

## **KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**

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### **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, 18th November, 2025.

**PRESENT:** Mr B Fryer (Chairman), Mr D Burns (Vice-Chair), Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr A Kibble, Mr T Mallon, Mr T Mole, Ms C Nolan, Ms C Russell, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto and Mrs P Williams

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mrs B Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Mrs C Palmer (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and Mr R G Streatfield, MBE

**OFFICERS:** Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director, Management Information and Intelligence, Integrated Children's Services), Pascale Blackburn-Clarke (Delivery Manager - Engagement & Consultation), Robin Cahill (Senior Commissioner), David Adams (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills), Ian Watts (Area Education Officer), Craig Chapman (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Jennifer Maiden-Brooks (System Improvement Manager), Nicholas Abrahams (Area Education Officer), Christine McInnes (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Samantha Sheppard (Senior Commissioner), Matt Wallace-Wells (Deputy Head of Service), Marissa White (Area Education Officer) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

#### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

**23. Apologies and Substitutes**  
*(Item 2)*

Apologies had been received from Mr Mayall and Dr Sturley.

**24. Declarations of Interest**  
*(Item 3)*

1. Mr Shonk declared that his daughter worked for the NHS.

**25. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025**  
*(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025 were a correct record.

**26. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members**  
*(Item 5)*

1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, gave a verbal update on the following:
  - a. When visiting the Turner School Trust in Folkestone, Mrs Fordham observed their inclusive environment for all students.
  - b. Alongside KCC officers, Mrs Fordham attended East Kent College on the Isle of Sheppey to support parents with the admissions process.
  - c. Mrs Fordham explored the new Snowfields Academy satellite SEND school on the Isle of Sheppey, noting it was an excellent facility.
  - d. Mrs Fordham spent time at Leigh Academy Milestone in New Ash Green to review the facilities and meet students.
  - e. Mrs Fordham attended in the New Head Teachers Event, which welcomed new head teachers in Kent and introduced the updated Ofsted framework.
  - f. Mrs Fordham visited the Pyramid Project on the Isle of Sheppey, an organisation which supported young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and alternative provision for Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) pupils.
  - g. Mrs Fordham visited the Vibe Community Youth Club in Sheerness, which helps keep children in school and offers out-of-school activities.
  - h. Mrs Fordham visited several primary schools, including Wentworth Primary in Dartford, Longfield Primary and Shipbourne Primary in Tonbridge.
  - i. Mrs Fordham visited the provision at the Oaks Specialist College, The Point (16+ provision) and Parkwood Hall Co-operative Academy.
2. Mrs Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
  - a. On 20<sup>th</sup> September, Mrs Palmer visited the Kent Youth Voice event, she was impressed by the young people's motivation and creativity.
  - b. Mrs Palmer attended the under 16's award ceremony at Kingsville activity centre with the Chairman of Kent County Council. Mrs Palmer shared that it was an emotional experience to hear about the positive impact of foster carers and their role in supporting young people.
  - c. Mrs Palmer visited St Peters house in Broadstairs to meet with social workers, she discussed the challenges around the shortage and retention of social workers.
  - d. Mrs Palmer attended the film launch for 'Run' this was a collaborative project with 90 other councils, aimed at recruiting foster families.
  - e. Mrs Palmer attended the Big Mental Health Conversation at Detling Showground which was hosted by Kent Youth Voice, the event showcased support services available to children and young carers.
  - f. Mrs Palmer praised a family hub she had visited in Swanscombe, noting the excellent youth provision.
  - g. KCC had its Ofsted inspection in October, the draft response had not been received at the time of the committee meeting. Mrs Palmer expressed her gratitude to all staff for their hard work and commitment in preparing for and participating in the Ofsted inspection.
  - h. Mrs Palmer attended the Foster Kinship Care and Supported Homes Host Awards in Maidstone. It was an emotional ceremony recognising

exceptional foster families and the support provided to young people. Mrs Palmer thanked all of the teams that worked within foster caring.

3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. KCC had its Ofsted inspection in October and was awaiting the report.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates were noted.

## **27. 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 explained that, in managing referrals, Early Help Units had assessed some cases for early help, while others received information, advice or guidance. In certain situations, support within family hubs was considered more appropriate. As the service began planning for the Families First Partnership Programme, they reviewed how referrals were managed and which elements of the family help system families accessed.
  - b. It was explained that requests for SEND statutory assessments followed seasonal patterns, with peaks and troughs throughout the year. December and March typically saw the highest demand.
  - c. When asked about the percentage of pupils at Key Stage 2 achieving age-related expectations, Ms Atkinson clarified that the data was drawn from SATs results, specifically those students meeting the 'expected' standard across reading, writing and maths.
  - d. Ms Atkinson outlined Kent's approach to managing school suspensions and permanent exclusions. She described how Exclusion Intervention Officers ensured all possible interventions were exhausted before any exclusion occurred, in line with DfE guidance. These officers were linked to the wider inclusive education strategy, delivering leadership programmes, core training and support for governing bodies and academic trustees. She also highlighted that, although exclusions had risen nationally since the COVID-19 pandemic, Kent's rates remained comparatively low.
  - e. Mr Chapman, Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion, reported on a successful six-week pilot run in August with the North Kent Assessment Team. The pilot handled 96% of cases and reduced task completion time by 52% through the use of existing technology and collaboration across six departments. He suggested that the next step was to extend the six-week process to the remaining assessment teams and eventually implement the full 20-week process, ensuring a consistent approach across Kent. The overall aim was to strengthen communication, increase data availability and improve system efficiency.

- f. A Member requested that the next area of focus be one where performance was poorest.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

**28. 25/00086 Parkwood Hall Expansion**  
*(Item 7)*

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision, explaining that she had visited the site, which was a large building situated on extensive grounds with numerous outbuildings including a small church and a former morgue, this provided substantial space for development. The proposal focused on exploring the feasibility and planning options for an expansion.
2. Mr Watts, Area Education Officer, outlined the proposal for KCC to support expanding Parkwood Hall School from 120 to 192 places, alongside extending the age range to admit pupils from reception through post-16. Mr Watts explained that although the school previously fell under the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, that authority no longer placed pupils there. It was highlighted that Kent remained the primary commissioner and the school aligned closely with KCC's strategic aims. Mr Watts confirmed that the legal and financial arrangements would ensure appropriate use of capital funds and secure KCC first refusal on any new places created through this investment.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Mr Watts reported continued high demand for SEND places in North Kent, particularly in Dartford, Sevenoaks and Gravesham, despite expansions in mainstream and specialist resource provision. Progress on the new special school in Swanley had been very slow, although approved in July 2023, the academy trust was not appointed until May 2024 and lengthy negotiations had taken place to avoid additional liabilities for KCC. While terms were now agreed, the project was paused with other free school schemes pending ministerial decisions expected in spring 2026. KCC continued to lobby the Department of Education (DfE) and had cleared the former Birchwood Primary School site to ensure readiness.
  - b. Mr Watts explained that special schools could be commissioned by other authorities, which was common in North Kent near the London boundary. Annual commissioning meetings set available places, Kent would have the opportunity to act quickly to take those places. It was explained that a legal agreement linked to Kent's capital investment would ensure that funding was used solely to develop additional places and would protect Kent's access to those places. Mr Watts confirmed that the school had been cooperative and commissioning arrangements were already strong.
  - c. Mr Adams, Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills, highlighted that Kent routinely commissioned SEND provision from organisations it did not control. Mr Watts explained that high needs or capital investment in independent providers, including FE colleges, could still result in places being taken

by other authorities. Academies could also offer places to any authority through the EHCP process, creating uncertainty for councils funding provision.

- d. Mrs Fordham reported that the Minister for Education had recently met the MP for Dartford to discuss SEND proposals. She had not been invited and could not confirm whether Parkwood Hall was discussed. Mr Watts added that KCC officers had not been given prior notice of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**29. 25/00087 Broomhill Bank North Expansion**

*(Item 8)*

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision, explaining that its purpose was to increase the designated number from 318 to 490 places and the creation of two lodges for social enterprise and skills for employment on the Tunbridge Wells site to increase the 16 plus provision.
2. Mr Watts added that the main expansion work was planned for the north site in Hextable with minor works at the West site in Tunbridge Wells. The proposal aimed to provide value for money in both revenue and capital and to help meet the growing demand for special needs places in North Kent.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**30. Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership Annual Report**

*(Item 9)*

1. Ms Maiden-Brooks, System Improvement Manager, introduced the report and gave an overview of the purpose of the report and its content.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Concerning the campaign to raise awareness that children should not be viewed as protective factors for a parent/carer's mental health, it was said that there was a risk that potential impacts on children's wellbeing could be overlooked. The 'I'm Lucy' video was highlighted as an important educational resource to raise awareness and support understanding of these issues
  - b. Ms Maiden-Brooks explained that the budget was a consideration within the report, but was not necessarily the focus. Further discussions were to take place to ensure the service was as efficient as possible and was taking every measure to ensure the right financial decisions were being made on the collaborative multi-agency basis.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

**31. 25/00065 Independent and Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) Procurement**

*(Item 10)*

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision explaining that the purpose was to develop and introduce a new framework, to allow for strategic alignment across the sector.
2. Ms Holden, Assistant Director for CYPE Commissioning, explained that the existing framework had been the first step in developing a strategic relationship with the sector. The recommendation presented was to propose a new contract to further develop this relationship. The proposal outlined a 4 year contract with an option for a further four year extensions, designed to remain flexible for local government reorganisation. Additionally, ongoing activity within the SEN transformation was expected to reduce future reliance on the sector.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Children and young people were placed in independent sector schools for various reasons, often at parental request, sometimes following tribunals. Some moved from mainstream schools at parents' insistence, while others were placed independently due to a lack of suitable local provision. Due to the significant cost, a rigorous decision making process was applied. There had been a notable rise in parental requests for independent placements for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), who previously would have attended mainstream settings. In response, the Local Authority reviewed its Sufficiency Plan and worked to expand Specialist Resource Provision (SRP). Data showed a spike in independent placements at Year 7, linked to low parental confidence in mainstream support. Plans were made to increase SRP places in secondary schools to reduce both the need for and the number of parental requests for independent placements.
  - b. Officers reported that the commissioning and SEND sufficiency plans projected a reduction in independent placements from 1,172 in 2025 to just over 900 by the end of the forecast, based on increased mainstream and SRP capacity. SRP panel data showed 1,370 cases considered and around 450 identified as requiring SRP places, against only 1,500 existing SRP places. Demand continued to be higher than supply, pushing children into independent settings. Expanding SRP capacity was essential to reverse this trend and strengthen confidence in meeting needs within mainstream provision.
  - c. Mr Adams emphasised that independent special schools continued to be appropriate for some young people due to specific needs or proximity and therefore the sector remained important. However, current high usage reflected insufficient local capacity. Increasing local provision would provide effective support closer to home, enabling children to thrive and improving parental confidence.
  - d. It was explained that the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) mirrored the new approach, with two quality-based lots. Kent placed pupils in more than 110 independent schools of varied size and quality and commissioning needed to reflect that diversity. The aim was to establish block contracts with higher-quality schools to secure

standards and value, while also including lower-rated schools to maintain relationships, support improvement and engage where pupils were already placed. This approach aligned with current placement patterns and supported better partnership working.

- e. When asked about the proportion of placements expected in Lot 1, Ms Sheppard advised that the team could provide the breakdown separately, as distribution would depend on school applications. There was positive engagement with schools previously outside the DPS and optimism that more high-quality providers would join.
- f. Members suggested annual committee review of the framework to monitor costs. Ms Holden confirmed that the full contract register was presented to the Committee each year, where officers would be available to answer questions.
- g. Ms Sheppard, Senior Commissioner, confirmed that the contract included strong negotiation terms to manage performance and fees. Schools had to apply annually for fee increases and justify costs above a threshold. The team routinely negotiated reductions and for 2025/26 had reduced requested increases from 42 placements, which amounted to around £1 million.
- h. In response to questions on improving placement timelines, Ms Gleave, Assistant Director SEN Statutory Services, explained that increasing the number of suitable independent providers reduced delays. When state-funded schools could not accept a pupil, officers consulted DPS schools first, it was explained that some cases required approaches to many schools, each with a 15-day response window. Faster responses from trusted schools significantly reduced waiting times and supported smoother transitions.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**32. 25/00056 KCC Community Learning and Skills (CLS) Adult Education Funding Reform - Apprenticeship Programme**  
(Item 11)

- 1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision, explaining that the apprenticeship programme within Community Learning and Skills (CLS) was making a loss, KCC were unable to further use any general fund to maintain the programme, as there was no guarantee that its financial position would change in the future.
- 2. Mr Wallace-Wells, Deputy Head of Service, explained that the service was making a significant financial loss due to low numbers of engagement. Two restructures had been undertaken within the past five years, seeking to create conditions for this provision to break even financially. These were unsuccessful and the service was making monthly losses, which averaged at £15,000 a month. The proposal was close the programme, whilst supporting the pre-existing learners to finish their apprenticeships.
- 3. In response to comments and questions it was said:

- a. When asked if officers had looked at models of good practice globally, Mr Wallace-Wells explained that the organisation's apprenticeship provision had previously been much larger, with over 150 learners compared to the current 36. At that time, the provision fell below Ofsted's minimum delivery standards, prompting required changes. An external consultant with national experience was appointed and improvements were incorporated into the 2021 restructure. A further restructure took place in 2023 due to ongoing financial misalignment. Despite these actions, engagement levels remained too low to justify the ongoing costs. Mr Wallace-Wells said that other providers in Kent offered the same opportunities and had access to the same funding as KCC.
  - b. Mrs Fordham explained that due to the economic climate and the lack of an apprenticeship strategy, there was no additional funding available. Even if KCC had the trainers to compete with the private providers there were barriers to small employers being able to access or engage due to increasing costs. It was highlighted that the current delivery model was not effective, but officers intended to explore new approaches to building apprenticeship pathways and supporting employers in the future.
  - c. A Member highlighted that the decision to close the apprenticeship programme was unfortunate but necessary as the scheme was flawed.
  - d. When asked if any lessons had been learnt from this, Ms McInnes explained that there were lessons learnt, KCC was committed to providing the high quality provisions.
  - e. When asked if the service had looked to refocus and reduce the scale of the programme, Mr Wallace-Wells explained that qualifications for careers such as teaching assistants had previously been delivered internally but were currently commissioned externally by KCC through approved providers, identified via procurement.
4. In accordance with paragraph 16.31 of the Constitution, Ms Nolan wished for it to be recorded in the minutes that she voted against endorsing the proposed decision 25/00056 KCC Community Learning and Skills (CLS) Adult Education Funding Reform - Apprenticeship Programme.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**33. 25/00099 Kent Commissioning Plan**  
(Item 12)

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision, explaining that it was a rolling plan that would be reviewed annually.
2. Mr Abrahams, Area Education Officer, provided an overview of the report, explaining that the plan aimed to forecast school place demand across the county and outline commissioning for both mainstream and SEND provision. Mr Abrahams said that the birth rate had fallen from over 18,000 in 2012 to 15,000 in 2024, affecting future demand. Overall, Kent was expected to have sufficient primary places, though some rural areas with housing growth may



need additional provision. However, several areas continued to face pressure for secondary places due to larger cohorts and migration, indicating additional secondary capacity would likely be required.

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

- a. Mr Abrahams explained that Cranbrook and High Weald posed challenges as KCC, was responsible for securing school places but was not the sole decision-maker. The closure of a local academy by the DfE had increased travel distances for families, which illustrated the difficulty of holding responsibilities without full authority. The Cabinet Member was arranging a meeting with local stakeholders to discuss how the council could facilitate support while advocating for the community.
- b. Mr Adams explained that forecasts relied on policy assumptions from the safety valve negotiations. Kent remained an outlier, with 6.2% of pupils holding EHCPs versus 5.6% nationally. Additionally, 36% of these pupils in mainstream schools, compared to 44% nationally and 39% in special schools, compared to 30% nationally. Pressure on special schools drove more pupils into the independent sector, which came at a significant cost. Mr Adams emphasised the need for clear policy direction and planning to secure appropriate placements efficiently, noting that unmitigated forecasts based on historic trends could be misleading.
- c. Ms McInnes highlighted the long-standing ambition to bring Kent in line with the national EHCP average. Kent's rate rose from below average in 2016 to among the highest nationally by 2022, reflecting decision making and other factors rather than a sudden increase in needs. Safety valve financial targets were not fully met because priority was given to children and families, including costly non-statutory services, which increased financial pressure.
- d. Ms McInnes added that regular safety valve reports were submitted to the DfE and published on the council's website. In addition it was explained that, health services did not contribute to the work that was covered within the KCC Commissioning Plan.
- e. Mr Adams explained that full costs only included housing with planning consent, following government criteria. The inclusion of housing allocations had previously reduced forecast accuracy, so the service no longer did this. Officers worked with boroughs to align local plans with long-term needs and the plan was updated annually to reflect realistic short to medium term provision needs, generally covering ten years.
- f. Localised issues were not included in the Commissioning Plan but were addressed through officers' regular work.
- g. Ms Gleave explained that officers worked with all KCC special schools on funding, visited schools regularly and that councillors could also arrange visits.
- h. It was highlighted that the gap between Kent and the national average for EHCPs was narrowing.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**34. 25/00085 Specialist Resourced Provisions**  
*(Item 13)*

1. Mr Adams introduced the decision paper, summarising the outcomes of the Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) review. The review assessed delivery models and identified areas where policy needed reinforcement. It highlighted the importance of incorporating SRPs into new schools and explained that the existing model did not fully meet demand, prompting consideration of alternative approaches. The priority was to increase capacity and improve local access, particularly by expanding secondary provision by September 2026. A budget of £20 million was allocated and Area Education Directors (AEDs) worked with schools to identify needs and ensure a cost-effective approach.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Ms White, Area Education Officer, explained that secondary schools were required to meet criteria on careers guidance, aligned with the Government's Skills Paper which had recommended strengthened Gatsby Benchmarks. Collaboration between SEN staff and careers leads had been a key element of central policy to support young people transitioning from education to work and to engage local businesses for apprenticeships and work experience.
  - b. Mr Adams explained that the proposal would help the high needs budget by reducing reliance on costly independent placements. SRP placements ranged from approximately £14,000–£17,000 per place, compared with an average of £55,000 in the independent sector.
  - c. Mr Adams explained that the £20 million capital grant for SRP expansions was managed through internal mechanisms such as the four AEDs. Each proposal included cost estimates and underwent review by the Education Asset Board, comprising property, finance, and education representatives. Indicative funding allocations were made to ensure high-quality provision was delivered cost-effectively.
  - d. Mr Adams added that the SRP sector served young people with EHCPs. Permanently excluded pupils were supported through an internal education programme before reintegration into mainstream schools. The SEND Sufficiency Plan addressed alternative provision, with particular pressure in health-related needs for young people unable to access mainstream schools due to mental health or school anxiety. Increasing capacity while fostering supportive school environments was emphasised as essential.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**35. 25/00097 External Tuition**  
*(Item 14)*

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision, explaining that the provision was for young people who were educated at home.

2. Ms Holden explained that while the service had the necessary governance in place to extend the contract, there was no governance covering the significant level of expenditure incurred since the contract began, which exceeded initial projections.
3. The contract began in September 2023, with costs rising due to providers significantly increasing prices at tender. The service implemented transformation initiatives to help officers balance quality and cost. The original £15 million allocation was intended to cover the initial three-year term but will be fully spent by its end, requiring additional funding for the proposed extension. The decision to extend was based on the view that re-procuring now would likely attract the same providers at similar rates, while the service needed them focused on transformation rather than preparing new bids.
4. There was a potential minor technical issue identified, regarding whether the amount originally advertised for the contract could affect the extension. The service was reviewing this, but considers the risk to be low, as no providers were excluded from tendering for the remaining term or the extension.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**36. 25/00092 School and Early Years Funding Arrangements for 2026-27**  
(Item 15)

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision.
2. Ms Stone, Finance Business Partner, explained that the paper set out the background of the KCC's responsibility for the budget for Primary and Secondary schools as well as Early Years and the setting of the Early Years rates for the free entitlement for 2026/27. Ms Stone highlighted that the school budget and the funding for early years payments came from a specific central government grant. The service was waiting for the funding announcements from the DfE. Once received, the final budget was to be presented to the Cabinet Member following any necessary consultations.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked about the decision from Schools Funding Forum on the 25/00071 Funding of Services to Schools 2026-27 decision. It was explained that, regarding the 2025/26 transfer, the Forum's decision was almost unanimous in supporting the proposal. The schools' consultation also indicated strong overall support for the transfer. Both pieces of evidence informed the final decision and the recommendation submitted to the Secretary of State, who reviewed this information before granting approval.
  - b. When asked about the effect of the approval from the Secretary of State to approve both the 1.2% transfer from the primary & secondary schools budgets to the High Needs block. To help to fund SEN Support services in mainstream schools and the reduction of minimum per pupil funding levels. Ms Stone explained that the Government set a statutory

level that all primary and secondary schools must be funded. By KCC reducing that, it reduced the amount of money that would be going directly in to schools. That money was then transferred into the high needs funding block, which would then be used for services which would go directly back into schools for special educational needs. It was explained that the Council had to gain formal agreement for that each year.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**37. 25/00100 In-House Provision of Children's Residential Homes - Match Funding**  
*(Item 16)*

1. Mrs Palmer introduced the decision.
2. Mr Kasaven, Director for Children's Countywide Services, explained that this was a good news story, as KCC qualified for match funding from the DfE. It was explained that there were grant conditions which meant the service had to make changes to the properties in line with the agreement, so the size of the portfolio had to increase. There was a budget of £6 million for the project, which incorporated some contingency planning. Kent was one of the few authorities to be selected, the service acquired £2.6 million of match funding from the DfE. Additionally, Mr Kasaven shared that the service had acquired two properties, there was a third property subject to offer.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked if the number of children KCC was anticipating placing had increased. Mr Kasaven explained that whilst the number of children had not increased, the complexity of the project and the cost had increased by almost 30%. This meant that the cost saving was even greater than previously thought.
  - b. When asked about the locations of the properties, Mr Kasaven explained that the two acquired properties with planning permission were located in Ashford and Sittingbourne.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

**38. 25/00093 KCC Sufficiency Strategy**  
*(Item 17)*

1. Mrs Palmer introduced the decision explaining that it was a statutory requirement, which detailed how the service planned to address challenge of finding safe and suitable placements for children in care, on the edge of care and care leavers. Mrs Palmer recognised the challenge in achieving this in Kent, as other local authorities placed children within the county. The decision was endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Panel on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2025.
2. Ms Holden gave an overview of the content of the report, explaining that the current strategy in place lasted until 2027. There was a need to revamp the strategy following the high court judgement on Unaccompanied Asylum

Seeking Children (UASC) in 2023. There was a focus on prevention, work done with the Families First Partnership and how the authorities in-house homes were being utilised.

3. Ms McInnes highlighted that the current number of foster carers was insufficient and emphasised the need for recruitment.
4. Mrs Palmer shared that there was a template for Members to put on the bottom of their email signatures, which promotes the fostering service, which would be circulated in due course.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

### **39. Complaints and Representations Report** *(Item 18)*

1. Ms Blackburn-Clarke, Customer Experience and Relationship Manager, introduced the report and provided the Committee with an overview of its purpose.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. A Member asked for further clarity around the 123% increase in complaints received about the direction of travel of the Children's Act. Additionally, the Member explained that they had sent in a Member enquiry and it had taken two months to receive a response, asking what is being done to improve the timescales.
    - i. In response to the first question, Ms Blackburn-Clarke explained that the number of complaints had risen significantly, largely due to increased attention from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) on these types of cases. To ensure people receive the appropriate service, the team has adopted a more cautious approach. Where it was believed a complaint would be treated by the LGSCO as a Children's Act matter, it was processed through that route. There has also been a noticeable increase in individuals being eligible to pursue this option, contributing to the overall rise in complaints. Additionally, the complaints team was handling a greater number of complex cases, which was reflected in the figures.
    - ii. Mr Chapman apologised for the delay in response to the Member enquiry, explaining that the service often received an considerable number of complaints. There were multiple efforts undertaken to improve timescales of communication, such as the pilot scheme which automated answers to straightforward queries. Mr Chapman explained that this was a work in progress and was part of an active work plan to improve communication timescales.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

**40. Work Programme**  
*(Item 19)*

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.