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, 15th September, 2026.

PRESENT: Mr T Mole (Chairman), Mr J Baker, Mrs. T Dean, MBE, Mr A Kibble, Mr R Mayall, Ms. C Russell, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto, Mrs. B Porter, Mr P Thomas, Miss D Morton and Mr A Brady (Substitute)

OTHER MEMBERS: Mrs B Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Mrs P Williams (Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and Mr B Collins (Deputy Leader of the Council)

OFFICERS: Christine McInnes (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education), Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure), David Adams (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills), Robert Veale (Assistant Director of Education-East Kent), 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), Joanne Taylor (Head of Capital) and Stuart Pryor (Programme Manager), and James Willis (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

89. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies had been received from Mrs Nolan for whom Mr Brady was present as substitute. Mr Mallon sent apologies. Webb (Cabinet Member for Integrated Services) was deputised by Mrs Williams (Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services)

The Committee membership was updated with Miss Morton having now joined the Committee.

90. Declarations of Interest
(Item 3)

No declaration of interests was received

91. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2026
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2026 were a correct record.

92. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members
(Item 5)

Mrs Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Mrs Williams (Deputy Cabinet member for integrated Children's Services) were present for the item:

1.Mrs Fordham and Mrs Williams updated the Committee with the following:

a) Outlined visits undertaken during the summer period to a range of educational settings, including specialist schools and a number of newly established Special Resource Provisions (SRPs) within mainstream schools.

b) Highlighted the development of provision at Turner School (Folkestone) due to open in September, Richmond School (Sheerness) Avery provision and The Downs School (Walmer) and emphasised the value of ensuring that children and young people were able to access specialist support within mainstream settings where appropriate. Members were advised that further visits would be undertaken as the provisions became fully operational and that Members would be invited to attend future visits.

c) Referred to GCSE and A-Level results activity across the county and highlighted visits undertaken to schools during results periods. The Cabinet Member advised that the visits had provided an opportunity to engage directly with young people as they considered progression into further education, apprenticeships and employment. The Cabinet Member highlighted the St George in Gravesend and the Leigh Academy in Ebbsfleet as notable GCSE performers.

d) Discussed visits to post-16 and vocational providers, including specialist provision for young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), where a strong emphasis had been placed on practical skills development and employer engagement. The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of strengthening links between employers and educational settings in order to improve outcomes for young people and support future workforce needs.

e) Members were informed of the significant work undertaken by admissions, fair access and inclusion teams during the summer period to prepare for the commencement of the academic year. The Cabinet Member also referred to attendance at careers engagement events (Future in Works) and highlighted the importance of exposing young people to a broad range of future employment opportunities and career pathways.

f) Councillor Baker updated on his visit to the Kent and Medway Communication and Assistive Technology (KM CAT) team and the important work undertake. The Member suggested that all Members look to attend in the future so the can see first hand the important work that the team completes.

g) Mrs Williams presented a verbal update on behalf of Mr Webb, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services. Members were advised of visits undertaken to a range of children's services settings, including reception centres for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, residential homes and family hubs. The update also highlighted attendance at events celebrating

the achievements of children in care and care leavers and summer activities organised for foster carers and young carers.

h) Members were informed of the opening of family hub facilities in Sittingbourne and Queenborough after a major refurbishment, the attending of the Kent Carers Activities even in August and the visiting of a newly opened children's home in Ashford, which formed part of the Council's continued investment in support services for children and young people.

2.In response to Members questions the following aspects were discussed:

a) In response to Members questions, the Cabinet Member confirmed that representatives from the two newly merged universities (Previously Kent and Greenwich) had contacted the authority regarding work on reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and advised that discussions would be taking place to explore potential opportunities for collaborative working.

b) Officers advised that NEET data was recorded through a nationally prescribed process and measured participation rather than attendance. Members were informed that young people enrolled within further education provision would generally be recorded as participating irrespective of attendance levels and that attendance information was not routinely collected by local authorities for post-16 learners. Officers noted that there was no equivalent statutory attendance requirement beyond compulsory school age.

c) In response to concerns regarding post-16 SEND transport still outstanding for a number of students, officers advised that whilst transport policy arrangements had seen a significant change, eligibility threshold had remained unchanged. Officers confirmed that all applications received by the published deadline had been processed.

d) Officers explained that transport arrangements were finalised as close as possible to the start of the academic year in order to maximise route efficiency and minimise costs. It was agreed that information regarding notification timescales would be provided outside the meeting.

e) Highlighted recent national reporting relating to autism and ADHD diagnosis, Officers advised that EHCP decisions were based upon assessments of individual need rather than diagnosis alone. It was highlighted that the Council's statutory responsibilities were discharged through consideration of a wide range of evidence and that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis.

f) The Cabinet Member reminded Members that a report concerning Post 16 SEND transport and appeals was scheduled to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

g) Following discussion regarding specialist education providers such as Salt college, the Cabinet Member agreed that officers would look to assist Members of the committee with signposting providers to available grant and funding opportunities where appropriate.

h) Questions regarding isolation practices within schools were raised, officers advised that the local authority did not collect data relating to pupil isolation and that behaviour management policies were matters for individual schools. Members noted that Sandwich Technology School continued to implement changes associated with school improvement activity and emphasised the importance of establishing clear expectations and consistent behaviour policies. The school had been placed in special measures and had seen key staff leave. The Chair acknowledged the concerns but suggested that if Members had continued concerns that they reach out to the school directly to discuss.

i) Officers further advised that schools were expected to maintain robust behaviour management systems supported by a range of interventions, including pastoral support, family engagement, detention processes, isolation and even exclusion. Members were advised that consistency and proportionality remained key principles underlying those approaches.

j) Responding to questions regarding attendance, officers advised that schools continued to operate first-day contact arrangements and that attendance remained a significant safeguarding and educational priority. Officers outlined the range of support and enforcement measures available where attendance concerns persisted.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.

93. Performance Monitoring
(Item 6)

Craig Chapman (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion) was in attendance for the item:

1.The officer discussed the following:

a) The Chair asked that the report be noted as read and suggested taking questions directly from Members.

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

a) Following concerns raised regarding a number of indicators recorded as amber or red within Dover district, officers advised that further analysis would be undertaken and discussed with Members outside the meeting in order to better understand the specific factors influencing local performance.

b) In response to questions relating to requests for Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) statutory assessments, officers confirmed that the indicator measured requests for statutory assessment and explained that the process determined whether an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) should be issued. Members were further advised that information relating to the number of plans declined and tribunal outcomes was available and could

be provided to Members. Members also suggested that numbers be provided in the detail in addition to the existing percentage metric.

c) Officers agreed to provide the underlying numerical data supporting Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) percentage figures. Members were advised that monthly reporting information containing detailed local data was already produced and could be circulated to Members.

d) Concerns regarding workforce capacity and increasing caseloads were raised, officers advised that staffing levels were affected by seasonal recruitment patterns and explained that newly qualified social workers (50-60) were expected to join the service during the autumn as professional registration requirements were completed. Officers highlighted the continued use of graduate recruitment pathways, apprenticeships and frontline social work. Officers acknowledged the national challenges affecting social worker recruitment and retention.

e) In response to questions regarding NEET performance, officers advised that a number of factors contributed to poorer outcomes in certain areas, including educational attainment, barriers associated with travel to learning opportunities, and limited post-16 provision capacity. Officers outlined ongoing work through the Pathways for All programme and wider partnerships with colleges and training providers aimed at increasing opportunities and reducing barriers to participation.

f) The Chair suggested potential online options be explored to mitigate some of the issues impacting NEET. Officers highlighted that some providers already offer this option and the complex nature of DfE funding and KCC involvement with the regional improvement team pilot.

g) A Member raised concerns on the NEET statistics for Canterbury and when interventions would start to be in and show a positive impact. Officers acknowledged the concern and suggested that this potentially be encompassed with the ongoing Marmot projects being explored.

h) The Committee was advised that the work could bring additional capacity, resources and provision for young people who were not in education, employment or training. Particular attention was being given to the decline in attendance and continuation between Years 12 and 13. It was noted that Canterbury may experience greater challenges in this area due to the size of Canterbury College, which could result in higher numbers of students leaving education before completing Year 13. Members discussed this trend and agreed that Year 13 retention appeared to be a particular area of concern. The officer confirmed that the issue would continue to be monitored and explored with education partners.

i) Officers confirmed that work remained underway to develop a Family Hub performance scorecard and that a further update would be provided when development had progressed.

j) In response to concerns regarding specialist placements, officers advised that decisions relating to independent and out-of-county placements were governed by statutory requirements and parental preference. Members were

informed that increasing specialist capacity within Kent remained a priority, but that historic placement decisions and sustained demand continued to influence current performance figures.

k) Advised that implementation of the Families First for Children (FFC) reforms would result in a revised operating model and allow a broader workforce to support children and families. Officers anticipated that the reforms would contribute to improved caseload management over time.

l) In response to questions regarding artificial intelligence (AI), officers confirmed that digital technologies were already supporting administrative functions and note-taking activity. However, Members were advised that professional judgement and direct engagement with children and families remained essential elements of social work practice and could not be replaced by technology.

m) Members discussed rationales for non-attending students. The Committee was advised that schools had a responsibility to investigate and address pupil absence, including undertaking first-day contact procedures when a child did not attend school as expected. The officer explained that first-day contact procedures were an important safeguarding measure, enabling schools to establish the reason for a pupil's absence and ensure their welfare.

n) Members were informed that schools were expected to have robust arrangements in place to engage with parents and carers where attendance was a concern and to support improvements in regular attendance. The officer outlined the role of the local authority's attendance service in supporting schools where non-attendance continued.

o) It was explained that the service worked with families to address barriers to attendance and improve engagement with education. Where appropriate, formal interventions could be considered, including the issuing of penalty notices or legal proceedings against parents where attendance failed to improve.

p) The Committee noted that attendance continued to be a significant area of focus for schools and inspectors following the COVID-19 pandemic. The officer advised that attendance levels had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels and that schools were expected to demonstrate that they had taken all reasonable steps to improve attendance.

q) Questions were raised concerning care leavers, officers advised that staffing shortages and resource constraints continued to affect service delivery. It was explained that recruitment challenges remained a significant factor affecting performance within elements of the care leaver service

r) Officers advised that previous Educational Psychology capacity issues had now been resolved and that improvements within the Educational Psychology service were beginning to have a positive impact on Education, Health and Care Plan timeliness performance.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

94. 26/00048 - Proposal for KCC capital contributions to the DfE Schools Rebuild Programme for Water Meadows Primary school to include 2 forms of entry core facilities to the 1 form of entry rebuild

(Item 7)

Robert Veale (Assistant Director of Education-East Kent) and David Adams (Deputy Director-Effectiveness, Sufficiency and Skills) were present for the item:

1. Introduced the report seeking approval for a capital contribution towards the Department for Education Schools Rebuild Programme at Water Meadows Primary School.

a) Explained that the Department for Education was progressing a rebuild of the existing one form entry school and that Kent County Council had identified a future requirement to expand the school in response to planned housing growth within the locality. The proposed contribution would enable core facilities required for a future two form entry school to be incorporated within the redesign and rebuilding programme.

b) Advised that the proposal represented a cost-effective opportunity to future-proof the site and ensure that the infrastructure required for future expansion was delivered as part of the current scheme. Members were informed that the proposal was supported by pupil forecasts contained within the Council's commissioning plans and reflected anticipated demand arising from housing developments within the area.

c) The Committee was advised that the estimated capital contribution to the Department for Education was up to £1.4 million and comprised approximately £1 million in base build costs and around £300,000 for external works and associated infrastructure.

d) Members noted that the authority had already secured just over £1 million through developer contributions towards the project and officer informed the Committee that an application had also been submitted to Canterbury City Council for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding of approximately £380,000 to meet the remaining cost.

e) Members were advised that the outcome of the funding bid was expected in October. It was discussed that, should the application be unsuccessful, the authority would be required to fund the shortfall from its own resources.

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

a) Officers confirmed that the updated Commissioning Plan for Education Provision would be presented to the Committee later in the year (November) and that current forecasts continued to support the need for additional primary capacity within the planning group.

b) In response to questions concerning future expansion arrangements, officers advised that the proposal related solely to the provision of core

infrastructure. Additional teaching accommodation would be considered through a future decision should pupil demand materialise as anticipated.

c) Members welcomed the inclusion of future expansion requirements within the rebuilding project and queried whether further preparatory works could be undertaken now to reduce disruption in future years. Officers advised that discussions continued with the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the most cost-effective approach to delivery and that disruption to the school community remained an important consideration throughout project planning.

d) In response to questions regarding planning and design, officers confirmed that the DfE remained responsible for delivery of the rebuilding programme and that design development and planning processes continued to progress.

e) Members highlighted the importance of sustainability and environmental considerations within school design. Officers advised that modern DfE design standards incorporated environmental performance and biodiversity requirements and that these would form part of the completed scheme.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

1) APPROVE the allocation of £1.4m from the Schools Basic Need Capital Programme to provide 2FE core facilities at Water Meadows Primary School as part of the DfE Schools Rebuild Programme of the 1FE School;

2) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Infrastructure to take relevant actions including but not limited to negotiating, entering and finalising the terms of relevant contracts, contract variations or other legal agreements as required to implement the decision; and

3) AGREE for the Director of Infrastructure, to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements, with authority to enter variations as envisaged under the contracts.

95. 26/00049 - Proposal to accept Department for Education (DfE) funding in support of Phase 3 of the School Based Nursery programme 2027 to 2030 *(Item 8)*

Robert Veale (Assistant Director of Education-East Kent) and David Adams (Deputy Director-Effectiveness, Sufficiency and Skills) were in attendance for the item:

1. Introduced the report seeking approval for Kent County Council to submit proposals to the Department for Education (DfE) and, subject to a successful application, accept capital funding through Phase 3 of the School Based Nursery Programme (SBN)

a) Advised that the programme had the potential to support approximately twenty school-based nursery projects across Kent and create around 550 additional nursery places between 2027 and 2030.

2.In response, Members discussed the following:

a) Member unanimously endorsed the decision positively; no additional questions or concerns were raised.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

1. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to:

   a) Accept and deploy any funding awarded under the School Based Nursery Programme 2027-2030

   b) Finalise the programme of schools and projects included within the approved funding allocation, and to make amendments to projects where required by the Department for Education, affordability, deliverability or programme requirements;

   c) Approve capital expenditure on individual school-based nursery proposals, including reallocating funding between approved projects, provided that the total capital expenditure remains within the amount determined by the DfE capital allocation, and in cases involving capital expenditure above £1m, such approval to be made in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills; and

   d) Take relevant actions, including but not limited to, negotiating, finalising and entering into contracts and legal agreements as required to implement the decision.

2 Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, to take relevant actions necessary to deliver the approved capital projects, including but not limited to, finalising, entering into and varying contracts and legal agreements as required to implement the decision.

96. 26/00044 - Replacement of modular classrooms at Dover Grammar School for Girls - Additional Funding Request (Non-Key Decision)

(Item 9)

David Adams (Deputy Director-Effectiveness, Sufficiency and Skills) and Christine McInnes (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education) were in attendance for the item:

1. Introduced the report seeking approval for an additional £400,000 to support the replacement of two modular classroom blocks at Dover Grammar School for Girls.

a) Members were reminded that a previous decision had approved £1.4 million for the scheme and that planning permission had subsequently been secured. During progression through detailed design and building control processes, additional fire safety requirements had been identified.

b) Advised that Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS), acting as a consultee to the building control process, had determined that fire appliances could not access the proposed building within required distances due to the constraints of the site. Officers explained that a sprinkler system, together with associated water storage and distribution infrastructure, was therefore required. These works had increased the project cost to £1.8 million.

2.In response to questions it was discussed:

a) Members queried if an oversight in the planning phase had contributed to the issue. Officers explained that the issue had arisen through the building control process rather than the planning process and that the requirement related to fire protection standards associated with modern building regulations.

b) Members queried whether the additional costs could be recovered from contractors or design consultants. Officers advised again that the issue had arisen due to technical requirements identified during regulatory review rather than design failings and therefore there was no realistic mechanism to recover the additional expenditure

c) Responding to concerns regarding future projects, officers advised that lessons learned from the scheme would be incorporated into future school replacement programmes, particularly in relation to fire appliance access arrangements and regulatory requirements.

d) Members questioned whether alternative building locations had been considered. Officers confirmed that all previous options had been revisited; however, alternative solutions would have involved substantially greater costs, additional planning complexity or significant operational challenges associated with the school site. The current proposal therefore remained the most cost-effective and practical option.

e) In response to questions regarding the sprinkler infrastructure, officers advised that water pressure on the site was insufficient to support direct operation of the system and that dedicated underground water storage tanks would therefore be required.

f) Officers confirmed that ongoing maintenance responsibilities for the sprinkler system would rest with the school following completion of the project and would be met through existing school revenue arrangements.

g) Members acknowledged the increase in costs but noted the importance of replacing buildings that had reached the end of their operational life and recognised that continuing maintenance of the existing structures would not represent value for money.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

1) INCREASE the funding for the replacement of two modular classroom blocks at Dover Grammar School for Girls by £400,000, from £1.4 million to £1.8 million, to fund the installation of a sprinkler system and associated contingency costs.

2) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Director of Education and SEND, and the Head of Law to take relevant actions, including but not limited to negotiating, entering into and finalising the terms of relevant contracts, contract variations or other legal agreements, as required, to implement the decision; and

3) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Infrastructure to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant contractual agreements and to enter into such variations as envisaged under any of these contracts.

97. KCC Maintained School Estate - Condition Survey Update
(Item 10)

Mr B Collins (Deputy Leader of the Council), Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Joanne Taylor (Head of Capital) and Stuart Pryor (Programme Manager) were in attendance for the item:

1. introduced the report and provided an update on the condition of the maintained school estate.

a) Members were advised that condition surveys commissioned from 2021 onwards had informed a long-term programme of maintenance investment and asset management and that updated calculations indicated a substantial continuing maintenance liability across the estate. Current backlog maintenance conditions sat at £330 million forecast over the next 10 years.

b) The Committee was informed that the condition survey programme was currently being updated through the procurement of new surveys based on the most recent information available. he officer explained that changes had occurred since the original survey programme was undertaken, requiring the scope of the surveys to be reviewed and that there had been a reduction in the number of maintained schools included in the programme as a result of academy conversions.

c) Changes to the treatment of voluntary aided schools within the survey programme had also affected the number of schools that would be subject to updated surveys and that the revised surveys would provide an updated assessment of the condition of the maintained school estate and reflect the current composition of schools for which the authority retained responsibility.

d) Officers outlined the Council’s continued focus on maintaining buildings to a warm, safe and dry standard. Members were informed that significant investment had been delivered through major maintenance programmes,

emergency works, modernisation funding and the ongoing replacement and refurbishment of mobile classrooms. The report also summarised interventions undertaken to address structural risks associated with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) and folded plate timber roofs to ensure School had continued to provide education service to the children of Kent.

e) Members were advised that, since the previous condition surveys had been undertaken, the number of maintained schools within the estate had reduced due to academy conversions. Officers highlighted the range of mechanisms used by the authority to monitor and manage building condition, including premises development officer visits, compliance activity, helpdesk reporting and direct engagement with schools.

f) Highlighted the ten schools nominated by the County Council for consideration under the Department for Education's latest School Rebuilding Programme, including Dover Grammar School for Girls. Members noted that no funding decisions had yet been made and that the nominations would be assessed by the Department for Education (DfE). The officer also informed the Committee that a new programme of condition surveys was due to commence in 2026 to refresh and update the asset condition data held by the authority, supporting future planning and investment across the school estate.

2. In response to comments and questions

a) Clarification was requested on the (Paragraph 2.1) if the backlog in the 2026 figure encompasses 244 or 351 schools. Officers confirmed the figure was for the 2024. Officers would look to clarify a figure on the total backlog of repairs.

b) In response to questions regarding changes in reported maintenance liabilities, officers advised that the figures had been updated to reflect inflation and revised costs whilst maintaining consistency with earlier reporting. Members were informed that the figures related only to schools that remained within the maintained estate

c) Clarification was sought regarding the schools nominated for inclusion within the DfE rebuilding programme. Officers explained that nominations had been submitted in accordance with Department for Education criteria relating to significant structural or condition issues. It was agreed that further detail concerning the categories under which schools had been nominated would be circulated to Members.

d) Members queried mobile classrooms, officers advised that replacement and refurbishment priorities had been established following detailed condition surveys and risk assessments. Those units identified as presenting the greatest risk had been prioritised first within the programme. Additional information on the remaining programme would be provided outside the meeting

e) The committee questioned the rationale for recommissioning condition surveys. Officers advised that condition data represented a snapshot in time

and required periodic updating in order to provide an accurate basis for future investment decisions. The next phase of surveys would commence during 2026 and would be delivered over a five-year period.

f) In response to discussion regarding overheating within school buildings, officers advised that climate resilience and environmental performance were becoming increasingly important considerations within capital investment programmes. Members were informed that heating replacement programmes increasingly considered opportunities to improve cooling and ventilation infrastructure and that wider environmental measures such as tree planting and shading were also being promoted

g) Officers explained that prioritisation decisions were informed not only by condition surveys but also by compliance inspections, health and safety considerations, operational risks and direct engagement with schools. It was emphasised that maintaining safe and functional learning environments remained the primary objective of the programme.

h) Members were advised that the Council continued to work closely with schools through its premises development teams and maintained arrangements enabling schools to report urgent property issues at any time

i) Members welcomed the update and recognised both the significance of the maintenance challenge and the importance of continuing investment across the maintained school estate.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

98. Work Programme
(Item 11)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.