

## AUDIT COMMITTEE

17 DECEMBER 2009

### COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT RESULTS 2009

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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Performance and Partnerships

#### Summary

This report informs Members of the results of the Audit Commission's 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment of Medway.

#### 1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The comprehensive area assessment (CAA) considers progress made by the council itself and in partnership with other agencies in delivering the priorities in the council plan and the local area agreement – consistent with the budget and policy framework.

#### 2. Background

2.1 CAA is the new national framework for inspection of the activities and achievements of councils and their partner agencies. It replaces the previous system known as comprehensive performance assessment. 2009 is the first year of CAA reporting.

2.2 CAA is overseen by the Audit Commission, but a wide range of inspectorates contribute to the judgements, including Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

2.3 CAA has two elements:

- **An organisational assessment of the council** - a report is made about the achievements of each council and a score is given
- **An area assessment** which reports on the combined achievement of all public agencies in Medway in improving the quality of life for residents. This is not scored but in exceptional circumstances 'flags' are given – green for 'best in class' performance and red for areas of major concern where the inspectorates are not confident that improvement plans will be effective.

2.4 The Cabinet will be considering this report on 15 December 2009 and its comments will be reported to this meeting.

2.5 Robert Grant (PKF) and Claire Bryce-Smith (Audit Commission) will be in attendance for this item.

### **3 The organisational assessment of the council**

3.1 The council overall has been assessed by the Audit Commission as 'performing well' – equivalent to 3 out of 4, where 4 is the highest score.

3.2 Appendix 1 shows the organisational assessment in full. The following summarises some of the key strengths and areas for improvement noted in the report.

#### **3.3 Strengths**

The report recognises that the council is tackling issues local people recognise as priorities and importantly is making improvements in those areas. It states that most services are good quality and delivered at low cost and that the council is good at managing its money and making savings. In particular it highlights as strengths:

- Cleaner streets
- Falling crime levels, particularly keeping people safe at night and less anti social behaviour
- More and better paid jobs for local people
- More local people supported to increase their skills levels to gain employment through effective community based social regeneration
- More good quality homes built, with many suitable for people on lower incomes
- Supporting older and vulnerable people to live safely and independently as they wish
- Managing the impact the council has on the environment – on target to meet 10% target for reducing carbon footprint by 2011
- Achievement by young people at the age of 16 in GCSEs
- Support for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable
- Councillors, managers and partner agencies work well together to benefit Medway's residents.

#### **3.4 Areas for improvement**

The report identifies areas for improvement. The council has recognised these itself through its own monitoring and as a result has plans in place to respond and make improvements – the Audit Commission recognises this. Areas highlighted by the Audit Commission for further improvement, with an update on the council's progress and plans:

- Increasing recycling still further and reducing the amount of rubbish collected overall.

The council plans further improvements to be delivered through the new waste contract to start next year

- Improving the achievement of children in school at the age of 11, through raising primary school performance and reducing the number of times children have to change schools before they go to secondary school.

These results (key stage 2) were disappointing this year, showing a drop against what had been an improving trend. This is a priority for improvement, so the council is changing the way it provides support and challenge to schools to target those most in need to seek to raise standards. It has been carrying out consultation on a programme of infant and junior school closures and amalgamations, taking forward its school organisation plan principles to bring together infant and junior schools where this is practical. This will reduce the number of changes of school children make, as evidence shows this can impact on children's levels of attainment.

- Reducing the number of teenage girls who get pregnant

We are working with NHS Medway to provide a range of support and services to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. This includes information and advice and improved contraceptive services – particularly targeting young people at greatest risk. We are beginning to see the impact of this work with a small reduction in teen pregnancies in the latest available figures.

- Helping users of adult social care services to have more say in the form of support they receive

Over the next three years Medway, like all other councils, will be offering all users of social care services the opportunity to have a 'personalised budget' if they want it, which will give them the opportunity to choose and buy for themselves the support they need to meet their care needs. We are on track to support over 7% of our current service users to have personalised budgets this year.

- Increasing residents satisfaction with Medway as a place to live – survey results taken at the end of 2008 show 68% of people are satisfied with the area – the Audit Commission note this is lower than other similar areas, but is better than results in 2006.

The council has very recently undertaken a residents' opinion poll which shows a further improvement with the 2009 satisfaction rate at 76%.

- 3.5 The areas for improvement are already reflected as priorities in the council plan. Members will be asked, as part of budget setting, to approve an updated action plan to support the delivery of the council plan. That action plan will describe the steps the council intends to take in the coming year to continue to respond to these improvement areas.

#### 4. The area assessment

4.1 The area assessment considers the difference all public agencies in Medway are making to the lives of local people. The report is attached at appendix 2. The Audit Commission have given its assessment of the progress we have made in achieving Medway's Local Strategic Partnership's priority themes of:

- children, young people and families
- economic development, transport and skills
- health, wellbeing and older people
- regeneration (including housing, environment and culture)
- safe and strong Medway

4.2 The Audit Commission has awarded Medway a 'green flag' for exceptional performance in making Medway a safer place by stopping people re-offending. This is as a result of innovative working between the police and probation in particular. This excellent practice is as a result being introduced in other parts of the Kent police area.

4.3 Medway has not been awarded a red flag indicating that the Audit Commission does not have any major concerns about the performance of public agencies.

4.4 There is some overlap between the findings of the organisational assessment of the council, and the area assessment, which reflects the important contribution the council makes to the quality of life in the area. In summary, the strengths and areas for improvement in the area assessment are:

#### 4.5 Strengths

- Achievement by 16 year olds (GCSEs)
- Approach to tackling bullying in schools
- Improving skills levels of local people including level 1 and 2 NVQs and degrees and higher education qualifications
- Response to the recession in helping people into work and protecting jobs
- Continuing to deliver new homes, including affordable houses, in the context of the recession
- Low levels of carbon emissions – the lowest in the south-east
- Making Medway a safer place with reductions in all types of crime and what the Audit Commission note as 'impressive drops' in burglaries and car thefts as a result of preventing re-offending.

#### 4.6 Areas for improvement

- Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education and training
- Reducing teenage pregnancy rates
- Improving waiting times for young people accessing mental health services
- Improving the quality of some private sector houses and reducing the number of empty homes in Medway
- Making sure improvements in fear of crime match the actual reductions in crime.

4.7 These areas for improvement are being addressed by Medway's Local Strategic Partnership and its multi agency thematic partnerships. The LSP Board has received a presentation on the area assessment findings and is developing its longer term response as part of the development of the new sustainable community strategy which is on track to be finalised in April 2010.

#### **5. Risk management**

5.1 There are no risks directly arising from this report. Improvement areas that continue to be reflected in the refreshed council plan to be presented to members in February 2010, will be risk assessed at that time.

#### **6. Financial and legal implications**

6.1 There are no financial and legal implications arising directly from this report.

#### **7. Recommendation**

7.1 The Committee is asked to consider and note the contents of the Audit Commission's comprehensive area assessments.

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#### **Background papers**

The report has drawn on the Audit Commission reports which are attached as appendices to this report, and refers to the Council Plan 2009-12, as agreed by Council in February 2009.

# Medway Council

## Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



for an independent overview  
of local public services

# Medway Council

## Overall, Medway Council performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	3 out of 4

### Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

## Summary

Overall Medway Council performs well. The Council is tackling issues local people recognise as priorities and that are important for Medway as part of the Thames Gateway growth area. These are: keeping the place clean and safe, caring for children and older people, transport, homes and jobs. Councillors and staff work well together. Most services are good quality, and delivered at a low cost. It is good at managing its money and making savings. Streets are cleaner and harmful carbon dioxide emissions are the lowest in the south-east. Crime is falling. Work is well underway to redevelop the towns and attract businesses into the area. People have greater opportunities to improve their skills and more have achieved qualifications, some for the first time. More and better quality jobs are available. Good quality homes have been built, with many suitable for people on lower incomes. More people are exercising regularly but people are not as satisfied with the range of sports facilities and other things to do in Medway as elsewhere.

Some things the Council does are not as effective. Recycling is improving but slowly and is still below the national average. Results for children at schools in Medway are very mixed and in some cases are not getting any better. Achievement at age 11 is significantly lower than the average standards nationally and in areas similar to Medway. The Council has not always taken a long-term approach to planning and managing the housing needs in the area. There are encouraging signs that there has been considerable improvement in developing this. Improving all these things is important to the Council and work is underway to tackle them, although this is not showing results yet in all areas.

Medway Council scores 3 out of 4 for managing performance. It knows that clean and safe streets, good quality homes and jobs and supporting children and older people are important to local people. These things are improving.

Streets are cleaner than last year. But too much rubbish is still produced and significantly more than in other areas. New initiatives from next year are designed to help reduce this. The Council and other organisations are working to develop Medway as part of the Thames Gateway growth area. New businesses have been attracted into Medway providing more and better paid jobs for local people. The creation of four universities in Medway has helped more people achieve high level qualifications. Take up of courses through community based programmes is good, helping local people develop new skills and achieve qualifications.

Ofsted has rated the Council's children's services as adequate. The number of young people getting good GCSE results in Medway has increased and is now similar to results nationally. But achievement at age 11 is significantly lower than average by similar areas and national standards. There are too many 16 to 19 year olds who are not in employment, education or training. This limits their job prospects. The number of young girls becoming pregnant is high and this is not reducing quickly enough.

The Care Quality Commission has rated the Council's adult social care as performing well. It found, among other things, that the Council supports people with long-term health related needs and their carers to live safely and as independently as they wish. Treatment and support for people with disabilities, frail older people and people at risk from drug and alcohol misuse is timely and well co-ordinated. Work is underway to help some of these people to choose the type of support they want but progress on this could be faster. More needs to be done to evaluate the level of success of the Council's actions and improve the quality of its information. The Council is tackling this.

The Council works with other organisations, such as the police, to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. This work is going well, especially helping to keep people safe when they are out late at night.

People are not as satisfied with Medway as a place to live as elsewhere. Over 67% of people are satisfied, which is better than two years ago. This is less than in other parts of the south east and in places similar to Medway. Most people also think that people from different backgrounds get on well together. But again this is lower than elsewhere. Less than 1 in 4 think that older people get the help they need to live alone. Most older people are happy with their home and neighbourhood but fewer than elsewhere.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources. It manages its money well. The cost of services in Medway is mostly lower than other Councils. Where costs are higher it is because the Council has decided it is a priority, such as education and managing household rubbish better. The Council made savings of £8 million last year. It plans to save another £18 million by 2012 by investing in information technology to provide better services and by making sure it has all the information it needs to deliver good services. The Council works well with partner organisations such as the Government, the NHS and local businesses to deliver improvements. It checks how well it works with partners and wants to make sure everyone benefits from the money it spends by creating opportunities for people to live, work and learn in Medway.

Councillors and staff work well together to manage the Council's money. They ask people from all backgrounds how good Medway's services are to



ensure that they meet their needs. Where services are not as good as they should be councillors and staff show good leadership to improve them, such as combining children's and adults' services to improve the overall service. The Council is good at managing risks, both for its services and partnerships, and is able to respond quickly to events such as the recession. The Council knows the impact it has on the environment and has made good progress to meet its target to reduce its carbon footprint by 10% by 2011. It is using less energy and water and reducing the amount of rubbish it produces. The Council has reduced the number of buildings it owns and shares these with others to deliver services such as charities and the NHS.

## About Medway Council

Medway is an urban area with a population of 253,500 living mainly in the area's five towns. Around 8% of the population are from black and minority ethnic communities and many of these are in Asian or Asian British communities. People living in Medway are younger than the average in the rest of the country. But the proportion of older people is growing fast.

Since the closure of the Royal Naval Dockyard in Chatham in 1984, different industries have moved into the area. Many jobs are now in retail, tourism, and finance. The area is on the north-west coast of Kent in the Thames Gateway growth area. This is resulting in significant investment in providing opportunities for people to improve their skills, creating new jobs and building homes. There are now four universities in the area, which also provide more opportunities for people to develop their skills and knowledge. Medway is the 150th most deprived area out of 354 council areas. There are neighbourhoods with high unemployment, people claiming benefits and fewer people who are healthy. Although crime is falling, it is still a concern for local people.

Medway Council has 55 elected councillors representing 22 areas. There are 34 Conservative councillors, 10 Labour, 8 Liberal Democrat, and 3 Independent. The Council is Conservative-run.

Medway Council has worked with local people and agreed six priorities for improvement for the next three years. These are:

- A clean and green environment
- Safer communities
- Children and young people having the best start in life
- Older and vulnerable people maintaining their independence
- People travelling easily and safely in Medway
- Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

## Organisational assessment

### A clean and green environment

Public places are generally clean and well looked after. Streets are cleaner because of initiatives such as community clean up campaigns which involve local people in helping to tidy up an area. But there is still more to do as people are not as satisfied with how clean the streets are as in other places.

Homes in Medway produce much more rubbish than those in similar areas. But levels are falling, so less rubbish is going to landfill. Recycling is quite high at 33%, but is below the national average. Levels are increasing, but not quickly. It will become easier for people to recycle and compost more of their rubbish from 2010 because the Council is improving services. It is too soon to say if new schemes to tell residents how to cut food waste and reuse unwanted furniture will make a big difference.

Medway has been successful in telling people about grants available to make better use of energy in their homes. Many residents have applied for the grants and have benefited from new gas boilers and insulation. This is helping people on lower incomes reduce their heating bills and cut carbon dioxide. Levels of carbon dioxide in Medway remain low and are the lowest in the south east.

## Safer communities

Crime is falling fast. The area has a Community Safety Partnership where the Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, and other groups co-ordinate their work very effectively, which has reduced crime and anti-social behaviour. In the last year crime fell overall by almost 9% on the previous year's levels. There was less anti-social behaviour and fewer fires started deliberately. More people feel safe than three years ago, including younger people, but local people remain concerned. Last year less than 1 in 4 considered the Council and the police deal with anti-social behaviour well. This is important to the Council and it has plans in place to tackle this. Partners have worked to keep people safe when they are out late at night and at weekends. Alcohol control zones in the town centres have helped reduce anti-social behaviour and drunkenness. The SOS bus provides help for anyone who may get into difficulties when out and television screens in public places give out safety messages and information.

## Children and young people having the best start in life

The rating for children's services in Medway Council is that it performs adequately. Performance across schools and day care settings is mixed. Nurseries mostly perform well although fewer are good or better than seen nationally or in similar areas. The quality of childcare is below similar and national averages and particularly poor for childminder settings, where less than half are good or better. Performance is also below national and similar area averages across primary schools where only half are good or better. The proportion of good or better secondary schools is satisfactory overall relative to the position nationally and in similar areas, with three judged outstanding and three inadequate. The overall effectiveness of school sixth forms is better than seen nationally or in similar areas. Provision for children and young

people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is successful. All special schools and the pupil referral units are good. One children's home is satisfactory, and one is good with outstanding features. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good as are private fostering arrangements.

Performance against national indicators for children's services, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and national values. Children's achievement at the end of foundation stage has improved and was in line with the position nationally and in similar areas in 2007/08. Achievement at age 11 however is significantly lower than average by similar area and national standards. The number of young people getting good GCSE results has increased and is now similar to results nationally. Significantly fewer young people gain two or more good GCSEs in science subjects at age 16. The proportion of young people who are not in education training and employment is high. Fewer young people from low income families than seen nationally achieve a Level 2 qualification by age 19. For Level 3 qualifications however the inequality gap is the same as for comparators.

## Older and vulnerable people maintaining their independence

The Council is giving older people and people who need care services the support they need and much of this work is improving. Many people who want to stay in their own home are able to do so safely, because care services help meet their needs. Numbers of people able to do this are higher than the average across the country. Inspectors rate care homes in Medway as good or excellent. It is important that people who are unable to live at home receive high quality care and support when they need it. Information on support and services available is easily available. And most people have their needs for services assessed quickly. Three out of four older people are happy with their home and the neighbourhood they live in. This is not as many as in the rest of the south-east but is the same as places similar to Medway.

Treatment and support for people with disabilities, frail older people and people at risk from drug and alcohol misuse are timely and well co-ordinated. Organisations involved in supporting these people share their money in a number of ways including supporting those at risk from drug and alcohol misuse. Good work prevents many people injuring themselves from falling. Rehabilitation services provided at home are also working well. These approaches, along with others, are helping reduce the number of people admitted to hospital. More needs to be done to assess the level of success of the Council's actions.

The Council is working with other organisations to help improve the choices available to people who rely on long-term care. One way to increase choice is to give people who need care the money to pay for it themselves. This is called 'direct payments' and can lead to people being more satisfied and lower costs. Medway has increased the number of people who receive direct payments. But progress on helping people understand the choices available could be faster. There is good progress in the number of people receiving direct payments, but numbers are lower than in other places similar to

## Medway.

The Council and its partners recognise the importance of good support for people who care for those with long-term health needs. Having listened to what carers say they need, improvements have been made. Organised breaks for carers are now focused on their needs and the number of respite places has increased to offer opportunities for carers to have a holiday and deal with emergencies. This supports those involved in caring for others well, but more needs to be done to review carers' needs quicker.

Some people in Medway rely on benefits. The number of people claiming benefits this year has increased significantly because of the recession. The Council is taking too long to deal with people claiming benefits. Last year people waited over 2 weeks to get payments. Earlier this year that almost doubled. This is improving now as the number of claims being made is falling. Making fast and accurate payments reduces the stress people can experience and the risk of homelessness.

## People travelling easily and safely in Medway

People in Medway are using public transport more. Bus use continues to increase slightly. People's satisfaction with the service is similar to other parts of the south-east, but less than across the rest of the country. Some progress is being made in reducing the number of children and young people who are killed or seriously injured in road accidents. But higher numbers are admitted to hospital with injuries than in similar areas.

The Council is working with other organisations to develop a clear understanding of how transport needs to improve in the area. Plans are being put in place to deliver improvements to bus and train services for local people. The main focus will be improving routes through the area and public transport so that local people can access easily jobs, shops and new housing. This will be adequate as long as the number of new homes and jobs grow together. If the homes are built but the jobs are elsewhere this could lead to significant increases in car use and cause more congestion. The Council and its partners are developing a new system to help reduce traffic congestion and improve the reliability of the bus services across Medway. This should be finished by 2011.

## Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

As part of the Thames Gateway growth area, the Council and other organisations are working hard to provide new homes, attract and support businesses and have good quality jobs in the area. Good progress is being made. Last year 914 homes were built, more than the Council anticipated. They are good quality and suitable for different sized families. Affordability remains an issue as people on lower incomes need seven times their income to be able to afford to buy a home in Medway. Just under half of the homes built last year were suitable for people on lower incomes, but many more are needed. House building has slowed during the recession but the Council is doing several things to ensure building work can continue when possible. It is talking to developers about building affordable homes first to help meet the

high demand, and is working hard to get sites ready for development when the recession ends.

The quality of homes in the area is mixed. Progress is slower on renovating empty homes so new tenants can be found. But most Council owned homes meet national standards for quality. The Council is getting better at preventing homelessness and helping people who are homeless. But people are staying too long in temporary accommodation.

People are now better skilled in Medway. Since the universities arrived in Medway more local people have achieved high level qualifications. The number of people in Medway achieving the highest level of qualifications is growing 3 times faster than the average. The Council works with community groups and voluntary organisations to help people without any formal qualifications improve their skills. More local people have become confident, developed skills and had their knowledge recognised. For some of them this has helped them get a job perhaps for the first time or start volunteering. This all means that local employers have a greater range of skills and knowledge to draw from.

Medway is successfully attracting different businesses and creating more jobs in the area, many of which are well paid. Last year over 1,000 jobs were created or protected. This was more than the number lost through redundancies. The local economy has previously relied on low paid, lower skilled jobs. People with higher level skills have either had to move away from the area for work or work elsewhere, such as in London. This is changing. More well paid and highly skilled jobs are now available in Medway. New businesses continue to move into the Innovation Centre with 18 out of 48 offices occupied since April 2009. As a result over 30 jobs have been created or protected.

More people are exercising regularly partly because of improved facilities. Significant funding has been spent on improving the Black Lion leisure centre and works continues on developing Medway Park. These places provide high quality facilities for local people as well as being promoted to international elite athletes to train at in advance of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Last year only 16% of people took part regularly in sport and other leisure activities. But a survey this year showed 45% of local people now do. It is important to the Council to improve people's health through encouraging healthier lifestyles. The Council is working with health partners to develop specific programmes aimed at helping people lose weight, stop smoking and eat better. High numbers of people take part and enjoy these activities but as yet it is too early to see any improvement in their health.

Many people enjoy the festivals and events, such as the Sweeps and Fuse festivals and concerts in Rochester Castle. But people are not as satisfied with the range of things to do in Medway as people are in other parts of the country. People in Medway are most satisfied with libraries but even this is lower than in other parts of the south east of England.

## Prospects for improvement

Councillors and managers work together well. The Council understands local concerns and listens to local people when developing services. It is good at

encouraging people to help develop services. More people volunteer in Medway than in similar places. It is good at attracting significant investment and funding into the area which is essential to the successful delivery of the planned growth. The greatest threat to the successful delivery of Medway's plans for improving travel in the area will be the lack of funding from new housing development coming forward and any reduction in central government transport funding.

It works well with other organisations. The Council leads the Multi Area Agreement, a major partnership with 4 other councils in north Kent working to improve transport, jobs and skills and deliver homes. People are not as satisfied with the way the Council runs things as in other parts of the south east. But they are more satisfied than in places similar to Medway. The Council is improving how it assesses the success of its actions and approaches so that it can understand the difference its work makes to local people's lives, but this is still at an early stage.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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for an independent overview  
of local public services

# Medway

## Area Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



**oneplace**

for an independent overview  
of local public services



## Contents

Medway at a glance

How is Medway doing?

About Medway

How well do priorities for Medway express community needs and aspirations?


Priorities for Medway

- Children, young people and families
- Economic development, transport and skills
- Health, well-being and older people
- Regeneration (including housing, environment and culture)
- Safe and strong Medway

## Medway at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Medway. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

**Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from**

 Green flag: Stopping people from reoffending

**Red flags - significant concerns, action needed**

No red flags have been identified for Medway

## The local area

Medway is an urban area in South East England. It has a population of 253,500 living mainly in the area's five towns which are Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham. The black and minority ethnic community is larger than in other areas in the South East, in particular Asian or Asian British communities. People living in Medway are younger than the average in the rest of the country. But the proportion of older people is growing fast.

Since the closure of the Royal Naval Dockyard in Chatham in 1984, different industries have moved into the area. Many jobs are now in retail, tourism, and finance. The area is on the north-west coast of Kent in the Thames Gateway growth area resulting in significant investment, providing opportunities for people to improve their skills, creating new jobs and building new homes. There are four universities in the area. Medway is becoming relatively more deprived over time, with some areas among the most deprived nationally.

The next section tells you how Medway's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

## How is Medway doing?

## Children, young people and families

More young people in Medway are getting 5 or more good GCSE's at the age of 16, including English and maths. This compares with the levels achieved in other areas in the country. There are some differences in how well different groups of young people do. The quality of secondary schools is not as good as they could be, but this is being tackled by the Council. Children make good progress during their early years at school, but by the age of 11 their achievements are below that seen nationally and in other similar areas to Medway. Children from different ethnic groups are achieving broadly the same as in other places, and the gap in achievement between children from low income families and the rest is narrower than in similar areas to Medway, which is good. Medway has fewer primary schools that are rated good or better, but the Council is clear what needs to be done and is tackling this. The numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training has increased in the last year and are relatively high. There are a good range of opportunities for 14-19 year olds and partners are identifying those young people most at risk of not progressing earlier, so that they can be given additional support. Participation of 17 year olds in education and training has significantly improved.

Reducing the high levels of teenage pregnancy in Medway is an important priority for the Primary Care Trust, Council and other partners. However, progress has been slow and based on current performance, the 50% reduction target by 2010 is unlikely to be met. Partners have local plans in place to tackle this, but it is too soon to know if these actions will make a real difference.

Much is being done to keep children and young people in Medway safe. Where there are concerns about a child's or young person's safety, the assessment of what needs to be done by children's social care is faster and now in line with similar areas. A comprehensive anti-bullying programme is in place, and young people report that Medway schools respond well to problems of bullying.

## Economic development, transport and skills

The skills of people in Medway are improving. Partners are working well together to provide training opportunities in some of the poorer neighbourhoods in the area. As a result, more people of working age are achieving level 1 and 2 national vocational qualifications (NVQs). And the numbers are now similar to elsewhere in the country. This means people are in a better position to get a job and benefit from the planned increase in employment in the area. More people are getting degrees and higher education qualifications. Levels are not yet the same as elsewhere in the country, but numbers are rising faster than in other places. These will increase further as about half of the students at the four universities in Medway are from the local area. This is good for job prospects as areas with a skilled workforce are attractive to businesses.

However, the recession has hit the area hard. Unemployment and the number

of people claiming benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance are higher than the national and regional averages. These numbers vary widely from one area to another. Partners are working together on a range of initiatives to protect and create new jobs and help people claiming benefits back into work, with success. The numbers and types of local jobs have increased, as a result of joint initiatives and because the right space and support is being created to attract businesses to the area. This is a positive step towards Medway's ambition to be an economic hub in the south east.

Plans are developing to improve bus and train services for local people. These include a range of measures including using better technology to keep traffic moving and a new bus station amongst others. December will also bring the introduction of a new fleet of high speed trains serving Medway and other areas of north Kent. Together they should help to prevent additional congestion caused by the likely increase in the number of homes and workers. But it is too early to know if these measures will be successful. This will partly depend on new housing and employment opportunities happening at a similar time, as well as continuation of government funding.

## Health, well-being and older people

Progress in reducing the high numbers of people who smoke in Medway is a priority for the PCT, Council and partners, and progress is good. The target for smoking quitters has been exceeded and partners are on track to meet the 2010 target. More adults are exercising regularly as a result of improvements to the quality of sports and leisure facilities and the range of sports and activities on offer, including free swimming for younger and older people. This is positive as the numbers of people who are overweight in Medway is high in comparison with other areas. The numbers of children participating in PE and sport is improving which is good, but levels are still lower than elsewhere. The emotional well being of children and young people is good, but it is recognised that they are waiting too long for mental health services if they need them. This is being looked at by the PCT.

The quality of the healthcare services in Medway is improving and expected to continue, with a focus on health inequalities. But in some areas, such as mental health services for children and adolescents for example, the rate of change is not as fast as it needs to be to deliver a first class health service for local people.

Higher than average numbers of adults and their carers who have long term health problems are being supported to live independently in their own homes. The Council is working with other organisations to improve choices available to people who rely on longer term care, and the numbers of people using direct payments continues to increase. Support for carers is improving, but there is more to do to review their need quicker. Adults who are not eligible for social care are being supported by signposting them to services within the community.

## Regeneration (including housing, environment and culture)

Progress on building the large number of new and affordable homes for Medway over the last year has been good. Despite the economic downturn, there has been a steady flow because of council action. This is important if the area is to grow as planned. Affordability still remains an issue. Most council-owned homes already meet the government's decent homes standard, but the quality of some privately rented homes is poor. The Council is working with landlords to improve these. Too many homes in Medway are empty for more than 6 months, and numbers of people on housing waiting lists are still high. Public, private and community organisation partners now have a long-term approach to planning and managing the housing needs and demands of the area. A new long-term housing plan for Medway is in place, based on a more detailed understanding of local housing needs and demand.

Homes in Medway produce much more waste than those in similar areas, but levels are falling fast. As a result, less waste is going to landfill, which is good for the environment. The Council is helping to cut waste by improving its recycling service and is encouraging composting. Residents are happy with the service. Recycling at just over 33% is below the average levels achieved elsewhere, and the amount is not increasing much. Further improvements are planned and it will become easier for people to recycle and compost even more of their waste from 2010. It is too soon to say whether more recent schemes to tell residents about how to cut food waste and about reuse of unwanted furniture will make a big difference. The quality of the local environment is good and public places are generally clean and well looked after. A range of environmental improvements have been delivered as a result of joint work with local communities.

Medway has been successful in telling people about grants available for making better use of energy in their homes. Many residents have applied for the grants and have benefited from measures such as gas boiler replacement and insulation. This is helping less well-off people reduce heating bills and cut the harmful greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide. Levels in Medway remain low.

Partners in Medway are coming together to keep improving the cultural, heritage, arts and sports activities people can do and experience in the area. But there is more to do to ensure they work together in the best way to ensure Medway is an interesting and lively place for people to live, visit and work in. This is important if Medway is going to develop as the city of the Thames Gateway growth area. There is also more to do to make sure all people find something of interest to them.

## Safe and strong Medway

Crime in Medway has fallen fast and is already lower than in similar places. All types of crime have fallen, with impressive drops in the number of burglaries and car thefts. There has also been less anti-social behaviour and fewer fires deliberately started. As a result Medway is a safer place.

Reducing reoffending and tackling anti-social behaviour are important priorities of the local crime and disorder reduction partnership. Innovative partnership working by the police and probation service is playing a big part in reducing burglaries and car crimes. People who are likely to carry out a crime again are more closely checked. This new approach is making a big

difference, without spending any more public money. The numbers of burglaries and theft have dropped by a quarter over 12 months. This is much better than in other areas and these improvements are likely to continue. Because of this success, the police and probation service are using the same approach to tackle anti-social behaviour. And there are early signs that this is also being successful.

However, despite all types of crime falling, local people say they are not as happy with Medway as a place to live. More people feel safe than three years ago, including younger people, but local people remain concerned. Last year less than 1 in 4 considered the police and Council deal with anti-social behaviour well. This is important to the police and Council and they are doing more work to try to understand why this is the case.

## About Medway

A recent survey shows that in Medway 68 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is lower than the average for similar areas and lower than the national average of 81 per cent.

Medway is the largest urban area in the south east of England outside of London. It covers 192 square kilometres and includes the five towns of Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham, as well as the Hoo Peninsula and surrounding rural areas. Almost half of the area is rural. Nearly 253,500 people live in Medway with over 88% living in the five Medway towns. There is a strong further and higher education presence in Medway, including the University for the Creative Arts and the Universities@Medway partnership. This includes Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Greenwich, University of Kent and Mid Kent College.

Medway's local economy was badly affected when the Royal Naval Dockyard in Chatham closed in 1984. Since then the area has seen gradual economic recovery and diversification. Almost half the jobs in Medway are within the retail and public sectors and generally offer low paid employment. As a result the average wage in Medway is 10% below the national average. Approximately 26% of the workforce commutes out of the area and many enjoy higher wages than can be secured locally.

Medway is a designated growth area and the biggest regeneration zone in the Thames Gateway growth area. The Government published a planning framework for the Thames Gateway 1995 to make the most of the opportunity of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, and to respond to the challenges local people in the area faced in accessing homes and jobs. The Thames Gateway in Kent covers the area east of the M25, bordered to the north by the River Thames and to the south by the A2 and the Downs. Each area within the Thames Gateway in Kent is developing a distinctive role. Medway is developing as a new 'city' based on its riverside developments, heritage and new university campus.

The population profile is slightly younger than regional and national averages. Older people make up only 16% of the population which is lower than the regional average of 20% and the national average of 19%. The largest ethnic group is White British which makes up 90% of the population. The second

largest ethnic group is Asian or Asian British accounting for 3.5% of the population. This is higher than the regional average but below the national average.

Population predictions estimate that the overall population is expected to grow by 5% or 11,700 people over the next ten years. However, this figure does not take account of the expected growth of the student population through the expansion of the universities or development linked to the Thames Gateway. It is estimated that children aged less than four years will account for seven per cent of this growth. In line with the national picture the older population is also set to increase in Medway. Although it is starting from a lower base than the national average, it is a faster growing community than in the rest of the country.

Medway is an area of contrast with areas of deprivation and affluence. It is ranked 150 out of 354 areas nationally in terms of deprivation (IMD 2007). This position has changed since 2004 when it was ranked 160. This is due to changes in the population profile and migration in some of the most deprived wards. There are five super output areas (SOA) in the 10 per cent most deprived areas nationally. In contrast six SOA are in the least deprived 10 per cent of wards nationally.

Health outcomes are generally worse in Medway than in the rest of the south east and inequalities exist by deprivation, location and gender. Healthy eating in adults and physical activity rates in both children and adults are below the national average. There is a six year gap for men in life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived areas. In the last ten years early deaths from heart disease and stroke have decreased but remain above the national average. Smoking rates are the highest in the south east and the death rate from smoking is above the national average. Teenage conception rates remain high.

Medway has a wide cultural and heritage offer available to local people and visitors alike. The local environment is of good quality with eight designated nature conservation areas with important estuary and marsh habitats. As a visitor destination Medway attracts mainly day visitors for local festivals and to the Historic Dockyard at Chatham. Cultural assets include the newly opened Dickens World in Chatham, Fort Amherst Heritage Park, Upnor Castle, Rochester Castle located near Rochester Cathedral, museums, sports and activity facilities, and street festivals, such as Fuse Medway.

## How well do priorities for Medway express community needs and aspirations?

Building significant numbers of new homes, creating jobs and improving skills are some of the key challenges and opportunities for Medway. A less visible, but equally challenging and important issue for the area is raising the aspirations of local people. Ensuring all people can prosper from the growth of the area, as part of the Thames Gateway, is essential to the area's success. The closure of the Royal Naval Dockyard in 1984 and continued decline of manufacturing had a massive effect on local communities. Significant numbers

of jobs, training opportunities and apprenticeships were lost at the time. This created high unemployment, low levels of skills and poor self esteem. Public services and their partners have been working hard for many years to tackle these issues through regenerating the area, attracting jobs, improving people's skills and confidence, with some clear successes. However, in some of the poorer neighbourhoods of the borough, such as Twydall, Brook-Lines and South Strood, these issues remain. Here, people's health is less good. Many more people smoke and exercise less. Household incomes tend to be lower, and children don't perform as well at school, which means their employment opportunities can be limited.

Local public services and their partners understand the challenges and opportunities for Medway very well. These are reflected in the range of the partnership's medium and long-term plans. Taken together these set out what improvements partners are working towards, and what success will look like. However, at the moment it is not easy for members of the public and wider interest groups to understand the full picture of what partners are trying to achieve in one place, and how well they are doing.

The overarching 3 year Community Plan to 2010 identifies the local priorities for the area, including improving the quality of life and increasing and improving employment opportunities through regeneration. These were decided on after listening to the views of many different people, communities and organisations in the area. The local area agreement 2008 to 2011 provides the focus on the things in the community plan which are the most important. Underneath these, there are a wide range of detailed plans, many of which are long-term, and provide further measures of success. For example the Children and Young People's Plan and the Community Safety plan. Partners recognise there is more to do to bring together and set out a longer term picture of improvements for the area in one place. This will make it easy for the public and other organisations to see, and importantly understand, what part they can play in helping to deliver it. A new community plan is being developed and consulted on. Partners are improving the way their joint working is being monitored and in making sure partners are held to account for their performance. Partners work well together and relationships are good. The 2010 area assessment will report on the new plan and how well success is being measured.

All public services provide opportunities for people to have a say in how services could improve or be run. Last year more people were involved in decisions which affected them than elsewhere in the country and in similar places to Medway. Despite this, only 23 per cent of people say they feel they can influence decision in their locality, which is lower than national average.

## Children, young people and families

More young people in Medway are getting 5 or more, good GCSE's at the age of 16 years, including English and maths. Levels now compare to those achieved in other areas in the country. This is good as it increases their future job prospects. Fewer of them were getting 2 or more, good GCSEs in science, but results for 2008/09 suggest significant improvement. There are also some differences in how well different groups of young people do in GCSE examinations - more Black, Asian and Chinese young people in Medway are doing well than in other areas. Some white young people are not progressing



as well as their peers. The quality of secondary schools is not as good as they should be, with 5 schools not achieving the governments minimum target levels for GCSEs. These are being tackled by the council. For example, 2 of these schools have already been closed and an academy is opening in their place. Another will close in 2010 and will be replaced by a second academy. The fourth school will become a national challenge Trust school in 2010 and the fifth school is improving.

Children make good progress during their early years at school. The gap between the lowest achieving children and others is narrowing quickly, and faster than elsewhere in the country. Good progress is being made in the more disadvantaged parts of the borough. However, by the time children are 11 years of age their achievement is below that seen nationally and in other areas similar to Medway. Fewer children are reaching the expected level 4 in English and maths at Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds). Children from different ethnic groups are achieving broadly the same as in other places. Some white boys are doing less well than their peers elsewhere. The difference in achievement at age 11 between children from low income families and the rest is narrower than in similar areas, which is good, but the gap is not closing fast enough.

Medway has fewer primary schools that are rated good or better than seen nationally or in similar areas. The Council is clear what needs to be done and is tackling this. For example, challenging schools to improve, as well as looking to reduce the number of times younger children have to change schools before they get to secondary school. To do this, they are looking to join separate infant and junior schools where possible. Medway has more of these than other similar areas. This is important because the more times children change schools can affect their performance. They will also look to close underperforming schools that do not improve. To help it do this, the Council has been successful in securing significant government funding to improve the condition of the remaining school buildings to make them better learning environments. This package of measures should help to ensure standards improve in the future. Because of the lack of improvement in key stage 2 results this year, the Council has responded quickly by putting 3 levels of enhanced support and challenge for underperforming primary schools in place, on top of its normal work programmes. This is in the early stages of being implemented and it is too soon to know if this will be successful. The 2010 area assessment report will report on whether this action is achieving better results for 11 year olds.

Much is being done to keep children and young people in Medway safe. Schools and other services have good or better procedures for keeping children and young people safe and they are satisfactory for child minding. When there are concerns about a child's or young person's safety, the assessment of what needs to be done by children's social care services is faster and now in line with similar areas. This wasn't always the case, and improvements are making a difference. For example, the numbers of children or young people requiring a second or consecutive child protection plan, because of recurring concerns over their safety or well being have decreased. These are now in line with other similar areas, which is better for children. Reasonable progress is being made in reducing the number of children and young people who are killed or seriously injured in road accidents. But higher numbers are admitted to hospital with injuries than in similar areas. And significantly more children report having experienced bullying than in similar

areas. The council is tackling this with a comprehensive anti-bullying programme, including training for schools and their staff, with on-line support for children and young people.

The numbers of young people in Medway who are not in education, training or employment have increased in the last year and are relatively high. This is poor because their chances of a good quality of life are reduced and they may miss out on the increased job opportunities offered through the area's significant development. More recent survey feedback on the 14-19 diploma developments and review of the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in the area, demonstrates a rich curriculum offer and a good range of opportunities for 14-19 year olds. Partners are identifying young people who are at risk of not progressing to education, employment or training when they complete compulsory secondary education, as early as possible. This means they can then get additional support. Numbers of young people who have offended and are in education, employment or training is good and improving. This helps reduce their chances of re-offending. Participation of 17 year olds in education and training is significantly improving although overall is a little lower than nationally and in similar areas. Those from low income families do not do as well in achieving Level 2 qualifications at age 19 as they do nationally. Although, the proportion of young people achieving Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications by age 19 is satisfactory and improving year on year broadly reflecting national and similar area rates.

Reducing the high levels of teenage pregnancy in Medway is an important priority for Primary Care Trust, Medway Council, and other partners. But to date there has been little improvement and levels have only reduced marginally over the last 10 years. As a result the target to reduce teenage pregnancies by 50% is unlikely to be achieved by 2010 based on current performance. Partners have local plans in place to tackle this and their work together is coordinated through the Medway Teenage Pregnancy Board. Actions include, for example, early identification of young people at risk of teenage pregnancy and providing better contraception and sexual health services when young people most need them. It is hoped this will help prevent unplanned pregnancies from happening. But it is too soon to know if these actions will make a real difference. Our 2010 assessment will report in more detail on whether these actions are making a difference.

## Economic development, transport and skills

Improving people's skills has been an important priority for the Medway Regeneration partnership and levels are rising. More working people now have level 1 and 2 national vocational qualifications (NVQs), and the numbers are similar to elsewhere in the country for the first time. Partners are working well together to bring training to some of the poorer neighbourhoods in the area, such as All Saints. People in such areas can often face difficulties in getting jobs because of their age, health or personal circumstances. Innovative projects such as Reignite have helped 648 more vulnerable people over the last two years to improve their reading and writing, gain other new skills and, importantly improve their self-confidence. Many of these people were unemployed, have low skills, or may have been involved with drugs and alcohol or victims of domestic violence for example. This is helping them get back into paid and voluntary work. Other partnership projects such as the

SCORE training initiative is helping local people with vocational qualifications. There has also been a huge increase in take-up on the Train to Gain programme, working with local employers. These types of projects are proving successful, but they are not equally available to all people living in similar poorer areas in Medway. More needs to be done to tackle the problem of availability.

The number of people getting degrees and higher education qualifications has risen greatly. Levels are not yet at those found elsewhere in the country, but numbers are rising fast, and are likely to increase. There are four universities in the area and a new Mid Kent higher education campus being built, and these act as a spur for the ambitions of local children. Closer working between the Council, University of Kent and University of the Creative Arts, primary and secondary schools is having an affect. Around half of students attending the universities are local, in contrast to 12 years ago, when there were none. This is good for the area because businesses are attracted to places where there is a more skilled workforce. In turn, local people don't need to move away to get improved skills, or a better paid, higher skilled job. Increasing the number of people with higher skills is an important priority for the partnership because it is an important means of changing the character of Medway's economy. In the past, many local people had lower skills and relatively lower wages because of the readily available jobs at the Royal Naval dockyard in Chatham, which closed in the 1980's. The type of jobs available in the area is slowly starting to change and the incomes of many people are rising.

The area has been hard hit by the recession. Unemployment and the number of people claiming benefits such as Job seekers allowance are higher than the national and regional averages. These numbers vary widely from one area to another. Partners are working together on a range of initiatives to protect and create new jobs and to help people on benefits back into work. For example, 409 employers in Medway have signed up to a scheme to work with the government's Jobcentre Plus. The scheme helps local people back into work by giving job training and work trials, for example. Since September 2008 the scheme has filled 900 vacancies at the Council and NHS Medway alone. In addition, the Gateway Knowledge Alliance - a partnership between the North Kent councils, various community and voluntary organisations and Groundwork Trust Kent and Medway - is creating 600 temporary jobs for up to 12 months each. These jobs are intended for 18- to 24-year olds, the age group hardest hit by the recession. The scheme provides new skills and experience in a wide range of jobs from event management, teaching assistants through to advice and information services.

The number and types of jobs available locally has also increased. This has been achieved through creating the right spaces that businesses need to locate in Medway and through supporting them to expand with advice. For example, an innovation centre for high technology companies has been opened next to Rochester airport and another in the historic dockyard. Most new businesses starting up and which are based at sites managed by the council survive. High speed trains starting in December 2009 will significantly reduce rail journey times to London. This will also help make Medway a more attractive business destination.

More help is planned to improve both skills levels and the local economy across Medway and the rest of the Thames Gateway area further. An

agreement between Medway Council and the North Kent boroughs of Dartford, Gravesham, Swale and Kent County Council has been signed to improve skills, housing and transport across the whole area. The partnership has set itself challenging targets, such as 58,000 jobs and 52,140 new homes by 2026 as well as increasing prosperity. But this new agreement is in its early stage of delivery and it is too early to see results.

Public services, working together as part of the Medway Economic Partnership have a 10 point plan to help support businesses and people through the recession. Actions range from graduate work placement schemes for micro businesses, business start up grants, through to local apprenticeships. Partners were clear that free swimming for younger and older people as well as the festival programme and free entertainment are important to people's wider well being during these more difficult times. These have been protected from any funding cuts. The small business community in has been particularly active in making sure public services in Medway understand how they can help the many micro small business in the area. Many of their suggestions are around improving procurement opportunities. We have not been able to follow up what difference these various initiatives have made, as it is too early to know. Our 2010 report will report in more detail on the progress made, including how the suggestions of the small business community are being progressed.

A clearer understanding of the transport needs in Medway is developing. The Council, other public services and transport providers are putting plans in place to improve local bus and train services. For example, these range from improving train stations and bus routes through the area, as well as ensuring buses run on time. This is being achieved by giving buses priority at traffic lights. More stops are planned as well as making sure all buses are easy for all people to use. A new bus station is being built in Chatham Town Centre and in December the new fleet of high speed trains across Medway will be in use. These measures should help to ensure that the new homes and jobs planned for the area will not cause more road congestion. But it is too early to know whether these plans will work. Success will depend in part on new housing developments coming forward to provide some of the money for these plans, and on government funding continuing. The plans are intended to encourage residents of areas where the new homes will be built to use public transport to commute, rather than use cars. This will depend on new housing and employment opportunities happening at similar times. If the homes are built but the jobs are elsewhere, this could lead to significant increases in car use and cause more congestion and emissions of greenhouses gases such as carbon dioxide in the area.

Reducing traffic congestion is important for local people. Improvements to the road systems in Chatham and Gillingham should ease traffic flows. The Council is planning to use new technology from 2011 to manage the flow of traffic in the Medway area. This should reduce congestion and in doing so make bus services more reliable. But it is too early to know this will be a success.

## Health, well-being and older people

Reducing the number of people who smoke is an important priority for the PCT, Council, and other partners. Many more people smoke and die from

smoking related illnesses in Medway than the average levels found elsewhere in the country. Partners recognise that reducing smoking is an important factor in poor health and reducing it will help to improve people's life expectancy. They have set themselves a target and progress in helping people to give up smoking is good. This is being achieved through a range of programmes provided by the Stop Smoking Service. The target for smoking quitters was exceeded this year, and further improvements are expected. This should mean the target for 2010 will be met.

The number of people who are overweight in Medway is high compared to other areas in the south east, and levels of healthy eating are low. Fewer people are eating 5 or more fruit or vegetables. The Council and partners have worked hard to increase the quality of sports and leisure facilities and range of sports and activities. For example, significant funding has been spent on developing Medway Park and improving the Black Lion leisure centre within it. Free swimming is available for adults over 60 and children and young people, and there are exercise and weight management schemes. As a result more adults are taking part, and almost half of local people exercise regularly. This is a significant increase from 2 years ago.

There are fewer overweight and obese children in reception year compared to the average for England. This is promising, but it is too early to know if numbers will stay at this level in the future. Partners recognise that the levels of overweight 11 year olds are higher than they should be. Participation in PE and sport is improving, which is good, but it is still lower than the average amount children elsewhere in the country do.

The emotional well-being of children and young people is good, but children are waiting too long for mental health services by national standards. The primary care trust recognises this and is looking at local needs and services to improve this. Our 2010 area assessment will report on progress and importantly whether children and young people are receiving good quality services quicker.

The quality of healthcare in Medway is improving and expected to continue with a focus on health inequalities. Good progress has been made in waiting times for cancer services and reduction of deaths from cancer and heart disease. However, in other areas such as childhood obesity, mental health services for young people and teenage pregnancy the rate of change is not as fast as it needs to be to deliver a first class health service for local people. In addition, there are concerns that children's safeguarding arrangements in Medway NHS Foundation Trust Hospital are not always consistent and that risk assessments of hospital buildings did not always consider the needs of everyone to ensure that patients, visitors and staff were safe. This is being looked at and the hospital has been improving its buildings in recent months. Our 2010 assessment will continue to report on progress being made in improving the quality of the health care sector.

Higher than average numbers of adults and their carers who have long term health problems are being supported to live independently in their own homes. This is good. Adult social care services in Medway are performing well. If people need to go to hospital, partners work well together, to make sure they can come back home as early as possible. This is possible because of services such as falls prevention and rehabilitation at home services, like physiotherapy.

The Council is working with other organisations to help improve the choices available to people who rely on long-term care. One way of doing this is to give people who need care the money to pay for it themselves. This is called 'direct payments' and can lead to people being more satisfied and lower costs. There has been good progress to encourage the use of direct payments, and numbers have increased. However, they remain below the average for similar councils.

Support for carers in Medway is improving. There is clear recognition of the importance in supporting those people who care for those with long term health needs and support has improved. Organised breaks for carers are now focused on their needs and the number of respite places has increased. This gives carers the chance to have a holiday and deal with emergencies. This is better, but more needs to be done to review carers' needs quicker.

Support is also given to adults who are not eligible for social care. This is done through signposting people to other services within the community. For example the council funds voluntary organisations to provide services to help people stay in their homes, such as shopping and gardening services. This is important as fewer people than elsewhere in the country say that older people are receiving the support they need to live independently. We have not been able to look at this area in detail in our report this year. Our 2010 assessment will report on this.

## Regeneration (including housing, environment and culture)

Public places are generally clean and well looked after. Streets are cleaner because of initiatives such as community clean up campaigns which involve local people in helping to tidy up an area. But there is still more to do as people say they are not as satisfied with how clean the streets are as in other places. The Council is doing some more work to understand why this is the case, and what actions need to be taken to improve satisfaction levels.

The local environment is of good quality with eight designated nature conservation areas, important estuary and marsh habitats, and 2 parks with Green Flags. These are awarded for high quality. Environmental improvements, such as the walkway at Rochester Riverside and Ranscombe Farm, one of the area's third country parks make the area more attractive for local people, investors and visitors. Local communities have been actively involved in improving their environments. For example, work in the more deprived areas of the borough on redeveloping Hillyfields Community Park, has helped local people contribute to improving their area. People living on the Hoo Peninsula worked with public services to improve the green space in the centre of the village. These facilities help improve the quality of the local area for local people and visitors.

Progress on building the large number of new and affordable homes for Medway over the last year has been good. This is important if the area is to grow as planned. Over 900 new homes were built, more than the target set by government. This was good, as over the last 7 years the area was behind

in the number of houses expected to be built. Just under half of these new homes were at a price people on lower incomes can afford. A good range of different size homes are available to cater for different needs. These include smaller flats through to family sized houses. But affordability remains an issue. Some people on lower incomes need seven times their income to be able to afford to buy a home. House building has slowed in the recession, but Medway Council is taking steps to ensure building work continues where possible. For example, it is talking to developers about building affordable homes first, as demand is highest for these. It has also been looking again at some of the conditions applied to planning permissions, to make schemes more financially viable for house builders. In addition, it has been getting sites ready for development. Because of this, the area is seeing a steady flow of new and affordable homes, despite the economic downturn. This should mean partners and developers are also in a better position to get going on building more houses when the recession finishes. This gives some confidence that future targets for new and affordable homes will be met.

Most council-owned homes already meet the government's decent homes standard. This means they are warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities. The Council is improving the few that do not, although these will not all be done by the 2010 deadline. However, council-owned homes represent only a small part of the housing in the area. The quality of some privately rented homes is poor, but Medway Council has greatly improved its approach to working with landlords to improve these. This is better because those who are renting them, often families with children, will be able to enjoy living in good quality and safe homes.

Too many homes in Medway are empty for more than six months, which is a waste. There are still high numbers of people on housing waiting lists, and others in general need of accommodation who could be renting these properties from private landlords. The Council does have plans to encourage homeowners to improve their properties and bring them back into use. But the plans are not big enough to reduce the number of empty homes by that many. The Council needs to do more.

Medway Council is developing a more long-term approach to planning and managing the housing needs in the area. Something it hasn't always done well in the past. A new housing partnership is in place, made up of the Council, and local house builders, landlords, and community organisations. It brings together the housing knowledge and expertise of a much wider group of people than before. A new long-term housing plan for Medway is in place, and more detailed research is providing a better understanding of local housing needs and demand, including people living in rural areas in Medway. By working together partners are in a better position to plan for, and meet, the challenging housing needs of Medway in the future.

Homes in Medway produce much more rubbish than those in similar areas, but levels are falling fast. As a result, less rubbish needs to go to landfill, which is good for the environment. The target for cutting household waste by 2011 has already been met, but it is likely that waste levels have fallen partly because of the recession. The Council is helping to cut waste by improving its recycling service and is encouraging composting. This has been successful and residents are happy with the service. Recycling at just over 33% is below the average levels achieved elsewhere in the country and the amount rose only slightly during the last year. Better services planned for 2010 will widen the

range of materials collected for recycling and composting. The Council has begun working with a charity to recycle unwanted furniture. A campaign, Love Food Hate Waste, to tell people how to cut food waste is about to be launched. However, it is too early to say whether these schemes will make a big difference.

Medway produces less of the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, than many other areas. The Council has worked with the local Energy Saving Trust advice centre to tell residents about grants for making homes better at using energy. This cuts the amount of greenhouse gas produced by homes and helps residents to use less fuel, saving them money. The number of Medway residents using these grants is the second highest of any area in the south-east of England. The numbers of vulnerable people on lower incomes benefiting from grants has more than doubled this year. This is helping to keep them warm and make their money go further.

The many new homes planned for Medway will be more energy efficient, meaning they will use less energy. Clear standards are in place for developers to follow. Thirty-two homes have already been built to the middle level 3 of the code for sustainable 'green' homes. A small number, recently built by Medway Housing Service achieved the higher, level 4, standard. Many more are planned.

Homes in Medway produce more of the area's greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, than comes from transport and industry. More will continue to be done to reduce the energy they use. The Council is now planning to do more work with business and other public organisations who produce greenhouse gases as well. It is too early to say whether the Council and the organisations it is working with will hit targets for cutting the gases. The details of this plan are being worked on.

It is important to many organisations that there is a wide variety of good quality things for people to do to help the future success of the area. Organisations involved include mainly the Council, the universities, the Historic Dockyard, Rochester Cathedral and regional arts and heritage organisations. With so many new houses and jobs planned for the area, these organisations understand well the importance of good quality cultural events and activities to make the area an attractive place to live. Last year a survey showed that people are not as satisfied with the range of things to do in Medway as people are in other parts of the country. More recent information is more positive. Partners are aware of the need to keep improving. They also understand how taking part in cultural events and activities can improve people's health. Tackling all of this is reflected in the cultural plans partner organisations are developing.

Work is going well to improve the range of things to do in Medway. Significant funding has been spent on developing and improving Medway Park and the Black Lion leisure centre to provide local people with high quality sports facilities. International athletes will also be able to use these in advance of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This is good as these athletes can help raise the aspirations of young people in Medway by being good role models. More people are now being active. Almost half of local people exercise regularly which is a significant increase from 2 years ago. This is important as many people in Medway are overweight and less healthy than in other parts of the south-east. Local people and visitors enjoy attending



festivals and events, such as the Sweeps and Dickens festivals, the Fuse festival and concerts at Rochester Castle.

There is more to do to understand what some people who already live in the area want. Taking part and sharing cultural experiences can help improve self esteem and develop skills and networks. In some neighbourhoods with higher unemployment and people experiencing poorer health, some work has been done to understand people's views. But partners should do more to find opportunities to listen to local views and link with work already underway in these areas.

A clear way forward for continuing to improve the range of attractions and activities for local people and visitors to the area is now in place. Medway Council led the development of a new cultural strategy and partners have very recently agreed it. The strategy sets out priorities which are breaking down barriers which prevent people from taking part, widening the range of things to do and preserving the heritage of the area. It has taken time to develop this approach and not all partners have done as much as they could to develop a shared approach. Most importantly, not all the funding that is needed to deliver the improvements is in place. Because of this it is not clear how partners are going to deliver all the improvements proposed in the strategy. The Council and its partners have a strong track record of attracting investment into the area. Over £4 million of European funding has been recently awarded to a scheme to improve five of the major heritage attractions in the area. This money will be spent on continuing to improve attractions in the area and celebrate the important maritime history. But more needs to be done to identify how partners are going to deliver other improvements.

## Safe and strong Medway

### Green flag: Stopping people from reoffending

Reducing reoffending and tackling anti-social behaviour are important priorities for the local crime and disorder reduction partnership. These have fallen fast and are at a low level because of the way the police and probation service are working together. The pioneering integrated offender management unit works quickly with those just released from prison, and who are likely to carry out these crimes again. Good communication with the prison service means the police and probation service know when offenders are going to be released. They also make sure the conditions attached to the release are right, including any conditions for day releases. For example, this might mean attending courses to help get off drugs and alcohol. By working together, sharing an office and using the same databases to record and share information, the police and probation service are able to keep a closer eye on what people are doing. They closely supervise those who are more likely to carry out a crime again, and review their behaviour more regularly to help them stop them from doing so. No extra public money is being spent to achieve these results - just working together differently. Because of the success of the unit, the same approach is being used to reduce anti-social behaviour. The integrated offender management unit is working closely with other public service teams and partnerships who are already working with people and families causing problems. For example police neighbourhood task

teams, housing providers and the joint family management unit. They hold to account those who cause anti-social behaviour, if their behaviour doesn't improve. This is good because local people say that parents do not take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children. Early results in hot spot areas are already showing a drop in anti-social behaviour of just over 20 per cent. Kent police has now introduced several similar schemes which draw on Medway's experience.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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