

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2021

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

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Author: Stephen Platt, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

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

1. Background

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

- Disabled adaptations to housing
- Homelessness and housing options
- Housing management and allocations
- Housing strategy
- Private sector housing
- Housing Landlord Services
- Development of the Council's housing stock
- Libraries and Community Hubs
- Adult Learning
- Climate Change
- Voluntary Sector
- Medway Development Company Ltd.
- Medway Commercial Group Ltd.

2. Housing Service Achievements for 2020/21

2.1 Disabled Adaptions

- 2.1.1 Medway Council undertakes alterations and adaptations to properties to assist Medway's residents to remain living independently in their homes and to reduce the need for support and care from Adult's or Children's Services.
- 2.1.2 The need for an adaptation is triggered through an assessment from an Occupational Therapist who assesses the needs of the applicant and recommend support and adaptations be implemented.
- 2.1.3 Following the Occupational Therapist assessment, the resident may be referred to the Housing Service to discuss how they can be assisted with possible adaptations or alterations.
- 2.1.4 There are national targets in relation to how the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is utilised which are set out below:
- Time taken from agreeing a new scheme to grant approval has now reduced to 15 weeks against a national target of 28 weeks
 - Processing an application after receipt, is now approximately one week against a national target of 26 weeks.
- 2.1.5 In 2020/21 the service has committed £1,896,499 to adaptations so far in 2020/21, approximately 75% of the budget is provided by government. This equates to 75 approvals for improvements to homes to make them more accessible.
- 2.1.6 An additional £293,204 of funding has been received to help local authorities to deliver more home adaptations for those people with disabilities who qualify for a DFG.

2.2 Homelessness and Housing Options

- 2.2.1 As with the delivery of all Council services, the impact of the pandemic from March 2020 has presented significant challenges for the Housing Solutions & Reviews Team. The team have shown incredible commitment and have worked tirelessly to ensure that we are able to continue to provide a legally compliant and effective homelessness service, one which has been an essential service to some of the most vulnerable during the pandemic.
- 2.2.2 In accordance with advice, staff presence at Kingsley House has been reduced to a minimum level. This has worked to maintain staff health and safety, with minimal levels of sickness absence and no cases of coronavirus within the teams.
- 2.2.3 The service for those homeless on the day and prevention appointments are primarily now being delivered via telephone, which is a channel shift from the

pre-pandemic model of service delivery. The Council retains a face-to-face facility for those clients who need an interpreter appointment or who are unable to use a telephone. This system has worked well with no identified negative impact upon our service delivery or statutory compliance.

2.2.4 Between April and November 2020 the service triaged 1,665 requests for housing assistance. Whilst this is a reduction of 7% comparative to the same period in 2019/20 (which saw 1,782) a major factor has been the impact of the pandemic, not least the measures introduced by government to stay possession actions (which ended in September 2020) and the increased notice periods for tenants. At times this has seen a reduction of approximately 50% in those cases approaching the Council as a result of being evicted from their privately rented and social housing accommodation.

2.2.5 Through Q2 and Q3 the service has seen a steady increase to equal to or greater than levels of normal footfall: rising from a low of 153 cases in April to a high of 244 in October, through to 234 in November. At this time there remains a high level of demand for housing assistance and, given the widely anticipated increase in evictions following the lifting of the stay of possession proceedings are likely to increase going forwards into 2021.

2.2.6 Despite the high level of demand, continual improvement and refinement of our practices and procedures implemented within the service, combined with an appropriately resourced, resilient and flexible staffing establishment has enabled the team to maintain a high quality statutory compliant service achieving comparatively high levels of success in preventing and relieving homelessness.

2.2.7 Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, for those cases triaged and which were assessed as triggering a homeless duty, to the end of November the service has successfully prevented/relieved homelessness for 562 homeless households. Whilst this is a decrease of 13.5% compared to the same period in 2019/20 which saw 643, the overall average prevention/relief rate for these cases stands at 52% which remains the same as at 2019/20-year end (52%).

2.2.8 A break-down of these cases is as follows:

- 471 prevention cases were triggered, of which 318 were successfully prevented: 182 by assisting them to secure alternative accommodation and 136 by assisting them to sustain existing accommodation. This equates to a successful prevention rate of 68%.
- 605 relief cases were triggered, of which 244 were successfully relieved of their homelessness by assisting them to secure accommodation. This equates to a successful relief rate of 40%.

2.2.9 Underpinning the Council's successful prevention/relief activities have been several initiatives, both new and existing. These include:

- Actively working to promote and maintain joint prevention working arrangements with a number of social landlords in the area – MHS Homes, MOAT and L&Q – to enable early interventions to seek to sustain tenancies for those tenants who are at risk of eviction.
- Actively working to promote and maintain our landlord helpline and co-operative working with private sector landlords to enable early intervention to seek to sustain tenancies for those tenants who are at risk of eviction.
- Reaching out to Medway County Court to enable us to promote our services at the court to those at threat of eviction.
- Undertaking monthly joint prevention appointments at the Endeavour Foyer, a commissioned supported housing project, seeking to sustain accommodation for young people at risk of eviction.
- Liaising closely with Children’s Services and Early Help to promote joint working and early intervention for customers at risk of eviction or who are homeless and at risk of being found intentionally homeless. This has included drafting and agreeing a joint leaving care protocol and a Housing Services pledge to care leavers as a corporate parenting initiative.
- Working with floating support providers, to embed support workers in the service to undertake prevention mediation visits with excluders to seek to sustain accommodation for customers asked to leave, and providing a weekly drop-in service at Kingsley House offering housing support to customers with budgeting and benefit issues;
- Maintaining an effective joint working relationship with Medway Revenues and Benefits Service to ensure access to Discretionary Housing Payments is maximised for the prevention of homelessness.
- Proactively working via our private rented sector (PRS) scheme to identify, match and secure accommodation for applicants in the private sector.
- Developing and rolling out a rent guarantee scheme for private rented sector landlords to improve our offer to seek to increase access to accommodation.

2.2.10 Of particular note has been the joint work undertaken by the PRS Team and Housing Options Teams to identify, match and secure accommodation for applicants in the private rented sector. Underpinning this has been the Council’s improved Private Rented Sector scheme, which offers customers deposits, fees, rent in advance, as well as incentives to landlords, to enable homeless households to secure private sector accommodation. This work has directly contributed to the Council’s prevention and relief of homelessness with 235 successful PRS sign ups so far, this financial year.

2.3 Temporary Accommodation

2.3.1 Due to the pandemic, there have been additional pressures on temporary accommodation, with the peak month being September where 370 households were recorded as being in temporary accommodation. The Council continues to work with private landlords and housing providers to reduce the level of households in temporary accommodation by providing permanent options and at the end of November 2020, 327 households were

in temporary accommodation compared to 338 at the same time in 2019/20, a decrease of 3.3%.

- 2.3.2 Benchmarking at the end of March 2020, showed the rate of households in temporary accommodation in Medway was 3.01 per 1,000 households, this is slightly lower than the national rate of 3.92. Further benchmarking has been undertaken to identify how Medway compares with other similar sized unitary authorities. In March 2020, the numbers in temporary accommodation Milton Keynes had a rate of 7.97 per 1,000 households and Brighton and Hove a rate of 12.92. Locally, Swale had a rate of 4.57 in the same time period.

2.4 Homechoice and Allocations

- 2.4.1 The Council's Allocations policy sets out the framework Housing Associations operating in Medway will use when allocating social housing.
- 2.4.2 From April 2020 to the end of October 2020, 376 households have secured accommodation through Homechoice compared to 378 for the financial year 2019/20. There has been a slight decrease in the number of properties let this year.
- 2.4.3 The number of active households on the housing register is currently 1,228 (October 2020) this is a slight decrease from the number on the register at 2019/20-year end which was 1,379.
- 2.4.4 In order to improve the customer experience a new Change of Circumstances form was implemented through the Homechoice system to allow customers to update their circumstances online. This has improved the service to the customers eliminating the need for them to complete an entire application form to keep their application up to date.

2.5 Housing Strategy

- 2.5.1 The Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team works with Housing Associations, developers and the Homes and Communities Agency to identify opportunities to develop additional affordable housing. During the last reporting year, a total of 333 affordable housing units were delivered which exceeded the target of 204 units.
- 2.5.2 Housing Services take an active role in future planning for additional schemes to meet Medway's needs, working with other partners including Children's Services and Adults Social Care, Public Health, charities and other organisations to identify opportunities for joint working to help meet housing needs across Medway. Due to the pandemic, we were unable to hold our usual partnership activities over the week preceding World Homeless Day, but instead we arranged an online multi agency conference which was attended by 48 people from Medway Partner Agencies.

2.5.3 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 for all short-term services and all services are validated on an annual basis. The review programme ensures that the funding allocated to these services is being used effectively to benefit vulnerable people living in Medway. We have aligned workers from commissioned services effectively to support the Council's work prevent homelessness and support people that are in temporary accommodation.

2.5.4 The Rough Sleeping Initiative has been delivering successful interventions since inception in July 2018. The initiative has been funded via grant from the MHCLG. Our allocation for 2020/21 is £867,000 and we are preparing a bid for continuation of funding in 2021/22. This year we were also successful in bidding under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and Cold Weather Fund. This has resulted in £249,000 of additional funding for increased bedspaces over the winter in Emergency Accommodation (primarily Hotel and B&Bs), security staffing, on call staff, additional support staff and rent for our nine bed move on guest house.

2.5.5 Key elements of the Rough Sleepers Initiative are:

- An Outreach Team that visits rough sleepers to verify their status, eligibility for services and offers support and signposting. The team includes specialist workers who provide additional input to vulnerable women and people with mental health support needs.
- Each rough sleeper has their needs and any risk factors assessed and this is used to design a short intervention plan to help them access support and accommodation.
- A Resettlement Worker helps people leaving supported accommodation find new accommodation and offer support and financial assistance 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.
- Housing Navigators to provide ongoing support for rough sleepers and ex rough sleepers who have moved into accommodation, as well as working with people who have set up tents to see what can be done to move them into settled accommodation.
- Supported accommodation for rough sleepers with high levels of complex needs.
- Housing First flats with intensive support. This works well for more complex individuals who have not managed within traditional tenancies and supported housing environments.
- A Somewhere Safe to Stay service which provides short term interventions to move people from the street and in to shelter whilst options are considered.

- A nine bedroomed guest house, with onsite support provided by One Big Family who were unable to run their Emergency Homeless Winter Refuge, therefore the Council has funded this building as an alternative.
- 2.5.6 As of December 2020 the Council has supported 97 rough sleepers into accommodation including accessing private sector, supported accommodation and Housing First. This activity has contributed to a reduction in our annual rough sleeping count, 3 people in 2020/21 compared to 12 in 2019/20 and 19 in 2018/19.
- 2.5.7 Strategic Housing have housed three highly vulnerable ex rough sleepers in Housing First in Medway Council properties – including one male who was considered impossible to house and had been barred from all temporary accommodation. The Service has also worked to place a further three rough sleepers in MHS accommodation. These Services are part funded by Public Health and the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 2.5.8 In response to the pandemic, activity was scaled up considerably with the following initiatives:
- Increased outreach visits to rough sleeping sites following the ‘Everyone In’ request from the MHCLG.
 - Engagement with a local hotel to secure 30 rooms to cope with the additional demand, as well as identifying over 30 rooms in shared accommodation.
 - Partner agencies from the voluntary sector supplied support and food with the Council commissioning an experienced security firm to keep the project running smoothly and manage any tensions between people placed at the hotel.
 - Joint working with Public Health ensured that procedures and practices were as safe as possible and since the start of the pandemic work from all agencies has housed 88 people, 50 of whom have already moved into longer term accommodation with only a small minority leaving of their own volition or being asked to leave following repeated instances of anti-social behavior.
 - Those who have left continue to be offered a service from the outreach team. Officers involved in the delivery of this initiative have worked tirelessly since the beginning of the pandemic to safeguard vulnerable rough sleepers in Medway.
- 2.5.9 The Service continues to monitor progress against the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024. The strategy identifies the Council’s key priorities in addressing homelessness and meeting the Government’s commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end rough sleeping by the end of the current parliament. An annual plan is put in place for January of each year. The document identifies the following priorities:
- Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness
 - Identifying households at risk of homelessness early
 - Intervening before homelessness occurs

- Preventing recurring homelessness
- Working with partner agencies.

2.6 Private Sector Housing

2.6.1 Official figures from the 2011 Census suggest that the private rented sector now accounts for 15% of all homes in England and Wales, up from 9% in 2001. 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.

2.6.2 The Council operates a predominantly reactive service that responds to complaints from private sector tenants who are concerned about the safety of their home. The Private Sector Housing Team acts to improve the conditions within the private sector by working with landlords and tenants and by offering support and guidance on their legal obligations. This action varies dependent on the situation and history with a particular landlord and will consider both formal and informal action to remove hazards. The most predominant type of hazards relate to excess cold, damp and mould and fire.

2.6.3 Between April and December 2020, the Council has improved the condition of 819 properties as a result of various interventions. This outcome has been achieved through various methods but has included:

- Developing 73 schedules of works to be completed
- Issuing 505 enforcement letters
- Issuing 1,420 pieces of informal correspondence to provide advice to landlords and address complaints
- Issuing 6 enforcement notices achieving 100% compliance
- 39 instances of formal action to enforce Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) standards or to address breaches of HMO conditions.

2.6.4 The Council has an obligation to license all HMO's meeting the statutory definition and has licensed 194 properties in the Medway area. Working with the Medway Taskforce the Council has obtained two warrants for properties owned by the same landlord in March 2020. The successful operations identified a large number of people occupying both properties, as well as many HMO management breaches, and the owner previously had failed to apply for a HMO licence. This case is now with our legal team and awaiting a court date for prosecution.

2.6.5 Following consultation and cabinet approval the team have implemented and published the Housing Enforcement & Licensing policy. The policy sets out enforcement criteria and legislative tools to help the Council tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and to improve standards in the private rented sector whilst ensuring that private rented housing is safe, well managed and properly maintained.

- 2.6.6 The Council is also working to improve its energy efficiency offer to private occupiers. LA Flex is the extension of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme that helps UK households reduce their energy bills and carbon footprint. Previously the eligibility criteria for this scheme was mainly residents in receipt of benefits. The LA Flex scheme allows Local Authorities to expand the guidelines of eligibility. This allows residents, in addition to those claiming benefits, to qualify for ECO funding often on the basis of low income, health, age or area, giving Local Authorities the ability to support a wider number of residents or target specific areas and communities.
- 2.6.7 Medway Council is working in partnership with Kent County Council to utilise flexible eligibility alongside other funding schemes where possible, to reduce the installation costs of energy measures for residents. Officers are currently in the process of publishing our Statement of Intent which outlines our commitment to the LA Flex Scheme and criteria. Once this has been published, we will be working closely with the KCC approved contractor, Aran Insulations in the delivery of the service and funding to residents across Medway.

3. Housing Landlord Service Achievements 2020/21

- 3.1 Performance across Landlord Services continues to be strong. This year as part of the review of service activity the Council took part in a national benchmarking exercise of costs, performance and customer satisfaction.
- 3.2 The key results for 2019/2020, when comparing Medway Landlord services to similar sized organisations are as follows:
- Satisfaction with the last repair = 98.8% - top quartile
 - % of Rent collected = 100.53% - top quartile
 - % of current tenant arrears = 1.54% - top quartile
 - Average re-let time = 21 days – median quartile
 - % Void loss = 0.72% - median quartile
 - % of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate = 100% - top quartile
 - % of repairs completed at the first visit = 99.9% - top quartile
 - % of repair appointments kept = 98.57% - top quartile
 - ASB cases per 1,000 properties = 8.69 – top quartile.

3.3 Repairs and Maintenance

- 3.3.1 The repairs and maintenance service delivered by Mears Group Plc continues to perform well with nearly all KPI's achieving top quartile when benchmarked.
- 3.3.2 In line with the national response to the pandemic, Mears reviewed its delivery with Medway to consider the safety of both our customers and workforce. The first lockdown brought an essential service only instruction and challenges with materials, manufacturing and production, also it led to the suspension of non-essential works.

- 3.3.3 Mears continued to deliver emergency and urgent repairs as a key front-line service to our residents, performing admirably with complete commitment, in a period where many customers and staff were extremely concerned about the risks associated with the pandemic. As we transitioned out of lockdown in the summer, Mears reacted positively with Medway staff to agree on a recovery plan to deliver any suspended works as well as deliver our planned and capital works programme.
- 3.3.4 The robust covid-secure practices embedded into the service from March meant that Mears required more time to reassure customers as to the process that would be followed to gain access and undertake work safely. Mears also required extra time before and after works to ensure all surfaces are cleaned thoroughly and that tenants can see that this has been done for their safety, as well as for the safety of staff. Social distancing on particular jobs and work streams also presented challenges for managing the number of operatives in a property making it more challenging to deploy resources. Facing these challenges head on, by November 2020 all outstanding repairs had been completed where tenants would allow access, and a suite of planned works has been delivered, with a plan in place to continue the programme, once government guidance permits non-essential works.
- 3.3.5 Mears continue to support our Medway residents with a number of learning and education initiatives, providing skills, apprenticeships and employment. During 2019 Mears welcomed eight young people from schools and Mid Kent College, individuals spent up to 350 hours over the course of 12 months, with three of those voluntarily extending their work experience for a further ten weeks. Mears offered a Gas Maintenance apprenticeship to one young Medway resident following work experience. Two of the Mears apprentices secured permanent employment with Mears at Medway this year, also Mears have secured an apprentice electrician, who will study at Mid Kent College and train at Mears for three years. Mears also welcomed two care leavers, who completed 70 hours trade work experience.
- 3.3.6 In terms of the current contract Medway Council and Mears successfully completed the sixth year of the current repairs contract. The sixth year of the contract ran from September 2019 to August 2020 and the figures below reflect this contract period.
- 3.3.7 Performance highlights are as follows:
- 98.4% (675/686) of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the overall repairs service (98.6% (1806/1197) Sep 18 to Aug 19).
 - 97.2% (667/686) of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the quality of the repair work (99.1% (1186/1197) Sep 18 to Aug 19).
 - The average number of days to complete a responsive repair was 7.7 calendar days (9.5 in Sep 18 to Aug 19).
 - As of 31 October 2020, the Council had a 99.96% gas compliancy record. Whilst it is an obligation for landlords to ensure all properties have an up to

date record for all properties, since the pandemic access to properties has been affected by isolation and shielding guidance. Any properties out of compliance are risk assessed and signed off by the Head of Service and certification sought as soon as feasible.

3.3.8 Out of the responsive repairs completed in this period:

- 99.9% of emergency repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100% (100% in Sep 18 to Aug 19).
- 99.8% of urgent repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100% (99.8% in Sep 18 to Aug 19).
- 99.3% of routine repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 99% (99.3% in Sep 18 to Aug 19).
- 99.6% of repair appointments were kept, against a local target of 99.5% (99.6 % in Sep 18 to Aug 19).
- 0.13% of responsive repair recalls against a local target of <=1% (0.4 % in Sep 18 to Aug 19).

3.3.9 Throughout the financial year 2019/20 the council invested £4.2 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 2019 and March 2020 approximately £2.1million was spent on completing the following capital works to council housing stock:

- Kitchens – 129
- Bathrooms – 152
- Boilers – 116
- Doors – 121
- Electrical tests – 465
- Asbestos surveys – 279
- Smoke detectors – 87
- Co2 detectors – 453
- Re wires – 114.

3.3.10 As of November 2020, this financial year the council have so far invested £1million on completing the following capital works to council housing stock:

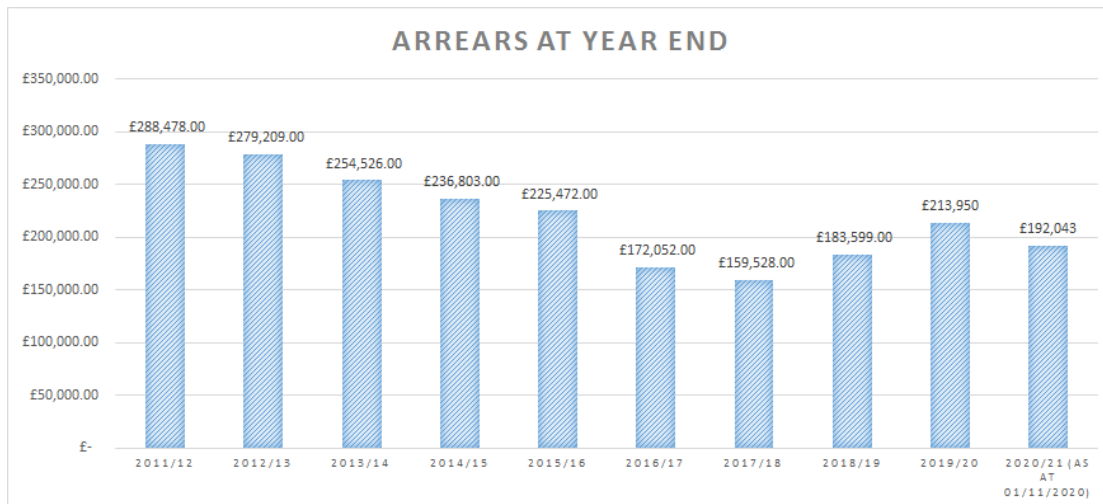
- Kitchens – 43
- Bathrooms – 81
- Boilers – 57
- Doors – 26
- Electrical tests – 207
- Asbestos surveys – 188
- Smoke detectors – 384
- Co2 detectors – 244
- Re wires – 104.

3.4 Re-letting void properties

- 3.4.1 Between April and October 2020, it took on average 36 calendar days to let normal voids against a target of 18 calendar days. Due to the effects of Covid-19 the increase in days to relet properties is something that has been felt across the sector. Recent benchmarking results identify that at the end of June 2020 Medway Council are top quartile compared to other providers with a similar stock size for the average time to re let council dwellings.
- 3.4.2 In addition to challenges brought about by the pandemic another factor in increasing void times is the undertaking of capital works whilst properties are empty. Works such as electrical rewires are undertaken whilst properties are empty to minimise disruption to tenants. Of the 104 properties handed back by Mears 101 had undergone a rewire, 29 a new kitchen and 22-bathroom upgrades, increasing the average void time.

3.5 Income Management

- 3.5.1 Universal Credit (UC) has been 'live' in Medway since May 2018, and it currently affects new claimants or existing benefit claimants who have a change in circumstances that triggers a move from the old benefits system to UC. At the end of September 2020, there were 647 (23% of all tenancies) council tenants on UC.
- 3.5.2 It is well known that nationally the introduction of UC is leading to increased rent arrears for social landlords, and this is proving to be the case in Medway. This is due in part to processing delays but mainly due to the way the housing element of UC is paid. As of November 2020, 70% of all current rent arrears are attributable to the 23% of council tenants on UC (total arrears, £192,000 of which £135,000 attributable to tenants on UC).
- 3.5.3 The chart below shows the year end comparison for arrears in the general needs stock, including Homes for Independent Living (sheltered housing). Although historically there has been a year-on-year reduction since 2012, arrears increased in 2019/20 compared to their lowest point in 2017/18 but have reduced in 2020/21 largely due to improvement in the way alternative payments are made to Local Authorities (detailed in 3.23 below). Homes for Independent Living arrears are also affected because they include residents who may be below state pension age and therefore subject to UC.



3.5.4 The percentage of current tenant rent arrears against the annual rent roll as at November 2020 stood at 1.37% against a target of 1.65%.

3.5.5 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.

3.5.6 Garage arrears have also reduced from a year end figure of £859 to £320 currently.

3.5.7 Former tenant debt (which includes rent arrears, rechargeable repairs and legal costs) has decreased from £261,017 in October 2019 to £200,846 as at end October 2020.

3.5.8 A new text messaging system has been successfully utilised and has been an excellent tool for reminding customers when rent is due, this has saved on Officer time and assisted customers to prevent arrears build up.

3.5.9 A new process for electronic UC APA payments is now in place and payments are now received every couple of weeks rather than every 6 to 7 weeks, this means that payments are posted to rent accounts more efficiently and has assisted in the reduction of arrears.

3.6 Welfare Reform

3.6.1 The Housing Welfare Reform Team continues to assist tenants facing the challenges brought about by welfare reform. This includes assisting customers to maximise their benefits, support them with budgeting and assist with areas of financial wellbeing.

3.6.2 The team had to put their weekly surgeries providing free advice and assistance on hold due to the pandemic. They have however identified COVID secure venues and these surgeries will start again when it is safe to do so.

3.6.3 From the start of the financial year to the end of October 2020, the Welfare Reform Team has assisted Council tenants to gain over £145,000 in backdated benefits and an estimated figure in excess of £245,000 per year in on-going benefits.

3.6.4 The team are now proactive in identifying customers that may need additional support by attending all signups for HRA accommodation. This allows them to identify those that require assistance with transferring their benefits to the new address and those that might require additional help. The service has also assisted with the signups for the new properties taken on by HRA, to assess affordability due to the rents being at affordable rates, which is a process that will continue for any new accommodation.

3.7 Tenancy Management

3.7.1 Tackling anti-social behaviour continues to be a high priority for the Housing Management Team. The handling of cases has recently been brought back into the Tenancy Team from the Community Safety Team to manage and this is currently under review.

3.7.2 Flexible tenancy reviews are ongoing throughout this year, there have been 83 tenancies reviewed. The recommendation during this review process is to grant a new five-year flexible tenancy to 81 tenants, to grant a two-year tenancy to one tenant and to grant a secure tenancy to one tenant. Out of all the reviews undertaken there have been zero recommendations for the tenancies not to be renewed.

3.7.3 A review of the Medway Council policy around using Flexible Tenancies is to be considered, as many social landlords are moving away from the use of these back to secure tenancies.

3.7.4 The Councils Mutual Exchange (where social housing tenants swap tenancies with each other) Policy was updated in 2019 to allow some more flexibility to tenants. Since April 2020 there have been 25 applications, which have so far resulted in 8 tenants moving home. This is good news for the Council because it means tenants are finding their own suitable housing that meets their needs and preferences, without the Council incurring the costs of voids and relets.

3.8 Evictions

3.8.1 Between April and mid-December there have been two evictions. Of these, one was for rent arrears and one for anti-social behaviour. The number has reduced from previous years due to the Government placing a ban on evictions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.8.2 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 evictions. These protocols include engaging and

working with the 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.

3.9 Homes for Independent Living (Sheltered Housing)

3.9.1 Satisfaction with the cleanliness of the schemes remains high with the latest satisfaction survey results across all 8 schemes as below (From April to September 2020):

- Cleaning carried out to schedule = 100%
- Laundry room clean = 100%
- Communal Kitchen and Lounge clean and tidy = 99%
- Communal Hallways and Staircases clean = 99%.

3.10 Estate Services

3.10.1 The NORSE cleaning contract for Estates has now completed the fifth year.

3.10.2 A report was presented to procurement board in May 2020 for an extension of the Estate Services contract. The original contract was for five years, with an option to extend for a further five years. The extension was granted.

3.10.3 There was an uplift of 14.5% in contract price from the original costs in 2015. The price is now held for a further five years, which will benefit our residents to enable them to have stability within their budget management.

3.10.4 The fourth year of the Estate Services contract provided by NORSE was completed at the end of September 2020. Performance Highlights are as follows:

- Estates Passing Inspection = 100% (97.5% in year 4)
- Fly-tipped Waste moved to safe location in 1 working day = 100% (100% in year 4)
- Estate cleaning schedule delivery of service on time = 100% (100% in year 4)
- Customer Satisfaction = 82.3% (85.2% in year 4).

3.11 Community Development

3.11.1 The Policy and Partnerships Team have been adapting to current restrictions to try and deliver community development and resident engagement in a variety of different ways this has included:

- Online consultations
- Increased use of social media
- Virtual games nights

- Activity packs for HFIL tenants.

3.11.2 We have recently published our Annual report and ensured this was communicated to residents online and as part of our printed newsletter.

3.11.3 During November 2020, the Social Housing White Paper was published, and the team are currently exploring the ways this will impact the service and how we can develop the service in line with customer expectations.

3.11.4 Following on from the development of the digital housing news page, tenants who have an email address registered with us receive a monthly housing newsletter.

3.11.5 During November 2020 a printed version of the newsletter was sent to all tenants. Given the current restrictions the newsletter details the support available and the activities being undertaken across the service.

3.12 Business Development

3.12.1 Policy and strategy work is ongoing within the team. Over the year we have reviewed all of the Housing strategies and policies that are published online to ensure they all meet accessibility standards.

3.12.2 The team have been exploring new and easier ways to collect feedback from residents. In October 2020 we launched a new tenant survey that can be sent out via text message and completed online. This has freed up Housing Officer time and ensured that feedback is collected at the point of move in.

3.13 Development of New Council Stock

3.13.1 Through 2020/21 officers have been working to establish the capacity of the Housing Revenue Account for the development of new rented homes. This has set that ambition for the Housing Revenue Account to increase its housing stock by one percent year on year over the next 10 years.

3.13.2 Whilst this number is still relatively small in relation to demand, the HRA has an obligation to ensure that its broader business plan remains sustainable and able to satisfy other demands and government targets such as the decarbonisation of stock by 2050. These increases will complement the broader affordable housing enabling process which also delivers additional affordable housing by working with registered providers.

3.13.3 After the successful delivery phase 3 which consisted of 6 bungalows being built at Petham Green, Twydall, the HRA is now moving forward with phase four of direct delivery. Phase four currently consists of three sites in Twydall and will deliver 14 x two-bedroom houses, five two-bedroom houses and nine one-bedroom bungalows.

3.13.4 The contract for phase four was awarded to Coombs Ltd who were intending to start on site Early 2021. Unfortunately, due to financial impact of the

pandemic, Coombs were forced to wind down business. As a result, a termination notice was issued, and Officers are in the process of looking to appoint a different contractor. It is hoped that a new contractor can be appointed early 2021 and works will start on site in the summer of 2021. It is still envisaged that the construction period will be between 18 and 24 months.

3.13.5 The HRA is also exploring an additional garage site at Norfolk Close which pending planning approval will consist of two x three-bedroom houses. It is hoped that this scheme can form an addition the phase four programme and completed within the same timeframe.

3.13.6 The HRA has recently completed the purchase of 17 units in Gillingham and may purchase further units on the site subject to planning. The 17 units provide a range of one, two- and three-bedroom flats that have been advertised on the Homechoice system with a local lettings plan.

4. Libraries and Community Hubs

4.1. Like many Council services this year has been extremely challenging with COVID-19 having a major impact on the way services have been delivered to residents.

4.2. For most of this year we have not been able to offer a full service, with residents having restricted access to their local libraries We have retained the important Home Library service throughout giving vital access to the service for some of the most vulnerable in Medway and enhanced our digital offer with events and activities for residents, families and young people. This has resulted in a large increase in the use of this digital library service and has broadly meant that residents have been able to access the service from the comfort and safety of their own home.

4.3. Through its branch network of 15 buildings the service continues to be the trusted public face of the Council in all of Medway's communities.

4.4 Community Hub Development

4.4.1 The development of Libraries to community hubs remains a strategic aim for the Council. This innovative approach has gained national recognition with local authorities across the country wanting to know how Medway operates.

4.4.2 The Council has six community hubs: Gillingham, Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Twydall and this year a new hub has been developed at Wigmore.

4.4.3 [Wigmore Community Hub](#) is now a modern fit for purpose library, a local centre to access a wide range of Council services, a large space for young people and for events and activities, as well as improving the fabric of the building.

4.4.4 The Council are developing plans to develop Rainham and Walderslade Hook

Meadow Libraries to community hubs.

4.5 Supporting Reading and Literacy

- 4.5.1 The service plays a major role in helping people to develop their literacy skills by fostering a love of reading from infancy and throughout life. Normally we would provide a whole range of activities, but because of the COVID-19 a digital approach has needed to be taken.
- 4.5.2 Since the summer, in partnership with the youth service, we have run 14 [digital book club](#) events for three different age groups over Microsoft Teams. Young people are supported in the use of Teams and all sessions are attended by a youth worker.
- 4.5.3 The digital book club included a club for looked after children and was attended by over 20 families.
- 4.5.4 A new adult's digital book club has started and is proving very popular as is the club set up for Council staff.
- 4.5.5 The Summer Reading Challenge is coordinated nationally by The Reading Agency to minimize the summer dip in literacy experienced by children who don't read over the summer holidays. Launched on 5 June this year's challenge took place digitally with the theme 'Silly Squad', a celebration of funny books, happiness and laughter, featuring artwork from award winning children's author and illustrator Laura Ellen Anderson.
- 4.5.6 With the pandemic disrupting many children's education, this year's Summer Reading Challenge was more important to Medway's children than ever. A national survey, commissioned by The Reading Agency revealed that 89% of the 7 to 11-year olds surveyed read during the first lockdown, with 37% of them reading more than before schools closed. Reading was cited as something that made children feel relaxed and happy during lockdown, with a quarter (26%) saying characters in books made them laugh during that difficult time.
- 4.5.7 Medway Libraries worked with The Reading Agency promoting a programme of digital events by children's authors and celebrities.
- 4.5.8 The Teen Reading Challenge ran online this year, from 20 July to, 21 September. Young people aged 13 to 16 were able to sign up for the challenge through the libraries' web page, and then completed a postcard style form as they read their books. Library staff sent participants a certificate and entered them into the prize draw to win new books.
- 4.5.9 We also took our popular [Lego Clubs online](#), and now club challenges take place every Tuesday at 4pm on our Facebook page and have generated 26,162 views.

4.5.10 The library service also started a [YouTube channel](#) to share poetry readings and story-time sessions. There are over 80 films to watch and this initiative has really developed towards the end of the year when the theatres technical team teamed up with libraries to produce some professional high-quality videos. This partnership will develop further to increase the variety of activities.

4.6 Events and Activities

4.6.1 As already indicated all library events and activities have moved to digital channels this year and have been only accessible in a digital way. Some highlights include:

- A series of webinars on [local and family history](#). Our first webinar, 'How to use the Dictionary of National Biography for your research' took place in October.
- The Arts Council England funded project '[Picture Medway](#)' in partnership with the University of Kent, Medway Archives with Chatham Grammar, Robert Napier and Brompton Academy Schools, was a great success. PHD photography and social arts students taught 24 pupils aged between 11 and 14 basic photography skills during a six-week course at Gillingham and Strood libraries. The young people thoroughly enjoyed the workshops which have helped them improve their photography skills. The project was themed around Medway, and the pupils had the opportunity to learn more about the area's fascinating history during a special session at Medway Archives Centre. They looked at the 'then and now' illustration collections and online resources capturing Medway's past and present. Fortunately, the workshops finished just before the first lockdown and all the students were able to complete their work. The students received a certificate from the university for completing the course and were delighted to receive postcards of their work to keep. The students produced a wonderful collection of 45 photographs that we are pleased to be [exhibiting online](#).
- The new Click & Collect Craft and Story pack was piloted at Luton Library and was a huge success— it got booked up twice over in just two days! The packs are for children aged 4 to 10 years and contain everything needed to make a wonderful 'Winter Wonderland' craft. There are also two stories in the pack for children to enjoy. There was also a live recording of how to make the craft, filmed at Luton Library. Every child who booked a pack received a link to the live event.
- To mark the 80-year anniversary of the Battle of Britain, Medway Libraries created a collection of Battle of Britain related items which people could borrow via the library website. Library members could also find out more about the Battle of Britain by logging into our online resources which allows access to Britannica, American National Biography and British National Biography. People were also able to search in the Library edition of Ancestry, by logging into their library account and searching the card catalogue on Ancestry for the UK Royal Air Force Airmen Records 1918 – 1940.
- Libraries celebrate and promote mental health and wellbeing 'Mental health for all' was the theme for this year's World Mental Health Day, on Saturday

10 October. It provided us with a perfect opportunity to make the most of our [Reading Well collection](#), our collection of books that can help people understand and manage their mental health and wellbeing. The books in the collection are chosen and recommended by health experts, as well as by people living with the conditions covered in the books and their loved ones and carers.

4.7 Click and Collect Services and Other Digital Offers

4.7.1 As an essential move to a more digital approach we have created a [click and collect service](#). This new service offers customers the opportunity to order books, parking vouchers, dog-waste bags, caddy liners, radar keys and electricity cards to collect from local libraries. This allowed us to continue access to these important Council services. They have proved tremendously successful.

4.7.2 Our library app, Spydus, gives library members the opportunity to manage their library account digitally, allowing the self-check-out of books, book searches, the ability to reserve and renew books, check your loan history and view current loans.

4.7.3 Our public access to digital resources continues to grow. Customers can view Britannica, the Oxford reference collection, Dictionary of National Biography and the family history website Ancestry that includes over 4 billion historical censuses, military records, passenger lists, parish records and other sources to help people trace their ancestors. So far this year over 8,700 enquiries have been made to online resources.

4.8 Home Library Service

4.8.1 Responding to the pandemic we continued our [home delivery service](#) to vulnerable and housebound residents and also older customers that cannot access their local library or the digital approach. Over 200 residents receive this service, borrowing over 14,000 books.

4.9 Performance Information

4.9.1 The table below illustrates the momentous impact COVIDd-19 has had on the service and the amazing shift from physical to digital engagement. Medway Libraries have been proactive and agile in continuing to deliver essential Council services for our residents.

	April to November 2019/2020	April to November 2020/2021
Physical book issues	586,255	214,972
Digital book issues	29,133	41,955
Digital magazines, newspapers & comics	44,741	92,338
Visitors	707,796	95,081
Public PC and Wi-Fi sessions	101,630	6,152
Enquires	260,136	73,311

5. Medway Adult Education

- 5.1 Medway Adult Education was on course for a highly successful year before the onset of COVID-19, which has created an enormous challenge for the service. The service has adapted to circumstances accordingly, at times operating solely online and when possible for face-to-face learning, in a COVID secure manner in line with Government guidelines. The service has risen to the challenge and continued to deliver high quality learning, against a backdrop of constant change.
- 5.2 Whilst enrolments have been adversely affected, broadly in line with the reduction in classroom sizes, achievement levels have remained consistently high. Whilst moving to online delivery has been complex for learners and staff, tutors have undergone training to enable them to teach effectively online, and the staffing structure has been changed to better serve our growing online offer.
- 5.3 During the second lockdown, the centres remained open as we recognise that lower-level learners find accessing online learning more challenging. This approach has helped to reduce the impact of social isolation, and our learners have responded positively to our COVID-19 measures and the opportunity to continue attending in person were possible.
- 5.4 Funding of c. £1.99m has been secured to develop the 1st floor of Britton Farm Mall into a Learning, Skills and Employment Hub, alongside making public realm improvements and bringing an affordable housing development forward. This investment is significant and represents the opportunity to bring forward new courses, in a state of the art learning facility, helping more residents to access employment whilst tackling digital exclusion. The centre is currently scheduled to open in March 2022.

5.5 Performance

- 5.5.1 As demonstrated in the below table, whilst COVID-19 has had an understandable impact on retention rates, pass rates have remained very high.

	Adult Skills		Community Learning		Funded by Learner	
	Retention	Pass	Retention	Pass	Retention	Pass
Overall % Rates for 18/19	92.4	95.5	95.9	99.5	98.1	100.0
Overall % Rates for 19/20	79.7	94.1	76.6	99.2	87.8	98.6
% Rates at end February 2020	91.4	97.3	95.9	99.7	100.0	99.1

6. Climate Change

- 6.1 A draft outline Climate Change action plan was presented to Cabinet in March 2020, noting the work undertaken and the Council's approach to the delivery of the Action Plan.
- 6.2 A full time Climate Change coordinator was appointed in April 2020.
- 6.3 A graduate from the University of Kent was successfully appointed to a 12-week internship at the end of September 2020, assisting with key projects such as the Solar Together Kent scheme and developing digital content. The calibre and output of the intern was so impressive that the intention is to offer another placement from Summer 2021.
- 6.4 Local Partnerships have been appointed to carry out a carbon baseline assessment of emissions data from the baseline year (2018/19). The emissions data relates to Scope 1 and 2 emissions (Scope 1 being direct emissions from the council's own assets and operations such as fuel from gas boilers and fleet vehicles. Scope 2 being indirect emissions from purchased electricity). Local Partnerships have produced a target mapping report based on these emissions and existing/planned initiatives. It sets out the high-level interventions required to put the council on a path to reduce its emissions by 2050. The report has been reviewed by senior officers and will be further refined in early 2021 to take into account 2019/20 data. Officers have received training from Local Partnerships, on an LGA supported carbon accounting tool, which will allow them to carry out accurate carbon emission reporting in future years.
- 6.5 The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy (KMELES) has been finalised and approved by key representatives of the Kent Environment Strategy Steering Group at the end of 2020. It was formally launched at the

Net Zero Conference in November 2020. The Strategy was approved for formal adoption by Medway's Cabinet on 12 January 2021.

- 6.6 The KMELES recognises the need to take significant joined up action in the next 10 years to be able to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. It sets out 10 high level priorities and activities required over the immediate, short term (2023) and long term (2030). The priorities are currently informing the emerging Medway Climate Change Action Plan and are a key element of Medway's approach to tackling the climate emergency. The Action Plan is due to go to Cabinet in Spring 2021.
- 6.7 The cross-party Member Advisory Board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. The Board has consistently thanked officers for the progress and achievements that have been made throughout the year. Successes from 2020 are set out below.
 - 6.7.1 Council decision making reports now include a requirement to consider climate change implications.
 - 6.7.2 Work is progressing on a Strategic Infrastructure Assessment and forms part of the evidence base for the emerging new Local Plan. The preparation of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework also has specific considerations in adaptation and mitigation for climate change.
 - 6.7.3 Officers bid for and have been successfully awarded funding to complete a Heat District Network Feasibility Study in early 2021. The scope of the study will focus primarily on the Hoo Peninsula and will also consider potential network opportunities in Strood, Rochester and sites with high heat output. The study is expected to take 4 months to complete.
 - 6.7.4 Separate funding has been awarded for a study focusing on the feasibility of a River Source Heat Pump. Officers have carried out stakeholder engagement in preparation.
 - 6.7.5 A new web form for residents and businesses to support tree planting across Medway, by donating any amount of their choice, is now live. The Medway Tree Fund has been promoted via social media and in the Medway Recycles resident leaflet. It has already generated some interest with £225 donated in the first 4 weeks.
 - 6.7.6 The Greenspace Development Team led on a successful bid to the Forestry Commission for the Urban Tree Challenge Fund. This grant means that they now have funding to plant 13,842 small trees (1 – 2 years old) across 10 sites in Medway. The planting is planned for February 2021 by Medway Norse officers.
 - 6.7.7 A Tree Strategy for Medway has been drafted and is scheduled to be completed in early 2021. The Strategy uses the findings of the successful tree canopy coverage study completed during the Summer. The study, led by the Greenspaces Development team and undertaken by volunteers from

Medway's Urban Greenspaces Forum, identified a baseline coverage of 16.7% of land area in Medway.

- 6.7.8 Work is underway to develop and implement Re:fit, a retrofit programme across the council's estate which will result in energy savings. Re:fit is a national procurement initiative for public bodies wishing to implement energy efficiency measures within their buildings or their estates. As a result of the measures (which can be things like solar panels, heat pumps or smart/intelligent heating controls) carbon emissions are reduced, and cost savings achieved. The intention is that delivery of Phase One measures will begin in Summer 2021, subject to any restrictions that may occur relating to COVID-19. This will include 32 electric vehicle charge points across several sites including Gun Wharf, Medway Crematorium Chapel, Medway Park, Chattenden Community Centre, Cuxton Library and Wigmore Library.
- 6.7.9 Officers have continued with their proactive and dedicated approach to improving air quality across Medway through the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan. A winner and runner up have been selected for an anti-idling poster competition, held during 2020. The winner was All Faiths Children's Academy and the runner up was English Martyrs RC Primary School. As part of Clean Air Day on 8 October the schools were presented with their posters made into a metal banner to be displayed around the school. An animated air quality video has been produced by the Communications team to raise awareness of air quality and its affects and what to do to reduce these impacts. The video has been promoted to all schools in Medway and can also be accessed from the council's website.
- 6.7.10 An engagement survey has been carried out with the taxi and private hire trade, looking at attitudes, barriers and opportunities for the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles. The survey was very successful with a 10% response rate across Medway and Gravesham, with 74 of the responses coming from Medway drivers. The main barriers were found to be the lack of infrastructure, lack of suitable vehicles and price. The survey report, produced by the Energy Saving Trust under the DfT funded local government support programme, is being finalised and will be shared in early 2021.
- 6.7.11 An Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Point survey has been developed and promoted on the Council website and through social media. The results of the survey, which include suggested locations for charging points, and separate evidence of predicted EV uptake scenarios are being used to inform a new 5-year Medway EV Strategy. An internal Medway EV Officer Working group has also been established to comment on the first draft of the strategy. Approval is being sought to instruct a specialist consultant to provide advice on potential on street charging options in early 2021. An FAQ document, addressing the most common questions around ownership, electric vehicle charging, and funding has been finalised and added to the Council website.
- 6.7.12 Officers have continued to engage with KCC on a prospective county wide charging network opportunity within council owned car parks. This could provide a series of charging hubs to cater for resident and visitor charging.

Competition and award of contract to a supplier is intended to take place in early 2021, dependant on sign off through Medway's necessary governance process.

- 6.7.13 Transport and Parking officers developed a roadmap for installation of charge points across Medway and presented it to Members at the most recent Climate Change Member Advisory Group meeting (December 2020). Officers will continue to refine the roadmap in early 2021, including robust timescales for delivery.
- 6.7.14 6 EV charge points have been installed at Broadside House to support a trial of 6 electric vehicles for staff business use. The scheme was successfully delivered in 8 weeks and will be monitored for a duration of 12 months, ending in November 2021.
- 6.7.15 Officers are developing a phased approach to replacing small council petrol and diesel vehicles with electric alternatives. A working group has been set up to explore options for the installation of additional EV charging points for these vehicles to enable replacements from early 2021/22.
- 6.7.16 Officers bid for and were successfully awarded £242k by the DfT during Summer 2020 to deliver measures to create an environment that is safer for walking and cycling. The work to expand and improve upon Medway's existing walking and cycling network was also completed during the Summer, including light segregation of cycle lanes and improved signage on Dock Road, Chatham.
- 6.7.17 An additional award of £927k for a second tranche of Active Travel Funding has been granted for up to 5 innovative projects across Medway (Rochester High Street, Chatham Hill, Cuxton to Strood, Four Elms Hill and Darland). Further to initial design and feasibility studies, the schemes will be presented for public consultation with completion scheduled for end of March 2022.
- 6.7.18 HR have successfully launched the new Tusker car scheme to all staff, which now includes an electric vehicle option.
- 6.7.19 The Council supported Medway residents and small businesses to install roof-top solar panels via the collective buying scheme Solar Together Kent. Launched at the start of September 2020, a letter and leaflet explaining the benefits of the scheme were sent to 10,000 residents in Medway. A detailed communications plan was developed and followed to promote the scheme as extensively as possible to staff, residents, businesses and members. Registration for the Solar Together scheme closed on the 5th of October. 354 Medway households registered an interest, of which 53 have accepted the installation offer. This represents 8% of the total number (649) of households that accepted the Solar PV offer across Kent. The conversion rate of those that registered and then went on to accept (354>53) is 14.97% which is above the average conversion rate of each of the participating districts (13.85%). There is a possibility that households may drop out of the scheme once they have received their individual survey which will provide details of additional

costs for work required before the panels can be installed. All installations are planned to be completed by the end of May 2021.

- 6.7.20 Officers have continued to support and promote low carbon opportunities to businesses in Medway such as the Workplace Charging scheme and Solar Together Kent.
- 6.7.21 Improvements have been made to the way the Council communicates about Climate Change by developing a dedicated web page, promoting national awareness days and behavioural change initiatives via social media and regular updates in Medway Matters. During the first Covid-19 lockdown, officers promoted Climate Change activities which could be done at home and family resources via social media.
- 6.7.22 Officers continue to support the Towards Plastic Free Medway community initiative for Medway to become a single use plastic free community. A single use plastic free web page has been developed for the Council website. The page provides a list of businesses in Medway who are Plastic Free Champions and encourages other businesses to get involved. In addition, the web content provides tips that individuals can take to reduce plastic pollution, promotes the relaunched Refill scheme and provides details of community groups who lead on litter picks and river clean ups. The content will continue to be developed and promoted via social media. At the end of 2020, officers worked with Towards Plastic Free Medway to send a letter to all schools in Medway asking them to consider how they can reduce single use plastic within their schools and communities.

7. Voluntary Sector

- 7.1 Following the establishment of a Business Support Overview and Scrutiny (BSD O&S) Task Group the following actions were approved by Cabinet in 2020 relating to the sustainability of and relationship between Medway Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS):
- Develop a compact between the NHS, local authority and third sector
 - Develop a community lottery programme as a potential income generation stream for local charities
 - Create a voluntary sector liaison post between the sector and the local authority
 - Develop a social value policy and climate change partnership with the NHS and the VCS
- 7.2 These actions will be progressed in 2021 in addition to building on the momentum of the close partnership working that has occurred between the local authority and third sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Medway Council identified the VCS as a critical aspect of its response and recovery both in terms of working collaboratively to support vulnerable residents and trying to ensure charities stay operational (with many facing significantly reduced investment and, in some cases, higher expenditure). As of January 2021, the response cell has been reactivated due to the high infection rates

and national lockdown, but officers will continue to work with NHS and VCS partners for the duration of the response and recovery process.

8. Medway Commercial Group/Medway Development Company

- 8.1 The Committee receives regular six-monthly reports on the performance of these Council owned companies. Rather than duplicate the reporting, Members are invited to consider the previously published reports. These are set out below. Due to the timing of the next six-monthly update to Cabinet for both companies on 2 February 2021, Members will also be able to access those reports. That will inform any questions Members have for the Deputy Leader.
- 8.2 Medway Commercial Group – reports to Cabinet were produced on 25 August 2020 at agenda item 11:
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=115&MIId=4746>
and 20 October 2020 at agenda item 5:
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=115&MIId=4748>
- 8.3 Medway Development Company Limited – a report was produced for Cabinet on 22 September 2020 at agenda item 9:
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=115&MIId=4747>

Lead officer contact:

Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive, 01634 332764
richard.hicks@medway.gov.uk

Mark Breathwick, Head of Housing, 01634 333540
mark.breathwick@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.