

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**31 JANUARY 2017**

### **ATTENDANCE OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director Regeneration, Culture,  
Environment and Transformation

Author: Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer

#### **Summary**

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within the Housing and Community Services Portfolio, which fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services being held to account.

#### **1. Background**

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services are:

- Disabled adaptations to housing
- Homelessness and housing options
- Housing management and allocations
- Housing strategy
- Private sector housing
- Housing Landlord Services (HRA)
- Development of the Council's housing stock
- Adult learning
- Libraries and Community Hubs

#### **2. DISABLED ADAPTATIONS TO HOUSING**

Achievements for 2016/2017

2.1 For the 2016/17 financial year up until 31 December the Council has provided assistance to 141 households to allow them to undertake alterations and adaptations to allow them to remain living independently in their homes.

### **3. HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS**

Achievements for 2016-2017

- 3.1 The Council has continued to refocus the Housing Options Service, working with a range of organisations and services, to help prevent households from becoming homeless. This is achieved through a range of initiatives including schemes to access the private rented sector, interventions to sustain tenancies and closer working with private landlords. Between April 2016 and the end of September 2016 this has resulted in 286 cases whose homelessness has been prevented or relieved an increase of 126% compared to the same period in the 2015-2016.
- 3.2 It is not always possible to prevent households from becoming homeless. The number of households approaching the Council for assistance has continued to rise with an average of 158 approaches per month compared to 131 per month during 2015-2016. However, an increased focus on prevention has helped to minimise the number of households that the Council owes an ongoing duty to accommodate, with an increase of 3.5% during April-September 2016-2017 compared to the same period in 2015-2016. This is compared to a rise of 7.8% across Kent for the same period.
- 3.3 The increase in the number of households approaching the Council, coupled with a reduction of social housing lets has resulted in the numbers of households in temporary accommodation increasing. At the end of December 2016, 318 households were in temporary accommodation. Without the dedicated focus on improving prevention work the likely increase for Medway would have been similar to the one seen across Kent. National data, currently available until the end of September 2016 indicates that the Council is performing well in relation to the number of households in temporary accommodation. The number of households in temporary accommodation in Medway increased by 7.3% between April 2015 and the end of September 2016 compared to 66% in Kent and 26% across the South East.

### **4. HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALLOCATIONS**

Achievements for 2016/17

- 4.1 The Council's Allocations policy sets out the framework for the approach that will be taken for the allocation of social housing held by the 26 Housing Associations operating in Medway. The service also manages the allocation of specialist supported accommodation commissioned by the council including hostels, extra care and sheltered housing schemes.
- 4.2 From April 2016 to the end of December 2016, 594 households have secured accommodation through the scheme compared to 839 for the same period last year. This reduction has largely been due to the low levels of house building.

- 4.3 Each application to join the register is assessed against the criteria set out within the allocations policy. At the end of December 2016 there were 21,980 applicants on the register. This is an increase of 4.8% compared to the previous year. Of these, 5,873 had an identified housing need considered high enough to be placed in the active bands of A to D. Of those 2,690 had a low housing need but were eligible for sheltered or extra care housing only.

## **5. HOUSING STRATEGY**

### Achievements for 2016/2017

- 5.1 The Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team works with Housing Associations, developers and the Homes and Communities Agency to identify opportunities to develop additional affordable housing. Housebuilding across Medway remains at a low level, but the service has been successful in delivering 80 units of affordable homes year to date, including two fully wheelchair compliant homes. The Council forecast to deliver a total of around 100 new affordable homes by the end of the year.
- 5.2 Good progress has been made on two Extra Care schemes. These will deliver an additional 125 units of accommodation for older people in Medway who require flexible care and support. Both schemes will be completed in 2017-2018.
- 5.3 The service also works with other partners including Children's and Adults Social Care, Public Health, charities and other organisations in to identify opportunities for joint working to help meet housing needs across Medway.
- 5.4 A range of Housing Related Support services are commissioned to help meet client groups with specific housing related needs. This includes floating support, specialist domestic abuse advice and accommodation, hostels, schemes for offenders, young people and other vulnerable client groups. The Council has a programme of service reviews and all of the services have been validated. The review programme ensures that the funding allocated to these services is being used effectively to benefit vulnerable people living in Medway and means that service providers can see where they are performing strongly and where they can focus their efforts to improve their services further.

## **6. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING**

### Achievements for 2016/2017

- 6.1 The majority of housing in Medway is privately rented or owned and the private rented sector continues to expand locally, with one in five households now renting privately. In partnership with national and local landlords associations the council's housing service provides training and advice to landlords on effective property management through the Landlords Forum. The Council also operates one of the largest and well respected accreditation schemes for landlords in the southeast

and continue to expand our tenants Accreditation Scheme. This scheme targets vulnerable clients with a poor track record of renting and provides them with targeted advice and training along with a period of supervision and on-going advice when in a tenancy. The scheme has been well received by landlords, tenants and support agencies.

- 6.2 The council's housing service has received more than 1,000 requests for assistance for the year to date in respect of housing conditions in private sector housing. In all cases appropriate advice is provided and in some cases it is necessary for the Council to intervene to secure improvements. For the financial year to date, following inspections some 418 homes have been improved through either informal, formal or enforcement action.

## **7. HOUSING LANDLORD SERVICES**

Achievements for 2016/2017:

### **7.1 Repairs and Maintenance performance**

- 7.2 Medway Council and Mears successfully completed the second year of the current repairs contract. The 2nd year of the new contract ran from September 2015 to August 2016 figures reflect this contract period.

- 7.3 Performance Highlights are as follows:

- 99.0% of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the overall repairs service.
- 99.2% of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the quality of the repair work.
- The average number of days to complete a responsive repair was 10 calendar days against a target of 13 calendar days.
- The Council maintained a 100% gas compliancy record for 2016.

- 7.4 The repairs service continued its excellent performance in terms of completion rates as follows:

Out of the 7,919 responsive repairs completed in this period

- 99.9% (1,440/1,441) of emergency repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 99%.
- 99.8% (2,515/2,519) of urgent repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 99%.
- 99.0% (3,919/3,959) of routine repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 98%.
- 99.2% (4,502/4,540) of repair appointments were kept, against a local target of 99%.
- 0.6% (46/7,919) of responsive repair recalls against a local target of <=1.5%.

- 7.5 The Council has invested £6m into Council housing stock, leading to improved homes for our residents. Between January 2016 and 31 December 2016 these improvements included:-

- Kitchens - 103  
Bathrooms - 108
- Boilers - 94
- Doors - 161
- Electrical tests - 247
- Asbestos surveys - 227
- Smoke detectors - 21
- Co2 detectors - 599
- Re wires - 172
- Pitched roof replacements - 67
- Window replacements - 35

7.6 HRA Housing is currently in year 2 of a 3 year programme of improvements to fire safety resulting from the completion of Fire Risk Assessments. The subsequent strategy and action plan to improve the standard of fire safety within the HRA stock was formalised by the Asset Management Group in 2015. A 3 year programme of works was tendered in the autumn/winter of 2015 with the contract being awarded and works commencing in January 2016. It is estimated that during 2015 - 2018 over £3million will be spent improving fire safety to more than 1,200 homes.

7.7 The price per property arrangement in the new Mears contract has continued to provide value for money. At the end of the second year of the contract there was an entitlement to a financial uplift in the contract by the Contractor. Officers led on a series of discussions with the contractor and this led to an agreement that Mears would forego an uplift on all aspects of the responsive repair, void and gas servicing elements of the contract. This has led to a saving of £50,000 approximately to the HRA for the next 12 months. Furthermore Mears agreed to a delay on an uplift of costs for a range of capital works including boilers, new kitchen and bathrooms until 1 April 2017 leading to further savings.

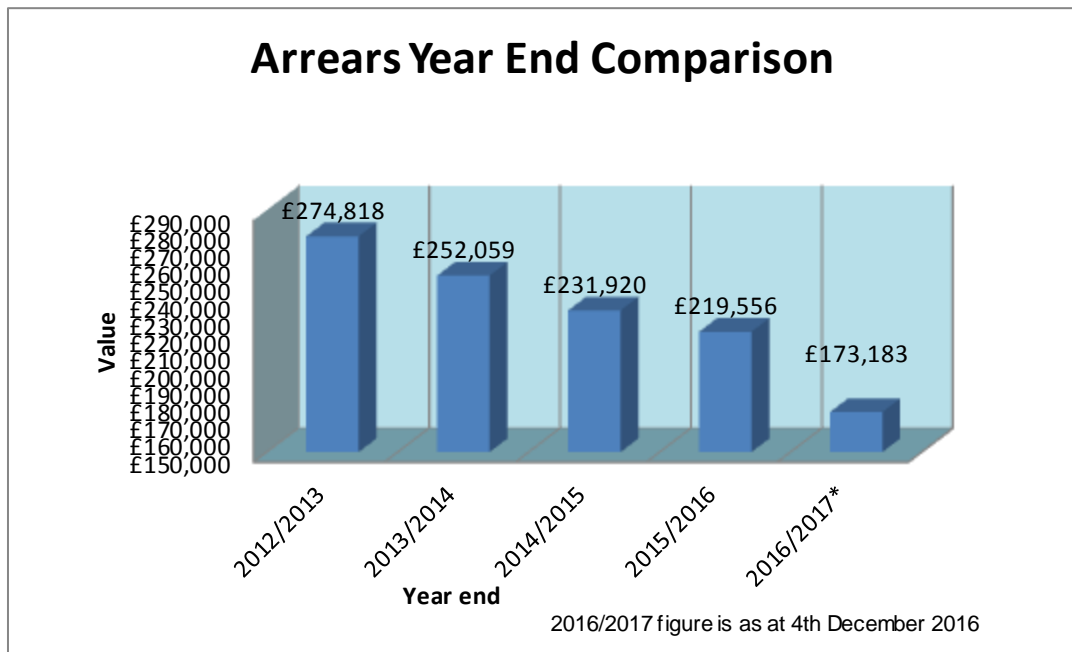
7.8 **Re-letting void properties**

7.9 Recent benchmarking results identify that Medway Council are top quartile compared to other providers with a similar stock size for the average time to re let council dwellings. During April to November 2016 it took on average 11 calendar days to let normal voids against a target of 19 calendar days.

7.10 **Income management**

7.11 Positive work by the Housing Officers and Welfare reform team has meant that rent arrears have reduced from £225,472 on the 3 April 2016 to £173,553 on 4 December 2016, a reduction of nearly £52,000.

7.12 The chart below shows the on-going reduction over the past 4 years with arrears.



- 7.13 The percentage of current tenant rent arrears against the annual rent roll as at the 4 December stood at 1.23% against a target of less than 1.65%.
- 7.14 Garage arrears have also reduced from £423.34 on the 3 April 2016 to £74.50 on 4 December 2016.
- 7.15 Former tenant rent arrears have reduced from £391,135 in December 2015 to £279,648 in December 2016.
- 7.16 **Tenancy Management**
- 7.17 The Housing Management Team have made improvements in effectively working in partnership with the Police and Community Safety Partnership Team to reduced and tackle Anti Social behaviour on Estates. This has led to improvements in communications and data sharing on cases, including taking part in daily telephone conferences on significant cases.
- 7.18 In 2015/16 the average turnaround time for dealing with a case was 128 days. This has reduced to 66 days for the year to date.
- 7.19 The team actively take part in the borough wide Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (M..A.R.A.C) this is led by the local Police and attended by borough wide social housing providers and social care. This enables a direct flow of information regarding high level risk cases in the borough to be discussed.
- 7.20 The team launched evening estate inspections in the summer months, this saw a higher turnout of residents than normal and will be undertaken again in summer 2017

## 7.21 **Evictions**

7.22 During April 2016 to November 2017 10 evictions were conducted, 7 for arrears and 3 for anti – social behaviour. Details of previous years' evictions are highlighted in the table below.

	ASB	Arrears	Other	Total
12/13	2	18	1	21
13/14	2	11	0	13
14/15	1	9	0	10
15/16	0	11	2	13
16/17-November	0	7	3	10

7.23 The HRA Welfare Reform team continues to assist tenants facing the challenges of the Welfare Reform and support the work done by the Corporate Welfare Reform board. As of November 2016 there are 14 known active recipients of Universal Credit. As of October 2016 analysis identified by the Department of Works and Pensions that 23 HRA tenants could be affected by the benefits cap. The Welfare Reform Team focused on targeting the effected residents with mail shots, telephone contact or home visits aiming to provide high level support and advice where necessary.

## 7.24 **Performance Management**

7.25 Performance across the service continues to be strong and this year the service as part of its review in relation to the Business Plan took part in a national benchmarking exercise of costs, performance and customer satisfaction.

7.26 The key results for 2015/16, when comparing Medway Landlord services to similar sized organisations were as follows:

- Void time – top quartile – and Medway was placed in 1st position.
- Repairs and Planned Maintenance were placed in top performing low cost categories.
- Repairs and Void costs – were placed in top quartile, 2nd position
- Gas Safety compliancy – top quartile, 1st position
- Customer Satisfaction with repairs - top quartile
- Void rent loss – top quartile
- Leaseholder service charge collection rates – top quartile, 2<sup>nd</sup> position
- Tenants satisfied their rent is VFM – top quartile, 3rd position
- Total direct costs (contract costs) for repairs and maintenance – top quartile
- Total cost per property including overheads and SLA costs – top quartile.
- Average number of repairs per property – top quartile, 3rd position
- % of properties that are non decent – top quartile

## 7.27 **Estate Services**

7.28 The first year of the Estate Services contract provided by NORSE has been completed at the end of September 2016. Customer satisfaction

has increased within the first year from a baseline of 68% satisfaction to 88% by the end of the first year of the contract.

7.29 A new service level agreement with Environmental Services started on 1 October 2016 –it is anticipated this will bring cost savings to the HRA of approximately £12,000 per annum.

7.30 **Community Development**

7.31 In July 2016 the new Twydall Hub was opened providing a wide range of services to residents including the Councils own Tenants and Leaseholders in the neighbourhood via the launch of Housing Surgeries. These surgeries provide a range of advice on tenancy issues, paying rent and leaseholder service charges.

7.32 In 2016 Landlord Services launched our new community engagement structure and have delivered 6 customer meetings and launched the Estate Champions group in July 2016, which allows residents to be a voice for their area and discuss issues that have been happening on their estates in relation to repairs, cleaning and tenancy management issues.

7.33 A collaborative working agreement (CWA) with Public Health has been established with the vision that healthy tenants lead to healthy tenancies. Housing Officers have attended a number of short courses aimed to give them knowledge on the day to day issues some of our customers face. These sessions have included training on Dementia Friends, alcohol awareness, second hand smoke awareness, social isolation and mental health awareness.

7.34 Landlord Services held a Big Lunch at Twydall Church Hall in June 2016 in partnership with Mears and Public Health that focused on healthy lifestyles. The day was a huge success with lots of families turning up to enjoy healthy activities including dance classes, messy play for children, a demonstration from the fire service and information stands from Medway Council.

7.35 To promote digital inclusion for older residents Landlord Services have had the Barclays Digital Eagles attend the Homes for Independent Living schemes in July and November. Residents really enjoyed the interactive sessions and Landlord Services hope to roll more out in the New Year to our general need residents.

7.36 To promote employability Landlord Services are currently working in partnership with Orbit housing to deliver 1-1 employment advice and skills training to residents and it has been agreed that Housing Officers and the Welfare Reform Team will hand out flyers to tenants promoting Employ Medway Services.

7.37 **Business Development**

7.38 A Young Persons Engagement Strategy 2016 – 2021 was launched in August 2016. The strategy was produced in conjunction with our residents and partners and identifies how Landlord Services will



engage with and help improve the life chances of some of the younger residents in our properties. The residents that helped develop the strategy have agreed to be part of a group to monitor the action plan. Landlord Services have also started to attend the Medway Youth Trust young person's forum to discuss and consult on housing related issues.

- 7.39 External inspections from ISO accreditors were undertaken in both May 2016 and December 2016. Housing Services retained accreditation at both inspections and the auditors highlighted a number of areas of good practice, stating that communication of performance and other housing issues via the "Housing Matters magazine" was well presented and contractor controls for the repairs service appear to be excellent.
- 7.40 Furthermore a Customer Services Excellence inspection in May and was successful in maintaining the award. One area of good practice that was highlighted was that the number of complaints against the Housing Service has reduced by 21% over the past year.

## **8 DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK**

- 8.1 In 2016/17 the Council completed phase 2 of its new build project. In a £4million investment 32 bungalows have been built at Centenary Gardens in Gillingham.
- 8.2 The new bungalows have been built to Lifetime homes standard and have been designed to be as open planned as possible and can be easily adapted to meet the changing physical needs of the residents living in them. Some of the properties have been specifically designed to full wheelchair accessibility standard, with extra wide doors, indoor electric wheel charge points, sinks and hobs that can be lowered and in built white goods that are easily accessible.
- 8.3 Many of the tenants that have moved to these properties were previously under occupying Council accommodation and much needed larger homes have been made available to families from the Housing Register.
- 8.4 In terms of future housing development the HRA Business Plan has recently been reviewed and has identified there is unlikely to be much capacity for future borrowing. Officers are exploring a number of possible initiatives and innovative financing options, as well as considering a range of delivery vehicles to provide more social housing, and a further report will be provided in due course.

## **9.0 MEDWAY ADULT EDUCATION**

### **9.1 A Comprehensive Programme**

- 9.1.1 Through its wide ranging programme Medway Adult Education (MAE) plays an important role in responding to the strategic themes of employability, social isolation, raising ambition and basic skills, with the key elements of the programme being:

- Skills for work – a programme of courses helping people to learn new industry standard skills and providing pathways to higher professional qualifications
- English & Maths courses from beginners through to GCSE.
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and English as a foreign language (EFL).
- Languages – French, Italian, Spanish and British Sign Language classes suitable for complete beginners to achievement of a high level of fluency.
- Supported Learning. A programme of courses specifically for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.
- Be creative – huge range of classes for the hobby enthusiast: from floristry to cake decorating, pottery & ceramics to drawing & painting, jewellery making to fashion textiles & needlecraft and so much more.
- Fitness, Health and Wellbeing – yoga, tai chi and meditation courses.
- Family learning programme across Medway's Children Centres

## **9.2 2015/16 Academic Year Programme Performance**

9.2.1 Building on the overall effectiveness rating of Good awarded by Ofsted following its June 2015 inspection, an improvement plan was framed and delivered over the last academic year to further strengthen the service, delivering:

- 6508 enrolments over the 2015/16 academic year, an increase of 8.5% over the previous year.
- An improved value for money Adult Skills Budget (ASB) programme with the formula value of the programme being £76K greater than actual ASB allocation received ( £542,720).
- Retention and achievement rates above ASB national benchmarks for 2014/15, with achievement rates improving by 3% on previous year.
- A very positive learning experience for learners, with 96% of learners rating their overall experience as positive. In a survey last year we further asked learners how taking a course had changed their life or outlook and out of the 401 replies:
  - 27% said their health and/or wellbeing had improved.
  - 23% reported they were more confident.
  - 62% had made new friends,
  - 23% reported that they were more able to help friends and family members; and
  - 11% felt they were more likely to get a job or progress at work.

## **9.3 2015/16 Academic Year Financial Performance**

9.3.1 Over the second half the last academic year (April–Sept 2016) the service actively and successfully reduced its expenditure by 12% against the same period 2015. A significant contribution to this was the staff reorganisation implemented early 2016, which deleted 11 established posts, primarily lost through natural wastage. This further

addressed some role confusion across the service and introduced a more streamlined management structure, both, improving operational efficiency and allowing the savings to be achieved with minimal operational impact.

9.3.2 This gain has been carried forward into the new academic year (2016/17) and with a new track record of successfully meeting its Skills Funding Agency contract obligations, avoiding grant clawback, and with current income being consistent with forecast the service has a financially sustainable future.

#### 9.4 **Working in partnership**

9.4.1 Medway Adult Education works closely and collaborative with a range of partners including:

- Children Centres – delivering a family learning programme across Medway’s children centres.
- Public Health – contributing to a number of health promotion projects.
- Adult Social Care – providing workforce training to social care providers and health workers across Medway.
- Medway Libraries – providing in-library IT courses, conversation cafes and book clubs.
- Jobcentre Plus, providing referral pathways to MAE’s offer boost employment prospects.
- Employ Medway – working in partnership to provide training opportunities to gain employment.
- Mid Kent College – curriculum planning and development of progression pathways.
- Community Learning Mental Health Research Project  
1 in 3 people in the United Kingdom have experienced mental health/wellbeing problems at some stage in their life. Through this national research project, separately funded by the Skills Funding Agency, MAE is providing a programme of courses designed to support the self-management of specific mental health symptoms, for example; poor sleep, social anxiety, low or fluctuating mood.

### 10. **LIBRARIES AND COMMUNITY HUBS**

10.1 Medway Council has a lively, well supported Library Service. A service that enjoys the support of both Public and Councillors alike. Indeed Medway Council are investing resources in its Libraries and ensuring they have a key role to play in the modernisation of the Council.

10.2 The Library Service has a clear strategic vision for the forthcoming years. It wants to build on its role as the public face of the Council in every community, supporting the delivery of the full range of Council priorities through its adoption of the national five universal Library Offers, these are Health Offer, Learning, Reading, Information and the Universal Digital Offer.

- 10.3 It is indeed in the field of assisting residents with digital technology that the service has an increasing role to play and will continue to develop partnerships that have for example produced coding clubs for young people by working with Barclays and new Wi-Fi everywhere from a 70,000 grant from the Arts Council

### **Community Hub Development**

- 10.4 A major part of the strategy for the development of Libraries has been the continued focus on Community Hubs, this approach has been shared with and endorsed by the Minister for Libraries. In fact the minister stated

*'It is always good to hear Councils such as Medway working in support of its local Library Service in innovative ways. May I take this opportunity to congratulate you and your colleagues on all the hard work you have put into making these community Hubs such a success. This work will prove instrumental in ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable library service is maintained across Medway for many years to come.'*

### **Twydall Community Hub**

- 10.5. This new Council facility opened in July 2016. The new hub, in Twydall Green, Gillingham, replaces the old library and has created a community building much larger in size following an extension into empty premises next door.
- 10.6 Local people now have access to a wide range of council services including help with council enquiries from trained staff, more computers with free internet access, free Wi-Fi, new books and space for community groups.
- 10.7 During the six month project a temporary library was set up a few doors away to allow customers continued access to services. Indeed the team involved in this project have just won the Council Make a Difference Award for customer Service.
- 10.8 Current performance indicates that the new Service is well supported by local residents. Compared to the same period last year visits have risen by 60%, book issues by 18%, Computer use by 11% and over 400 more people have attended a library event.
- 10.9 This is with a backdrop of a decline in national figures, for example the average rate of decline for national book issues is 6% and visits fell by 3.9 % last year.
- 10.10 At Hempstead and Strood performance, Community Hubs created last year, figures continue to increase again contrary to the national trend.
- 10.11 It is hoped that further venues will provide opportunities to continue this now nationally recognised strategy within Medway.

## **Partnership working**

- 10.12 The Service is developing a whole range of partnerships through all of its locations and firmly believes that this is the model that maintains and expands customer numbers, but also increased understanding of the Service and the ways it can be used.
- 10.13 This partnership approach and its success can be very clearly evidenced by partnership buildings with Customer Contact in the Community Hubs, Medway Adult Education at Rochester, Surestart at Cuxton, the Youth Service at Lordswood and Hoo.
- 10.14 A whole range of other mutually beneficial partnerships with other organisations exist and are currently being developed, these include Adult Education where the provision of joint workshops and a joined up approach to marketing point to added value for the customer. Another close partnership is being developed with Public Health which again provides opportunities for Medway residents to access advice, information and support on public health through its local community Hubs and Libraries.
- 10.15 Further partnerships exist with Deaf Services, Blue Badge Assessment, Stroke Association, U3A, Barclays Bank (provide coding clubs for young people at 3 venues), Community Safety team, Adoption team, Alzheimer's Society (developing a Dementia café at Chatham Community Hub,) RNIB (support our visually impaired readers group at Chatham), Victim Support, Medway Youth Trust, Medway Register Office (support our Bookstart project, books for babies) and Hi Kent.
- 10.16 The Service also works very closely with a whole range of other Medway Council departments most notably with early years and Education to support literacy and Waste to support their ambition to increase the amount of recycling in Medway.

## **Customer Services Excellence Award**

- 10.17 A recent inspection in September meant that this award was successfully regained again. One of only four Council departments to hold this award, Libraries and Community Hubs were again recognised for providing outstanding customer Service.
- 10.18 The assessor said:

*Medway Council Library Service has developed a deep understanding of the characteristics of its service users, both current and potential. Staff know their customer groups well and are responding appropriately to their differing needs and preferences.*

*There is a high level of corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of the service. Feedback and surveys show that customers feel they are treated fairly and attention is paid to recruitment and training to ensure continued commitment to providing excellent*

*customer service. Customer facing staff are encouraged to use their insight and experience to improve service delivery.*

## **Events programme and Community Engagement**

- 10.19 Medway Library Service provides an ever increasing range of activities and events for all ages throughout Medway.

### **Young People**

- 10.20 The Bookstart project continues to thrive in Medway. This government sponsored project continues to gift free books to babies through the registration Service and to early year's children through Pre Schools
- 10.21 The Summer Reading Challenge continues to prove very popular with young people in Medway. The theme this year was Roald Dahl and over 3100 young people took part in the scheme, to support this project over thirty teenagers provided over 300 hours' worth of volunteer time, proving a great inspiration to inspire the young people to keep up their reading skills in the long summer holidays.
- 10.22 Baby Bounce and Rhyme continues to provide a great attraction for Medway families, as does Toddler Shake and Boogie (last year over 30,000 Medway residents attended one of these sessions.)
- 10.23 Above is only part of the event offer for Young people in Medway. Also provided are homework clubs, chatterbooks, reading groups, Lego clubs, pop in and play, Computer coding clubs and story time as well as a whole range of events in every library at every school holiday time.

### **Adults**

- 10.24 Adults are also well provided for, our ever increasing range of author talks continues to develop a national profile attracting to Medway international best-selling authors such as Peter James, Tess Gerritsen and John Connolly. These author events attracted around 200 residents on each occasion, a figure that makes publishers very keen to work with Medway.
- 10.25 A whole range of vibrant readers groups are provided these include clubs for crime readers, poetry, plays, visually impaired, Hard of hearing and many general groups.
- 10.26 The Six book Challenge (now called Reading Ahead) again proved successful, many adults took part in this scheme to improve their reading confidence and enjoyment. By running the Six Book challenge, we are building people's reading confidence and literacy skills, improving their life chances.
- 10.27 A successful Books on Prescription scheme is offered. The aim of the project at a national level is to encourage GPs to prescribe a self-help book for people living with a mild to moderate mental health condition such as anger, anxiety or depression. Through reading these books,

people living with these conditions could understand their conditions and take steps towards addressing the issues that may trigger or worsen them. The scheme in Medway is promoted through publicity displayed in libraries, online and in social media and working with partner organisations.

- 10.28 Community engagement is a positive part of the library agenda. This is illustrated through our Friends of Medway Library Service group who not only provide advocacy for the Service, but practical help at events and activities. The service also has volunteers that are Computer buddies and support other areas of library work for the benefit of residents.
- 10.29 The Home Library Service continues to thrive. Volunteer couriers deliver books to over 200 housebound customers and clearly helps with the concern over social isolation for these residents.
- 10.30 The postal Service for the visually impaired (over 100 active borrowers) and a service to residential homes (30 homes visited) continues to be provided in partnership with Kent County Council.

### **External Investment and creating Best value**

- 10.31 Libraries continue to explore all possible avenues to bring external funds into the Council to support and develop services.
- Libraries have bid for and received three grants worth 140k from the Arts Council. This has for example provided for new top quality Wi-Fi in all Libraries. The take up by public has been very high.
  - The service belongs to a large central buying consortium for purchasing book stock. This brings best value to the stock fund by allowing book purchases to come with discounts of over 40%.
  - The service belongs to a consortium called SELMS that drives through economies on the purchase of the Library Management system. This for example will soon result in a yearly saving of over 20 k for the Council.
  - Libraries are national leaders in the use of a software system called 'Collection HQ.' This allows us to analyse in a scientific way the purchase and maintenance of all our book stock, thereby creating best value for the public.
  - Libraries are striving to develop further opportunities of self service for the public. It has a programme of purchasing new RFID (Radio-frequency identification) self service machines for the issue and return of stock, that also allows payment at the same time.
  - As part of its ambition to provide a 24/7 service Medway Libraries have nearly 10,000 eBooks and eAudiobooks available to download by library members to devices like tablets, smart phones, eReaders and computers. Since the project started in 2011 there have been over 100,000 downloads (86,513 ebooks and 14, 627 eAudiobooks.) Over 4000 unique users have used the service.

### 10.32 Performance Analysis

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2015-16 (April-October)</b>	<b>2016-17 (April-October)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Visits</b>	668,987	693,164	Increase on previous year. This is a 3.4% increase, while the national picture is a 3.9% decrease.
<b>Issues</b>	578,07	544,907	Decrease on previous year, although this performance out performs the national picture. This is a 5% drop, though the national picture demonstrates a fall of 6%.
<b>e-books/e-lending</b>	16,617	19,551	This is an increase of 17.6%.
<b>Computer sessions</b>	97,077	104,922	Increase of 7.4%. (National picture unavailable.)
<b>Event attendance</b>	34,236	37,366	Numbers continuing to increase. Increase is 8.3 % ( National picture unavailable.)
<b>Satisfaction with Libraries (Lib4.)</b>	81.9%	96%	Satisfaction continues to rise. This is completed by a sample of the public within Libraries.

10.33 Famous author Neil Gaiman perfectly describes the power of and importance of Libraries “Google can bring you back 100,000 answers, a librarian can bring you back the right one.”



**Lead officer contact:**

Richard Hicks, Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation. [richard.hicks@medway.gov.uk](mailto:richard.hicks@medway.gov.uk), tel 01634 332764

Tomasz Kozlowski, Assistant Director, Physical and Cultural Regeneration  
[tomasz.kozlowski@medway.gov.uk](mailto:tomasz.kozlowski@medway.gov.uk) , tel 01634 331192

Marc Blowers, Head of Housing Management  
[marc.blowers@medway.gov.uk](mailto:marc.blowers@medway.gov.uk), tel 01634 334382

**Background documents**

None

**Appendices:**

None