

BUSINESS SUPPORT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 AUGUST 2020

ATTENDANCE OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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Summary

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within the Portfolio of the Leader of the Council, which all fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Leader of the Council being held to account. The report also includes an overview of the Council's role in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Leader of the Council are:

- Strategic leadership of the Council
- Communications and marketing
- Finance

2. The Council's response to Coronavirus

2.1 In March 2020, Medway Council took on a pivotal role in the response to Coronavirus.

2.2 The Council activated its emergency procedures in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 and command structures were implemented to guide Medway's response, as well as ensuring the council's critical services could be maintained throughout the crisis. Protecting and supporting the

people of Medway during the pandemic has remained Medway Council's top priority.

- 2.3 Staff across all directorates have continued to deliver fundamental services in line with government guidelines to reduce the spread of the virus, as well as putting new measures and support services in place to protect Medway's most vulnerable residents.
- 2.4 The Council developed and launched a pioneering service to provide food packages to the most vulnerable members in the community. The coronavirus emergency support service has delivered more than 110,000 meals to Medway residents, who have been shielding or faced with self-isolation with no one else to turn to for help. The Council also offered a medicine delivery service, befriending service and a personal shopper service to help vulnerable residents obtain their usual food items from the supermarket. The council worked closely with the voluntary sector to ensure those most in need received support through the new service, and staff not working on the front line were redirected into other areas of work to support Medway's community.
- 2.5 Although some services and amenities were closed and cancelled in line with government advice, including theatres, events, sports centres, libraries and other valued council buildings, staff across the council have worked hard to continue providing essential services, in many cases using innovative new ways of delivery. Residents were able to access eBooks and other materials through an online library service and more than 71,000 eBooks, audiobooks, newspapers, comics and magazines were accessed during lockdown. Fitness instructors launched online sessions to bring workouts to residents' living rooms and our Public Health Team provided a range of health and wellbeing services through the internet. In addition, the council's dedicated Customer Advice and Business Support team kept their telephone lines open and answered thousands of calls from residents to help them access services.
- 2.6 Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Medway's families with children and young people was a priority for us throughout the pandemic. Medway Council's schools team, from the outset, worked in close collaboration with head teachers and trust chief executives to support them keep their schools open for vulnerable children and key worker pupils, and supported schools with their plans to safely welcome back more year groups as part of the government's phased return of pupils in June. Our social workers remained on the front line each day, caring for and protecting the most vulnerable people in Medway, including children and families. Our Early Help Team provided engaging and much appreciated activity packs to families they usually work with and our Youth Services Team ran many online activity sessions throughout lockdown.
- 2.7 Medway's weekly household waste and recycling collections continued in lockdown and throughout the pandemic, with crews collecting 21 per cent more recycling, between 23 March and 5 July compared with the same period last year due to more people being at home. Despite other councils stopping their garden waste collections, Medway's crews continued to collect waste, recycling and brown bins. Medway also developed and launched a new online

booking system for both Medway and Kent County Council to allow residents to safely visit its household waste and recycling centres. In addition, initial data suggests there has been a reduction in tonnages of fly-tipped waste between when lockdown started on 23 March and up until 10 May.

- 2.8 At the start of lockdown, the Council's Housing team immediately prioritised its support for rough sleepers to give them somewhere safe to stay, thanks to the help of local accommodation, and the team made 400 calls each day to check on older tenants in our housing properties.
- 2.9 The Council has processed and issued a total of £66.746million in financial support to Medway's residents and businesses, including grants of more than £35million to businesses in need of financial support during the pandemic, more than £1.6million to small businesses as part of the government's discretionary grant scheme, £1.449million to those in receipt of Local Support for Council Tax (LSCT) as part of the Council Tax Hardship Fund, £33.166million as part of the Expanded Business Rates Retail discount and has offered a Business Rates holiday for non-local authority nursery schools through which we have awarded £286,000. In addition, £166,000 will be used to apply a credit of £208 to the council tax accounts of around 800 claimants who have received the additional £20 per week of working tax credits and £441,000 is available to fund discounts for new claimants and applications from council tax payers experiencing hardship, under our existing discretionary hardship relief scheme.
- 2.10 The Council's Digital team published service updates and government information day and night to keep residents up to date on the latest situation.
- 2.11 An extensive and consistent communications campaign has been carried out throughout the pandemic, through social media and the press around the clock. This has helped keep Medway residents informed about any changes to our services in a fast and efficient way, as well as provide important Public Health England and government messages locally. Both residents and businesses have also been provided with information about the advice and support available to them, including financial.
- 2.12 Daily email bulletins were issued to all councillors, staff and partners providing updates on national news, Medway developments and informing on changes to our services as well as providing useful health and wellbeing guidance to the large majority of our staff who were working remotely during this time. Ten messages were issued by the Leader of the council to Medway to reassure local residents and keep them updated on how we had responded to the pandemic. Our press office issued 97 press releases, almost double the number for the same period in 2019 and facilitated 44 interviews with local and national media. The Digital team developed new online services in record time to enable the ongoing provision of some of our key services and to support the safe reopening of important facilities. Our website unique page views were up 113.06% at 4.9million compared to the same period last year.

Getting Medway open for business again

- 2.13 With the announcement of the gradual easing of lockdown, we have worked at speed to support local businesses to reopen safely and to enable residents

to return safely to our high streets and use our own services such as sports centres, community hubs and visitor attractions.

- 2.14 Medway's high streets have successfully reopened, with the help of council teams who provided guidance and support to businesses able to reopen in line with the easing of restrictions. The council supported businesses while they put new measures in place to help protect staff and customers and to encourage people to return to Medway's high streets. Extensive signage has been put up around Medway and support continues to be provided to businesses across Medway to help them thrive once again and rebuild our economy.
- 2.15 Medway Park and Strood sports centres and heritage attractions have successfully reopened with extensive measures put in place to keep customers safe and our libraries and community hubs are reopening on a phased basis enabling people once again to access these important council services in their neighbourhood. Other important services including birth and death registrations are now open and weddings are starting to be held again through our registry services.
- 2.16 As more services and businesses gradually reopen, Medway Council continues to adapt the way it works to help keep residents and its staff safe, and to ensure it can continue to support residents throughout the ongoing pandemic.

3. Strategic Leadership of the Council

Achievements for 2019/20

- 3.1 Our achievements for 2019/20 have outperformed previous years and we are truly putting Medway on the Map, promoting Medway as a great place to live, work, learn and visit.
- 3.2 We had the honour of hosting the formal commissioning of HMS Medway, a new River-class offshore patrol vessel, to mark her entry into active service in the Royal Navy's fleet. The celebrations took place in September 2019, with thousands of residents visiting Chatham Docks to see the ship.
- 3.3 We officially launched our UK City of Culture 2025 aspirations at local and national levels. We held our community launch at the Medway Mile event in July 2019, followed by a stakeholder launch event at the Houses of Parliament in September. Both events showcased the significant stakeholder support for Medway, and the Council has agreed to fund a small team to progress the Bid. We have successfully appointed a Bid Director, who started the role in February and is currently working through an extensive engagement and consultation programme which will identify the key desires and challenges for Medway's 2025 Bid.
- 3.4 Another significant milestone for 2019/20 was being successful with our Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid, with funding worth £170m being allocated to Medway. The funding will provide significant improvements to road and rail

connections, as well as triggering investment to support healthcare, leisure, education and greenspace facilities for the Hoo Peninsula. We will create a new community at Hoo and this funding will help to unlock the potential for new homes. Throughout 2019/20 we have been working alongside Homes England, Network Rail and other key stakeholders, including the Hoo Consortium, to progress the work required to ensure the £170m improvements are delivered by March 2024. The proposals for a new town on the Peninsula will also present an opportunity to explore and pilot our smart cities aspirations for Medway's residents.

- 3.5 Our monumental regeneration programme continues apace despite the challenges of Covid-19 and we are working to our 'Growth for all' ambition, ensuring all our residents benefit from regeneration wherever they live in Medway and that regeneration reaches everyone in our communities.
- 3.6 Starting with our city centre, Chatham. Medway Development Company has commenced the works at Chatham Waterfront, bringing forward 170 new homes, a new City Square and commercial opportunities. Works will commence in early 2020/21 on the proposed development at Whiffens Avenue, on a council-owned car park, bringing forward a further 100 homes for our city centre. The off-site affordable provision at White Road and Britton Farm are also being developed, with the White Road homes being available from Autumn 2020.
- 3.7 We acquired the head lease for the Pentagon Shopping Centre in April 2019, a strategic property at the heart of our ambitious city centre regeneration plans. Owning the Centre, provides us with an additional revenue income and strengthens our ability to deliver, on a long held aspirations, to acquire and transform Mountbatten House, from an empty office building to a mixed-use residential led development, as part of our wider regeneration plans for our city centre.
- 3.8 We have submitted our final bid for the Future High Streets Fund, exploring opportunities for our city centre having progressed through the earlier rounds. We will be submitting a bid for up to £10m to improve the public realm in Chatham, as well as making investments for further economic growth, increasing housing and employment opportunities and helping to create a vibrant city centre.
- 3.9 We have also been successful with a recent bid for £1.6m to invest in the historic high street from Star Hill through to Sun Pier Conservation area. The bid is match-funded, bringing the total available spend to £3.2m to create a heritage creative quarter for Medway.
- 3.10 Following my last report in April 2019, the former fire station arches have now been developed into the Fire Station Brasserie, and this together with the lighting and art on the bridge provides a great sense of arrival to Chatham city centre.
- 3.11 The Command of the Heights project in Chatham is now complete, with the newly restored amphitheatre at Fort Amherst hosting its first performance in September 2019. There was a significant archaeological discovery made while uncovering the Barrier Ditch, with the final design including the newly

restored casemates as a significant addition to our heritage offer.

- 3.12 The former Civic Centre site has attracted a wide range of developers to bid for the site, with the aspiration for this location to be our prestige regeneration site in Medway, bringing forward around 550 homes.
- 3.13 Countryside, the developer for our flagship regeneration site at Rochester Riverside, is continuing the excellent build programme at speed, with future phases being accelerated. Sales are strong. The development has been awarded the 'winner of winners' in the Housing Design Awards; this is a great achievement for Rochester Riverside and Countryside!
- 3.14 In the last year, Medway's economy has risen to £5.6bn according to the latest available Gross Value Added (GVA) figures. This rate of growth is higher than the South East and the national average. We continue to focus on Skills here in Medway, supporting students and residents to extend their skill set, working with our Universities, MidKent College and the Waterfront UTC. As I mentioned last year, we have established a Cabinet Advisory Group to progress the agenda around Skills, with the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships taking the lead on this. We delivered a Skills Summit in October 2019, hosted by MidKent College and there were key speakers from organisations such as City & Guilds, JobsinKent, University of Greenwich and The Careers & Enterprise Company. There were around 130 people in the audience from across the skills and business sectors in Medway.
- 3.15 We are continuing to progress our ambitions for Innovation Park Medway, working closely with national agencies such as Highways England and Natural England to ensure the site is progressed. The development will deliver around 3000 high value, high GVA employment opportunities in advanced manufacturing and in the engineering supply chain, focused around BAE, adding to the vibrancy of Medway's economy. We have secured the final element of IPM funding, under the SELEP funding opportunity LGF 3b, worth £1.5m, bringing the total to circa over £10m of investment for this project.
- 3.16 We have secured additional funding from Government under their 'Shovel-Ready' schemes for the development of Britton Farm Mall, Gillingham. The development has secured funding of £1.99m and will create a new learning, skills and employment hub.
- 3.17 We continue to manage 7 Green Flag sites across our greenspaces, and we continue to invest in our play areas. We know that sport and play are important to people as they strive for healthy lifestyles and with this in mind we continue to offer free swimming to under 16s and over 60s. Our Sporting Legacy is nationally recognised, and we hosted the national cycling championships in July 2019, with thousands of visitors basking in the Rochester sunshine.
- 3.18 We held the Medway1 Launch in October 2019 in London, where we showcased our 12th edition of the publication. There were around 100 developers in attendance, including new businesses looking to redevelop in Medway. We launched the opportunity of the Civic Centre site in Strood and there were a number of developers interested with our prestige regeneration

site. The Chairman of SELEP gave his support for our City of Culture aspirations. We look forward to showcasing Medway at our next Medway1 event proposed for Summer 2021.

- 3.19 Our Place Branding journey continues at pace. The Place Board meets on a quarterly basis, chaired by the Principal at MidKent College and supported by Medway's Place Manager. The Board has recently undergone a membership review to ensure the most appropriate strategic partners represent Medway at these meetings. The organisations in attendance are: Southeastern, Visit Kent, Historic Dockyard, University of Kent, University of Greenwich, MHS homes, Countryside properties, Copper Rivet Distillery, Locate in Kent and Zest the Agency. The Place Board has held 2 virtual meetings, which have been successful and a helpful guide to understand how each organisation has been dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.20 The Place Board has an overarching role in supporting the development of Medway as a great place to live (supported by the Cultural Partnership), work (supported by the Medway for Business Partnership), learn (supported by the Medway Learning Partnership) and visit (supported by the Medway Tourism Association).
- 3.21 In addition to the Place Board, a Medway Champions programme has been established and has successfully 'recruited' over 150 champions across Medway. The Champions represent a number of Medway businesses, communities and individuals who are keen to learn more about Medway and become ambassadors for Medway. The Champions meet every 2 months at different venues, where there is the opportunity to hear something new about Medway. Our Champions have been supported throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and have taken part in 2 virtual meetings, which have been a great success.
- 3.22 Last year saw a number of visitors attend our successful festivals programme, ranging from our Focus on Festivals to Dickensian Christmas. Unfortunately our festivals programme for 2020 has been paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic, although we have provided a unique digital tourism offer, in particular to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Dickens' death. We look forward to attracting visitors to Medway next year, starting with the Digital Light Nights festival and Medway's first Gaming and Creative Festival; watch this space for further announcements!
- 3.23 October 2019 marked the transition of the Waste Contract from Veolia to Norse, which was achieved seamlessly. Not only was this undertaken without a hitch, Christmas collections, which are always challenging, were dealt with professionally and to a very high standard. Our partnership with Norse goes from strength to strength.
- 3.24 We are continuing our Children's improvement journey with colleagues across the Council and external partners, and there will be a further review later this year. We are determined to see a step-change improvement in the care we provide our young people. We have recently made significant additional investment into the service and appointed a new Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, who will lead the service through the improvement journey and beyond. I know at first hand the Commissioner is encouraged by

the momentum we have secured. We continue to invest in our schools, with 90% of schools being rated as either good or outstanding. We are progressing our longer-term vision and aspiration for Medway to become a Child-Friendly City, following cities such as Leeds to improve the way our City engages with our young people and how our young people can be involved with decision making in terms of Medway's future.

- 3.25 We are committed to supporting older people living more independently in their own homes, through the greater use of technology, and over the forthcoming period, a range of significant changes and innovations will be brought forward in how we deliver Adult Social Care.
- 3.26 And given this significant range of high quality service provision, we still charge by far the lowest Council Tax in Kent and are one of the lowest charging Unitary Authorities in the country.
- 3.27 We are continuing to work with Greater North Kent Leaders, involving Dartford, Gravesham, Maidstone and Swale Councils to identify opportunities for shared services and other joint initiatives, offering cost reductions and efficiencies. There is the opportunity to jointly work on the Climate Change agenda for the North Kent Area, with options currently being explored. We have held virtual meetings with the Greater North Kent Leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic, which have been very successful.
- 3.28 Having declared a Climate Change emergency last year, a cross-party Member Advisory Board has been established to oversee the Council's work in this area. £100K was identified in the 2020/21 Budget to ensure work is coordinated across the Council, and that steps to address Climate Change inform everything we do.
- 3.29 County and regional meetings are attended in order to influence others and build relationships which are of value to Medway, such as the SE7; Transport for the South East; meetings of Kent MPs and Kent County Council (KCC); meetings of Kent Leaders, including KCC and Medway, and informal meetings of District Councils. Medway has also joined the Key Cities Group, including authorities such as Wakefield, Coventry and Portsmouth, to discuss how as a collective group the cities can play a key role in the regional economy.
- 3.30 We are continuing to work with external partners on developments outside Medway which will have an impact here. We meet with London Resort colleagues on a regular basis to support their development, as it will see 33,000 jobs created, providing opportunities for Medway. We continue to work with Highways England around the proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing, identifying the opportunities for North Kent as well as the potential impacts on our local road networks. This development will bring £8bn to the regional economy and 6000 jobs.

4. Communications and Marketing

Achievements for 2019/20

- 4.1 Over the past year the Communications and Marketing Team has delivered a wide range of high-quality campaigns and PR initiatives. In addition to our work to put Medway on the Map and support our many services, one of our primary areas of focus for the year has been our Children's Services work, supporting the team as we all implement the improvement journey with internal communications and engagement activities as well as external communications. The examples below are just some of the campaigns and work carried out during this year.

Children's Services

- 4.2 A primary area of focus for the team has been supporting our Children's Services colleagues, particularly their internal communications and engagement. The team managed all the external communications at critical milestones including the publication of the report, the publication of our Improvement Plan and the report from the Commissioner to the Minister in January, all receiving very balanced coverage as a result. A comprehensive communications plan is now being implemented including the creation of a Staff Reference Group, staff newsletters and opportunities for staff feedback. This remains a key project for the Communications Team and we will continue to support internal and external communications as a matter of priority. A short film showcasing the range of support Medway Council gives to children is now being created and work is underway to explore initiatives for Child Friendly Medway, bringing together the range of services we provide for Medway's children.

SEND

- 4.3 A full communications plan was created following the creation and approval of the SEND Strategy in response to the Ofsted inspection. A sub group has been set up to ensure that we communicate clearly with our different target audiences about the Local Offer and that we shape our communications over the coming years in the best way to engage and deliver our services with the full co-production of our young people, their families and carers and local professionals.

Social Worker Recruitment

- 4.4 Recruitment of social workers has been a major project for us over the year. Five videos were produced focusing on the advantages of working in our Children's Services team and we ran an advertising campaign on 500 Southeastern trains all of which resulted in good website visits and awareness of the roles on offer. This has resulted in 65 applications in the second half of the year.

Shared Lives

- 4.5 One of the team's major projects for the first half of the year was a campaign to recruit new Shared Lives carers. This has included the creation of seven

wonderful videos showcasing how rewarding the work can be, many awareness events at different locations across Medway including hubs and libraries, social media advertising and radio promotions. 34 enquiries have been received for the year to March 2020.

Medway on the map

- 4.6 A number of events have taken place over the year to help us put Medway on the Map. These included:

City of Culture launch

- 4.7 On 19 July we held our local launch setting out our proposed ambition to bid for UK City of Culture 2025. We used the opportunity of the ever-popular Medway Mile to host the event knowing we would be playing to an audience of thousands at a very upbeat event. Against the backdrop of a huge art worked Back Our Bid flag draped from the top of Rochester Castle as well as a number of other large flags located on the castle walls the Leader announced our bid intention to big cheers. The launch was covered extensively by local and national media and ensured that Medway was seen as getting ahead of the game in announcing our ambitions at this stage.

City of Culture Parliamentary launch

- 4.8 A parliamentary launch was held at the Houses of Parliament on 4 September. Despite coinciding with a number of Brexit votes in Parliament, we welcomed 65 guests including a number of MPs. Talks were given by host Reh Chishti, Cllr Alan Jarrett, Eme Enemokwu – a recently graduated student from Kent Business School who is running his own fashion label - and Amanda Cottrell the Patron of our Bid. The event generated a huge amount of support and goodwill that our Bid team can build on, particularly with fundraisers and influencers as we move towards submitting the Bid.
- 4.9 In February, we were delighted to welcome Imogen Robertson as Medway's City of Culture Bid Director to take this work forward.

HSBC UK National Circuit Championships

- 4.10 Thousands of people visited Rochester on Sunday 21 July for the British Cycling championships. As well as the national cycling competition, we held a day of activities in the castle grounds and the Medway Big Ride that saw hundreds of people taking part in a ride on part of the course. It was an opportunity to showcase Medway's ability to host this scale of events here in Medway and support our City of Culture bid. We are working with British Cycling to bring more such events to Medway.

HMS Medway visit

- 4.11 The visit of HMS Medway was a huge success both for us and the Royal Navy and was a great example of how well we work in partnership with a wide range of partners.
- 4.12 Despite very strict restrictions being imposed around when the news could be issued (only 8 days before the visit), we managed to ensure widespread

awareness through our Medway Matters door drop, social media and the media, and the tickets to visit the ship on 22 September had all been allocated within a number of hours following release. We secured some excellent drone footage of the arrival which the navy was delighted with and which has also given us good broader footage of that area of Chatham Maritime. It was fantastic for social media. We also secured good coverage for the Commander's visit to the Mayor and the Freedom Parade on 21st.

Medway 1 Launch

- 4.13 16 October saw the successful launch of our latest **Medway 1 magazine**. The publication showcases our monumental regeneration programme and development projects as well as initiatives such as our UK City of Culture 2025 ambitions. The launch event attracted 80 attendees interested to learn more about Medway and future developments such as the Civic Centre site which was launched to the market on the night.

Place branding and Medway Champions

- 4.14 More than 150 businesses and organisations have joined as Medway Champions, all keen to represent Medway and play a part in raising its profile. We are also actively engaging with all our local communities where possible and are developing a scheme with Raising Youth and Medway Youth Council to engage with our young people.
- 4.15 Meetings have been held in a variety of venues including Rochester Cathedral, the Copper Rivet Distillery, Historic Dockyard Chatham, MCH, All Saints Church in Allhallows and the University of Kent. An average of 60 champions come to the meeting every two months.
- 4.16 The Medway Place branding programme has gathered momentum over the year and is being increasingly used by partners including:
- Southeastern – new Medway signs at all Medway station platforms.
 - Four universities - using the branding on their impact reports and at their open days last summer.
 - AC Goatham – on site entry boards to the farm.
 - Building site hoardings including Strood, Chatham Waterfront, Bardell Wharf and the former Toys R Us site.
- 4.17 It is also being used by MHS Homes, Historic Dockyard Chatham, MCH, Arriva, Locate in Kent and the Thinking Schools Trust.

External campaigns

Regeneration

- 4.18 We have continued an active year of promotion and awareness-raising for our many regeneration projects. Highlights have included:
- Communications to support the Strood town centre improvements including an exhibition, residents' leaflets and advertising.

- Communications support for the successful launch of the Command of the Heights project at Fort Amherst and the demolition of the Riverside 1 building.
- Impactful communication of the success of our HIF bid and preparation of communications with residents due to be rolled out this Spring.
- Successful ground-breaking for Chatham Waterfront.
- Further initiatives for our Love Chatham campaign.
- Opening of the hotel at Rochester Riverside.

New Waste Contract

- 4.19 The team provided all the communications support for the smooth and successful roll-out of the new waste contract by Medway Norse. This included the design of a new suite of livery for the environmental vehicles as they came into action. Our aim was to communicate the partnership work between Medway Council and Medway Norse and to highlight key messages using our “Love Medway” brand, linked to keeping Medway clean.
- 4.20 The team also came up with a very speedy campaign to support major changes to the way we operate our waste and recycling centres, requiring visitors to present ID on arrival. A large scale awareness campaign was put into action comprising more than 20 elements including advertising, social media, media coverage, video and e-newsletters, Social media reach for the short campaign was highly effective at 68,000 with many sharing and liking our posts and minimal negative coverage. On the first day of the changes, 90% of people visiting the sites were aware of the new requirements and prepared for the changes, demonstrating the effectiveness of the campaign.
- 4.21 Our winter and Christmas recycling messages have resulted in an increase in recycling over the Christmas and New Year period in recent years.

Public Health

- 4.22 We have run a record number of campaigns to support our public health work during the year. Our joint work with the team over recent years has resulted in smoking prevalence in Medway being the lowest ever at 14.7%, recording the biggest fall in Kent. Our Stop Smoking awareness campaigns used nudge techniques to encourage people to give up and we promoted our new digital services. Our Stoptober campaign attracted 285 residents to sign up.
- 4.23 Tackling social isolation was a major theme for the year. We promoted a number of our A Better Medway Together initiatives including support for community-run events to bring people together, Focus On events, community pledges and case study videos. One of the most successful projects was the promotion of our Chatty Bench tour, which visited 10 locations across Medway to raise awareness of the support available and helped signpost 320 people to support services. Social media reach for this campaign was hugely successful, seeing a reach of more than 14,000 people for some posts.
- 4.24 Lower My Drinking – increasing engagement has been our target this year and we’ve taken a more targeted approach geographically and demographically. It has largely been led through social media activity as well as using targeted bus

route advertising, support leaflets and initiatives such as our alcohol quizzes and alcohol-free drinks recipes.

- 4.25 Other campaigns through the year included Mouth Cancer Awareness month, flu and Stay Warm This Winter campaigns, White Ribbon Day, cycling promotions, child health communications, disability health checks, LARC contraception improvement, Dementia awareness, our Time To Change mental health initiative, Tri for You- active and healthy family campaigns, Blooming Bumps and Staying Active in the Workplace.
- 4.26 We continue a programme of public and staff reassurance communication messages around Coronavirus, following the lead of Public Health England, working across the sector.

Events and heritage

- 4.27 The team led on the promotion of each of our events in our packed annual events calendar – The English Festival, Sweeps, Summer Dickens, four Focus On events, River Festival, Armed Forces Day, Castle Concerts, Will Adams, Fireworks Night, Rochester Christmas Markets and the Dickensian Christmas festival. We had a record number of people join our Open Top bus last summer, with an increase of 51% in numbers when compared to last year, despite it being on for one week less.
- 4.28 Christmas in Medway this year was a particular success, attracting 154,245 people to our markets, the highest number ever. Marketing started early using new channels including promotion on Southeastern trains in phases which saw more than four million people viewing our adverts as they logged in on the trains and nearly 7,000 visiting our site.
- 4.29 A new marketing booklet has been created to promote our heritage buildings as wonderful places to host weddings, and this will be used at wedding fairs across Kent.
- 4.30 Our new digital totem went live outside Rochester station in August providing a useful source of up-to-date information, maps and guides for people visiting Rochester and information about what's on for residents.

Theatres

- 4.31 Our marketing campaigns have helped increase seat occupancy in our theatres this year. We have increased our social media marketing and targeting as well as going out to popular shopping centres and local events to promote our shows. Our What's On brochure remains very popular with a 50% increase in online sales in August and September. Other successful initiatives included promotion of theatre vouchers as Christmas gifts. For the calendar year 2019 we sold 90,715 tickets for shows at the Central and Brook Theatres compared to 68,054 in 2018.
- 4.32 Our own Christmas production for toddlers: Adventures of Archie the Mouse beat last year's sales with increased ticket revenue of £2,500 thanks to extensive digital and video marketing and visiting busy shopping areas in the period before Christmas to promote it.

Adult Education

- 4.33 Numbers of enrolments on our adult education courses have risen sharply thanks to strong marketing pushes throughout the year. There has been a continued focus on three areas of provision - creative and hobby courses, qualifications and free work skills courses for job seekers. Each area has been promoted heavily across digital and social media and shared across relevant Medway Council services pages. Enrolments for the year to 6 March have been 6,314 an increase of by the end of the third quarter up from 4,531 in 2018/19 to 4,978 this year up nearly 40% on last year's figures.

Libraries and Medway Archives Centre (MAC)

- 4.34 Our work to encourage people to visit our libraries has continued this year with a number of initiatives including e-newsletters, raising awareness that we carry many of the most popular latest titles as well as an extensive back catalogue, the Medway Reads summer campaign which attracted 3,641 participants, and promotion of our successful author visits. Recent work has been a public engagement campaign to support the launch of the new library smart phone app allowing people to manage their account online. Planning is currently underway for the promotion of the new Wigmore hub when it opens in Spring.
- 4.35 Much of our work for MAC involves raising awareness of the many excellent events and exhibitions held to encourage people to visit the centre. One of the special projects was our popular, themed "Your Medway Memories" encouraging people to share memories and photographs of Medway through the years – a lovely project that also helped tackle social isolation amongst older people.
- 4.36 We also took our libraries, adult education and MAC services on the road to events such as the Medway Home Start event at Brompton Barracks to raise awareness of what we provide.

Sport and leisure

- 4.37 We continue to promote key memberships at our gyms across Medway with our major push at the moment being the Premier Membership. We have created a number of videos for our centres promoting the benefits of our Medway Park gym and providing tips on exercise and getting the most from your gym. We also support specific pushes including Christmas gifts.
- 4.38 Our summer of sport campaign proved very successful bringing in around £23,000 for our different courses over the summer holiday weeks.

Three elections

- 4.39 The team provided full communications support for this year's three elections – Local, European and General. The work included:
- social media to communicate key messages in the run up to the elections
 - liaising with the media in the run-up and on the night
 - campaigns to encourage young people to vote
 - videos showing new voters how to vote in a polling station

- organising all staging, dressing and AV for the count on the night at Medway Park

- Issuing the results on the night through social media and our website with very strong engagement figures.

Brexit

- 4.40 The Communications team launched a campaign in the early autumn in support of the government campaign to ensure we were prepared for a “no deal” Brexit. We created a new section on our website providing help and guidance for all and sent a direct mailer to every Medway business.

Additional design projects

- 4.41 Our Graphic Design team also provide creative work for a number of partner or external organisations throughout the year. Their successful creative work has included the Sheppey Shoreline Guide, Talking Telescopes, Wonderful Woolly Watery World, Queenborough Interpretation panel, Kent Orchards, Guardians of the Deep and Birdwise – all generating a useful income source for the team.

Internal Communications

- 4.42 Key success stories for our internal communications this year have been
- Carrying out the staff survey which showed a very positive picture in terms of improving internal communications and engagement across the Council. A number of areas saw improvements since the previous survey, including a 27% increase in senior leadership listening to staff, 16% increase in believing senior leadership has a vision for the council, 74% managers feeling well informed and 13% increase in staff feeling well informed.
 - Support for the internal communications and engagement work in our Children’s Services team following the Ofsted announcement. This includes setting up a new Staff Reference Group and the production of a monthly staff newsletter.
 - Launch of our new intranet MEDSPACE – bringing a more collaborative and engaging internal communications tool to our staff enabling them to upload their own content, communicate with colleagues and search and find the information they need with ease. It regularly has around 70,000 hits per month.
 - From this we’ve launched our regular weekly MEDSPACE news bringing people a weekly newsletter to their inbox.
 - Continuation of our leadership monthly email CMT Headlines to keep people informed on the key corporate stories.
 - The Communications Team also helped generate the £21,000 sponsorship income that ensured that this year’s Make A Difference Awards event took place at no cost to the council.

Media

- 4.43 Our press office provides a professional, proactive and reactive media service as well as maintaining our social media channels which are an increasingly important tool for communication with our communities.
- 4.44 Through forward planning we work to ensure strong coverage of Medway and Medway Council key stories in local, national and specialist media. The press office has issued 204 press releases in the past year- down just six on the previous year despite three periods of purdah this year, showing the regular demand for media releases across all our council services. We also regularly issue short News in Brief items to the media via email for some of our smaller events.
- 4.45 In addition to our regular stories on service initiatives and events some of our key news stories this year, many of which secured local and national coverage have included:
- Management of the announcement of Ofsted inspection, publication of our action plan and the Commissioner's report all of which received balanced coverage locally and nationally.
 - SEND revisit result
 - Changes to Household Waste and Recycling Centres
 - All our events and festivals for the year to drive attendance
 - Launch of the UK City of Culture 2025 ambition – national coverage
 - HSBC UK National Cycling Championships – national coverage
 - Adam Peaty race clinic in Strood – fantastic local coverage.
 - HIF bid success - national and local coverage
 - Purchase of the Pentagon lease
 - HMS Medway visit - national and local coverage.
 - Climate change emergency and electric bus trial
 - Enforcement for fly tipping stories
 - Additional funding for rough sleepers
 - Medway Development Company – planning permission and Chatham Waterfront ground-breaking.
 - Litter enforcement officers starting in Medway Council
 - Skills and employability summit
 - Scholarship for medical student
 - SELEP Funding to ease congestion on Medway City Estate
 - School admissions and test results
 - Leading the way in Adult Social Care
 - £5m government funding for the Medway Tunnel
 - Medway budget
 - Medway Park to become a dementia friendly sports centre.
- 4.46 In addition to proactive media work, the team has handled 936 reactive media enquiries during the course of the year which is down slightly on the previous year but is not surprising as we were in purdah three times this year.

Digital communications

- 4.47 We are increasingly using digital channels for both our external and internal communications campaigns. It is proving one of the most effective ways to reach our audiences and also to be able to measure the success of our work. We have used new channels including greater use of video, Southeastern trains WIFI services, and our corporate Instagram account, launched last spring, now has more than 1,100 followers and has growing engagement with new audiences.
- 4.48 Our other social media accounts grow well, demonstrating this important source of reach. We have more than 11,600 Facebook followers, more than 20,600 Twitter followers and nearly 7,000 followers on Linked In. We are planning to grow our social media presence and activities further over the coming year.
- 4.49 #OurDay tweetathon this year saw us issuing 47 tweets through the day on the work done by the Council in Medway as well as tweets from other council accounts with a reach of 900,000 people.
- 4.50 Our electronic email news services now have 28 topics that we post to on a regular basis with 38,400 subscribers signed up to receive one or more of the news stories.

5. Finance

Achievements for 2019/2020

- 5.1 The Finance division has now combined forces with a large proportion of the former Transformation division, to become the Finance and Business Improvement division. Although largely a 'lift and shift' of existing teams, we are already seeing benefits in terms of the way the divisional management team is working together to improve the way the Council works.
- 5.2 The 2018/19 statement of accounts again achieved an unqualified audit opinion and value for money conclusion and Council officers have quickly developed an excellent working relationship with new auditors from Grant Thornton. We appear to have reached an understanding with the auditors over a number of issues affecting the audit of the 2019/20 accounts, including the Minimum Revenue Provision and the treatment of the deficit position on the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve.
- 5.3 We have already started preparing for the 2020/21 closure of accounts too, not least in readiness for group accounts incorporating our 100% Council-owned companies.
- 5.4 The first round of revenue budget monitoring will be discussed by Cabinet on 25 August, but I can reveal that it forecasts a very challenging set of figures for the current year. This is inevitable given the impacts of the

Covid-19 pandemic and whilst the Government has been generous in terms of the package of support, the longer term effects on the economy will have implications for the tax base, demand for statutory services and the Council's income generating services for some time to come. The medium-term financial plans are likely to be our most challenging yet and will require us to look very carefully at everything we do.

- 5.5 I will not dwell on our superb response to Covid-19 in this report, as it is dealt with far more comprehensively elsewhere on this agenda. However I would like to recognise the part played by Finance staff in ensuring that the Council continues to exercise excellent stewardship over the significant sums of public funding made available to us, targeting resources at where its most needed, whilst ensuring that best value is achieved.
- 5.6 The last time I was held to account by this Committee, I referred to the scale and ambition of our capital programme, which at the time amounted to around £220 million. Since then, the programme has grown significantly and now represents an impressive £430 million, including not least £170 million of Housing Infrastructure Fund grant to facilitate the delivery of 12,000 new homes on the peninsula.
- 5.7 My previous report referred to our four Trainee Accountants in post, all studying for professional qualifications. Well, I can now report that three of these have moved into substantive roles as management accountants and so you can rest assured that the Council's finances will be in safe hands for the foreseeable future.
- 5.8 As always System developments within the division are always ongoing and have included the following:
- Making Tax Digital went live September 2019;
 - Use of Fiscal Technologies to assist with prevention of duplicate payments;
 - Resource Link moving to a hosted platform, the start of the exciting major transformation programme to be undertaken in 2020/21 for the Payroll and HR services;
 - Pilot scheme for the new Payroll SS4U, undertaken in order that staff will be able to move to a more comprehensive self-serve operation for payroll activities in the coming year, including online forms for expenses, mileage, sickness etc;
 - Work has started on a new Insurance Claims Handling System which will make it easier for claims to be submitted, processed and reported on. This will be live 2020/21;
 - Upgrades for the Council's financial systems have been undertaken on a regular basis;

- Continue to work with the services and IT to so that the public can find it easier to make payments online thereby improving service quality and reducing processing times.
- 5.9 A review of a number of monitoring processes has been undertaken to ensure that the Council's financial processes are as robust as they need to be.
- 5.10 Auto enrolment within the Council's pension scheme which has to happen every three years was successfully carried out.
- 5.11 The teams are well placed to continue to strive for improvements in the coming year whilst also supporting customers both internal and external on a day to day basis.
- 5.12 The division worked across teams to help ensure moratorium rules were monitored and followed including making a number of changes to systems and processes to make this as easy as possible.
- 5.13 Much of the finance operation is seen and never heard as they meet the need to ensure payments are made to both staff and suppliers, reconciliations carried out, claims processed, cash collected etc. but we should not underestimate the importance of the role that they undertake for the public and the Council .

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Appendices

None

Background documents

None