

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2019

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

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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:

- All Housing Services (including HRA)
- Homelessness and Housing Options
- Private sector housing
- Adult learning
- Libraries and Community Hubs

2. Strategic Housing Achievements for 2018/2019

2.1 Disabled adaptations to housing

2.2 Medway Council undertakes alterations and adaptations to properties in order to assist Medway's residents to remain living independently in their homes. Just under £2.5 million (including commitment brought forward from 2017/18) has been budgeted for disabled adaptations in 2018/19. In 2018/19 the Council expects to approve approximately 165 adaptations (compared to 168 in 2017/18).

2.3 **Homelessness and housing options**

- 2.4 The Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 was enacted in April 2018, this act reinforces the duties placed on local authorities to ensure households threatened with homelessness receive earlier significant intervention. The HRA has introduced further prevention and relief duties for local authorities to take action to prevent homelessness for any at risk client regardless of their priority need. Medway has received £459,315 funding from Government to implement new systems to continue the focus on preventative work.
- 2.5 The Housing Options service has implemented a change in practice that is even more focused on prevention and relief of homelessness. This includes proactively seeking new opportunities to work collaboratively with internal and external partners, recruiting additional staff and changing the team structure to make it more effective.
- 2.6 Despite the challenges posed by the delivery of HRA, including an increase in approaches of circa 18% since April 2018 (1,888 approaches in 2018/19 compared to 1,602 in 2017/18), the Housing Options Team has maintained a high quality service that is fully statutory compliant. It also continues to work towards reducing the number of households entering temporary accommodation in Medway.
- 2.7 The Housing Options Team have significantly increased the number of successful homeless preventions and reliefs. Since April 18 to November 18 the service has prevented/relieved 567 homeless approaches, compared to 273 for the same period last year. Consequently, despite the significant increase in footfall, the percentage of households who approach and are placed in temporary accommodation has fallen from 20% year to date 2017 to 18% year to date 2018.
- 2.8 Housing Services has introduced a number of new initiatives contributing to the prevention/relief of homelessness including:
- working with commissioned support providers to embed support workers in the options team, and provide a drop-in service at Kingsley House to offer housing support to customers with budgeting and benefit issues;
 - developing an effective working relationship with MRBS to ensure access to Discretionary Housing Payments is maximised for the prevention of homelessness;
 - liaising with Children's Services to ensure joint working on early interventions;
 - launching a landlord helpline to promote co-operative working with private sector landlords to prevent evictions;
 - proactively working to identify, match and secure accommodation for applicants in the private sector.
 - introducing a new Family Support Service to help families address any issues including benefit take up and budgeting to enable the

young person to remain at home until they are able to secure their own accommodation.

- 2.9 Of particular note has been the development of a very effective working relationship with mhs, who are the largest social landlord in the district area. This has ensured the service is notified at the earliest opportunity of tenancy issues and evictions, with joint appointments being undertaken by Housing Options and mhs staff at Kingsley House to seek to resolve these problems. This has been very successful with some 128 appointments having been completed.
- 2.10 Medway Council has also launched a Private Rented Sector scheme with improved deposits/fees/rent in advance offers for private sector landlords. This has contributed to the prevention of homelessness with 183 sign ups so far this financial year.
- 2.11 In cases where homelessness cannot be prevented or relieved clients are offered a final duty assessment and those eligible will receive support to be placed into permanent accommodation. There has been a significant reduction in the number of homeless applicants reaching this stage, 188 November year to date compared to 436 at the same point of time last year. This emphasises the increased focus by the Housing Options team on preventing or relieving homelessness.
- 2.12 Housing Services have been working to ensure full compliance with the substantial increase in administration required by HRA. To illustrate this, a Homelessness Advice and Support team adviser from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has confirmed their satisfaction with our steps to implement the HRA, whilst our H-CLIC (homeless) data submissions to government for Q1 & Q2 were on time and 100% compliant.
- 2.13 **Temporary Accommodation**
- 2.14 Dedicated work to prevent homelessness and move households into secure accommodation has meant that the number of households in Temporary Accommodation has remained fairly stable despite the increase in the number of people coming to the authority for Housing Assistance (see 2.6). At the end of November 2018, 368 households were in temporary accommodation compared to, 384 households at the end of November 2017.
- 2.15 Available national figures from September 2018 show that the rate of households in temporary accommodation is currently 2.97 per 1000 households, this is slightly lower than the national rate of 3.51 and significantly lower than the rate seen in London of 15.49. In comparison Brighton currently has a rate of 12.18 households per 1,000 in temporary accommodation and Milton Keynes currently have a rate of 5.56.
- 2.16 The Temporary Accommodation team have made further improvements to the service this year. A new system called Academy has been implemented to improve the collection rate of rent from people in Temporary Accommodation. The system includes more rent paying options for customers including online payments. Additionally

the team have implemented processes to support customers in rent arrears. As a result the team have seen an increase in rent collection for the year.

2.17 Two members of the West Kent Communities, Floating Support Service joined the Temporary Accommodation team for integrated services this year. One officer focuses on existing tenants, particularly those with a high amount of arrears to assist them to maximise their income, budget appropriately and support them to move on. The other worker deals with new tenants in Temporary Accommodation ensuring that they are settled, aware that they need to pay rent and provide support where necessary.

2.18 **Housing management and allocations**

2.19 The Council's Allocations policy sets out the framework Housing Associations operating in Medway will use when allocating social housing. The Allocations Team also manages the appointment of specialist supported accommodation commissioned by the council including hostels, extra care and sheltered housing schemes.

2.20 From April 2018 to the end of October 2018, 539 households have secured accommodation through the Council's Housing Allocation scheme (called Homechoice) compared to 658 for the financial year 2017/18. There has been a slight increase in the number of properties let this year which coincides with an increase in Council voids (see 3.15) and an increase in the number of affordable housing units developed (see 2.24).

2.21 The Homechoice team complete an annual rolling review of the Housing Register and have now completed a full year. This has resulted in the removal of all the households that no longer want to be registered to be re housed. Homechoice has therefore seen a drop from 13,579 households registered in November 2017 (of which 3,858 were active applicants) to 4,006 households (of which 1,803 are active applicants) registered in November 2018. The reduction is largely due to the removal of inactive applicants and the decrease in the number of household specifically wanting sheltered housing.

2.22 To improve the customer journey the new Kent Homechoice website has been launched, which has a fresher look, is easier to navigate and now includes more security for households registered when they log in. Auto bidding is now live, which means that customers can request the Homechoice system to bid on properties for them. This is particularly helpful for those that are vulnerable or unable to use a computer, so are not able to bid for themselves. Households that are not bidding are being contacted and where appropriate they have been set up for auto bids, to assist them to move on.

2.23 **Housing Strategy**

2.24 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 150 units of affordable homes year to date (compared to 80 at the same point of time last year). The Council forecast to deliver a total of around 220-250 new affordable homes by the end of the year.

- 2.25 Two Extra Care schemes have been completed, Atlas Place at St Mary's Island and Rogallo House at Horsted Park. These have delivered 125 units of accommodation for older people in Medway who require flexible care and support. Households have moved into the Rogallo Extra Care Scheme and Atlas place is due to open early in the New Year.
- 2.26 Strategic Housing also works with other partners including Children and Adults Social Care, Public Health, charities and other organisations to identify opportunities for joint working to help meet housing needs across Medway.
- 2.27 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.
- 2.28 Strategic Housing implemented a Rough Sleepers Initiative in 2018 to help assist street homeless clients. The initiative has been funded via a £410,000 grant from Communities and Local Government that must be spent between July 2018 and March 2019. Housing Services has recruited a rough sleeper co-ordinator to run the Initiative.
- 2.29 Key elements of the Rough Sleepers Initiative are:
- A commissioned outreach service that visits rough sleepers to verify their status and offer support.
 - Engagement with rough sleepers to design a short plan to help them access support and accommodation.
 - A service to help people leaving supported accommodation find new accommodation and financial support for rough sleepers to move into accommodation including rent deposits, fees and money for essential furniture.
 - Emergency housing for vulnerable rough sleepers to live in temporarily whilst more suitable accommodation is sought.
 - Mental health support services for rough sleepers.
 - Supported accommodation for rough sleepers with high levels of complex needs.
- 2.30 At the end of December the Council has supported over 50 rough sleepers into accommodation including supported accommodation and Housing First.

2.31 Strategic Housing have two vulnerable ex rough sleepers in Housing First (a scheme to place rough sleepers into accommodation, and support them to sustain their tenancy) and are working with three other rough sleepers that it is hoped will soon move into accommodation.

2.32 **Private sector housing**

2.33 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 the national and local landlords association the Council provides training and advice to landlords on effective property management through the Landlords' Forum. Two forums have been held this year with a total of 152 attendees and the feedback on the forums has been positive.

2.34 The Council operates one of the largest and well respected accreditation schemes for landlords in the southeast and continues to expand our Tenants Accreditation Scheme. The tenants' scheme targets vulnerable clients with a poor track record of renting and provides them with targeted advice, training and a period of supervision whilst they are in a tenancy. The scheme has been well received by landlords, tenants and support agencies and financial year to date 54 tenants have attended.

2.35 The Private Sector Housing Team acts to improve the conditions of Private Sector housing by working with landlords and tenants. Improved reporting systems have allowed the team to report on all action taken and during April to December 2018/19 the Council/s Private Sector Housing Team assisted 1,023 households to improve the condition of their property. This has been done via intervention work such as informal/formal action, the removal/reduction of hazards such as excess cold, damp and mould growth and fire, and the licensing of Houses in multiple occupation.

2.36 **Business Development**

2.37 Strategic housing have developed two key documents in 2018:

- The Tenancy Strategy 2018 sets out the preferred types of tenancy that the Council would like social landlords to consider using. It encourages the use of fixed term tenancies that are reviewed every five years to help ensure that social housing is used by households with a current housing need.
- The Housing Strategy 2018-2022 identifies the Council/s key housing priorities; 1. Deliver homes that meet the identified needs of Medway residents; 2. Improve the quality of homes and people's lives; 3. Ensure residents have access to suitable homes and support. The strategy has an associated action plan which will be monitored every quarter to ensure progress is made.

3. Housing Landlord Services Achievements for 2018/2019

3.1 Awards

3.2 Medway Council was proud to be the only local authority landlord in the country to be shortlisted for landlord of the year at the finals of the prestigious Inside Housing Awards 2018.

3.3 Landlord Services also received a joint award along with Medway Housing Benefits and Revenues Team for joint working in partnership with DWP (nominated by DWP) at the annual Directorate Make a Difference Awards in September 2018.

3.4 Performance Management

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

3.6 The key results for 2017/2018, when comparing Medway Landlord services to similar sized organisations are as follows:

- Satisfaction with the last repair = 98.9% - top quartile
- % of properties vacant = 0.4% - top quartile
- % Void loss = 0.36% - top quartile
- % of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate = 100% - top quartile
- % of repairs completed at the first visit = 99.1% - top quartile
- % of repair appointments kept = 99.6% - top quartile
- % of current tenant arrears = 1.14% - top quartile
- % of write offs = 0.15% - top quartile
- Overheads as a % of turnover - top quartile
- Total cost per property of void works (management) - top quartile
- Total cost per property of cyclical maintenance (management) - top quartile
- Total cost per property of responsive repairs (management) - top quartile

3.7 Repairs and Maintenance performance

3.8 The repairs and maintenance service delivered by Mears Group Plc continues to perform well. As a result of excellent performance and partnership working Cabinet approved the recommendation that the current contract be extended for a further five years with effect from 1 September 2019. This not only ensures that the excellent service will continue but that costs are stable up until 2024.

3.9 The price per property arrangement in the new Mears contract has continued to provide value for money. At the end of the fourth 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 Mears Group Plc and despite being entitled to a higher uplift negotiations took place which led to a reduction overall and eventual savings for Landlord Services of 1.2% on the value of works across all work streams.

3.10 In terms of the current contract, Medway Council and Mears successfully completed the fourth year of the current repairs contract. The fourth year of the new contract ran from September 2017 to August 2018 figures below reflect this contract period.

3.11 Performance Highlights are as follows:

- 98.5% (1,499/1,522) of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the overall repairs service (99.3% (1,289/1,298) Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- 98.6% of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the quality of the repair work (98.9% (1,285/1,298) Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- The average number of days to complete a responsive repair was 8.9 calendar days (9.3 in Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- As at 31 October 2018 the Council had a 100% gas compliancy record.

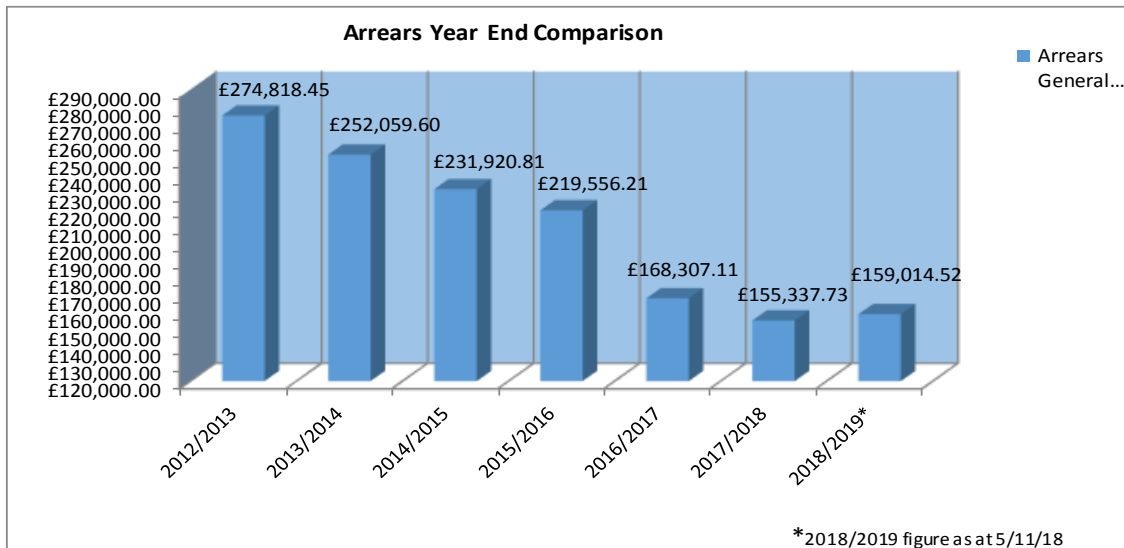
3.12 Out of the responsive repairs completed in this period

- 100% of emergency repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100% (99.8% in Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- 99.9% of urgent repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100% (99.8% in Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- 99.2% of routine repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 99% (99% in Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- 99.4% of repair appointments were kept, against a local target of 99.5% (99.5 % in Sep 16 to Aug 17).
- 0.4% of responsive repair recalls against a local target of <=1% (0.5 % in Sep 16 to Aug 17).

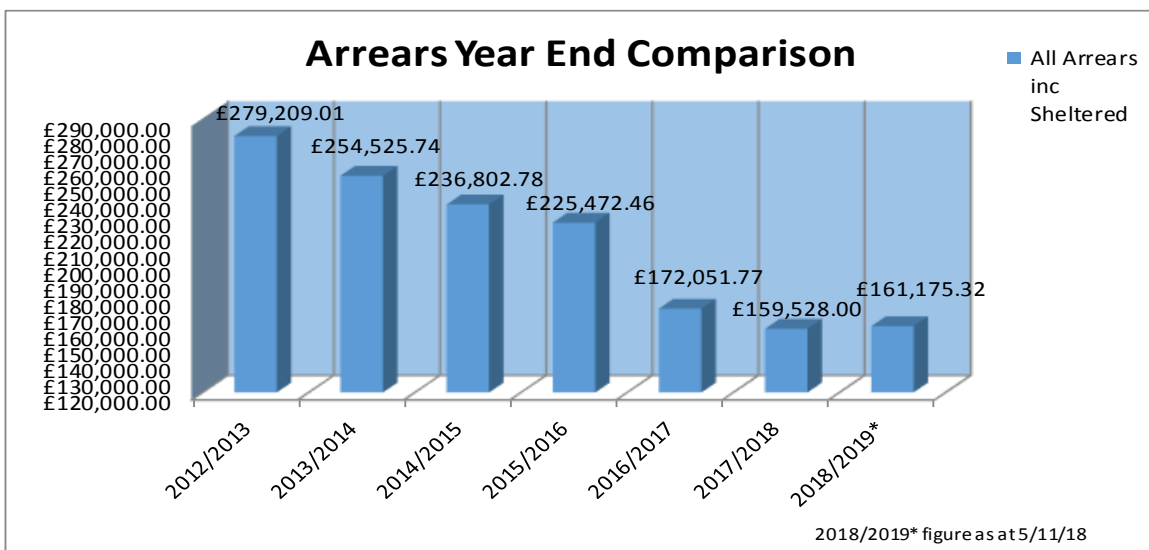
3.13 During the financial year 2018/19 the Council has invested £4.8 million into both the planned and capital works programme. A proportion of this investment has been put towards completing traditional capital works; and between April 2018 and December 2018 approximately £1.1million was spent on completing the following capital works to council housing stock:

- Kitchens – 84
- Bathrooms – 80
- Boilers – 97
- Doors – 64
- Electrical tests – 530

- Asbestos surveys – 170
 - Smoke detectors – 98
 - Co2 detectors – 347
 - Re wires – 64
- 3.14 Landlord Services has concluded a three year programme of fire risk assessment works. During 2015 - 2018 over £4million has been spent improving fire safety to more than 1,200 homes.
- 3.15 **Re-letting void properties**
- 3.16 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 2018 it took on average 15 calendar days to let normal voids against a target of 19 calendar days.
- 3.17 Void rent loss at the end of November was 0.42% compared to 0.32% at the same point of time this year. Void loss is slightly higher due to an increase in the number of void properties year to date in 2018/19 (148 voids) compared to 2017/18 (111 voids). Officers are currently analysing void reasons to determine if there are any trends in the increase of voids.
- 3.18 **Income management**
- 3.19 The full roll out of Universal Credit commenced at the end of May 2018. The Welfare Reform and Income Management team have worked hard, in partnership with DWP, to prepare the organisation and residents for transition to this new method of receiving benefits; and the shift away from their rent being paid directly to the Landlord Services via Housing Benefit.
- 3.20 As of November 2018 there are 159 known active recipients of Universal Credit. The Welfare Reform Team has targeted affected residents with mail shots, telephone contact or home visits aiming to provide high level support and advice where necessary.
- 3.21 Positive work by the team has meant that rent arrears have not increased by as much as had initially been expected. Total arrears at the end of the last financial year were £159,528 and as of 05/11/2018 they were £161,175.
- 3.22 The chart below shows the year end comparison for arrears in the general needs stock, **excluding** Homes for Independent Living (sheltered housing). Although historically there has been a year on year reduction since 2012, arrears have risen slightly in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18; this largely associated with the effects of Universal Credit.



3.23 The chart below shows the year end comparison for arrears in the general needs stock, **including** Homes for Independent Living (sheltered housing). Universal Credit is not having an adverse impact in Homes for Independent Living as the majority of tenants living there are over the ordinary retirement age. As a result they remain eligible for Housing Benefit should they need assistance with their housing costs.



3.24 The percentage of current tenant rent arrears against the annual rent roll as at the 05/11/2018 stood at 1.16% against a target of 1.65% (1.16% at the same point of time last year).

3.25 Benchmarking has identified that the rent collection rate and current arrears position within Landlord Services is very favourable in terms of performance against other similar organisations.

3.26 Garage arrears have also reduced from a year end figure of 1.14% to 0.07% as of 05/11/2018.

- 3.27 Former tenant debt (which includes rent arrears, rechargeable repairs and legal costs) has increased very slightly from £353,214 in December 2017 to £356,082 as at end December 2018.
- 3.28 Currently the estimated bad debt provision for rent arrears is £541,000. This includes arrears for weekly rent, service charges, rechargeable repairs and court charges for both current and formal tenants.
- 3.29 The Leasehold service charge accounting module went live in January 18 and was used for the 2018/19 leaseholder ground rents and service charge estimates. This new system makes monitoring and interrogating accounts much easier and has led to improved service charge collection rates so far this year.
- 3.30 A new texting system was introduced over the summer, replacing the previous 'liquiddrop' system. The new service is part of the Gov.Uk service and is GDPR compliant and cheaper to use. It is used to contact tenants to chase arrears and remind them of appointments, ultimately reducing costs for abortive visits and increasing income through the payment of rent.

3.31 **Welfare Reform**

- 3.32 Landlord Services 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.
- 3.33 The team have continued to hold weekly surgeries at the Twydall Hub to provide free advice and assistance specifically around Universal Credit and other Welfare Benefits.
- 3.34 From the start of the financial year to the end of November 18, as a result of working with tenants to obtain further financial support the Welfare Reform Team assisted over 70 tenants to gain £99,253 through new or back dated benefits or other income. See income table below.

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Totals
Number of clients	13	12	5	5	9	11	13	9	77
Lump Sum	£16,580.15	£37,120.63	£2,838.63	£5,875.66	£3,568.40	£5,770.87	£9,144.00	£13,536.03	£94,434.37
Weekly Award	£1,404.42	£787.70	£319.36	£250.03	£686.64	£444.09	£626.70	£300.31	£4,819.25
TOTAL MONTHLY VALUE	£17,984.57	£37,908.33	£3,157.99	£6,125.69	£4,255.04	£6,214.96	£9,770.70	£13,836.34	£99,253.62

- 3.35 The Welfare Reform Team also supports customers in other areas of financial wellbeing, such as food bank vouchers and assistance with working with creditors. In other cases the team have assisted tenants to apply for a range of benefits including Disabled Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP), and Attendance Allowance (AA).

3.36 **Tenancy Management**

- 3.37 The Housing Management Team have made improvements in partnership working with the Police and Community Safety Partnership Team to reduce and tackle Anti Social behaviour on Estates. This has led to improvements such as the installation of new CCTV cameras at

Beneden Manor which can be viewed on Officers iPads for monitoring and recording purposes.

- 3.38 The 2017 STAR Survey results showed overall satisfaction with the ASB service increased from 2015. This supports the changes and closer working undertaken by the team with the Community safety Team and Police over the last 18 months.
- 3.39 Through positive work the Housing Management Team identified an attempted Right to Buy fraud this year and successfully gained repossession of the property.
- 3.40 The Housing Management Team have relaunched a new approach to estate inspections with dedicated officers focussing on either Repairs and Maintenance issues or Tenancy and Estate Management issues. This has allowed individual officers to focus on their areas of expertise, which will further improve the condition of the estates and speed up the process for raising orders and getting repairs completed.

3.41 **Evictions**

- 3.42 During April 2018 to November 2018 11 evictions were conducted, 10 for rent arrears (although 2 of these properties were abandoned towards the end of proceedings) and 1 for antisocial behaviour. Details of previous year's 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	0	7	3	10
17/18	0	6	4	10
18/19	1	10	0	11

- 3.43 Eviction is always seen as the last resort by the Council and Landlord Services is required to follow strict pre court protocols before being able to obtain a court order for eviction. The protocols include engaging and working with tenants to try and sustain their tenancy, including referring them to support agencies where necessary. Assistance offered to tenants facing eviction for arrears includes referrals to our Welfare Reform Team that helps with debt management and additional signposting to debt advice agencies.

3.44 **Homes for Independent Living (Sheltered Housing)**

3.45 Results of the 2017 STAR survey (Tenant Satisfaction) identified that 96% of resident were satisfied with the overall service provided by their scheme support officer.

3.46 Satisfaction with the cleanliness of the schemes remains high with the latest satisfaction surveys results across all 8 schemes as below:-

- Cleaning carried out to schedule = 94%
- Laundry room clean = 97%
- Communal Kitchen and Lounge clean and tidy = 94%
- Communal Hallways and Staircases clean = 91%

3.47 **Estate Services**

3.48 Following the positive outturn for the NORSE cleaning contract for Estates in 2017/18 and in accordance with the contract model the fourth year of the contract has been undertaken with the price reset, saving £10,000 for Landlord Services. The benefit of this will be felt by residents as they will see reduced services charges.

3.49 The third year of the Estate Services contract provided by NORSE was completed at the end of September 2018. Performance highlights are as follows:

- Estates Passing Inspection = 88%
- Fly-tipped Waste moved to safe location in 1 working day = 99.7%
- Estate cleaning schedule delivery of service on time = 92%
- Customer Satisfaction = 85% (85% in year 2)

3.50 **Community Development**

3.51 The Community Development Team have undertaken a full range of resident involvement and community development activities to engage with residents and the wider community. Key highlights were:-

- Community Easter event in Twydall - this was a multi-agency event with emphasis on healthy lifestyles.
- As a result of a youth engagement consultation evening at James Street one young person that lives in Medway Council accommodation secured a work experience placement at Mears to enable him to complete his college course in electrical engineering.
- Collaborative working with the Sports Team, Youth Services and Community Safety Partnership to deliver park sports events at Medway Council accommodation (Saunders Street cages & Hazelmere Drive) for diversionary activities for young people.
- The Community Development Officer delivered connect 5 training (mental wellbeing training for emotional resilience) to Housing Officers in the Landlord and Strategic Housing services to enable

service delivery to be more holistic and enable officers to sign post customers in need of mental health services. This training has also been delivered to tenant representatives.

- Landlord Services Big Community lunch event was held at St Margaret's School Rainham this summer. The free event was for residents and their families along with other members of the community to attend and find out more about council services. This Event was delivered in partnership with the Medway Sports Team and Youth Services.
- Collaborative working with Medway Adult Education to support all community events and offer taster sessions to Medway Council tenants to reduce social isolation and a stepping stone back into education or employment (tai chi at Homes for Independent Living Scheme Mount Evans House and Big Lunch support).
- Youth engagement event during October half term in partnership with Medway Council apprenticeship academy, KATO and Mears to offer young people and their families living in Medway Council stock information on apprenticeship opportunities.
- Rainbow room at Hazlemere Drive social value project to bring an old caretakers room back in to use for the community by the community. Mears and Norse have contributed to this project as part of their social value projects. The room will be used by partners such as Youth Services, Public Health and Adult Education. Welfare Reform officers will also provide a weekly drop in service there.

3.52 **Business Development**

3.53 The STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) was completed in January 2018 and an action plan has been put in place to address areas identified for further improvement.

3.54 The results were as follows:

- Overall satisfaction with landlord services = 85%
- Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance = 85%
- Satisfaction with the value for money for rent = 86%
- Satisfaction with keeping residents informed = 74%
- Satisfaction with cleaning of the Internal communal areas = 70%
- Satisfaction with cleaning of the External communal areas = 60%
- Satisfaction with Grounds Maintenance = 66%
- HFIL only - Satisfaction with the overall service provided by your scheme support officer = 96%

3.55 There has also been a number of new key policies launched during the year namely:-

- Production of an Energy Strategy and Action plan which will lead to improved energy efficiency of the stock and also reduce fuel poverty for residents.
- Revision of the mutual exchange to include financial incentives for tenants affected by Welfare Reform to move to smaller accommodation.
- Streamlining of all Leasehold policies.
- Publication of Housing Services Tenancy Fraud Policy to ensure fraud is identified, challenged and resolved as quickly as possible.
- Refresh of the Tenancy Management Policy to include protocol around Fixed Term Tenancy reviews.
- Publication of Temporary and Permanent Decant policies.
- Garage Lettings policy.

3.56 The annual external inspection from ISO accreditors was undertaken in December 2018. Housing Services retained accreditation and the auditors were very complimentary about all aspects of the service. The auditors highlighted a number of areas of good practice, stating they had trouble identifying any non conformities.

3.57 Furthermore a Customer Services Excellence inspection was conducted in May 2018 and the service was successful in maintaining the award. One area of good practice highlighted was the work the Welfare Reform team had done to recover benefit underpayments for clients who were formerly experiencing financial difficulties.

4. Development of the Council's housing stock

4.1 A third phase of Landlord Services new build programme consisting of 6 x 1 bedroom bungalows at Twydall has been tendered and works are due to commence early 2019. The properties will be let under a local lettings plan to existing tenants under occupying much needed family accommodation. The family homes will then be let to households either on the housing register or in temporary accommodation.

4.2 There are also further plans for future new build Landlord Services developments following the Government's announcement in October that they have now scrapped the borrowing cap. Officers are currently working with Savills to analyse and identify the sustainable borrowing capacity before progressing these further.

5. Medway Development Company

5.1 Medway Development Company Limited (MDC) was incorporated in late 2017.

5.2 Councillor Doe was appointed the Chairman of the Board and Councillor Adrian Gulvin the other Councillor Director. There are also

two non-executive directors, Barbara Richardson and Jonathan Sadler, who were also appointed.

- 5.3 Barbara Richardson is Chief Executive of Windsor and Maidenhead's housing company. She previously worked for Hounslow's housing company. She has many years of housing industry experience and has previously worked at Savills, Berkeley Homes, Orbit and NHBC.
- 5.4 Jonathan Sadler was until recently Chief Executive at Chatham Maritime Trust and prior to that worked at the Homes and Community Agency (HCA now Homes England). He was well known to the Council as he was the HCA representative on for Rochester Riverside project board.
- 5.5 In January 2018 MDC appointed Lewis Small, as Head of Operations. He started work on the first of the sites that MDC identified for the Council to fund for development. Twelve sites were suggested by the Council for initial consideration by MDC.
- 5.6 The Board has met a number of times through 2018 and 2019 and planning applications for the first four sites it believes should be developed, have now been submitted and are due to be presented to the March Planning Committee.
- 5.7 These are Chatham Waterfront (176 apartments and 1141m2 of commercial space), Whiffens Avenue (124 apartments), White Road (20 houses), Britten Farm (48 apartments). The 368 units proposed will be built over a phased period with the first site to be completed being at White Road. That is due for completion in 2019. After a competitive process that site will be built by Tophat, the developer completing the Kitchener Barracks site opposite Gun Wharf, and sold to MHS.
- 5.8 The Britten Farm, Chatham Waterfront and Whiffens schemes will be tendered shortly to appoint contractors and an affordable housing partner. Work is also taking place to create a website for MDC that will go live in March. Work is also taking place to identify a pipeline of future sites to be developed.

6. MEDWAY ADULT EDUCATION

A Comprehensive Programme

- 6.1 Medway Adult Education (MAE) continues to offer a wide ranging programme for local people looking to improve their work skills, retrain for a different career, return to employment, or to simply make friends and enjoy their leisure time. The key components of the programme are:
 - 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 activities across Medway's Children Centres, schools, libraries and other venues.

2017/18 Academic Year Programme Performance

6.2 MAE was visited by Ofsted in May 2018 for a short inspection. This was the first inspection since the service was judged to be 'Good' in June 2015. Ofsted found that the service continues to be 'Good'. This was a significant achievement and the service regards this as a stronger good, with less pointers for improvement identified. The inspectors found:

- Board members, leaders and managers have a good focus on improving the quality of the provision through self-evaluation and quality-improvement activities. This leads to concerted and usually effective improvement action when required.
- Managers have made sure that all tutors now use their assessments of learners' starting points to set appropriate, individualised targets. Most learners have personalised learning plans, which staff use well to monitor and record their progress.
- Learners value their classes, not only because of the skills and knowledge they acquire but also because of the interactions they have with others. That interaction helps to combat any isolation they may have felt in the past. Many now feel part of their community and have built new social networks. Learners who have recently been diagnosed with dementia and/or physical disabilities value their lessons, as they help them to maintain and to develop skills.
- Managers have acted effectively to improve learners' development of literacy skills. They ensure that the large majority of learners receive clear and helpful feedback on their spelling, punctuation and grammar in their written work. The centre's marking policy gives good guidance to tutors about the need for helpful feedback to learners.
- Managers are committed to developing outstanding teaching and learning across all courses. However, they are not yet able to identify whether staff development activities to improve teaching, learning and assessment have had a positive impact on learners' progress.

- Since the previous inspection, achievement rates for accredited mathematics courses have improved to national rates, but need to be improved further. Achievement rates for accredited English courses have also improved, but remain well below national rates.
- Learners benefit from good-quality information and guidance to help them select the right courses. The highly qualified careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) coordinator provides good initial CIAG to all learners before they select their courses. For learners on employability and English and mathematics courses, this includes individual and group guidance during early classes and at the end of each course. This guidance helps learners to make the right choices and supports many learners to progress to further courses. A good proportion of learners move on from non-accredited to accredited courses.

6.3 Next steps for the service include:

- Continue to focus on developing learners' and apprentices' knowledge of 'Prevent' and British values, so that learners and apprentices understand how they apply to their lives and work.
- Continue to improve learners' achievement rates for English and mathematics qualifications
- Continue to ensure staff development activities help tutors develop outstanding teaching and learning practice.

6.4 The Service's own self-assessment for the 2017/18 academic year identified the following strengths:

- Achievement, retention and attendance rates are all good with the vast majority of learners making good progress
- A well-qualified staff team delivering and maintaining 89% good or better teaching, learning and assessment.
- Good quality systems and practice which have maintained good outcomes for learners and supports continuous improvement across the service.

6.5 The 'Good' Ofsted provides a strong platform to develop a new three-year business strategy for the service.

Achievement, Attendance and Retention

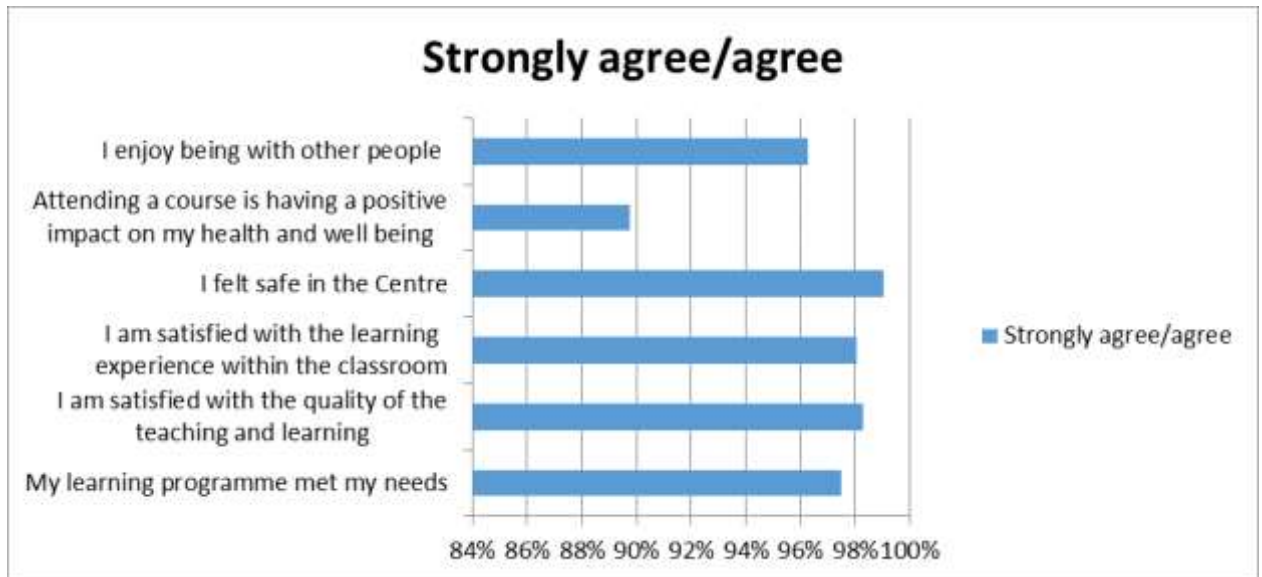
6.6 2,759 learners made 5,473 enrolments in the academic year 2017/18 against 3,070 learners making 6,399 enrolments in the previous academic year (2016/17). This decrease was primarily due to the loss of a significant partner and a bespoke programme of courses which was designed to maximise learner numbers. This has also impacted on retention and achievement rates, as the courses were 1-day courses which achieved 100% retention and 100% achievement.

- 6.7 Although there have been fewer learners during the academic year 2017/18, delivery of the Adult Skills Budget (ASB) allocation has been maintained and the Education and Skills Funding Agency fund was fully utilised again.
- 6.8 Overall attendance and retention rates remain good although slightly lower than the previous academic year 2016/17. The learner cohort will present a number of learners with significant social and well-being issues which impact upon their ability to complete their courses and are outside of the services influence or control e.g. bereavement, ill health etc. Attendance and retention rates were also adversely impacted by the loss of the significant partner and the bespoke programme of courses as these were 1-day courses which achieved 100% attendance and retention.
- 6.9 The full statistical picture of the 2017/18 academic year is set out in the table below.

	Adult Skills Budget Equipping People for Work		Community Learning		Non-Funded	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
Learners	2,182	1,912	3,672	3,142	120	104
Retention Rate	95.0	93.1	96.9	96.8	95.9	94.2
Achievement Rate	90.4	88.3	96.0	95.7	94.2	88.3
Attendance	86.6	87.0	89.0	87.8	92.7	90.3

Learner Satisfaction

- 6.10 Overall learner satisfaction across the service is very high and learners continue to evaluate their experience at MAE as being either satisfactory or above. Over the year 2,335 end of course learner satisfaction surveys were completed with the results being presented below:



Teaching and Learning

- 6.11 To standardise and moderate observation reports, staff attended an Observation of Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) meeting through the South East Quality Improvement Network. Grading of MAE OTLA reports were agreed by the network members.
- 6.12 Over the year 57 out of 78 tutors were observed and graded. 89% of observations were graded as good or better after moderation with 23% graded as outstanding. There were no tutors observed as being inadequate (grade 4).

New Initiatives and Partnerships

- 6.13 The Service's volunteer programme continues and it is currently working with 7 volunteers. All volunteers receive comprehensive training before entering the classroom, e.g., Safeguarding, Prevent and Data Protection, and each is offered the opportunity to qualify as a Learning Support Assistant.
- 6.14 The new apprenticeship programme has continued to make progress during 2017/18 with 38 apprentices now on programme. The achievement rate over the year was 72.2%. This is significantly above the latest national benchmark of 67.7%. Apprentices retained in employment by Medway Council have passed their apprenticeships.
- 6.15 The LLDD cohort (Learners with Learning Difficulties and / Disability) still accounts for over 20% of enrolments. Most LLDD learners are supported by carers, LSAs or volunteers in class. The tutors liaise with them to help provide clarity and direction on their involvement in the lessons to enable the learners to achieve and progress well (LLDD achievement rate – ASB – 97.8% & CL – 96.5%).
- 6.16 Collaborative working agreements are in place with Public Health who support with course materials that are shared with learners at the centres. Managers work well with Public Health team to meet local and national priorities on health and well-being, delivering courses at

Children's Centres and local schools. These have successfully engaged families in the healthy eating agenda.

- 6.17 Programmes are developed flexibly to meet needs for example, retail courses are provided at Entry 3, which is the minimum requirement for working in retail at local shopping centres and short 6 week courses for JCP claimants with further progression opportunities available, to engage and support learners with low levels of literacy and numeracy. Unemployed learner numbers have declined significantly due to improved employment opportunities in the Medway area and changes to the benefit system. MAE is working with Employ Medway to provide courses for the new DWP Health and Work programme.
- 6.18 The Creatives 59 project combined student work from 1959 and the early '60's with contemporary pieces displayed in the Rochester centre. The exhibition was launched in September with a reunion of a group of 45 alumni who studied creative arts in the Rochester building from 1959-1965. The exhibition marked the 60th anniversary since this alumni started on their creative journey in this historic building in Rochester. They took part in several workshops run by MAE creative arts tutors, back in the same studios they used several decades ago. Over the 2018/19 academic year current learners will produce work that embraces this rich personal and social history as well as research projects in partnership with Medway Archive Centre.
- 6.19 Weekly creative arts lessons were held at the Arches Local in Luton, throughout 2018, engaging mostly young families. They are near the completion of a mural, which they have all contributed to as part of promoting cohesive team-work and building confidence as well as using a *pride in Medway* content. This will be on display at Rochester Train Station from February 2019. Several participants are now progressing on to other education as a result of these courses.
- 6.20 Weekly painting lessons have been held at the Sunlight Centre in Gillingham since September, aimed at both the Men in Sheds participants as well as the Sunlight's well-being group. Embedding confidence building and project planning, as the group work towards a community mural using inspiration from the history of the area.
- 6.21 Taster sessions have been held in Brennan House, Victoria Street (Ukulele) and Mountevens House, Skinner Street (Tai Chi) to engage residents in social housing. A workshop was held as part of the launch of the Rainbow Room at Hazlemere Drive, Gillingham. Partnership work is underway as MAE plan to help support parents as ambassadors of the room as well as create a community mural.
- 6.22 The Community Learning department has been working with the project manager for the Command of the Heights project at Fort Amherst. As part of this project MAE has secured a Community Garden at the Fort for September 2019, which will be used across the service, with the Supported Learning Planting and Growing group taking a lead. This is also part of the remit to improve mental health - through more interaction with outdoor spaces, with upcoming foraging,

gardening and outdoor photography and painting. MAE has also delivered several workshops as part of the project at Fort Amherst, including family learning pottery, contributing to their archaeological dig and also at the Christmas Markets.

- 6.23 A term of drawing and painting classes was held in the spring, for those who are resident in the temporary accommodation at Regent House in Chatham.
- 6.24 A partnership link with the Net Community Hub in Walderslade has been established, to provide community learning to those with financial barriers to participation. Several taster workshops have been run in their café space, returning in February with a view to create a community artwork.
- 6.25 Medway Adult Education is the lead partner with Medway Neurological Network in planning Medway's first Neurological Festival - 19th and 20th July 2019. Regular meetings are held working together on the social isolation agenda.
- 6.26 Weekly Tai Chi classes have run for the year for those living with dementia, and their partners/ family/ support. The Community Learning department staff are on the Medway Dementia Action Alliance forum and the Rochester and Strood Dementia Friendly Community group.
- 6.27 The Art of Conversation was delivered as a year-long joint partnership with Lyrici Arts to address social isolation. Monthly workshops were held at Age UK's Woodlands Rd, Gillingham site, including differentiated activities taken into the Pat Warner Suite, for those living with dementia.
- 6.28 A 4-week cookery course ran through November/December at the Gillingham Baptist Church to provide a welcome and social environment for people isolated and also lacking in cookery skills.
- 6.29 Weekly family learning Yoga classes were held in the late autumn as part of the Huguenot Museum's Story Time. This was aimed at new parents to help improve well-being and provide some support.
- 6.30 A partnership with The Stroke Association was developed late in December 2018 to establish regular community learning for their clients with the first targeted session to be delivered on 10th January 2019.
- 6.31 Short taster workshops have been run at several schools including St. Margaret's, Rainham and Saxon Way, Gillingham as well as Ourzone, Patterns Lane and at Rochester Library.
- 6.32 The service gave evidence to the Member Task Group on the Impact of Social Isolation in Medway, quoting many of the initiatives set out above as examples of how its work is also contributing to combatting social isolation.

Improvements to premises and resources

- 6.33 During 2017/18 MAE was able to invest in new classroom and course resources, as a result of the legacy fund from the mental health project the service ran during 2016/17 and 2017/18. Resources included new chairs for art classrooms, mirrors and storage for the fitness studio and new sewing machines for the textiles classroom.
- 6.34 Parts of the Rochester Community Hub were re-decorated during the summer of 2018, providing an improved environment for learners in September 2018. A number of classrooms and corridors are scheduled for re-decoration in early 2019.
- 6.35 Work to display work of past learners along corridors of the Rochester centre, including the fashion designer Zandra Rhodes who studied at the centre in 1959, will take place in early 2019.
- 6.36 Graphics have been installed to the stairwell of the Gillingham centre, creating a bright and inspiring display for current learners of the centre.

Contribution to Medway's Digital Transformation agenda

- 6.37 MAE launch of online enrolment in January 2018 has proved a great success. Over 17% of the enrolments processed since the launch have been online enrolments, and over 26% of the online enrolments have been by learners new to MAE.
- 6.38 MAE is implementing a new management information system, to record learner and course information and submit funding claims to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, following the decision of the current provider to withdraw from the market. The new system, 'Education Business Systems' (ebs) will include the ability to mark registers digitally. The service is due to go live with the new system in February 2019, and digital marking of registers will be launched in the new academic year, from August 2019.

7 Libraries and Community Hubs

a) Libraries

- 7.1 The Library Service has had another very successful year, showing significant achievements in many areas, continuing to make a huge difference to the lives of Medway residents. Through its branch network of 15 buildings and two Mobile Libraries, the Service continues to be the trusted public face of the Council in all of Medway's communities.
- 7.2 Medway Library Service had a particularly successful year in 2017/2018, bucking the national library trend for statistics. In fact where nationally, the trend is downwards Medway's figures saw items borrowed that were at a similar level to the previous year at nearly 931,000.

- 7.3 This year (2018-19) so far figures continue to remain encouraging and for example loans are currently showing an increase of over 3% on last year. The use of eBooks is a particular growth area, currently showing an increase on last year of year 51%, use of online resources in the form of the online reference library, increasing use of Wi-Fi and the online catalogue underline the role that the Service has in supporting digital transformation.
- 7.4 With this clear strategic vision the service is building on this vital role and aims to support the full range of Council priorities. We have a special focus on children and older people, promoting and developing reading as the gateway to learning.
- 7.5 Nationally Libraries have identified 6 universal offers, these are Health Offer, Learning, Reading, Information, Cultural and the Universal Digital Offer. These are being developed locally and provide a focus for libraries to clearly support Council priorities.

b) Community Hub development

- 7.6 A major part of the strategy for the development of Libraries and their continued success has been the development of Community Hubs, this is an approach that has gained national recognition within the library world.
- 7.7 So far the Council has 5 community Hubs Gillingham, Chatham, Rochester and more recently at Strood and Twydall. It has also developed a Neighbourhood Community Hub at Hempstead.
- 7.8 This year the Community Hubs have undergone further transformation. They continue to provide a gateway to a whole range of Council services, but the staff are now under one management with the Library Service. This gives the public a far more flexible, multi skilled body of staff. Our branch libraries continue to aspire to be Hubs by providing partnership space for community organisations, as well as leading or hosting workshops and activities.

Supporting Reading and Literacy

- 7.9 The service has a major role to play in helping people to develop and enhance their literacy skills by fostering a love of reading from infancy and throughout life. We provide a whole range of activities, including a programme of regular weekly in-library fun activities for babies and toddlers:
- Baby bounce and rhyme
 - Story time
 - Toddler, shake and boogie
- 7.10 The average monthly pre-school events attendance is approaching 2000 babies/toddlers.
- 7.11 Teenage reading groups, homework clubs and chatterbooks sessions are provided for older children.

- 7.12 The children's mobile library is taking the service to Medway primary schools. Every month 22 schools are visited and each child is given access to a wide range of books.
- 7.13 The library service ran three reading challenges during the summer:
- The Summer Reading Challenge for children, with over 3000 taking part and which realised an over 55% finisher's rate, the highest figure in the history of the scheme in Medway. National evidence is very clear on the value of this activity to schools, in that it has a major impact on children's reading.
 - the Teen Reading Challenge for teens which saw 166 teenagers take part and just under 50% complete the challenge.
 - The Rewarding Reading Challenge for adults was again very popular with 453 taking part, and just under 50 % completing. Feedback has illustrated to the team that families really like the idea of being able to read together with the provision of these three schemes.
- 7.14 Medway Libraries also runs another reading challenge yearly; the Reading Ahead Challenge in partnership with *Medway Adult Education*. The challenge this year which started in December 2018 and runs to the end of June 2019 is aimed at helping participants improve their reading skills, gain reading confidence or for those who want to get back into reading.
- 7.15 The yearly Children's Book Festival ran in May 2018. 10 authors, illustrators and a poet visited Medway meeting 1144 children, aged between 5 and 15 years, in their local library. Children, teachers and authors were all very positive with their feedback and the value that this activity has in supporting literacy.

Providing a digital Offer

- 7.16 An increasing number of customers want to access services online and Libraries play a vital role. Medway libraries offer public computers in all 15 static libraries. There are currently 153 public computers in libraries. Last year 130,487 public computer sessions were provided across the 15 branches. A long standing offer gives residents free access to the Internet, with trained Library staff and volunteer computer buddies able to assist customers get online and complete the ever increasing amount of transactions that are available only on the internet.
- 7.17 Medway Libraries also offer a managed public Wi-Fi solution, giving the public free access to the internet for their mobile devices in 14 branches. Residents made use of 33,571 public Wi-Fi sessions.
- 7.18 This digital offer is extended further by the availability of eBooks, eAudiobooks and an online reference library.
- 7.19 Last year the service extended its digital offer by providing eMagazines, bringing 136 titles that the public can access for free from their local library or even from home. At the moment over a thousand downloads

take place each month. Plans are now taking place to extend this offer to eNewspapers.

- 7.20 eBooks continue to be very successful, in fact this year the service is forecasting further growth of 51% compared to last year. Again feedback from customers tells us this is bringing new or lapsed users to the service (particularly amongst commuters.)
- 7.21 The Service is at the forefront of the Council's assisted digital support service as more services go online. Libraries staff are trained on these new applications to offer support to residents. This year a major feature has been the support given for Universal Credit claimants.

Working in partnership

- 7.22 The Community Hub strategy places a great importance on partnership working; this approach can be evidenced firstly by the development of partnership buildings with Medway Adult Education at Rochester the Youth Service at Lordswood and Hoo and Early years at Cuxton
- 7.23 Many partnerships also exist with other Council departments who use Libraries to provide advice, information, and support and to facilitate the many well attended walking groups that run out of these venues.
- 7.24 Recent Council partnership work includes working with the Adoption team, Deaf Services, Medway Register Office and Public Health. Libraries also work with many other community groups and both local and national organisations. These include the Stroke Association, Alzheimer's Society (running Dementia café at Chatham Community Hub,) RNIB (supporting our visually impaired readers group at Chatham) and Victim Support.

Events and activities

- 7.25 The service runs a whole range of events and activities and we have already mentioned the events for young children in Baby, Bounce and Rhyme and Toddler, Shake and Boogie.
- 7.26 Our author events have attracted a national profile. Recent high profile author events include Susan Lewis, Rosie Goodwin, Gerald Seymour, Elly Griffiths, Saul David, Ben Kane, Lesley Pearce, Karen Maitland and James Swallow. As Medway is able to guarantee a large audience (often around 200 residents) publishers are happy to provide these authors at no cost, often to launch a new title.
- 7.27 Reading Groups continue to capture the imagination of the residents of Medway and the library service provides a whole range of groups, covering crime, plays, poetry, etc and of course many general readers groups. There are also groups that cater for visually impaired customers and those that are hard of hearing.

Inward investment and creating best value

- 7.28 The Friends of Medway Library Service group, who have supported Libraries for over 10 years, not only provide advocacy for the Service, but practical help at events and activities.
- 7.29 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.
- 7.30 Volunteer computer buddies provide much appreciated support for those residents who require support using computers and getting online.
- 7.31 The service also has benefited by recruiting and training 'Reading Hacks.' *Reading Hack* is a programme led by young people aged 13 to 24 who complete reading activities and volunteering to gain skills and experience. The *Reading Hacks* this year provided great support for the Summer Reading Challenge.
- 7.32 The Service was delighted to receive £14,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions to help with the provision of Universal Credit assisted digital support.

Challenges

- 7.33 Libraries like all Council Services have contributed to the need for efficiencies.
- 7.34 Grain Library continues to run as a community volunteer led library, with local residents showing their support by providing volunteer time to open the service to the public.

Performance information

Indicator	2017-18 (April-October)	2018-19 (April-October)	Notes
Visits	656,539	619,673	This is a decrease on the previous year of 4.31, although this is similar to the national picture and can be explained by more customers moving to a digital option.
Issues	558,074	571,938	Increase on previous year, this out performs the national picture where there is an ongoing decline.

e-books/e-lending	23,915	36,254	This is an increase of 51.25%.
Computer sessions	80,197	73,367	Decrease of 8.5%, though it should be noted that the use of Wi-Fi sessions has gone up by 2.8% (National picture unavailable.)
Event attendance	41,914	42,238	Numbers continuing to increase. Increase is 1.36 % (National picture unavailable.)
Satisfaction with Libraries (Lib4.)	97%	98.33%	Satisfaction continues to rise. This is completed by a sample of the public within Libraries.

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Background documents

None