

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 Tuesday, 16th September, 2025.

PRESENT: Mr B Fryer (Chairman), Mr D Burns, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Ms I Kemp, Mr A Kibble, Ms C Russell, Mr P Stepto, Mr P Thomas, Mrs P Williams, Mr A Brady (Substitute for Ms C Nolan), Mr J Finch (Substitute for Mr R Mayall), Mr T Mallon (Substitute for Dr G Sturley), Mrs S Roots (Substitute for Mr O Bradshaw), Mr M Reidy and Ms R Ainslie-Malik

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs B Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Mrs C Palmer (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services)

OFFICERS: Sarah Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Christine McInnes (Director of Education & SEND), Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director, Management Information and Intelligence, Integrated Children's Services), Christy Holden (Head of Children's Commissioning), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Steve Lusk (Senior Commissioner), Hayley Bodiam (Service Manager) Nick Abrahams (Area Education Officer), David Adams (Assistant Director Education, South Kent), Susannah Burden (LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

11. Election of Vice-Chair *(Item 1)*

1. Mr Thomas proposed, and Mr Mallon seconded that Mr Burns be elected as Vice-Chair of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee.
2. As there were no further nominations, the Chairman declared Mr Burns as Vice-Chair of the Committee.
3. RESOLVED that Mr Burns be elected Vice-Chair of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee.

12. Apologies and Substitutes *(Item 2)*

Apologies had been received from Dr Roper, Mr Bradshaw who was substituted by Mr Mallon, Mr Mayall who was substituted by Mrs Roots, Dr Sturley who was substituted by Mr Finch and Ms Nolan who was substituted by Mr Brady.

13. Declarations of Interest *(Item 3)*

1. Mr Stepto declared an interest in item 9 of the agenda, that he was a Governor at Nexus School.

14. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2025
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2025 was a correct record.

15. Verbal Updates by Cabinet Members
(Item 5)

1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. Mrs Fordham undertook numerous visits to both mainstream and special educational schools, as well as to services supporting young people experiencing homelessness and in need of assistance.
 - b. On 14th August, Mrs Fordham visited Tunbridge Girls' Grammar School for A- Level results day, where she offered her congratulations to students on their achievements. She also highlighted the availability of resources for those requiring additional support.
 - c. Mrs Fordham attended GCSE results day at St John's Catholic Comprehensive School, expressing her congratulations for the students' academic outcomes and their commendable behaviour and attendance records. She shared her enthusiasm about returning to the school in the future.
 - d. Mrs Fordham visited the Home to School transport system operating in Aylesford, emphasising the importance of its efficiency and effectiveness. She commended staff for their efforts in preparing the Q Roots system for its phased introduction in September 2025 and expressed her intention to return to observe its progress and further implementation.
 - e. In relation to the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programmes, Mrs Fordham visited DDivine in Northfleet, where she praised the work being done and emphasised the significance of such services. Following the Government's announcement of continued funding for three more years, she committed to visiting more providers to explore how KCC could help expand the programme to benefit more children.
 - f. Mrs Fordham visited the Amber Foundation in Ashford, a charity supporting young adults transitioning out of homelessness. She engaged with the young people to hear their stories and gain insight into how the service had positively impacted their lives.
 - g. Mrs Fordham visited CLS at Oakford House to review the provision and funding available for adult education. In light of reductions in Government funding, she noted the shift towards skill-based courses designed to prepare students for employment.
 - h. Mrs Fordham visited Nexus School, the only provision in Tunbridge and Malling for children with highly complex needs. She stressed the importance of ensuring that the needs of children with disabilities were fully considered when planning educational provisions.

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

- a. Due to the timing of the local elections, Mrs Fordham had limited opportunity to visit schools during term time. She prioritised visits to special educational needs schools in light of upcoming decisions. Over the following year, she planned to visit schools that had begun implementing inclusive practices, with the aim of observing best practice and gathering feedback.
 - b. Mrs Fordham emphasised that the cost of home-to-school transport was not the primary concern, rather the individual needs of each child were the key factor in decision-making. Work was ongoing to identify the most efficient ways to meet those needs.
 - c. Officers were asked to provide a Member with details regarding the number of providers offering activity fund and HAF programmes during the summer holiday period.
 - d. Mrs Fordham explained that a home-to-school transport information session had been scheduled to give Members a comprehensive overview of the entire process.
3. Mrs Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. Mrs Palmer met with directors and staff within her portfolio, accompanied by her Deputy Cabinet Member. An Education Grant Scheme of up to two million pounds was successfully secured for Project Athena, which aimed to develop provisions for children with complex mental health needs and challenging behaviour.
 - b. Mrs Palmer wrote to Janet Daby, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, inviting her to visit KCC and witness the dedication of Directors and Officers. In her letter, Mrs Palmer praised the staff's efforts in improving the lives of cared-for children and requested a discussion on the high fees charged by independent fostering agencies.
 - c. Mrs Palmer and her Deputy Cabinet Member attended the Virtual School Kent (VSK) award ceremonies, where she highlighted the vital role played by the Virtual School in supporting children and young people.
 - d. Mrs Palmer visited the KCC Youth Council and commended the council's efforts in generating ideas and working proactively to bring them to fruition.
 - e. In August, Mrs Palmer visited the Young Lives Foundation to observe the work of volunteers supporting young attendees. She particularly praised the organisation's impressive advocacy service.
 - f. During her visit to Fairlawn Short Breaks Unit, Mrs Palmer emphasised the essential nature of the service provided there.
 - g. Mrs Palmer announced the opening of two new reception centres in Kent, Connors House in Canterbury and Aspen Lodge in Deal. She emphasised the importance of delivering high-quality care and support to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), while ensuring full compliance with all relevant legislation.
 - h. The Suicide, Self-Harm and Prevention Strategy 2026–2030 was due to enter its consultation phase. The strategy aimed to significantly reduce the number of suicides in Kent and Medway, with the goal of bringing figures below the national average by 2030, if not sooner.
 - i. Mrs Palmer was scheduled to attend the Big Mental Health Talk Conference in October.

4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Project Athena aimed to secure four residential units for looked-after children in Kent. Each unit was designed to provide two beds for children with the most profound emotional wellbeing challenges. The initiative sought to bring the service in-house, reducing reliance on the private sector. KCC was on track to purchase two units and Mr Kasaven believed the service was progressing well towards having all four units operational by September 2026.
 - b. Project Athena was funded through capital investment secured from the Department for Education (DfE), which was added to the agreed capital allocation for the four residential units. Officers expressed their willingness to provide ongoing feedback and updates on the project to the Committee.
 - c. Mrs Palmer had not yet visited Conners House but intended to visit as many reception centres as possible in the future. She reassured Committee Members that the team remained committed to safeguarding both staff and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

RESOLVED that the verbal updates were noted.

16. 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 some targets were based on the academic year, while others aligned with the financial year. She emphasised the importance of ensuring the service had access to the latest national and statistical neighbour benchmarks to set appropriate and meaningful targets.
 - b. Ms Atkinson explained that recruitment varied across different areas of the county, noting that it was particularly challenging in districts located deeper within Kent.
 - c. The Department for Education (DfE) published annual Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) data each July, based on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) returns from local authorities. This enabled comparisons across school types and geographical areas. The Kent Commissioning Plan (KCP) was reviewed annually and included a specific focus on SEND. While efforts were made to reduce out-of-county placements, some children had complex needs that could not be met within Kent, necessitating external placements. As part of a wider SEND improvement journey, a special school review was undertaken to assess the provision and distribution of special schools. Several internal initiatives were introduced to support individuals entering social work, resulting in the recruitment of over 50 newly qualified social workers during the year. However, it was acknowledged that burnout led many to leave the profession early, both nationally and locally, creating a need for

ongoing recruitment. Challenges were also identified in university programmes and the student pipeline. In response, local programmes were developed and implemented to maintain a steady flow of professionals into children's services.

- d. It was noted that upcoming reforms under the Children's Wellbeing Bill were expected to shift responsibilities not only to qualified social workers but also to alternatively qualified staff. Consequently, key performance indicators (KPIs) would need to be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the broader workforce contribution.
- e. There was a focus on schools working collaboratively at a local level. Through a local agreement, a permanently excluded pupil could be placed in another school and supported to succeed as quickly as possible. Mrs Atkinson confirmed that there were no Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) for primary-aged children.
- f. A Member highlighted the potential impact of the merger between the Universities of Kent and Greenwich.
- g. The timeliness of the Performance Monitoring report was influenced more by submission deadlines for Cabinet Committee reports than by technology. Ms Atkinson explained that if later submission dates were permitted, the service could provide more current data. In response to concerns about the number of primary school exclusions, she suggested that the Head of Service could be asked to provide a more detailed report.
- h. Efforts were made to streamline and improve processes in educational psychology. Measures included reviewing previous reports from independent educational psychologists, shortening report lengths and periodically using local educational psychologists to increase capacity. As part of the 20-week EHCP process, work was undertaken to improve inter-service communication, with a pilot running during the zero to six-week stage to identify potential time savings. Early learning from the pilot was already emerging and the initiative continued to be closely monitored with the aim of further improvement.
- i. Mrs Fordham agreed to request a list of providers whose funding had been cut, with the intention of initiating direct conversations to offer support and foster collaborative relationships aimed at better serving young people in need.
- j. Provisional results for the Early Years Foundation Stage were reviewed. Although results had dropped significantly in the first year following the Covid-19 pandemic, they had gradually improved since. Analysis of the provisional data revealed that children in care faced fewer challenges than other vulnerable groups. A detailed analysis was commissioned from the Corporate Analytics Team to examine learning patterns and identify areas where children were falling behind. This work aimed to inform future strategy, including school support and alignment with the Start for Life initiative focused on family hubs.
- k. Ms Atkinson acknowledged the ongoing challenges in educational outcomes since the Covid-19 pandemic. The Corporate Analytics Team was tasked with conducting a deeper analysis to identify patterns and provide more detailed insights.
- l. Ms Atkinson explained that the average duration for EHCP cases open beyond 20 weeks was below 24–25 weeks. She noted that the

structure of the educational psychology service meant that psychologists undertook more than just EHCP reporting. A calendar of training and drop-in sessions was in place and while not continuous, it did not delay EHCP turnaround times.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

17. Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Education Safeguarding Service (LESAS) Annual Report 2024-25
(Item 10)

1. Mrs Palmer introduced the report and gave an overview into the role of a Local Authority Designated Officer.
2. Ms Burden, LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager, presented a report to the Committee, outlining the significantly transitional year for the service.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Ms Burden was happy to offer safeguarding training to Members.
 - b. It was noted that LESAS had not previously engaged with the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Ms Burden recorded this for the faith lead to follow up. Kirsty Owens had been identified as the lead officer for work with faith groups. The team had joined a national focus group to explore barriers to engagement and collaborated with the organisation Thirtyone:eight to reach smaller faith communities. While strong links existed with larger groups such as the Church of England and the Catholic Church, smaller groups particularly those led by independent pastors, remained more difficult to engage. Ongoing work with partners aimed to raise awareness of services, address challenges and offer support, sometimes in collaboration with police colleagues or other churches.
 - c. The service could be asked by partners within the Local Authority to do particular reviews, also schools select to commission them to do them themselves.
 - d. Ms Burden had written peer auditing reports with Lancashire County Council, as well as Oxfordshire County Council, these would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.
 - e. Ms Burden confirmed that parents who educate their children from home could access the service. Whether the child was educated at home or not was not monitored by the service, Ms Burden explained that this was something that could be monitored in the future.
 - f. The 75% increase in referrals came from a single local authority, considered to be an outlier. The National LADO Network had explored reasons for the upward trend, identifying factors such as high profile cases including the Lucy Letby case, which had raised awareness of LADO's among communities previously unfamiliar with it. It was also noted that with publicity demand would increase which was seen as a positive in many ways.
 - g. In terms of the 'inappropriate conduct' category in the Allegation Types 2024/25 category, Ms Burden explained that it acted as a catch all for a wide range of concerns that could not be categorised elsewhere.

- h. Ms Burden explained that funding was being sought to subsidise courses for early year providers, though this had not yet been secured and no promises could be made. In the meantime, alternative cost effective ways of engaging with providers was being explored, including running network meetings and potentially twilight sessions to avoid impacting nursery ratios
- i. The project being conducted with the Isle of Wight had no relevance to the prison population, alternatively it was related to the service for UASC.
- j. LESAS did not have a blanket view on the use of mobile phones by children in schools. LESAS aimed to support schools to manage the procedures they have in place, Ms Burden noted the difficulty schools would face trying to implement a blanket ban on mobile phone use. Ms Burden recognised the importance of mobile phones in situations such as diabetes blood sugar level monitoring. Additionally, Ms Burden explained that some of the physical interventions mentioned in the report had been due to mobile phones.
- k. It reported that the quality assurance framework for family hubs was being delivered in partnership with the safeguarding unit with the service contributing. Visit to each district family hub was scheduled to be completed by July 2026 and no issues were anticipated in meeting this target.
- l. For UASC homes and supported lodging units, the IRO team was leading practise inquiries and collaboration visits with the service participation in line with the timeline set by the IRO service. There was a program in place to oversee these homes, aligned with their Ofsted regulation, ensuring good quality of care and awareness of circumstances prior to inspections. For homes with heightened concerns, safety plans were implemented to address potential protests, alongside daily safety measures.
- m. A Member asked that within the next LESAS Report presented to the Committee, an update on the KPI's and the outcomes of the action plan that would show that results were moving in the right direction.
- n. The service had changed its data collection method since developing LESAS, as there were some overlap between external safeguarding issues and inappropriate conduct. It was clarified that situations were classified as external safeguarding if they did not occur within the workplace, such as in a nursery or school.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and its findings.

18. Private Fostering Annual Report 2024-25
(Item 11)

- 1. Mrs Palmer introduced the report and gave an overview of the purpose of the Private Fostering Annual Report.
- 2. Ms Bodiam, Service Manager, provided the Committee with an overview of the report, highlighting its findings and how the service was working to improve.
- 3. In response to comments and questions it was said:

- a. There was support in place under the Child in Need Framework for 'Child Five' as referred to in the report.
- b. Ms Hammond explained that private fostering regulations were significantly tightened after the death of Victoria Climbié. It was important to remember that some parents did not want their family arrangements to be investigated by Local Authorities. The service was reliant on families being honest about their arrangements and colleagues in schools and health referring any changes in care to the Local Authority.
- c. Ms Bodiam assured Members that areas that required improvement went back to management and officers to investigate and rectify. There were no comparisons to other local authorities available, but it was something that the team would look into. Mr Kasaven added that the inspection of the service observed a good improvement from the previous inspection in 2017. Only twenty percent of authorities received outstanding rating, this showed that nationally there was a challenge around various aspects of practice.
- d. Ms Crisan explained that it was not a criminal offence to not declare a private fostering arrangement.
- e. Ms Bodiam explained that the domestic abuse incident related to 'Child Five' was not linked to a lack of DBS.
- f. Ms Bodiam explained that 'Child Two' was not in fostering arrangement, instead they had remained in family arrangement.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and its recommendations for 2025-2026.

19. 25/00073 Release of capital for the second phase of works to increase the Designated Number at Nexus Foundation Special School
(Item 7)

1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, introduced the item and reasoning behind the decision.
2. Mr Abrahams, Area Education Officer, introduced the report and explained the level of needs at the school and explaining that this was linked to a previous Key Decision taken, the implementation of the decision would allow for extra teaching areas and other rooms to support students. Additionally, Mr Abrahams highlighted that the funding came from dedicated DfE grants.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. When asked about the increase costs from those that were projected, Mr Abrahams explained that Officers were disappointed to see such a dramatic increase. In response to this, the service had integrated a second step into the process of contractor's providing costs. Quantity surveyors were to go through contracts to ensure the costs estimated were appropriate.
 - b. When asked about the cost of the original contractor, Mr Abrahams explained that the estimates were pre-construction estimates. Additionally, the contractors would have been paid by revenue funding as part of the design of the project and he would come back to the Committee with the exact figure.

- c. A Member thanked Mrs Fordham for her complimentary comments about Nexus School and encouraged Members to visit the school and see the work that was done.
- d. Mr Abrahams explained that this decision would avoid the need for future children to travel further. The majority of children that would be placed at Nexus School would have otherwise been put into the independent sector, which would have resulted in higher costs and further distances to travel.
- e. When asked if there was a delivery programme in place, Mr Abrahams explained that contractually KCC could not spend money until decision had been formally taken. There was a programme that would have pre-groundwork starting in November 2025, with construction starting at the beginning of 2026 and the target was the building would be completed for the September 2026 cohort.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

20. 25/00071 Funding of Services to Schools 2026-27
(Item 8)

- 1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, introduced the item, explaining the reasoning behind the decision.
- 2. Mr Adams, Assistant Director Education (South Kent), introduced the report, highlighting the potential saving to the Council of circa £2.6 million. The purpose of the decision was to ensure that there was parity between the funding that went to the academy and maintained school sectors.
- 3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. In terms of listening to feedback from schools and the potential risk of increased costs if issues arose, Mr Adams explained that top-slicing was not a decision that KCC could make as they needed the support of the Schools Funding Forum or the decision of the Secretary of State. The service thought the safest, lowest risk option was for KCC to continue to provide the service in the way that they had previously. Mr Adams acknowledged that if the questions within the survey had been altered slightly, there may have been more clarity with the responses. The decision would be debated through Schools Funding Forum and Mr Adams was to relay the feedback made by the Committee to the Forum.
 - b. Mr Adams explained that the Government had changed some grant funding that KCC had received, for example if a grant had ceased then equivalent funding would have gone into school budgets. Kent had been slow in telling schools to pay for services with their funding and consequently they had continued to fund services out of the general fund. Mr Adams highlighted that in some cases this would have been a conscious choice and historically, Kent's maintained schools were amongst some of the lowest funded in the country. As the funding was now with schools, Members would have to make policy choices as to whether KCC continued to fund these services out of the general fund or whether schools should fund services out of their own budgets and what mechanisms would be used to do that. Mr Adams recognised the importance of the challenge to keep a balance

between risk to the Council, the cost to schools and the autonomy for people to make their own decisions.

- c. The grant funding previously received by the Local Authority would have detailed its purpose of use. When the equivalent funding went into school's budgets, the expectation was that either schools purchase those themselves or buy them from the Local Authority.
 - d. Mr Adams had spoken to colleagues in Infrastructure to investigate how to have conversations with the Forum about meetings of a school's group to have a look at matters such as the FM Contract. The service were aware they needed to be better at engaging with schools around what they were buying on their behalf and how to assure quality. There was a focus on how to work collectively for all schools.
 - e. The survey response rate was lower than anticipated, which prompted efforts to encourage greater participation. Whilst proposals had already been shared and it was acknowledged that schools were under significant time pressures, the service was to continue working with the Forum to explore further ways to improve engagement.
 - f. In terms of discharging liability, the Local Authority had different responsibilities for different maintained schools. Mr Adams explained that trying to unpick liability can become confusing as health and safety legislation does not allow duties to be delegated, only responsibilities. The service was to investigate with the School's Forum to see how this was to look in a year or so time.
4. In accordance with paragraph 16.31 of the Constitution, Mr Brady wished for it to be recorded in the minutes that he voted against endorsing the proposed decision 25/00071 - Funding of Services to Schools 2026-27.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

21. 25/00069 Commissioning of Short Break Day Activities 2026 to 2028
(Item 9)

1. Mrs Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, introduced the item, explained that these short breaks were a vital service for families who look after profoundly disabled children.
2. Ms Holden, Head of Children's Commissioning, gave an overview of commissioning and introduced the report.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mr Lusk, Senior Commissioner, explained that providers were required to record their information on Core Plus, the Council's early help system. This gave the service an increased amount of visibility on the number of children, their needs type and the outcomes of each session. The service looked into annual reviews of the grant project, to ensure feedback was provided by parents and carers. The service had received positive feedback detailing how important the breaks were for parents and careers and how their children had developed and grown due to the activities. The service was achieving value for money in those grants, however it was highlighted that the budget had not changed in numerous years. The service was continuing to seek

best value of money through the voluntary community sector. In terms of next steps there had only been one full year of data, but this had been encouraging. Ms Holden added that an outcomes framework had been developed with colleagues within SEN, which was led by children and the outcomes that they wanted to see.

- b. When asked if there was capacity within the voluntary sector to manage demand, Ms Holden assured the Committee of sufficient capacity and emphasised that this was a vital part of the commissioning landscape.
- c. Ms Holden explained that the use of the term 'disabled children' had only recently been changed from 'children with disabilities', but she was happy to pass back feedback to the service.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

22. Work Programme
(Item 12)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.