draw together themes and highlight the key findings. It is unlikely that the committee will be able to develop and agree recommendations immediately, but, unless the session is part of a wider inquiry, enough evidence should have been gathered to allow the chair to set a clear direction.

64. After an evidence session, the committee might wish to hold a short 'wash-up' meeting to review whether their objectives were met and lessons could be learned for future sessions.

Developing recommendations

65. The development and agreement of recommendations is often an iterative process. It will usually be appropriate for this to be done only by committee members, assisted by co-optees where relevant. When deciding on recommendations, however, members should have due regard to advice received from officers, particularly the Monitoring Officer.

66. The drafting of reports is usually, but not always, carried out by officers, directed by members.

67. Authorities draft reports and recommendations in a number of ways, but there are normally three stages:

i. the development of a 'heads of report' – a document setting out general findings that members can then discuss as they consider the overall structure and focus of the report and its recommendations;

ii. the development of those findings, which will set out some areas on which recommendations might be made; and

iii. the drafting of the full report.

68. Recommendations should be evidence-based and SMART, i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed. Where appropriate, committees may wish to consider sharing them in draft with interested parties.

69. Committees should bear in mind that often six to eight recommendations are sufficient to enable the authority to focus its response, although there may be specific circumstances in which more might be appropriate.

Sharing draft recommendations with executive members should not provide an opportunity for them to revise or block recommendations before they are made. It should, however, provide an opportunity for errors to be identified and corrected, and for a more general sense-check.

Annex 1: Illustrative scenario – creating an executive-scrutiny protocol

An executive-scrutiny protocol can deal with the practical expectations of scrutiny committee members and the executive, as well as the cultural dynamics.

Workshops with scrutiny members, senior officers and Cabinet can be helpful to inform the drafting of a protocol. An external facilitator can help bring an independent perspective. English institutions with devolved powers should consider the advice in the [Scrutiny Protocol](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-for-english-institutions-with-devolved-powers/scrutiny-protocol) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-for-english-institutions-with-devolved-powers/scrutiny-protocol>) to further inform development of their own protocol.

Councils should consider how to adopt a protocol, e.g. formal agreement at scrutiny committee and Cabinet, then formal integration into the Council's constitution at the next Annual General Meeting.

The protocol, as agreed, may contain sections on:

- The way scrutiny will go about developing its work programme (including the ways in which senior officers and Cabinet members will be kept informed).
- The way in which senior officers and Cabinet will keep scrutiny informed of the outlines of major decisions as they are developed, to allow for discussion of scrutiny's potential involvement in policy development. This involves the building in of safeguards to mitigate risks around the sharing of sensitive information with scrutiny members.
- A strengthening and expansion of existing parts of the code of conduct that relate to behaviour in formal meetings, and in informal meetings.
- Specification of the nature and form of responses that scrutiny can expect when it makes recommendations to the executive, when it makes requests to the executive for information, and when it makes requests that Cabinet members or senior officers attend meetings.

- Confirmation of the role of the statutory scrutiny officer, and Monitoring Officer, in overseeing compliance with the protocol, and ensuring that it is used to support the wider aim of supporting and promoting a culture of scrutiny, with matters relating to the protocol's success being reported to full Council through the scrutiny Annual Report.

Annex 2: Illustrative scenario – engaging independent technical advisers

This example demonstrates how one Council's executive and scrutiny committee worked together to scope a role and then appoint an independent adviser on transforming social care commissioning. Their considerations and process may be helpful and applicable in other similar scenarios.

Major care contracts were coming to an end and the Council took the opportunity to review whether to continue with its existing strategic commissioning framework, or take a different approach – potentially insourcing certain elements.

The relevant Director was concerned about the Council's reliance on a very small number of large providers. The Director therefore approached the Scrutiny and Governance Manager to talk through the potential role scrutiny could play as the Council considered these changes.

The Scrutiny Chair wanted to look at this issue in some depth, but recognised its complexity could make it difficult for her committee to engage – she was concerned it would not be able to do the issue justice. The Director offered support from his own officer team, but the Chair considered this approach to be beset by risks around the independence of the process.

She talked to the Director about securing independent advice. He was worried that an independent adviser could come with preconceived ideas and would not understand the Council's context and objectives. The Scrutiny Chair was concerned that independent advice could end up leading to scrutiny members being passive, relying on an adviser to do their thinking for them. They agreed that some form of independent assistance would be valuable, but that how it was provided and managed should be carefully thought out.

With the assistance of the Governance and Scrutiny Manager, the Scrutiny Chair approached local universities and Further Education institutions to identify an appropriate individual. The approach was clear – it set out the precise role expected of the adviser, and explained the scrutiny process itself. Because members wanted to focus on the risks of market failure, and

felt more confident on substantive social care matters, the approach was directed at those with a specialism in economics and business administration. The Council's search was proactive – the assistance of the service department was drawn on to make direct approaches to particular individuals who could carry out this role.

It was agreed to make a small budget available to act as a 'per diem' to support an adviser; academics were approached in the first instance as the Council felt able to make a case that an educational institution would provide this support for free as part of its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility.

Three individuals were identified from the Council's proactive search. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee had an informal discussion with each – not so much to establish their skills and expertise (which had already been assessed) but to give a sense about their 'fit' with scrutiny's objectives and their political nous in understanding the environment in which they would operate, and to satisfy themselves that they will apply themselves even-handedly to the task. The Director sat in on this process but played no part in who was ultimately selected.

The independent advice provided by the selected individual gave the Scrutiny Committee a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and meant it was able to offer informed advice on the merits of putting in place a new strategic commissioning framework.

Annex 3: Illustrative scenario – approaching an external organisation to appear before a committee

This example shows how one council ensured a productive scrutiny meeting, involving a private company and the public. Lessons may be drawn and apply to other similar scenarios.

Concerns had been expressed by user groups, and the public at large, about the reliability of the local bus service. The Scrutiny Chair wanted to question the bus company in a public evidence session but knew that she had no power to compel it to attend. Previous attempts to engage it had been unsuccessful; the company was not hostile, but said it had its own ways of engaging the public.

The Monitoring Officer approached the company's regional PR manager, but he expressed concern that the session would end in a 'bunfight'. He

also explained the company had put their improvement plan in the public domain and felt a big council meeting would exacerbate tensions.

Other councillors had strong views about the company – one thought the committee should tell the company it would be empty-chaired if it refused to attend. The Scrutiny Chair was sympathetic to this but thought such an approach would not lead to any improvements.

The Scrutiny Chair was keen to make progress, but it was difficult to find the right person to speak to at the company, so she asked council officers and local transport advocacy groups for advice. Speaking to those people also gave her a better sense of what scrutiny's role might be.

When she finally spoke to the company's network manager, she explained the situation and suggested they work together to consider how the meeting could be productive for the Council, the company and local people. In particular, this provided her with an opportunity to explain scrutiny and its role. The network manager remained sceptical but was reassured that they could work together to ensure that the meeting would not be an 'ambush'. He agreed in principle to attend and also provide information to support the Committee's work beforehand.

Discussions continued in the four weeks leading up to the Committee meeting. The Scrutiny Chair was conscious that while she had to work with the company to ensure that the meeting was constructive – and secure their attendance – it could not be a whitewash, and other members and the public would demand a hard edge to the discussions.

The scrutiny committee agreed that the meeting would provide a space for the company to provide context to the problems local people are experiencing, but that this would be preceded by a space on the agenda for the Chair, Vice-chair, and representatives from two local transport advocacy groups to set out their concerns. The company were sent in advance a summary of the general areas on which members were likely to ask questions, to ensure that those questions could be addressed at the meeting.

Finally, provision was made for public questions and debate. Those attending the meeting were invited to discuss with each other the principal issues they wanted the meeting to cover. A short, facilitated discussion in the room led by the Chair highlighted the key issues, and the Chair then put those points to the company representatives. At the end of the meeting, the public asked questions of the bus company representative in a 20-minute plenary item.

The meeting was fractious, but the planning carried out to prepare for this – by channelling issues through discussion and using the Chair to mediate the questioning – made things easier. Some attendees were initially frustrated

by this structure, but the company representative was more open and less defensive than might otherwise have been the case.

The meeting also motivated the company to revise its communications plan to become more responsive to this kind of challenge, part of which involved a commitment to feed back to the scrutiny committee on the recommendations it made on the night.

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1. A distinction is often drawn between ‘overview’ which focuses on the development of policy, and ‘scrutiny’ which looks at decisions that have been made or are about to be made to ensure they are fit for purpose.
 2. As defined in section 9R of the Local Government Act 2000.
 3. Added by section 8 of and Schedule 3 to the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 and further amended by section 70 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.
 4. Further provision for combined authority and combined county authority scrutiny is set out in The Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) (S.I. 2017/68). Note this SI has been amended by S.I.2024/430.
 5. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000; paragraph 1 of Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009; and paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.
 6. Combined authority and combined county authority overview and scrutiny committees must have a chair who is either an “independent person” or an “appropriate person” – both terms are defined in legislation.
 7. Combined authorities and combined county authorities may have directly elected mayors and their constituent council members are elected members of those councils appointed to the authority.
 8. See Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999.
 9. Section 9FB of the Local Government Act 2000; article 9 of the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
 10. See, for example, regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Committee System) (England) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2012/1020) and article 4 of the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017 (S.I. 2017/68).
 11. “Appropriate person” is defined at para 3(5) of schedule 1 to the 2023 Act and art.5(6) of S.I. 2017/68 for combined county authorities and at para 3(5) of schedule 5A to the 2009 Act and art.5(6) of S.I. 2017/68 for combined authorities. “Independent person” is defined at art.5(2) of S.I. 2017/68 for both combined authorities and combined county authorities.

12. Section 9FA(3) of the Local Government Act 2000.
13. Paragraph 2(3) of Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and paragraph 2(3) of Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.
14. A definition of 'relative' can be found at section 28(10) of the Localism Act 2011 and article 2(2) of The Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
15. See article 5(2) of the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017 (S.I. 2017/68).
16. Article 5(6) of the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
17. Section 9FA(4) Local Government Act 2000.
18. Regulation 17 - Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012; article 10 Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
19. Regulation 17(4) – Local Government (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012; article 10(4) Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
20. Regulation 17(2) – Local Government (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012; article 10(2) Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
21. Section 9FA(8) of the Local Government Act 2000; paragraph 2(6) of Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009; paragraph 2(6) of Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.
22. Section 9FA(9) of the Local Government Act 2000; paragraph 2(7) of Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009; paragraph 2(7) of Schedule 1 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.
23. Authorities should ensure they have appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the effective democratic scrutiny of Local Enterprise Partnerships' investment decisions.



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Item No

By: Peter Oakford – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services
Paul Royel, Director of HR & OD

To: County Council **Date:** 13 March 2025

Subject: Pay Policy Statement 2025/26

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This paper addresses the actions the Authority is required to make on pay as part of delivering its responsibilities under the Localism Act 2011.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 An objective of the Localism Act is to increase transparency of local pay. This requires councils to publish the salaries of senior officials, enabling local people to better understand how public money is being spent in their area.
- 1.2 The Act requires a local authority pay policy to be openly approved by democratically elected Members on an annual basis.
- 1.3 Last year, County Council agreed a 1.35% increase to the Kent Scheme pay scales. The agreed percentages awarded for each performance rating under TCP were 2.7% for a Successful rating, 3.8% for Excellent rating and 4.9% for Outstanding. As a result of this year's local pay bargaining process, County Council agreed to a pay award of at least 3% for all employees, and a 5 % increase for grades KSA to KSD to accommodate a minimum salary of £12.71 per hour.
- 1.4 The new minimum salary, as agreed by County Council in February 2025 will result in an hourly rate of £12.71 per hour and is above both the National Living Wage and the Voluntary Living Wage which are £12.21 and £12.60 respectively.
- 1.5 On 1st April 2025, there will be a new pay and grading structure in place which incorporates a new approach to pay progression. This was agreed by Personnel Committee in March 2024 followed by County Council in May 2024. All employees will transition to new salary values as part of the new pay structure and then receive the annual pay award, although the pay award will be withheld for 2025/26 if someone is not performing.
- 1.6 In place of TCP, progression within a grade (where applicable) is subject to, and informed by, a performance assessment each year at the anniversary date of being appointed to the grade. Progression is by steps and the length of time between steps is clearly defined.

- 1.7 The Council operates a Market Premium Policy which is designed to help managers attract and retain high quality employees in a competitive recruitment market. This is done on a business case basis. Payments are reported to Personnel Committee annually.
- 1.8 The Council continually seeks to ensure that policies, procedures and payments are designed and operate in a way that treats employees in a fair and inclusive manner. In addition, the Gender Pay Gap Report is published each year.
- 1.9 KCC's approach to pay recognises that there will be a wide variety of factors and issues that employees face. We have a range of support, employee benefits and signposting available through KNet and Kent Rewards, which is intended to offer something of value for everyone independent of grade, lifestyle or personal commitments.

The Pay Policy, including the performance assessment process and related increases, applies consistently to all of the County Council's employees at all grades.

2. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26 is attached at Appendix 1. As in previous years, and as agreed by County Council on 29 March 2012, the statement relates to all staff, including chief officers and specifically to: -
 - the level and elements of remuneration for each chief officer which includes recruitment, increases and additions
 - the approach to the payment of chief officers on their ceasing to hold office under or to be employed by the authority
 - the publication of and access to information relating to remuneration of chief officers.

For the purpose of the Localism Act, a Chief Officer in KCC is defined as being at 'Director level'. This includes the County Council's Corporate Directors and Directors.

- 2.2 The provisions of this statement do not apply to the staff of local authority schools.

3. PAY MULTIPLE

- 3.1 A pay multiple is calculated in order to measure the difference in pay between the norm and highest salary. The definition of pay multiple as defined in the 'Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency' document is the ratio between the highest paid salary and the median average salary of the authority's workforce.
- 3.2 KCC's current Pay Multiple figure is 8.1:1. This excludes schools.

4. GUIDANCE

- 4.1 The policy is compliant with expectations and guidance in the Code of Recommended Practice along with supplementary updates which have been received.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 County Council endorses the attached Pay Policy Statement.

Louise Gavin
People Strategy Adviser
03000 416135

Appendix 1.

Kent County Council Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026

The Authority seeks to be able to recruit and retain staff in a way which is externally competitive and internally fair. The Kent Scheme Pay Policy applies in a consistent way from the lowest to the highest grade.

- The Pay Policy is influenced by a number of factors which include local pay bargaining, market information, market forces, economic climate, measures of inflation and budgetary position.
- The policy referred to in this Statement is relevant to Council employees generally. The scope of this Statement does not include all Terms and Conditions as some are set on a national basis. These include Teachers covered by the schoolteachers pay and conditions in (England and Wales) document, Soulbury Committee (pay only), Adult Education, National Joint Council (NJC), Joint National Council (JNC) and the National Health Service (NHS).
- The Kent Scheme pay range consists of grades KSA – KSR. Details of the pay range are at the bottom of the page.
- The details of the reward package for all Corporate Directors and Directors are published and updated on the County Council's web site.
- KCC will publish the number of people and job title by salary band. This is from £50,000 to £54,999 and then by pay bands of £5,000 thereafter. This will include elements made on a repeatable or predictable basis such as market premium payments.
<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/finance-and-budget/spending/senior-staff-salaries>
- The appropriate grade for a job is established through a job evaluation process which takes into account the required level of knowledge, skills and accountability required for the role.
- The lowest point of KCC's grading structure (Grade KSA) is set such that the hourly rate is above the National Minimum Wage and marginally above the equivalent of the Living Wage Foundations Living Wage.
- Staff who are new to the organisation must be appointed at the entry point of the grade unless there are exceptional reasons to appoint higher. These must be based on a robust business case in relation to the level of knowledge, skills and experience offered by the candidate and consideration is given to the level of salaries of the existing staff to prevent pay inequality. For senior staff, any such business case must be approved by the relevant Corporate Director.
- Council signs off the pay structure. The subsequent appointment of individuals, including those receiving salaries in excess of £100,000, is in accordance with the pay structure and the principles outlined in the pay policy.

- Staff who are promoted should be appointed to the entry point of the grade. However, their pay increase should equate to at least 2.5%.
- Progression within a grade (where applicable) is subject to, and informed by, a performance assessment each year at the anniversary of being appointed to the grade. Progression is by steps and the length of time between steps is clearly defined. A separate annual pay award is made in April of each year. This applies to all levels in the Authority and there are no additional bonus schemes for senior managers.
- The annual pay award is set following the outcome of the local pay bargaining process.
- The 'Lowest' paid employees are defined as those employees on KCC's lowest grade, KSA. They receive relevant benefits and are remunerated in the same proportionate way as others.
- The entry level salary will increase to £24,513 which equates to £12.71 per hour.
- In order to establish the pay difference and the relative change in pay levels over time, a pay multiplier can be calculated. This is the base pay level of the highest paid employee shown as a multiple of the median Kent Scheme salary. This multiplier will be published on the County Council's website annually.
<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/data-about-the-council#paymultiplier>
- KCC recognises that managers need to be able to reward performance in a flexible and appropriate way to the particular circumstances.
- Managers have delegated powers to make cash awards and non-cash awards when necessary and where not covered by any other provision as defined in the Blue Book Kent Scheme Terms & Conditions.
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/jobs/careers-with-us/working-for-us>
http://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/12574/Kent-Scheme.pdf
- Should it be shown that there is specific recruitment and retention difficulties, the Market Premium Policy may be used to address these issues.
- The Council would not expect the re-engagement of an individual who has left the organisation with a redundancy, retirement or severance package.
- Policies about termination payments and employer discretions under the Local Government Pension Scheme will be reviewed and published for all staff. These will be produced with the intention of only making additional payments when in the best interests of the Authority and maintaining consistency through all pay grades. This will continue to be managed through the HR & OD function and monitored by Personnel Committee.

2025/26 Kent Scheme pay scale

Grade	Entry	Temporary transition point 1	Middle 1	Middle 2	Temporary transition point 2	Top
KS R	£217,528	£222,449	£227,370	£237,213	£242,134	£247,055
KS Q	£168,222	£175,205	£182,188	£196,154	£203,137	£210,120
KS P	£136,839	£141,006	£145,173	£153,508	£157,675	£161,842
KS O	£109,856	£113,135	£116,414	£122,972	£126,251	£129,530
KS N	£89,579	£92,868	£96,156	£102,732	£106,021	£109,309
KS M	£77,348	£79,671	£81,994		£84,317	£86,639
KS L	£68,295	£70,292	£72,288		£74,284	£76,280
KS K	£60,800	£62,461	£64,122		£65,783	£67,444
KS J	£52,716	£54,599	£56,481		£58,364	£60,246
KS I	£45,672	£47,127	£48,581		£50,035	£51,489
KS H	£39,355	£40,742	£42,128		£43,514	£44,900
KS G	£34,421	£35,392	£36,363		£37,334	£38,304
KS F	£30,404	£32,078				£33,752
KS E	£27,852	£28,784				£29,716
KS D	£26,393	£27,053				£27,713
KS C	£25,252	£25,757				£26,262
KS B						£25,126
KS A						£24,513

The Council is implementing a new pay structure that is fit for purpose for the future. As part of the transition arrangements to the new pay, there are temporary transition points for 2025/2026 only.

County Council Meeting - 13th March 2025

Motion for Time Limited Debate – Addressing the Environmental and Social Harm of Disposable Vapes

Proposer: Mark Hood

Seconder: Jenni Hawkins

Background Information – provided by the Green & Independents Group

Disposable vapes cause significant environmental harm due to their plastic waste, lithium battery content, and lack of effective recycling options. Many end up in landfill or as litter, contributing to pollution.

An estimated 8 million disposable vapes are thrown away each week in the UK, equivalent to the lithium batteries of 5,000 electric vehicles annually. The improper disposal of disposable vapes leads to dangerous chemicals entering the environment, soil pollution, and increased fire risks in waste management facilities.

There is growing concern about the social and health impact of disposable vapes, particularly among young people, with evidence showing their appeal due to bright packaging and sweet flavours.

The government has proposed a ban on disposable vapes but the introduction of new 'Big Puff' devices are designed to avoid the imminent legislation which now requires amendment.

The Conservatives' own Shadow Health Secretary has called for amendments to limit the size of refill tanks and close other loopholes in the proposed ban.

Motion:

This Council believes that:

- a.) Immediate and decisive action is needed to address the environmental and public health risks posed by disposable vapes, rather than delaying with prolonged studies.
- b.) Any ban must be robust and comprehensive, preventing manufacturers from exploiting legal loopholes to continue selling harmful products.
- c.) Stronger regulations on vape marketing, packaging, and accessibility to young people should be introduced alongside the ban.
- d.) Urgent action is required to address the environmental and health impacts of disposable vapes.

And;

This Council agrees to call on the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health to:

- a.) Write again to the government, urging swift and decisive action on disposable vapes, rather than a decade-long study;
- b.) Support calls for amendments to the proposed legislation that limit refill tank sizes and close other loopholes that could undermine the ban;
- c.) Advocate for a comprehensive ban that addresses both single-use and potentially harmful 'Big Puff' alternatives;
- d.) Work with local schools, businesses, and community groups to raise awareness of the environmental and health risks of disposable vape; and
- e.) Encourage stronger local enforcement against the improper disposal of vapes and promote responsible recycling initiatives.