

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held at Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 12th May, 2026.

PRESENT: Mr T Mallon (Vice-Chair), Mr J Baker, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr A Kibble, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr M Reidy, Ms C Russell, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto, Dr G Sturley and Mr P Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs B Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Mrs P Williams (Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services)

OFFICERS: Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director, Management Information and Intelligence, Integrated Children's Services), David Adams (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills), Craig Chapman (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion), Ingrid Crisan (Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services), Kevin Kasaven (Director for Children's Countywide Services), Robert Veale (Assistant Director Education (East Kent)), Nicholas Abrahams (Assistant Director Education (West Kent)) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

68. Election of Chair
(Item 1)

The Vice-Chair presided over this item.

1. Mr Mole was nominated by the Leader to be the Chairman of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee.
2. The Committee agreed the nomination and Mr Mole was declared as Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED that Mr Mole was elected as the Chairman of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee.

69. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies had been received from Mrs Porter and Mr Webb, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services for whom Mrs Williams, Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, was present as substitute.

70. Declarations of Interest
(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

71. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 were a correct record.

72. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members

(Item 5)

1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. Mrs Fordham outlined activity since the previous meeting. She described a programme of visits and engagement across education, skills and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services, explaining that this work was helping to inform strategic priorities and provide assurance regarding service delivery.
 - b. Recent visits included a maintained nursery school, mainstream and specialist colleges, and a range of internal services. In particular, Mrs Fordham highlighted the role of the maintained nursery school in delivering high-quality early years provision and supporting the sharing of good practice across the sector.
 - c. A further visit was undertaken to Oak Specialist College, which Mrs Fordham explained had provided a clearer understanding of the college's operating model and specialist offer following its opening.
 - d. Mrs Fordham also referred to a visit to the Lower Thames Crossing Skills Hub, where the focus had been on how education and training providers were working together to align skills provision with future employment opportunities arising from major infrastructure projects.
 - e. Mrs Fordham attended at an event recognising North Kent College as a Construction Technical Excellence College was also highlighted, with Mrs Fordham noting the collaborative approach taken by Kent colleges to support skills development across the county.
 - f. An update was provided on the Partnership for Inclusion and Neurodiversity (PINS) pilot, which Mrs Fordham advised had been successful, with work underway to consider wider rollout in preparation for forthcoming SEND reforms.
 - g. Mrs Fordham reported on a visit to the SEND Hub, describing it as an important source of information, advice and signposting for families, and drew attention to the volume of enquiries being managed by the service.
 - h. Mrs Fordham met with the in-year admissions team and outlined the work underway to improve data collection and streamline processes in order to better support families moving into the county during the academic year.
 - i. In addition, Mrs Fordham advised that she continued to engage with national briefings on SEND reform and the White Paper and confirmed that further updates would be provided to Members as national policy and funding arrangements became clearer.

2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mrs Fordham confirmed that specialist colleges had raised concerns regarding post-16 home to school transport and that engagement with the transport service was underway to ensure providers and families understood the process.
 - b. Mr Chapman, Interim Deputy Director of Education, explained that engagement with the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) workforce had continued throughout the period of industrial action. He advised that officers had been working with staff and trade unions to ensure clarity around the universal offer and consistency of service delivery across the county.
 - c. Mr Adams, Interim Deputy Director of Education, outlined the role of the maintained nursery school as a recognised stronger practice hub, supporting professional development and inclusion across the region. He explained that while the provision supported early identification and inclusive practice, its direct impact was limited to early years due to age range.

3. Mrs Williams, Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, provided an update on behalf of the Cabinet Member on the following:
 - a. The statement outlined the induction activity Mr Webb had taken part in since his appointment, including visits to frontline services and engagement with partners.
 - b. Mrs Williams highlighted the passage of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, describing it as a significant reform package affecting safeguarding, education and children's social care. She outlined key provisions relating to family group decision-making, information sharing, multi-agency safeguarding, regulation of children's homes, care market reform and changes to education policy, including breakfast clubs, uniform requirements and elective home education.
 - c. Mrs Williams advised that work was progressing locally on the design of the Families First Children's Practice Model, which would be considered by the Committee at a future meeting. She also drew Members' attention to forthcoming corporate parenting refresher training, explaining that the session would be delivered in a hybrid format and cover a range of services supporting children in care and care leavers.

4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mr Kasaven, Director of Children's Countywide Services, explained that opportunities already existed through the Corporate Parenting Panel for Members to meet and hear directly from children in care and care-experienced young people, and that further opportunities could be explored.
 - b. Ms Crisan, Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services, outlined the statutory role of the Youth Justice Service, explaining how risk assessment, restorative justice and multi-agency intervention were used to reduce reoffending and support positive outcomes.
 - c. Mr Chapman explained the Council's responsibilities in relation to elective home education, including quality assurance activity and forthcoming legislative changes intended to strengthen early engagement and safeguarding.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates were noted.

73. Performance Monitoring
(Item 6)

1. Ms Atkinson, Assistant Director Management Information and Intelligence, introduced the report, providing the Committee with an overview of the performance data of the individual indicators.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Ms Atkinson clarified that the reported reduction to 51 cases related specifically to Education, Health and Care Plan cases open for longer than 20 weeks. She explained that this represented a significant reduction compared to previous periods, when figures had exceeded 250 cases, and reflected improved system performance rather than a reduction in overall demand.
 - b. Ms Atkinson explained that performance indicators within children's social care had been revised to better reflect current practice and workforce availability. She advised that while average caseloads were monitored, additional work was underway to identify early warning signs where individual workers or teams exceeded agreed thresholds, enabling earlier intervention.
 - c. Ms Crisan explained that caseload pressures varied across districts and were influenced by factors such as recruitment challenges, staff turnover and periods of leave. She outlined current recruitment activity, including the appointment of newly qualified social workers, and explained that induction and gradual allocation of cases were essential to ensure workforce sustainability and quality of practice.
 - d. Mr Chapman explained that the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans was heavily dependent on the availability of educational psychology assessments. He outlined how improvements in educational psychology capacity had directly contributed to improved EHCP performance and emphasised that SEND delivery required multiple services to function effectively together.
 - e. Ms Crisan explained that adoption timelines were often extended due to the length of care proceedings, judicial requirements and the priority given to family placements. She emphasised that delays were not due to a lack of adopters and that Kent had sufficient adoptive capacity through the regional adoption agency, with income generated from placing adopters with children from other authorities.
 - f. Mr Chapman explained that rising NEET figures were part of a national trend and that work was underway to strengthen vocational, technical and skills-based pathways for young people. He advised that post-16 provision was being developed in collaboration with schools, colleges and employers to support young people who did not follow traditional academic routes.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

74. 26/00024 - Proposal to permanently increase the formal designated number of Students at Laleham Gap School from 188 to 208 from September 2026
(Item 7)

1. Mr Veale, Assistant Director of Education (East Kent), introduced the report proposing an increase in the designated number of pupils at Laleham Gap School from 188 to 208 from September 2026. He explained that the proposal followed the repurposing of former accommodation into additional classrooms.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mr Veale explained that the proposal to increase the designated number of pupils was enabled by the repurposing of accommodation previously used by a service that had transferred back into the Council. He advised that the additional classrooms had already been refurbished and brought into use.
 - b. Mr Veale clarified that increasing the designated number by more than 10% constituted a significant change under school organisation regulations, requiring a statutory process including a public notice and Cabinet Member decision.
 - c. Officers confirmed that the school was already operating above its former designated number due to demand pressures and that formalising the increase would provide greater certainty for planning and placement decisions.
 - d. Mr Veale advised that increasing capacity within maintained special schools helped reduce reliance on more costly independent placements and supported the Council's strategy to increase local provision wherever possible.
 - e. It was confirmed that the works had been delivered without capital expenditure from the Council and with minimal disruption to pupils, as the accommodation was detached from the main school buildings.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

75. 26/00025 - Proposed New Paddock Wood Primary School
(Item 8)

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the proposal, explaining that it formed part of forward planning to meet increased demand arising from housing growth in Paddock Wood.
2. Mr Abrahams, Assistant Director of Education (West Kent), outlined demographic evidence, consultation feedback and the rationale for progressing to the next stage of planning. He explained that the decision sought approval to proceed with statutory processes and detailed design, with a further decision to be brought back to the Committee.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mr Abrahams explained that pupil forecasts were based on actual preschool population data rather than hypothetical projections. He advised that the number of children living in Paddock Wood had

increased steadily and that evidence showed continued growth linked to completed housing developments.

- b. Members were advised that the Department for Education had approved a free school for Paddock Wood in 2013, based on increasing parental choice rather than identified basic need. Concerns raised by KCC regarding timing led to repeated delays, and the scheme subsequently fell out of the DfE programme. It was explained that, although KCC would forward fund the project, costs would be recovered over time through basic need grant funding and were reflected within the capital programme.
- c. Mr Abrahams clarified that while birth rates across the wider borough had declined, Paddock Wood represented a distinct community with different demographic trends, driven by inward migration and new housing.
- d. It was explained that timing was critical and that the proposal sought approval only to proceed to the next stage of planning. Members were advised that the anticipated governance process would involve a further decision being brought to the Committee at its September meeting, following which a final decision on the school opening will be taken by the Secretary of State, expected around Christmas 2026. The current programme anticipated the school being in September 2028 with an initial reception cohort.
- e. Mr Abrahams outlined how the Council had engaged with local schools and the Diocese through informal consultation and meetings. He acknowledged concerns about potential impact on neighbouring schools and explained that forecasts accounted for existing travel patterns and parental preference.
- f. Officers explained that the school would be designed to open in phases, initially admitting a single form of entry, with capacity to expand to take two forms of entry and up to 420 children in the future, subject to future decisions. This approach would allow flexibility and help mitigate risks associated with over-provision.
- g. Mr Abrahams confirmed that infrastructure considerations, including transport, highways impact, walking routes and community use of facilities, would be addressed during the detailed design stage and through statutory consultation.
- h. Mr Abrahams advised that all new schools were established as academy trusts, with the County Council not acting as the employer of staff. He explained that the specific trust had yet to be identified and would be selected through the presumption process, after which the appointed trust would assume responsibility for staffing. While acknowledging potential recruitment challenges in some areas, he reported that trusts had generally been successful in recruiting staff.
- i. In response to a question regarding accountability is where academies failed, Mr Adams advised that academies were not the responsibility of KCC. Responsibility rested with the Secretary of State through the contractual agreement between the Academy and the Department for Education, with intervention undertaken by the regional commissioner where necessary.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

76. Work Programme
(Item 9)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.