

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held at Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 21st November, 2024.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr D Beaney, Ms M Dawkins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Ms S Hamilton, Ms J Hawkins, Mr A Sandhu, MBE and Mr P Stepto

OTHER MEMBERS: Mrs R Binks, Mrs S Chandler, Mr R Love, OBE, and Mr M Whiting

OFFICERS: Nick Abrahams (Assistant Director education- West Kent), David Adams (Assistant Director Education (South Kent)), Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director, Management Information and Intelligence, Integrated Children's Services), Ingrid Crisan (Director, Operational Integrated Children's Services), Sarah Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Christy Holden (Head of Children's Commissioning), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Emily Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer), Jennifer Maiden-Brooks (KSCMP System Improvement Manager), Claire Thomson (Children's Complaint and Customer Care Manager), and Robert Veale (Assistant Director Education, East)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mrs Meade for whom Mr Lewis was present and Mr Manion for whom Sir Paul Carter was present.

Mrs McArthur, Mr Dendor and Mrs Game were in virtual attendance.

2. Declarations of Interest
(Item 3)

Mr Stepto declared an interest in agenda item 10, as a school governor at Nexus Foundation Special School. Sir Paul Carter declared an interest in agenda item 10, as a director of the Leigh Academy Trust.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024 were a correct record.

4. Draft Revenue Budget 2025-26 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MFTP) 2025-28
(Item 5)

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report.

2) Mrs Chandler and Mr Love outlined the areas of the report specific to their portfolios.

3) Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- It was likely that funding would be extended for those authorities currently funded for the Family Hub offer. However, it was not clear how much funding would be coming forward.
- There were fewer children in care (LACs) but those children currently in the care of the local authority had more complex needs. Savings were proposed to be made through expansion of kinship care.
- The final settlement for the Dedicated Schools Grant would be outlined once this was received from government but it could not be forecast.
- School Rebuilding Programme bids would be subject to priority and in addition to this, there was High Needs capital funding allocation. Requirements to make mainstream schools more inclusive for special needs would need to come from this funding allocation.

4) RESOLVED to note the report.

5. 24/00093 - Commissioned Family Hub Contracts
(Item 6)

1) Mrs Chandler introduced the report.

2) Mrs Binks addressed the committee.

3) Mr Whiting addressed the committee.

4) Further to debate, it was noted that:

- There were concerns that the building that houses Millmead Family Hub would close. However, this had not been confirmed at the time of the committee meeting.
- The area around Millmead Family Hub was statistically, not considered the most deprived area in Thanet.
- The next closest Family Hub to Millmead (based in the Cliftonville area of Margate) was not well used and concerns were raised that service users would not necessarily start to use this other provision.
- Seashells Family Hub's contract value had been reduced previously. It was asserted that if the centre closed, it would not be a relocation and there would be a reduction in the number of services available.
- It was only under very limited circumstances that contracts could be extended for a limited period and clarification would be sought on this point.
- The outreach model that was in place was due to be extended. The network was providing the family hub services from designated hubs and from other community buildings.
- The current contracts were not funded from the Family Hub Grant. The local authorities who were in receipt of the grant also had to deliver other public

health services. The current contracts were funded separately from this grant through Children's Services budgets.

- The two centres had been used as pilot hubs

It was proposed by Mr Lewis and seconded by Mrs Dean that:

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.

5) Upon being put to the vote, the motion was declared CARRIED.

6. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members

(Item 7)

1) Mr Love said he attended the opening of the new sport and teaching block at Borden Grammar School in Sittingbourne on 27 September 2024. Around 100 people attended the event and it was anticipated that the facility would be much used by all of the students. Mr Love was pleased to hear from the head teacher about some of the great work being done in the school.

The newly appointed headteacher welcome event was held on 3 October, run jointly by KCC and the Kent Association of Leaders in Education (KALE). This was a good opportunity to share what was being done well including the Outstanding Ofsted grade for social services, significant progress with SEND, the good student level outcomes and above national levels of schools who Ofsted deemed to be 'taking effective action'. Kent's headteachers played a vital part in schools and the wider system. Mr Love expressed gratitude for the headteachers' dedication and support to Kent's children, young people and parents.

Mr Love had attended the KALE annual conference in the morning before the committee meeting. He endorsed school leaders' commitment to share good practice and learn fresh insights from guest speakers.

The School Funding Forum took place on 11 October and Ben Cooper, from Swalecliffe Primary School was elected as the new chair. Mr Love said that he looked forward to working with Mr Cooper.

Congratulations were given to Michelle Bramble, a dedicated member of the Community Learning Services workforce, for achieving a remarkable honour. Michelle had recently been awarded the prestigious Local Government Association award in recognition of her outstanding efforts as an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Champion within KCC. Michelle had played a pivotal role in influencing, changing, and enhancing the way KCC operated by promoting equality and inclusivity in our workplace. Mr Love said that it was fantastic to see the contributions of KCC staff members celebrated in this way, highlighting the importance of leadership within the organisation.

Mr Love said that a number of reforms had been made to the special educational needs services and the aim was to set the services on a sustainable financial footing. The work was also about quality of service. Over the preceding 18 months, it was noted that Members had held him to account over issues. He said that he had not pursued a quick fix but was working to make underlying changes. It was reported that the performance for the issuing of EHCPs within 20 weeks had improved with 197 being issued in September, with 64.0% within 20 weeks and in October, 118 had been issued, with 76.9% within 20 weeks. The results illustrated the start of the journey. No cases were over 26 weeks, which was down from 107 weeks being the oldest case at the start of the year.

2) Mrs Chandler said the Department for Education (DfE) published the long awaited policy paper on children's social care reform: Keeping children safe, helping families thrive. The Secretary of State made an oral statement in the House of Commons. There was commentary in the paper about independent care providers. Greater control over the profits made by independent care providers was welcomed. There was also discussion within the paper about rebalancing the system towards preventative work. There were some indications that there might be further funding but Mrs Chandler would report back once there was further clarity.

Mrs Chandler attended the National Agenda and Reforms Conference and Kent Academy Social Care Awards on 24 October 2024. The conference included guest speakers, Isabelle Trowler CBE, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families and Yvette Stanley, the National Director of Ofsted who gave their perspective on the national reforms in children's social care. The awards recognised the good work that was undertaken across the county by Children's Services and was a celebration of the fantastic practice in children's social care which was often in very challenging circumstances. Rebecca Button received the Outstanding Lifetime Achievement award and was also shortlisted in the Lifetime Achievement category at the Social Worker of the year national awards.

The Kent Fostering Service's Award Ceremony was held on 8 November and celebrated the outstanding work by Kent County Council's foster carers. Every year the awards ceremony had gone from strength to strength and 2024 was no exception. KCC received a phenomenal 348 nominations for foster carers, Kent Support Homes Hosts and staff, which was the highest to date. The awards reminded all of the truly inspirational work that was undertaken to provide our most vulnerable children with a safe and loving home.

Mrs Chandler was delighted to announce that Kent Children in Care Councils (OCYPC, OCYPC Extra and the Young Adult Council) had won first place at the Coram National Voice Awards 2024. The National Voice Awards was an annual award programme that recognised the exceptional contributions of Children in Care and Care Leavers in England. The awards were open to Children in Care Councils, Care Leaver Forums and other projects in Children's Social Care. Kent Children in Care Councils won the award in 2024 for a project they have been working on for several months, called 'Listen Up'. They had created a training workshop and made a film to raise awarenesses of the importance of professionals listening to children and young people.

KCC had won the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum Team of The Year Award for the 18+ food bank project. This was achieved through outstanding hard

work and leadership to deliver the project across the service from Mario Silva, Team Manager in 18+ Care Leavers. The 18+ Foodbank Project was launched in April 2023 by a small group of personal advisors from the 18+ Care Leavers Service; the aim of the project is to support our care experienced young adults in times of need. The project worked in collaboration with The Family Foodbank and The Hygiene Bank Medway to offer an in-house food and hygiene bank service to young people within the service and was available to all Kent Care Leavers. Last week The NLCBF noted: “The Kent team recognised and responded to the cost-of-living crisis, and so the 18+ Food Project was developed to support young people through this critically important time.”

A new fostering film from over 100 councils in the UK, including Kent County Council was launched on 17 October. ‘Everything’ was the seventh film produced by a growing partnership of councils and children’s trusts to promote local authority fostering. The film was linked on the KCC website.

Mrs Chandler attended the ‘Big Mental Health Conversation’ which welcomed 200 young people from 25 Kent schools to coincide with World Mental Health Day. This was funded and hosted by KCC and the NHS Integrated Care Board. All the young people there appreciated the opportunity to be part of the workshops and to talk about the issues.

On 14 November 2024, KCC hosted a visit to two of its new reception centres by Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby, and Minister for State at the Home Office, Dame Angela Eagle, alongside senior leaders from Home Office and Department for Education. The visit was positive, with Ministers impressed by how the centres are being run. Discussions were held on improving the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and a national response to the needs of newly arriving UAS children.

Since 1 January 2024, 2600+ UAS children have been referred to KCC, with 2100+ transferred to the care of other local authorities under the NTS.

KCC had six operational reception centres providing temporary homes for newly arriving UAS children in Ashford, Cranbrook, Faversham, Dartford, and Ash. Four of these centres were new and had been open since July 2024. Three more centres will open between now and Summer 2025 in Gravesend, Canterbury and Sholden. All the centres had successfully registered with Ofsted, either as children’s homes for children aged under 16 or supported accommodation for children aged 16 or 17. Feedback from Ofsted and stakeholders who had visited the centres had been positive and the centres continued to engage stakeholders and communities.

3) Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:

- Significant progress had been made with the issuing of EHCPs within the set timescales. Changes relating to the performance targets for EHCPs would be reported to Members.

4) RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

7. Performance Monitoring *(Item 8)*

1. Ms Atkinson introduced the Performance Monitoring report and highlighted that the number of EHCPs done within the 20 week timescale had continued to rise and was above the national average. Children's social work caseloads had reduced.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Timeliness of EHCPs being issue had improved considerably and the quality of the work was not being compromised. There were four methodologies for the quality assurance on EHCPs. The Department for Education (DfE) had taken six samples of EHCPs and found that five of six deemed to be very good.
3. RESOLVED to note the update.

8. 24/00099 Funding of Services to Schools 2025-26
(Item 9)

- 1) Mr Adams introduced the report.
- 2) Mr Love said the decision he was proposing was as shown on pages 167 and 168 of the agenda pack.
- 3) Further to questions, it was noted that:
 - The services were not provided free of charge to maintained schools and had been paid for through council tax income and also through the national funding formula.
 - The cost of 'de-delegation' was detailed on table 8, on page 184 of the agenda pack.
 - There had not been many responses from schools to the consultation on this proposed change.
- 4) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report.

9. 24/00097 Special School Review
(Item 10)

- 1) Mr Love introduced the report.
- 2) Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:
 - There were concerns about High Needs Funding and support for children with EHCPs.
 - It was felt that there was support for what was being done in mainstream schools and change was welcomed. However, it was felt there were barriers relating to communication with special school settings.
- 3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations outlined in the report and proposed decision as outlined in appendix 5.

- 10. 24/00098 Westmeads Infant School Expansion**
(Item 11)
- 1) Mr Veale introduced the report.
 - 2) Further to a question from a Member, it was noted that:
 - There had been an announcement of government capital funding to increase the number of nursery places and schools were coming forward expressing interest and seeking advice on nursery provision.
 - 2) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report.
- 11. 24/00096 Kent Commissioning Plan Update**
(Item 12)
- 1) Mr Abrahams introduced the report.
 - 2) RESOLVED to endorse the report.
- 12. Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership Annual Report**
(Item 13)
- 1) Ms Maiden-Brooks introduced the report.
 - 2) RESOLVED to note the report.
- 13. Kent County Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Service Annual Report 2023-2024**
(Item 14)
- 1) Mr Kasaven introduced the report.
 - 2) RESOLVED to note the report.
- 14. Private Fostering Annual Report 2024**
(Item 15)
- 1) Mr Kasaven introduced the report.
 - 2) RESOLVED to note the report.
- 15. Complaints and Representations 2023-24**
(Item 16)
- 1) Ms Thomson introduced the report.
 - 2) RESOLVED to note the report.
- 16. Work Programme**
(Item 17)
1. RESOLVED to note the work programme.

