Corporate Parenting Strategy

2025 — 2027

Medway Corporate Parenting Board

Medway Council
Serving You

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1 Foreword

As the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, I am both honoured and deeply privileged to hold this role – one that carries the weight of responsibility, but also the promise of positive change.

Being a corporate parent is not just a title; it is a commitment, a duty, and above all, a collective endeavour. In Medway, we believe firmly that *being a corporate parent is everybody's business*.

In 2023, Ofsted graded our Children services as Good and recognised that "children matter in Medway" – a powerful affirmation of the dedication and progress we have made together.

But we know there is always more to do. Our ambition is bold and unwavering: we want every child and young person in our care, and every care leaver, to be safe, supported, and able to thrive. Their aspirations must be our aspirations. Their futures must be filled with opportunity and hope.

We are proud that Medway Council has recognised care leavers as a protected characteristic within our organisation. This step sends a clear message: our care leavers are valued, their voices will be heard, and they will receive the respect and equity they deserve.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to raise the bar for our children and young people. It is a shared commitment – across all council departments, our partners, and our community – to stand beside them as champions, advocates, and trusted adults.

Together, we can ensure that every child and care-experienced young person in Medway has the support, love, and opportunity they need to flourish.

Cllr Adam Price
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Introduction

We believe in you and your potential. In Medway, we want every child and young person to grow up in a safe, loving home —ideally with your family, with the right support to help things work.

If that's not possible, we'll make sure you're cared for in a way that meets your needs and helps you thrive.

Everyone's journey is different, and we respect what makes you unique. When families face challenges, we'll do all we can to help before things break down. If you do come into care, we'll be there for you every step of the way.

As your corporate parents, we have a special role. We're here to support you, listen to you, and help you succeed — whether you're in care now or have left care. This strategy sets out how we'll do that, based on what you've told us matters most.

We use the words ***'children in care'*** and ***'care leavers'*** because that's what you've asked us to use. When we say ***"you"*** or ***"your,"*** we mean you—our children and young people in Medway.

Medway's Children in Care and Care Leaver – Medway's Context

We support a growing number of children and young people in care, including those with disabilities and those aged 16 and over.

As of March 2025:

- 493 children were in our care — that's 74 per 10,000 children in Medway, slightly above the national average.
- We supported 202 care leavers aged 18+.
- Around 55% of care leavers were in education, employment, or training.

This strategy is part of a wider effort to improve your experience. Other work includes:

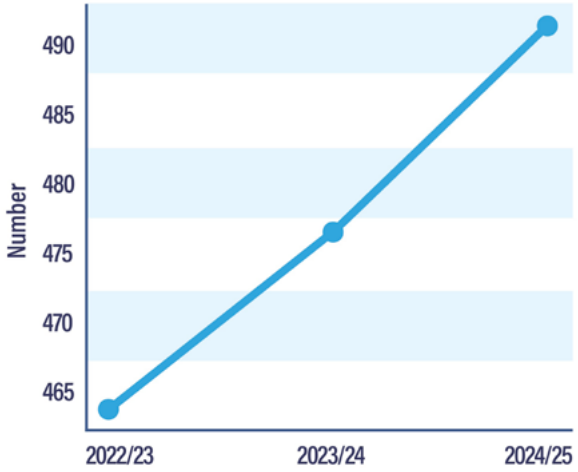
- Our Pledge and Local Offer — created with your input to reflect what matters most to you.
- Corporate Parenting Board — where your voice helps shape decisions, alongside councillors and NHS partners.
- Medway Children and Young People Council (MCYPC) — making sure your views are heard and acted on.
- Virtual School — helping you succeed in education, from school to college and beyond.

We're also updating our Children's Sufficiency Strategy, which looks at what support is needed now and in the future. Scan the QR code to read the current version, or go to:

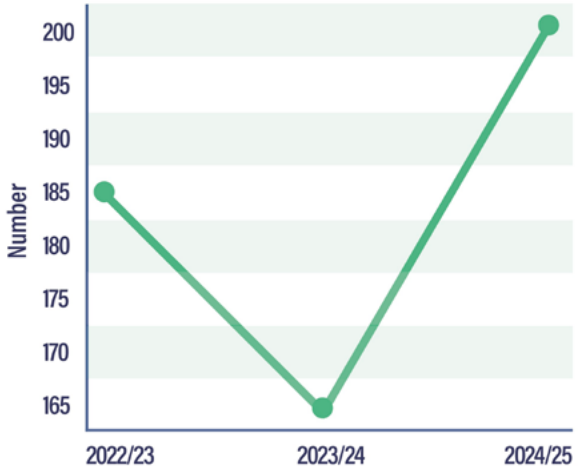
democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=67932

Medway Corporate Parenting Strategy:
Key Statistics

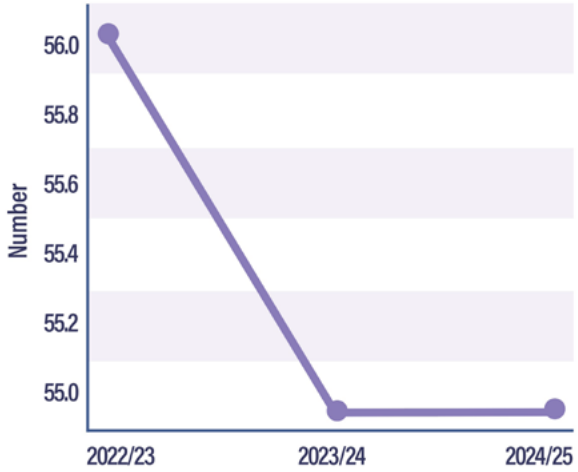
Children in Care



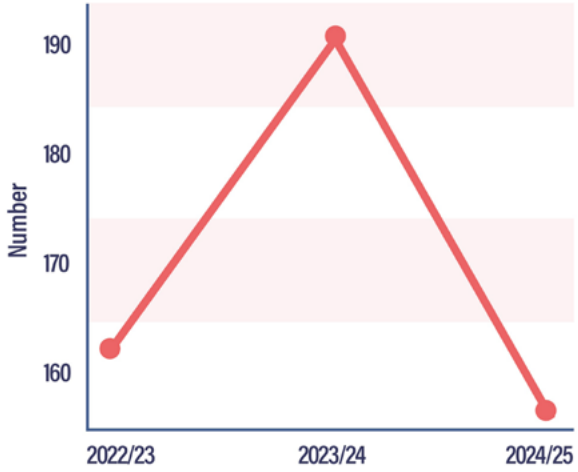
Care Leavers Supported



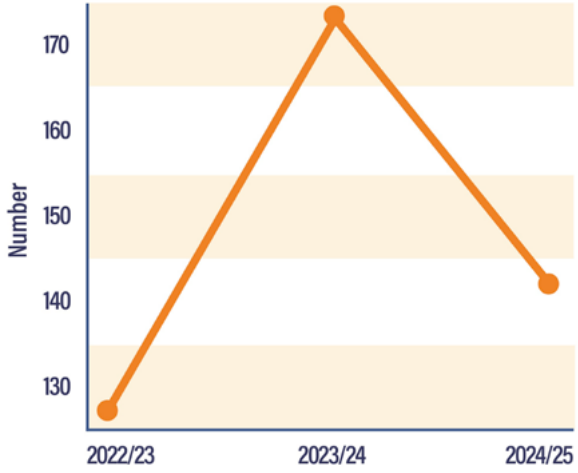
Care Leavers in Education / Employment / Training



New Starters in Care



Children Leaving Care



4 Our Vision for Children in Care in Medway

We support a growing number of children and young people in care, including those with disabilities and those aged 16 and over.

We will achieve this by:

- Working with children, young people, and families to help everyone feel safe, supported, and valued.
- Helping children grow up in stable, caring homes with strong relationships that support their journey to independence.

Our Pledge to our Children in Care and Care Leavers

We're updating our Pledge to make sure it reflects what matters most to you right now. The Young Lives Foundation (YLF) is helping us gather your views, so the Pledge truly represents your voice.

Medway Council's current Pledge was created with children and young people and can be found here. It's reviewed every quarter by the Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC), who make sure it stays relevant and meaningful.

This strategy works alongside our Pledge—it's part of our promise to support, listen to, and stand by you.

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Our Corporate Parenting Principles

As your corporate parents, Medway Council has a legal and moral duty to give you the same care, support, and opportunities that any good parent would want for their own child.

We follow a set of principles to guide how we support you:

- ***We act in your best interests***, promoting your physical and mental health
- ***We listen to your views*** and make sure they shape the decisions that affect you
- ***We help you access the services you need***, when you need them
- ***We support your ambitions***, helping you reach your full potential in education, health, and life
- ***We make sure you feel safe*** and have a stable, secure place to live
- ***We prepare you for adulthood***, offering support as you move towards independence

These principles are at the heart of everything we do. Our ***Corporate Parenting Board*** makes sure your needs are championed across the council and with our partners.

We focus our work around five key priorities, each led by a dedicated group that reports into the Board. These priorities help us stay focused on what matters most to you.

For us to be good corporate parents we aim to achieve the following five priorities for you, our children in care and care leavers.

Priority 1:
Safety and Permanency

Ensuring that children, young people, and care leavers are protected from harm, experience consistent and nurturing care through stable placements, and are supported by skilled, committed carers who provide a sense of belonging and long-term security.

We will know we're achieving this when:

- You tell us you feel cared for and supported in your placements.
- You experience stable placements for at least two years.
- You are long-term matched with your carers.
- You can stay with your carers after 18 through Staying Put arrangements.
- More children return home to live with family or friends when it's safe and in your best interest.
- Your views are consistently heard and acted on when decisions about your safety and permanence are made.
- You understand your life story and why you are in care.
- You can name trusted adults in your life.
- You have healthy friendships and romantic relationships.
- You experience fewer changes in social workers or personal advisors, and they stay in regular contact.
- Return home interviews are completed on time, your voice is captured, and your experiences inform safety planning.

We will:

- Make sure care and pathway plans are child-focused, culturally informed, and shaped by your needs and the views of those who care about you.
- Provide safe, nurturing homes with well-trained carers, and only move you if absolutely necessary.
- Give you clear information about your placement, carers, and local support services.
- Support our foster carers to provide the best possible care.
- Increase the number of caring family homes in Medway so you can stay close to what matters to you.
- Fully implement our Fostering Business Plan and expand the hubs model.
- Train and support foster carers to meet your individual needs.
- Regularly review placements and offer support to help you move into family settings when appropriate.
- Hold early family group conferences to explore family and friend placements.
- Review your permanence needs regularly and match you long-term with carers if returning home isn't possible.
- Support you and your family to live together safely when possible.
- Help you stay connected with people who matter to you.
- Build trust with professionals and identify risks early to prevent harm.
- Support care leavers who are parents to access early help.
- Work to maintain a stable workforce and inform you in advance if your worker changes.
- Develop staff skills in direct work and life story work to help you understand your journey.
- Respect your heritage and cultural background in all decisions made about you.

Priority 2:
Preparing you for Independence and Adulthood

We will support you to build the skills, confidence, and resilience you need to thrive as an adult — whether that's living independently, working, studying, or contributing to your community in your own unique way.

We will know this when:

- You have an up-to-date Pathway Plan that reflects your voice, your goals, and your needs.
- You are in education, employment, or training — or supported to get there.
- You feel confident about living independently and managing your money.
- You tell us you have high aspirations and feel motivated about your future.
- You live in a safe and suitable home.
- You have a bank account and savings set up to support your independence.

We will:

- Assign you a Personal Advisor from age 17 to help you build independence skills and confidence. You can continue receiving support up to age 25 if you choose.
- Work with adult social care to identify early if you need additional support as you transition to adulthood.
- Make sure your Pathway Plan is current and co-produced with you.
- Support you financially (where appropriate) to help you set up your first home.
- Work with housing teams to ensure you have access to the right accommodation when you leave care.
- Ensure you receive all the benefits and entitlements available through our Local Offer for care leavers.
- Help you develop practical life skills like budgeting, cooking, and applying for jobs — and never expect you to leave care before you're ready.
- Provide access to specialist advice, including legal or immigration support, when needed.
- Offer learning opportunities at the Elaine Centre to build your independence.
- Deliver the Medway Family Model to support your transition into adulthood.
- Support you as a young parent, helping you to be the best parent you can be.

Priority 3:
Health and Wellbeing

We will support and encourage you to live a happy, healthy life — both physically and emotionally. We will make sure professionals work together to design services that are tailored to your individual health and wellbeing needs.

We will know this when:

- You are registered with a GP, dentist, and optician.
- You have timely access to emotional wellbeing and mental health support that meets your needs.
- Your health assessments are up to date.
- You leave care with a clear understanding of your health history.
- You can access services that meet your needs, including if you have a disability or additional needs.
- You complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and the results help shape the support you receive.
- You feel confident managing any long-term health conditions.

We will:

- Provide a holistic health assessment within four weeks of entering care, and annually thereafter (or every six months for under 5s), reviewing your physical, emotional, and developmental needs.
- Embed the NHS Core 20 PLUS 5 approach across Medway to support long-term health conditions.
- Promote the use of SDQs to tailor emotional wellbeing support to your needs.
- Use the i-THRIVE framework to ensure timely identification and support for mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- Ensure you can access skilled mental health professionals when needed, without delay.
- Strengthen partnerships with the Medway Therapeutic Alliance and Specialist Mental Health Services to simplify and improve the support available to you.
- Help you develop healthy routines and make informed choices about your wellbeing.
- Work with partners to ensure that if you live outside Medway, you still receive high-quality services.
- Make sure you leave care with your full health history.
- Improve access to the Dynamic Support System for those with complex neurodevelopmental needs, ensuring coordinated support across services.
- Take a trauma-informed approach that recognises how race, identity, and lived experience affect mental health and wellbeing.
- Work with drug and alcohol services to ensure support is available when needed, including for those affected by parental substance use.

Priority 4:
Education, Training and Employment

We will champion your ambitions and support you to reach your full potential. Whether you're at school, college, university, or starting work, we'll make sure you have the same opportunities to succeed as your peers — and the support you need to get there.

We will know this when:

- You tell us you are enjoying and regularly attending school, college, or training.
- You experience fewer disruptions to your education.
- You share your hobbies, interests, and goals with us.
- You feel proud of your efforts and tell us you're doing your best.
- Your school attendance improves, and you feel supported to succeed.

We will:

- Work with the Virtual School to find the best education and training opportunities for you, so you can attend, achieve, and thrive.
- Support schools and colleges to understand your individual experiences, so they can respond with care and flexibility.
- Work with education partners to prevent exclusions and suspensions.
- Monitor and address any disparities in attainment, including those linked to race or background, to ensure fairness and equity.
- Collaborate with the SEND service to ensure your EHCP is up to date if you need one.
- Provide opportunities for work experience, including Year 10 placements, care leaver apprenticeships, and corporate parenting takeover days.
- Ensure your Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are up to date, high quality, and reflect your aspirations, interests, and strengths.
- Work with council teams and local businesses to increase apprenticeship opportunities for care-experienced young people.
- Encourage local employers to prioritise care leavers for job opportunities.
- Offer enrichment activities to help you explore your interests and build confidence.
- Make sure your Pathway Plan clearly outlines the support available to you as you move into further education, training, or employment — including access to coaching and guidance from our Aspiration Officer.
- Celebrate your achievements and recognise your progress, big or small.

Priority 5:
Listening to You and Participation

We will strengthen your voice and influence by listening to you, involving you in decisions, and using your experiences to shape the services that support you. Your views matter — and we're committed to making sure they help drive change.

We will know this when:

- You share with us that your voice is heard, and you feel listened to when a decision is being made about your life.
- We have increased our use of advocacy and independent visitors.
- We are able to provide evidence of how your views are influencing service development and are at the heart of our policy and practice.
- You are an active part of MCYPC and represent the voices of others.
- You confidently participate in yearly care leaver's survey.
- You have an advocate to represent your views when necessary.
- You will have the opportunity to provide feedback on your experiences of the health system.

We will:

- Continue using Mind Of My Own (MOMO) to help you share your views in a way that works for you.
- Champion and support the MCYPC to amplify your voice.
- Involve you in reviewing and updating our pledge to children and young people in care.
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to share feedback, especially children with disabilities and those living outside Medway.
- Support MCYPC to help you co-deliver training to carers and staff, including foster carers and residential workers.
- Involve you in recruitment campaigns and staff training.
- Consult and engage with you on new policies, procedures, and service development.
- Explore how your voice can help shape wider council policies and community initiatives.
- Make sure you can contribute to your reviews in a way that suits you.
- Carry out an annual survey of care leavers to hear your views.
- Ensure you have access to advocacy and Independent Visitor services.
- Make sure your voice is reflected in the themes of our Corporate Parenting Board.
- Continue using challenge cards to show how your feedback leads to action — "You said, we did."
- Champion corporate parenting as a whole-council responsibility, engaging local communities and businesses.
- Deliver training for Corporate Parenting Board Councillors to strengthen their understanding of your experiences.
- Ensure Senior Leaders, Assistant Directors, and Heads of Service regularly engage with you.
- Celebrate your achievements, including through our annual Time to Shine event.
- Provide opportunities for you to pursue your hobbies and interests.
- Work with NHS partners to ensure your voice shapes health services.

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Taking the Strategy Forward

This section outlines how we will monitor progress against our priorities and ensure that the voices of children and young people remain central to everything we do.

1 — Children in Care Scorecard Report
A quarterly report tracking progress for children in care and care leavers aged 16+. It highlights areas needing attention and outlines actions taken, enabling Corporate Parenting Board members to challenge and support improvements.

2 — YLF Quarterly Report
Provides updates and captures the voice of children in care and care-experienced young people, ensuring their views inform service development.

3 — Corporate Parenting Annual report
Offers a comprehensive overview of the support provided to children and young people. It aligns with our strategic priorities and highlights areas for improvement, keeping young people's experiences at the heart of decision-making.

4 — Independent Review Officer Annual Report
Complements the Corporate Parenting Annual Report by providing insights into the care population, celebrating successes, identifying challenges, and setting out plans for the year ahead.

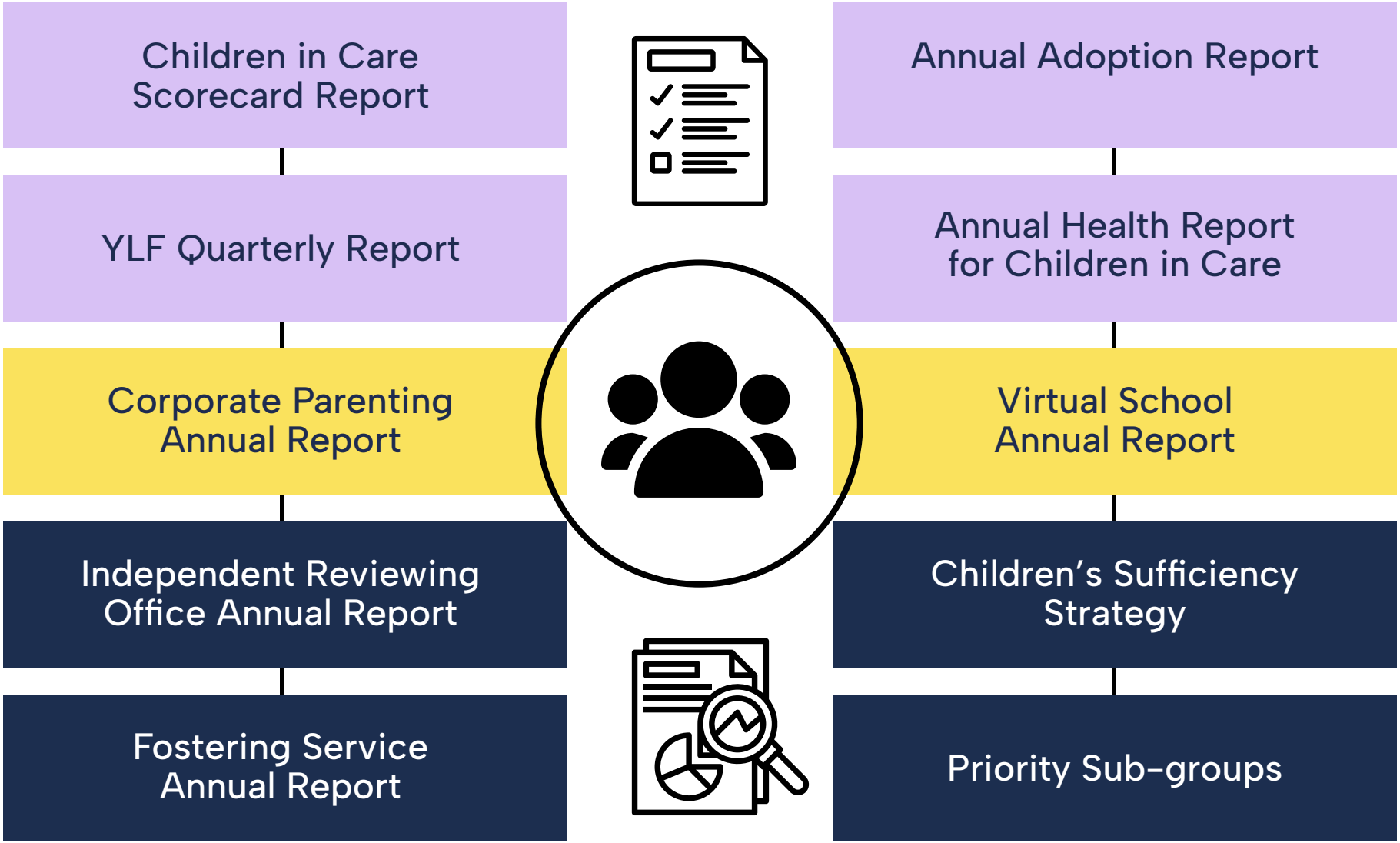
5 — Fostering Service Annual Report
Reviews the fostering statement of purpose and recognises the vital role of Medway's foster carers. It includes updates on recruitment, retention, training, and support, covering kinship care, long-term fostering, and Special Guardianship.

6 — Annual Adoption Report
Produced by Adopt South East (RAA), this report details how adopters are recruited and supported, and outlines the range of services available to children and families affected by adoption.

7 — Annual Health report of Children in Care in Medway
Reviews the delivery of health services, performance indicators, clinical work, and service improvements. The Corporate Parenting Board uses this report to identify emerging challenges and commission further updates if needed.

8 — The Virtual School Annual Report
Summarises the educational progress of children in care, including attainment, use of Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), and the support provided to help children succeed.

9 — Children Sufficiency Strategy
An annual update outlining the current and future support needs of children in care and care leavers, with clear actions for the year ahead.

10 — Priority Sub-groups
Each sub-group aligned to the strategy's priorities will report to the Corporate Parenting Board every six months (or by exception). Their work will also be reflected in the reports presented to the Board.

Taking the Strategy Forward