



BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 25 NOVEMBER 2021

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

Report from: Councillor Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

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:

- Homelessness and housing options
- Housing management and allocations
- Housing strategy
- Private sector housing, DFGs and adaptations
- Housing Landlord Services
 - Income management
 - Tenancy management
 - Repairs and maintenance
 - Homes for Independent Living
 - Estate Services
 - Community Development and Business Development
- Development of the Council's housing stock
- Libraries and Community Hubs
- Medway Adult Education
- Climate Change

- Voluntary Sector
- Kyndi/Medway Development Company

2. Homelessness and Housing Options

- 2.1. The Covid pandemic continues to have an impact upon the services delivered by the Housing Solutions & Reviews Team, including the traditional delivery model and working arrangements, the reduced availability of private sector accommodation to offer to homeless applicants under the PRS scheme and the increased numbers of approaches for homelessness assistance due to being evicted or asked to leave their accommodation. Despite these significant challenges, across the team, officers continue to show tireless commitment and remarkable spirit to ensure that business operates as usual and able to provide a legally compliant and highly effective homelessness service to customers.
- 2.2. In accordance with Council policy, where able, staff continue to split their time between working from home and coming into the office at Kingsley House, with the team presence there maintained at a reduced level. This has worked to maintain staff health and safety and team morale, with minimal levels of sickness absence, including absence due to coronavirus.
- 2.3. The service for those homeless on the day and prevention appointments continue to be delivered via telephone, which is a channel shift from the pre-pandemic model of service delivery. However, 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 service delivery or statutory compliance. Of particular benefit is the increased flexibility this method of access offers to service users, no longer needing to come to a corporate building and waiting to be seen.
- 2.4. Between 1 April and 31 August 2021, the service triaged 1,269 requests for housing assistance. Compared to 955 for the same period in 2020/21, this represents a significant increase of 33%, with levels of footfall now being above the pre-pandemic level (i.e. the same period in 2019/20 seeing 1086, or some 17% less).
- 2.5. Significant drivers for this increase appear to be the lifting of the stay on evictions (31 May 2021) and the implementation of the priority need provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (from 5 July 2021) taking effect. To illustrate this, monitoring of these factors shows an increase from June (35 evictions and 12 domestic abuse approaches) to July (60 evictions and 17 domestic abuse approaches). Of the evictions, rent arrears are a major factor, at 20 making up 66% of June's figure and at 38 making up 63% of July's.

- 2.6. Despite the high level of demand, continual improvement and refinement of practices and procedures, combined with a well-resourced, resilient and flexible staffing establishment, the team continue to maintain a high quality statutory compliant service and achieve high levels of success in preventing and relieving homelessness.
- 2.7. To illustrate this, for those cases triaged and were assessed as triggering a homeless duty, to the end of August the service has successfully prevented/relieved homelessness for 448 homeless households, which is an increase of 35% compared to the same period in 2020/21 which saw 333, and 19% compared to 2019/20 which saw 378. The overall average prevention/relief success rate for these cases is currently averaging at 67%.
- 2.8. A break-down of these cases is as follows:
 - 350 prevention cases were triggered, of which 246 were successfully prevented: 144 by assisting them to secure alternative accommodation and 102 by assisting them to sustain existing accommodation. This equates to a successful prevention rate of 70%.
 - 324 relief cases were triggered, of which 210 were successfully relieved of their homelessness by assisting them to secure accommodation. This equates to a successful relief rate of 65%.
- 2.9. Underpinning the Council's successful prevention/relief activities has been the following initiatives:
 - Actively working to promote and maintain joint prevention working arrangements with a number of social landlords in the area, including MHS Homes, MOAT and L&Q. In particular, this has enabled early interventions to seek to sustain tenancies for those tenants who were likely to be at risk of eviction, typically for rent arrears, once the stay on evictions was lifted.
 - Actively working to promote and maintain the 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. The landlord forum re-started in October 2021, with the landlord accreditation training also due to resume.
 - Reaching out to Medway County Court to promote available 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 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 work with excluders to seek to sustain accommodation for customers asked to leave and offering targeted 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 the Council's 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 the offer to increase access to accommodation in the sector.

2.10. Fundamental to the Council's successful prevention and relief activity is the joint work undertaken by the Private Rented Sector Team and Housing Options Teams to identify, match and secure accommodation for homeless applicants in the private rented sector. In accordance with this scheme, customers can access practical assistance as well as deposits, fees, rent in advance, and incentives to landlords, to enable them to secure private sector accommodation. Due to the pandemic, there has been some stagnation in the private rented sector market, with tenants not wanting to move and landlords not wanting to re-let, and indeed some landlords selling up their property portfolios, which has impacted upon the availability of accommodation to utilise for the purposes of the scheme. Despite this, for the current year to the end of August, the PRS Team have secured 120 successful sign-ups for new tenancies in the private sector.

2.11. The team's continued success in prevention and relief activities has been a major factor in maintaining the significant reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation. The Team continues to provide high levels of performance to secure successful outcomes for homeless applicants and to sustain this reduction in cost for the Council.

2.12. Findings of the LGSCO; Previously reported to this committee were the findings of an investigation from the LGSCO in relation to an intentionally homeless household containing a child. The Council has continued to ensure that families continue to be provided with accommodation whilst joint housing solutions are explored between Children's Services and the Housing Service. Whilst this is an additional cost to the service, the initiative is providing more stability and support for vulnerable families and will continue.

3. Temporary Accommodation

- 3.1. 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 September 2021, 303 households were in temporary accommodation compared to, 370 households at the end of September 2020, a decrease of around 19%.
- 3.2. Recent benchmarking at the end of April 2021 showed the rate of households in temporary accommodation in Medway was 2.92 per 1000 households, this is slightly lower than the national rate of 4.05. Further benchmarking has been undertaken to identify how Medway compares with other similar sized unitary authorities. In April 2021, the numbers in temporary accommodation Milton Keynes had a rate of 10.6 households per 1,000 households. Locally, Swale had a rate of 5.24 in the same period.

4. Homechoice and allocations

- 4.1. The Council's Allocations policy sets out the framework Housing Associations operating in Medway will use when allocating social housing.
- 4.2. From April 2021 to the end of August 2021, 399 households have secured accommodation through Homechoice compared to 240 in the same period for the financial year 2020/21. There has been an increase in lettings compared to the same period last year and this is likely to be due to the minimal turnover during the pandemic, leading to less lets during that period.
- 4.3. The number of active households on the housing register is currently 1,499 (August 2021) this is a slight increase from the number on the register at 2020/21-year end, which was 1,227. Applications to the register have also increased, between April 2021 to end August 2021 there were 1,656 new applications compared to 1,354 in the same period last year.
- 4.4. Since April 2020, the average waiting time for all types of property let is 14.5 months. The table below sets out the shortest waiting times for all properties let since April 2021 to date:

Property type	Number of lets	Shortest wait
Sheltered accommodation	144	17 days
Studio – general needs	35	20 days
1 bed general needs	338	5 days
2 bed flat or maisonette	431	11 days
2 bed house	130	5 weeks
3 bed flat or maisonette	30	6 weeks
3 bed house	167	5 days

4 bed	10	8 weeks
5 bed	1	29 months

5. Housing Strategy

- 5.1. The Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team works with Housing Associations, developers and Homes England to identify opportunities to develop additional affordable housing. During the last reporting year, a total of 216 affordable housing units were delivered which exceeded the target of 204 units. Since April 2021 a further 90 units have been delivered.
- 5.2. Following the introduction of Government's 'First Homes' low-cost home ownership scheme, work is underway to implement this initiative within both Housing and Planning Services including local policy updates, processes, procedures and impact of resources. First Homes are new build homes prioritised for first-time buyers and sold at a discount of at least 30%. Price and income caps apply, and local connection and/or key worker criteria can also be applied. It is a requirement that 25% of homes delivered through developer contributions should be First Homes.
- 5.3. The Housing Service takes 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. The service is working to continually expand and improve partnership work and have set up a monthly Housing Strategy and Partnerships meeting to build on the success of the previous covid partnership meetings. An engagement event with Adult Social Care and the Medway Taskforce has been held to improve communications, with a view to enhancing joint working. Work continues with the Homelessness Forum and Task and Finish groups for Rough Sleeping and Ex-Offenders. Provision of advice and guidance to voluntary sector partners continues around service development and capacity building. This year, on World Homeless Day (10 October 2021) colleagues who worked on the 'everyone in' will be celebrated and a social media campaign will run around myths and facts, for example, people who are sleeping rough can still claim welfare benefits, even without a fixed address.
- 5.4. A range of Housing Related Support services are commissioned to help meet client groups with specific housing related needs. This includes floating support (250 households at any one time), specialist domestic abuse advice and accommodation (14 refuge spaces and a community-based service in place, with new dispersed accommodation scheme/complex needs worker currently being commissioned), homeless hostels (80 rooms), schemes for offenders (41 rooms), young people (57 rooms) and other vulnerable client groups. The aims of these to assess, engage, advise and signpost clients to make incremental improvements to their independence, health and wellbeing with the ultimate goal of moving clients into more permanent and/or long-term housing solutions.

- 5.5. The Council has a programme of service reviews for all short-term services (i.e., those where people are expected to move on from) and all of the services are validated on an annual basis. The review programme ensures that the funding allocated to these services is being used effectively. It also encourages services to innovate and if required the HSP Team assists services into a programme of continuous improvement over the course of a commission to benefit vulnerable people living in Medway.
- 5.6. This year the service has revised the review tool and have developed the Medway Quality Assessment Framework in discussion with service providers, and people who use services, to ensure that reviews capture the most relevant information and securing feedback on the actions taken to achieve continuous improvement of the services delivery to clients to stay ahead of the curve on legislative changes and sector best practice. The team continues to redeploy workers from the floating support commissioned service effectively to support the work of the Housing Options and Preventions service and the Rehousing team. Two members of staff visit households in TA to see how they can be assisted in moving to more settled accommodation and a further member of staff is based with Housing Options to deal with urgent support needs and mediate where a family has asked a young person to leave the home. The help provided by the wider Floating Support service allowed clients to sustain their accommodation without the need for temporary accommodation, during 2019/20 this led to a saving of approximately £98,000 in temporary accommodation costs.
- 5.7. In addition, the team have worked closely with colleagues across Public Health, Children's Services and Adult Social Care to understand where the services may meet and to identify any gaps in provision, which will assist with successful, best value and highest quality recommissioning of services. This also entails close work with Revenue and Benefits colleagues to keep an overview of accommodation costs across the supported accommodation market.
- 5.8. The Rough Sleeping Initiative has been delivering successful interventions since its inception in July 2018. The initiative has been funded via grants from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The allocation for 2020-2021 is £1,117,068 and a bid for the continuation of funding in 2022-2023 is currently being prepared. Suggestions have been made to DLUHC regarding the short-term cyclical nature of the funding, and they agree that this creates challenges for the commissioning of services. The DLUHC are requesting that the settlement for next year is part of a multi-year funding package. Whether this is agreed will be determined after the upcoming Spending Review.
- 5.9. Key elements of the Rough Sleepers Initiative are:
- Medway's Rough Sleepers Coordinator who oversees the activity of in-house and commissioned services and is the first port of call for partner engagement and reporting to the DLUHC.

- An Outreach Team that visits rough sleepers to verify their status, eligibility for services and offer support and signposting. The team includes staff with specialist knowledge to 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 Senior Resettlement Worker helps people leaving emergency or temporary accommodation and offers 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. Additional funding to expand this service from 6 to 10 flats has been received.
- The Medway Assessment Centre service which provides short term interventions to get people off the street utilising a building provided by a voluntary sector partner whilst options are considered.
- A nine bedroomed guest house, with onsite support provided by One Big Family. This has been hugely successful as a move on project for people housed under 'everyone in' and needing a supportive environment to work with them to prepare for more independent accommodation settings.
- New this year, funding has been granted to recruit a Rough Sleeping Prevention Officer, who will work between the RSI team and Housing Solutions to identify people at risk of sleeping rough and look to find accommodation solutions to avoid rough sleeping taking place.
- Also new this year, funding for an employment project for rough sleepers has been received. This aims to provide employment and training opportunities for up to 20 people, with crowdfunded equipment and courses included.

- 5.10. As of July 2021, the team were back to a 'Business-as-Usual' approach following significant success in complying with the Government's 'everyone in' request. A central core of this activity was the partnership work carried out at a local hotel, in conjunction with colleagues from Public Health, voluntary agencies, commissioned services and police and wider statutory services. There was engagement with all known people sleeping rough and those who were new to the streets due to the effects of the pandemic. A total of 167 people were accommodated in the hotel over the year, with only 13 being asked to leave due to serious anti-social behaviour. This compares very favourably with the national picture, with some authorities reporting 30% eviction rates due to unmanaged behaviour. Of those who were supported at the hotel, 113 were assisted into longer term accommodation.
- 5.11. Discussions are currently taking place with colleagues and partners about how SWEP is implemented for the coming winter. Previous use has been assessed and plan to address early interventions for these cohorts to regulate access into SWEP provision and identify where other routes will offer more suitable options. The service continues to work with colleagues around winter provision and have supported Caring Hands in accessing funding to provide accommodation at their main building and are awaiting the result of the Medway Winter Night Shelter bid for staffing at this provision.
- 5.12. 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

6. Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- 6.1. This has provided significant changes in legislation, added responsibility with some additional resources. Some of these are directly relevant to other Housing teams, but the focus for Housing Strategy and Partnerships relates to some additional areas of work.
- 6.2. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on each tier one local authority in England to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions. These are to:

- Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims in their area, including those who require cross-border support.
- Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the need's assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions).
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back to central government.

6.3. Significant progress is being made towards this, with the Local Partnership Board having been set up, the Needs Assessment completed, the Strategy section amended, and commissioning having commenced.

7. Private Sector Housing, DFGs and Adaptations

7.1. 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 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.

7.2. Hazards are subject to a statutory risk assessment that determines whether the hazards are classified as a category 1 or 2, with category 1 being the highest priority. The Council has a statutory duty to take formal action when a category 1 hazard has been identified and will consider which notice is the most appropriate. The council doesn't have a duty to take action with category 2 hazards, however the council can utilise its powers to take action.

7.3. During the 2020/21 year a total of 1,182 properties were improved as a result of intervention from the private sector housing team. Between April and June 2021, a further 512 properties were improved following intervention.

7.4. The Council has a statutory duty to license larger Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) and has currently licensed 241 HMOs in Medway (October 2021) with a further 13 applications being processed.

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

7.6. To date the team have served 17 Improvement Notices, 15 Emergency Prohibition Notices, one Prohibition Notice, six EPA Notices and 10 Hazards Awareness Notices.

- 7.7. From April 2021 to date, the team have served four Financial Penalties for failure to comply with the HMO Management Breaches, failure to acquire a HMO licence and failure to comply with the HMO licence conditions.
- 7.8. The Council is 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. The new LA Flex scheme allows Local Authorities to expand the guidelines of eligibility. This allows residents, to qualify for ECO funding often based on low income, health, age or area, giving Local Authorities the ability to support a wider number of residents or target specific areas/communities.
- 7.9. To date the team have received 18 applications to access LA Flex funding, of which 17 have been agreed, with the agreement of additional funding on 1 of these to assist with a boiler replacement. The range of measures requested are for loft and cavity wall insulation and boiler replacement.
- 7.10. The Mobile Homes (Requirements for Manager of Site to be a Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020, (the Regulations) introduced a fit and proper person test for mobile homes site owners or the person appointed to manage the site, unless exempted by the Regulations.
- 7.11. From 1 October 2021 the site owners of most residential mobile homes (Park homes) sites must ensure that they, or a person who they appoint to manage the site, is a fit and proper person.
- 7.12. The Fit and Proper Person requirements will make it an offence for a site licence holder to operate a park home site unless they appointed a manager, that is a fit and proper person to do so. The purpose of the test is to improve management and to the raise standards in residential mobile homes sector.
- 7.13. The team are currently reviewing all applications received and are carrying out the necessary checks to ensure that the applicant, or a person appointed to manage the site is a fit and proper person. Once the council is satisfied that the relevant person meets the fit and proper requirements, they will be included on the Fit and Proper Register.

Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) and Adaptations

- 7.14. Medway Council undertakes alterations and adaptations to properties in order to assist Medway's residents to remain living independently in their homes and to reduce the need for support and care from adult's and children's services.
- 7.15. The importance of the disabled facility grant is to help support residents to live in suitable housing and remain independent for longer. Many disabled and older people spend most of their lives in their home and the

accessibility, warmth and comfort of that home has a vital role to play in health and wellbeing. For families with disabled children the home enables children to grow, develop and lead as normal a life as possible.

- 7.16. The need for an adaptation is identified through an assessment from an Occupational Therapist (OT) who will assess the needs of the applicant and recommend support and adaptations to be implemented.
- 7.17. Following an Occupational Therapists assessment, they may refer the patient/client/resident to Private Sector Housing to discuss how they can be assisted with possible adaptations or alterations.
- 7.18. The new Financial Assistance Policy to assist applicants for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), has been drafted and is currently subject to internal consultation. The policy aims to enable more applicants to benefit from the funding available to assist them to remain living independently in their home.
- 7.19. For 2021/22 to date, the team have approved 85 DFGs cases, the range of work consists of flush floor showers, access to and from a property, various lifts and access to amenities. On average it is taking the team 6 months from receipt of the referral from OT to the completion of the works.

8. Housing Landlord Service achievements 2021/22

- 8.1. Performance across Landlord Services continues to be strong and this year and as part of the review of the Business Plan the service took part in a national benchmarking exercise of costs, performance and customer satisfaction.
- 8.2. The key results for 2020/2021, when comparing Medway Landlord services to similar sized organisations are as follows:
 - Satisfaction with the last repair = 98.5% - top quartile
 - % of Rent collected = 100.72% - top quartile
 - % of current tenant arrears = 1.4% - top quartile
 - Former tenant arrears = 1.28% median quartile
 - Average re-let time = 32 days – median quartile
 - % Void loss = 2.4% - 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 = 99.237% - top quartile
 - ASB cases per 1,000 properties = 18.72 – top quartile

Benchmarking source – Housemark.

9. Repairs and Maintenance

- 9.1. The repairs and maintenance service delivered by Mears Group Plc continues to perform well and shows comparable levels of service when benchmarked against similar organisations.
- 9.2. In line with the national response to the pandemic, Mears reviewed its delivery with Medway to consider the safety of both customers and workforce. The periods of national lockdown, brought an essential service only instruction and challenges with materials, manufacturing and production, also it led to the suspension of non-essential works.
- 9.3. Mears continued to deliver emergency and urgent repairs as a key front-line service to 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 the service 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 the planned and capital works programme.
- 9.4. The robust covid-secure practices embedded into the service from March 2020, 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 the job 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. It was also hard to work in teams and remain socially distanced, which led to challenges with productivity. Facing these challenges head on, all outstanding repairs have been completed where tenants would allow access, and a suite of planned works has been delivered.
- 9.5. Mears continue to support Medway residents with several learning and education initiatives, providing skills, apprenticeships and employment. Unfortunately, the pandemic meant that Mears were unable to provide work experience or take on any new apprentices or care leavers, however Mears did retain one of their electrical apprentices who Mears supported via home learning who is now working towards their practical assessment. Mears are also looking to take on 2 Business Administration apprentices and are now engaging with local schools regarding work experience placements.
- 9.6. 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 2020 to August 2021, the figures below reflect this contract period.

9.7. Performance highlights are as follows:

- 93.90% (185/197) of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the overall repairs service
- 93.90% (185/197) of customers that returned a customer satisfaction survey were satisfied with the quality of the repair work
- The average number of days to complete a responsive repair was 8.75 calendar days.
- As of 31 August 2021, the Council had a 99.96% gas compliancy record. Challenges with gas service mainly related to access, particularly access being withdrawn due to self-isolation.

Out of the responsive repairs completed in this period:

- 99.94% of emergency repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100%
- 99.87% of urgent repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 100%
- 99.22% of routine repairs were completed on time, against a local target of 99%
- 99.6% of repair appointments were kept, against a local target of 99.5%
- 0.2% of responsive repair recalls against a local target of <=1%

9.8. Throughout the financial year 2020/21 the council invested in properties through the planned and capital works programme. Between April 2020 and March 2021, the following capital works were completed:

- Asbestos surveys – 373
- CO detectors – 487
- Bathrooms – 78
- Boilers – 90
- Front doors – 17
- Rear doors – 29
- Electrical tests – 227
- Electrical rewires – 165
- Smoke detectors – 436
- Kitchens - 51

9.9. Approximately £1.1m has been spent as part of the current capital work programme to improve Council properties.

9.10. Good progress is being made with the 2021/22 planned works programme despite starting slowly due to the pandemic. The Service will be increasing

the rollout of the window replacement programme and have appointed Bailey partnership to take forwards the pitched roofing replacement programme, with year one not able to commence during the winter, the programme will be condensed into a two-year programme commencing next year. Kitchens and bathroom replacements are progressing well, however there has been an increase in the number of tenants wanting to waiver their replacement. The service, in conjunction with Mears are exploring a change to the kitchen unit supplier with a better product and are installing pilots into void properties.

- 9.11. Officers are developing a 2 year capital works programme rather than continuing with annual programmes. This will enable approaching the market with larger quantities and should attract a better calibre of contractor whilst potentially delivering financial savings due to increased economy of scale. It will also allow contactors to plan over a longer period which should deliver some operational efficiencies. As a result, Officers will be reinvigorating our stock condition survey programme and will be carrying out around 235 surveys this year in order to validate some of the data held to ensure that the programmes instructed are as accurate as possible.
- 9.12. The HRA continues to improve the energy efficiency of Council owned housing but replace old for new, more energy efficient components, this includes topping up loft insulation where roofs are replaced and installing A-rated boilers.
- 9.13. Work continues on assessing the improvement needed to council housing to focus investment efforts and bid for eligible funding streams. Analysis of current asset management information, open source epc information as well as demographic information will enable detailed investment plans to be produced. It is likely that social landlords will need to meet an EPC level C for all homes by 2030, currently 1,451 properties have an EPC level C or above, with 584 properties having a D rating, and 26 having and E or an F rating. The remainder do not have a current EPC but would be expected to follow a similar ratio as the properties with a known EPC rating.

10. Re-letting void properties

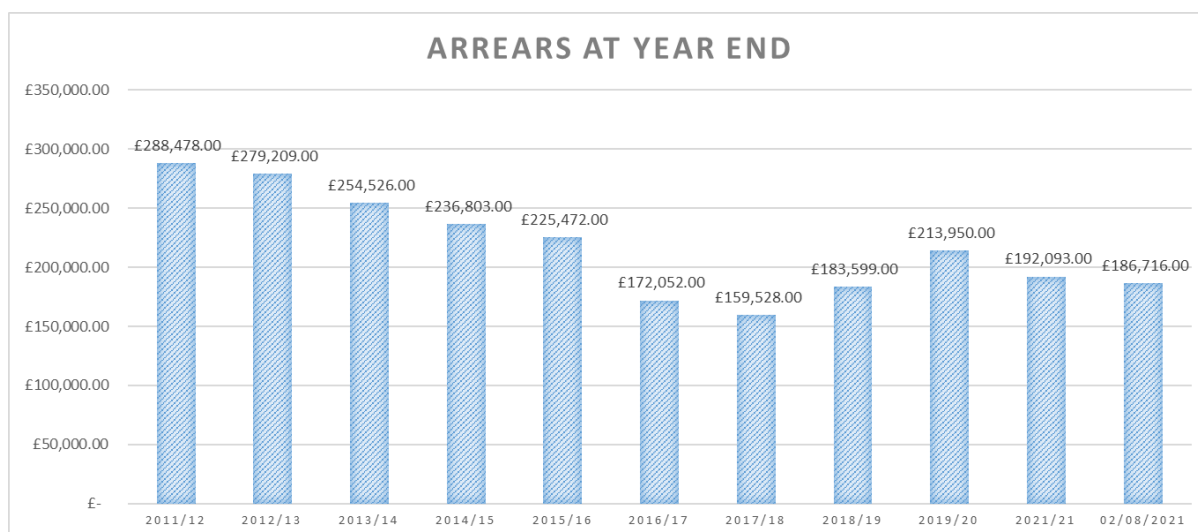
- 10.1. Between April and August 2021, it took on average 36 calendar days to let normal voids against a target of 18 calendar days. This is up from 32 days at year end (2020/21) Due to the effects of Covid-19, the increase in days to relet properties is something that has been felt across the sector. Recent benchmarking results identify that Medway Council are top quartile compared to other providers with a similar stock size for the average time to re let council dwellings.
- 10.2. Void rent loss at the end of March 2021 was 2.4% compared to 0.55% at the end of 2019/20. The impact of the Pandemic on the Council's void performance has been significant, and officers continue to work with Mears to increase capacity to improve this stream of work. Mears have recently onboarded two new contractors to provide additional support.

11. Income management

11.1. 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. As at end July 2021, there were 785 (26% of all tenancies) council tenants on UC.

11.2. It is well known that nationally the introduction of UC is leading to increased rent arrears for social landlords, and although arrears have decreased in comparison to last year arrears for those on UC is much higher than other tenants. As of 05 September 2021, 69% of all current rent arrears are attributable to the 26% of council tenants on UC (total arrears, £193,026 of which £132,971 attributable to tenants on UC).

11.3. 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 rose slightly in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18; this is largely associated with the effects of Universal Credit. However, the arrears decreased slightly in 2020/21 and are currently showing a slight decrease for this financial year. With the reduction in UC for customers it is expected that arrears will rise but the proactive and early engagement aims of the team will limit the risk.



11.4. The percentage of current tenant rent arrears against the annual rent roll as at 4 August 2021 stood at 1.39% against a target of 1.65% (1.51% at the same point of time last year).

11.5. 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.

11.6. Garage arrears have also reduced from a year end figure of £565 to £364 currently (August 2021).

- 11.7. Former tenant debt (which includes rent arrears, rechargeable repairs, and legal costs) has decreased from £231,110 in March 2020 to £175,945 as at end March 2021.
- 11.8. The team are now looking at earlier interventions to avoid or address arrears, which includes the Tenancy Sustainment Team supporting customers at the sign-up stage and early intervention from Housing Officers including engagement with the Housing Options Team.

12. Tenancy Sustainment

- 12.1. Landlord Services Tenancy Sustainment Team continue to assist tenants facing the challenges of the Welfare Reform. Including assisting customers to maximise their benefits, support them with budgeting and assist with areas of financial wellbeing.
- 12.2. The team have restarted some surgeries following their closure due to COVID, these are currently on an appointment only basis. It is hoped that the offer of drop-in services will resume soon.
- 12.3. From the start of the financial year to the end of August 2021, the Tenancy Sustainment Team have assisted Council tenants to gain over £38,000 in backdated benefits and an estimated figure in excess of £100 per year in on-going benefits.
- 12.4. The team continue to be 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. This helps them to build a rapport with the customer and makes them aware that there is support if they should require it.

13. Tenancy Management

- 13.1. Tackling anti-social behaviour continues to be a high priority for the Housing Management Team. The handling of cases is now back into the Tenancy Team from the Community Safety Team to manage and is currently under review as to how this is delivered in the future.
- 13.2. 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 to Secure Term Tenancies.
- 13.3. Since April 2021, 22 flexible tenancies have been reviewed, all of which have been recommended to renew.
- 13.4. The Councils Mutual Exchange Policy (where social housing tenants swap tenancies with each other) was updated in 2019 to allow some more flexibility to tenants. Since April 2021 there have been 23 applications received, which have so far resulted in 7 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.

14. Evictions

14.1. Between April 2021 and end of September 2021 there has been a total of 3 evictions, of which 1 was for rent arrears and 2 were tenancy related issues.

14.2 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 the Welfare reform Team that helps with debt management and additional signposting to debt advice agencies.

15. Homes for Independent Living (Sheltered Housing)

15.1. Satisfaction with the cleanliness of the schemes remains high with the latest satisfaction surveys results across all 8 schemes as below (From April to September 2021):

- Cleaning carried out to schedule = 96%
- Laundry room clean = 100%
- Communal Kitchen and Lounge clean and tidy = 98%
- Communal Hallways and Staircases clean = 98%

15.2. The team continue to work with residents to ensure that they can remain living independently in their own homes. Assistance includes, but is not limited to:

- Extra help/support from the scheme support officer.
- Referrals to external agencies – Age Concern, Dementia groups and hospital.
- Support packages – discussions with next of kins, families and friends.
- Care packages – carers visiting from one up to four visits a day, liaising with care agencies and social services.
- Management moves, where a tenants health deteriorates, discussions take place about transferring from first floor to ground floor to comply with fire safety.
- At the end of the 2020/21 reporting year a total of 107 scheme residents were being assisted to remain living independently within the schemes.

16. Estate Services

- 16.1. The NORSE cleaning contract for Estates has now completed the sixth year.
- 16.2. The sixth year of the Estate Services contract provided by NORSE was completed at the end of September 2021. Performance highlights are as follows:
- Estates Passing Inspection = 100%
 - Fly-tipped Waste moved to safe location in 1 working day = 100%
 - Estate cleaning schedule delivery of service on time = 100%
 - Customer Satisfaction = 84.4%

17. Community Development and Business Development

- 17.1. The Policy and Partnerships Team have been adapting over the past year to encourage engagement in a greater variety of ways:
- Online consultations
 - Increased use of social media
 - Virtual games nights
 - Activity packs for HFIL tenants
- 17.2. Since the easing of restrictions, the team have been able to hold in person meetings and some events on estates. Since June 2021, 2 Estate Champions meetings and 2 events at Hazlemere Drive including community planting with Medway Adult Education and consultations around new play area equipment have been held.
- 17.3. A new resident communication scrutiny group has recently been established for the service to gain greater insight into how customers prefer to receive communications as well as representatives having input into how communications look and feel, and the type of language used.
- 17.4. The Annual Report has recently been published, with input from customers and ensured this was communicated to residents through a variety of channels.
- 17.5. Since the publication of the Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, a White Paper action plan and working group has been established to develop the service in line with the expected standards and the expectations of customers.
- 17.6. A monthly newsletter is sent to all tenants and leaseholders who have an email address registered.

- 17.7 Online engagement through social media continues to increase, with a total of 751 followers on Facebook currently.
- 17.8 The new Quality Management System has been launched alongside a robust 'Test and Review' programme in place to ensure that teams strive for continuous improvement.
- 17.9 In May 2021, the Business Development Officer received an award as part of the Kent Engagement Group's Extraordinary Awards. This highlighted the officer's commitment to the service and recognition of always going over and above the remit of the role to help colleagues and improve the service for customers.

18. Development of New Council Stock

- 18.1. Through 2020/21 officers worked 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.
- 18.2. 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.
- 18.3. 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 4. Phase four currently consists of three sites in Twydall and will deliver 14 two-bedroom houses, five two-bedroom houses and nine one-bedroom bungalows.
- 18.4. The contract for phase four was awarded to Coombs Ltd who were intending to start on site in early 2021. Unfortunately, due to financial impact of the pandemic, Coombs were forced to wind down the business. As a result, a termination notice was issued. The project was retendered and subsequently awarded to Build Associates LTD. Works on site started in August 2021 and are scheduled to completed November 2022.
- 18.5. In December 2020, the HRA completed the purchase of 17 units (Block A Ingram Court) in Gillingham. The 17 units provide a range of one-, two- and three-bedroom flats that have were advertised on the Homechoice system with a local lettings plan. The HRA has ceased its interest in the second block at this time.
- 18.6. The HRA has completed the purchase of two further sites in Twydall which, subject to planning, could result in an additional 45 units being added into the

housing stock. These projects will for Phase 5 of the Council's development programme.

18.7. The HRA is also in discussion with Medway Development Company (MDC) regarding the Britton Farm site which could result in the HRA acquiring a further 44 units.

18.8. The HRA is also exploring several other sites with a view to establishing a pipeline of work for the next 3-5 years.

19. Libraries and Community Hubs

19.1 Like many Council Services and Library Services across the country this year again has been very challenging; and since April the service has followed the Governments 'No earlier than' roadmap to recovery from the last national lockdown.

April	All Libraries to open for browsing and face to face enquiries
May	Return to normal opening hours
June	Library events and activities started to resume in a phased way

19.2 Libraries and Community Hubs have continued throughout this pandemic period to offer its services in a flexible and agile way to suit all residents in these post Covid times.

Community Hub Development

19.3 This approach to service provision continues to drive forward, an approach that many other authorities continue to adopt and approach Medway for advice and guidance on.

19.4 Our latest Community Hub at Wigmore opened last year and has been very well received by the residents in that it gives them a much wider offer with the ability to pay, apply, book and enquire about many council services.

19.5 To date six Community Hubs have been developed Gillingham, Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Twydall and Wigmore with plans are being developed to transform Lordswood and Walderslade Hook Meadow Libraries into Community Hubs.

19.6 A new five-year business plan has been developed. Set in a national and local context the business plan defines a confident future for Medway's Community Hub's and Library Service placing them at the heart of every community. It sets a clear and ambitious vision, values, themes and commitments to ensure this vital service continues to be relevant, resilient, engaging, accessible and excellent.

19.7 Our vision is that Medway Community Hub and Library Service will be:

Ambitious	Provoking exciting new ideas and collaborations
Agile	Ensuring a flexible high-quality service
Creative	Harnessing the power of words and language for social good
Engaging	Reflective of our diverse communities needs
Sustainable	Providing a strong future proofed service that is invested in

19.8 Each theme has ten commitments to be achieved over the next five years.

The themes are:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Theme 1 | <p>Creative Community Connections</p> <p>We will clearly identify where the service needs to reach further into our communities building quality creative and learning partnership that support public health, cultural strategy, climate change and Child-Friendly Medway priorities.</p> |
| Theme 2 | <p>Digital Futures</p> <p>We will understand the future digital needs of our individual communities improving our digital environment, future proofing it to match these demands, guaranteeing residents have easy and supported access to digital information and services where they need it.</p> |
| Theme 3 | <p>The Right Resources</p> <p>We will maximise our resources to maximise our impact, ensuring our staff and buildings are used to their full potential. We will make the most of regeneration opportunities to develop our services to ensure reflect the needs of our existing and future communities, offering a safe and accessible spaces where all residents feel welcomed.</p> |
| Theme 4 | <p>Commercial Opportunities</p> <p>We will use our strong customer base to grow our commercial activity through sales of products and services, developing a better offer for businesses and commercial services so they can connect to our thousands of customers, their potential customers.</p> |
| Theme 5 | <p>Better for the Environment</p> <p>We will work collaboratively with colleagues in Climate change, ITC, HR, procurement and capital</p> |

project colleagues to reduce our own carbon footprint and will utilise the access we have to our creative community connections and one million visitors to engage and work with our residents.

Theme 6

Communication

We will develop the voice of Community Hubs and Libraries', so residents know the full extent of what they provide and deliver, focussing on their value in each local community.

- 19.9 The themes and their commitments are set out in a detailed action delivery plan that will be reviewed and updated annually.
20. Supporting Reading and Literacy
- 20.1 Community Hubs and Libraries' have had a major role to play in helping people to develop and enhance their literacy skills by fostering a love of reading from infancy and throughout life. Since the start of the recovery process the service has provided a range of activities, that continue to move to a more face to face approach understanding that some customers find the digital method more convenient.
21. Summer Reading Challenge
- 21.1 This summer, [The Reading Agency's](#) national [Summer Reading Challenge](#) (SRC) was eco themed called 'Wild World Heroes'. The main aims of the SRC are to promote reading for pleasure, and to combat "the summer dip" in children's literacy which leaves non-readers struggling to catch up when they return to school.
- 21.2 The SRC ran from Saturday, 10 July to 11 September. 1,932 children started and 1,127 finished (just shy of 60%) which is our highest ever starters-finishers ratio. We were aiming to join 50% of the number of children who started the SRC in 2019 - thanks to the hard work of our staff we reached 64%.
- 21.3 As it wasn't possible to undertake our usual promotional school visits, we worked with the Theatres team to create a [promotional film](#) that could be shown in assemblies and classrooms, sent home to parents, and shared across social media.
- 21.4 One of the reasons for the high starters-finishers ratio was the enthusiasm and ownership taken by our Library Assistants, who created engaging, interactive displays and new initiatives using the Reading Agency's resources, tirelessly promoted the SRC to our young residents and their families and created a fun and welcoming experience once the children joined.

Living River Litterama Art Installation

- 21.5 In support of the Summer Reading Challenge's 'Wild World Heroes' eco-theme, [The Living River Foundation's Litterama](#) art installation has been available to view throughout September at Rochester and Chatham Libraries.
- 21.6 The Living River Foundation monitors the Thames and Medway rivers, which harbour a diverse mix of fauna and wildlife threatened by plastics, sewage and litter.
- 21.7 The Foundation educates the public about our impact on our environment, and the ways in which we can improve it. The artwork was created with litter and driftwood Living River volunteers collected from the River Medway, which was suspended in resin cubes and sliced. Checklists of items to spot proved highly engaging with families.

Medway Festival of Literature

- 21.8 Organised for the end of August and centred at Chatham Community Hub Library, this festival offered events for all ages and a mixture of performance, workshop and have-a-go events all celebrating reading and an escape into the world of the imagination.
- 21.9 The range of events included puppet shows, poetry performance, anime and manga workshops, storytelling and creative writing workshops.
- 21.10 Across the 14 events that took place, many of the events were booked to capacity, with 82% capacity achieved overall.
- 21.11 The festival's success benefitted from the professional support of the Theatres team and the availability of high-quality sound system. Working with partners including Applause, Waterstones bookshop, town centre and shopping centre management and local library staff team support for individual events, all helped to guarantee the success of the festival.

The Big Library Read

- 21.12 In April the service promoted [The Big Library Read](#). Multiple copies of a free eBook were published to our e-book library Libby for two weeks, so anyone with a Medway library card could read it during these weeks.
- 21.13 This year's title was 'The Art of Taking It Easy' by Dr Brian King. Dr King is a psychologist and stand-up comedian comes a practical yet laugh-out-loud guide to embracing humour to reduce stress and live a happier, fuller life.

Author Events

- 21.14 Before the pandemic Medway Libraries had built up a national reputation for high profile well attended author events for both adults and young people, these have now started again and so far, well known authors Mark

Billingham and Ben Aaronovitch have been booked. These have been well attended.

Reading Well

21.15 As part of our remit to support the mental health and wellbeing of our local community, the service will be curating 30 sets of the [Reading Well](#) collections at community locations. We have already located eleven collections at workplaces, staff rooms, school and other community settings. We will be sending the other 19 out after half term. Reading Well supports you to understand and manage your health and wellbeing using helpful reading. The books are all recommended by health experts, as well as people with lived experience of the conditions and topics covered and their relatives and carers.

22. Events, Activities and Festivals

22.1 During the pandemic most of the library events have been run digitally including story times, book clubs, Lego clubs and lectures.

22.2 Since April, events have returned to face to face, these include our very popular Baby Bounce and Rhyme, Toddler Shake and Boogie and Teatime story time.

22.3 During the last few months Libraries have taken part in a whole range of festivals, these included:

Gillingham POW Arts Trail

[Gillingham POW](#) (A temporary art project involving local creatives) launched in the town centre on 28 August and Gillingham Library has welcomed local families and young people who have taken part in several workshops.

[Karen Scudder](#) has been brightening the walls of Gillingham Hub with artworks that she created during lockdown exploring shape and texture as she gained inspiration from the Gillingham landscape and townscape. Her work was on display until the end of October. Also, during October, as part of POW, Karen shared her love of texture with local families as she led a set of drawing workshops.

Across September the library has enjoyed a series of three manga illustration and three song-writing

workshops for young people, led by Nadia and Ruairi from [2A-LTY](#). They created a wonderful atmosphere, with 70 people taking part.

Electric Medway

Community Hubs and Libraries supported the [Electric Medway](#) the digital arts festival that ran from 21 to 30 August by hosting four virtual reality workshops in library spaces and an exhibition at Gillingham Community Hub.

'Your Own, Your Very Own'

The service have been awarded a grant of £48,990 by Arts Council England (ACE) following a successful funding bid for 'Your Own, Your Very Own' local history and arts-based project, to be delivered over the next year. The project will be in partnership with [Play on Words Theatre Company](#), Kent-based artist Jamie Zubairi, a group of 16 to 19-year-olds and local schools. Celebrating the diverse history of the Medway Towns from the birth of music hall in the 1850s, with Chatham at its centre, to the current day, it will bring to life Medway's previously unknown personalities and reflect upon events that have been shaping the character and the social landscape of the towns. We want to develop a sense of pride in the area by learning about its diverse history and community and highlighting the libraries' local history collections. We want to change the young people's perception of what a library is, and also change their perception about the Medway area, developing a sense of pride and belonging. The project culminates in performances by Play on Words held in libraries and includes provision to replace the microfilm reader at Gillingham Community Hub with a new digital reader that will enhance the access to the material stored in this format.

Family Arts Standards

Libraries have been successful with an application for £500 funding and

achieving the Family Arts Standard. Using this funding and putting the Family Arts standard into practice a Saturday morning arts club has been organised at Luton Library.

Wigmore Lectures

The very popular [Wigmore Lectures](#) have returned, and a diverse, exciting programme has been planned for over the winter at Wigmore Library.

The first one that took place at the end of October, a talk on the SS Montgomery attracted over 90 in the audience.

Other proposed lectures include A local Newspapermen by Bob Ogley, Kent Yuletide Traditions by Suzanne Cobie, The Golden Age of Comedy Songs by Janet Ayers and Matt Parsons, The story of English Freedom by Andy Thomas and Reminiscences of an immigrant: my life in Soviet Russia by Irina Fridman.

Black History month

To celebrate Black History Month, Gillingham Library hosted a free talk about the life of Sarah Forbes Bonetta. Born in Nigeria, Sarah was the goddaughter of Queen Victoria and lived for some time with Jacob Schön's family in Palm Cottage, Canterbury Street. Sarah lived a full and interesting life and is described as having 'a great talent for music'.

Medway libraries have also hosted themed craft activities for children and young people during half term.

Home delivery Service

Responding to the pandemic the service has continued this year to offer a home delivery service, this offers a service to vulnerable /housebound residents and older customers that cannot access their local library or the digital approach. Over 200 residents receive this service, borrowing over 14,000 books. This is now returning to being a volunteer courier delivered service.

The service has also continued to work with over 20 residential homes and offers a service for the visually impaired, this year delivering spoken word audio books to over 70 residents.

Reading Friends Project

The service has been awarded £10,000 from the Reading Agency the [Reading Friends project](#) that will encourage residents to have a conversation about something they have read during a Reading Friends session. This is to ensure that people who are carers, living with dementia or memory loss or simply lack the time or energy to read can still take participate. Participants who are able to will be encouraged to read articles, books, poems mentioned during the discussion, but the primary focus is on social connection. The project is to help encourage social integration, especially given the rising levels of social isolation and mental health issues. The initial focus has been on people who use the home library service, but the project is aimed at anyone who is isolated. Equipment to enable individuals to read eBooks, access online resources has been purchased.

Phase two of the project will focus on working with young people delivering a diverse programme in Walderslade Hook Meadow and Lordswood libraries and Gillingham Community Hub, offering weekly session that engage young people and help improve their self-esteem and general well-being. We aim to work with specialists from the Medway Youth Service, NHS, Better Medway Champions, Mind, Education, Medway Sport and more.

Census 2021

- 22.4 Building on the services authority wide reputation for providing assisted digital support, we bid and received funding from the [Good Things Foundation](#) to pay for staff to assist the public in completing their online Census form.

Performance information

- 22.5 The service performance information does not make for a valuable comparison with last year because of the impact of the pandemic, but the table below illustrates not only the tremendous take up of digital services, but also the return during the recovery period of the face-to-face service.
- 22.6 The Community Hubs and Library service have been agile and flexible enough to provide a service that can not only be accessed from one of our 15 Libraries, but also remotely.

	April to September 2020/2021	April to September 2021/2022
Physical book issues	151,076	214,937
Digital book issues	42,626	34,105
Digital magazines, newspapers & comic issues	60,477	44,549
Visitors	56,096	182,487
Public PC and Wi-Fi sessions	4,614	22,204
Enquiries	42,360	104,616

23. Medway Adult Education

- 23.1 Medway Adult Education has experienced another challenging year due to covid. However, it has successfully utilised the allocated ESFA funding and continues to provide an excellent service to learners and the community. It delivered online learning throughout the third lockdown when centres were closed, which reduced social isolation and supported residents to upskill and retrain.
- 23.2 Covid has impacted on learner numbers and some learners have been cautious about returning to centre-based learning. To support this the Service continues to offer a mixture of centre based, online and blended learning opportunities to make learning accessible for all. This has been supported by the innovative approach of purchasing digital equipment that can be borrowed by learners for remote working.
- 23.3 Once on course, learner retention levels across all curriculum areas are good at 91.34%. Learner attendance has been impacted by the pandemic, but digital resources have enabled learners to improve their digital skills and progress their learning which is evident in the strong pass rates at 96% for 2020/21.
- 23.4 The Service continues to develop the range of education programmes offered in line with Medway's priorities and to meet local needs. In the past six months the Service has launched qualification courses in cybersecurity, domestic abuse awareness and environmental awareness to enable learners

to retrain, upskill and access CPD opportunities. Most recently it has successfully delivered preparation to work in construction programmes in conjunction with partners to enable Not in Education, Not in Employments (NEETs) to access employment.

23.5 The new Skills and Employment Hub at Britton Farm Mall has continued at pace and is scheduled to be completed by the March 2022 deadline.

23.6 Performance:

As demonstrated in the below table retention rates in Community Learning and courses that are funded by the learner are almost matching what they were pre-pandemic. Adult Skills funded courses have significantly closed the gap on what they were pre-pandemic.

	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
Overall % Rates for 20/21	87.6	95.8	94.7	97.5	97.8	100.0

24. Climate Change

24.1 The committee received a detailed report on progress against climate change at their last meeting on 21 October 2021. Copies of the report are available here - <https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=60164>. A summary update of the Council's response to the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency is set out below.

24.2 The Climate Change Action Plan was endorsed by Cabinet on 8 June 2021 and aligns with the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy. Both a simplified and digital version of the plan have been made available at www.medway.gov.uk/climatechangeplan.

24.3 In addition to an allocation of £100k within the core budget, a further £75k was allocated from the Modern Medway Fund at the beginning of this financial year (2021/22). This additional funding has allowed for the recruitment of two new posts (Climate Response Support Officer and Climate Response Engagement Officer) which are crucial to the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan.

- 24.4 Key projects, funded through the existing capital programme, have continued to support the climate agenda including the [LED street lighting replacement programme](#) and Re:fit, a £12m retrofit programme across the Council's estate which will result in substantial energy and financial savings. Phase One of Re:fit started in October 2021 across 11 Council owned buildings and it is anticipated that Annual carbon savings equal to 476 tonnes of CO2 will be made.
- 24.5 Examples of successful grant funding awards in 2021/22 include:
- £85,420 from the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles for the installation of 34 electric vehicle charging points at 3 council owned car parks.
 - The Climate Coalition awarded £1,500 to support an Electric Vehicle event held in the Rochester Castle Grounds in September 2021, to promote Great Big Green Week
 - Officers supported Canterbury City Council with a successful bid to the Defra Air Quality Grant Programme for an air quality education project
 - £232K has been allocated via the Capability Fund from the Department for Transport to support active travel initiatives, including the development of a Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).
- 24.6 Climate Change has been included in the Council Plan (2021/22). The objectives are to work with partners and the public to minimise emissions of greenhouse gases and reduce Medway's contribution to climate change to net zero by 2050. The Climate Response team has been raising awareness of the climate change action plan to senior managers, directorates and team groups to encourage everyone to include climate action in their service plans.
- 24.7 All Councillors were invited to attend a climate change briefing session on 20 October, of which 20 attended. Feedback was positive and will help to inform the further roll out of briefing sessions.
- 24.8 The Climate Response team hosted a 12-week internship further to the successful appointment of an intern during 2020 through the Employability Points (EP) Scheme hosted by the University of Kent. The intern carried out project work in support of the Climate Change action plan including a review of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and an audit of the Climate Change Action Plan. Their findings will be considered for incorporation into the refresh of the Climate Change Action Plan.
- 24.9 Other key achievements in this period include:
- 24.10 A Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework Strategy, giving specific consideration to adaptation and mitigation for climate change, has now been prepared and will be published in alignment with the Local Plan.

- 24.11 A River Source Heat Pump study is underway, further to a successful award of funding from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). A Senior team, including Councillor Gulvin, have met to understand the roles and responsibilities involved and intend to meet with other local authorities that are further along on their heat network journey. A Heat District Network Feasibility Study for the Hoo Peninsula and Strood has been completed and it is anticipated that the report findings will be progressed through the relevant democratic process for the findings and recommendations to be formally recognised.
- 24.12 £740 has been donated to the [Medway Tree Fund](#) since it was launched in November 2020. Planting of 13,842 small trees, funded by the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, was completed in February 2021. The emerging Medway Tree Strategy is due to be submitted for approval in early 2022. The Strategy uses the findings of the successful tree canopy coverage study completed during Summer 2020.
- 24.13 An [animated video](#) has been produced to raise awareness of air quality and its effects and what to do to reduce these impacts. The video has been promoted to all schools in Medway, alongside a resources pack containing fun facts and the history of air pollution. The video can be accessed from the Council's website and has received over 200 views on YouTube.
- 24.14 A new public facing website ([KentAir](#)) went live on 1st April 2021. It contains near real time information on current air pollution levels, continuation of the free air pollution forecast service, a range of tools, reports, additional information and a refreshed and rebranded educational tool kit ([Care for Air](#)). The resource will be a critical tool in the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan.
- 24.15 The Council supported Medway residents and small businesses to install roof-top solar panels via the collective buying scheme Solar Together Kent. Installation progress has continued to be slower than expected due to global supply challenges slowing down the delivery of batteries into the UK, however delivery of battery stock is now expected and so the pace of delivery should increase. Of the 53 Medway households which accepted the offer, 16 have proceeded to install stage.
- 24.16 34 EV charging points were successfully installed across three sites in Medway and have been live since October. 268 responses to the [Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Charge Point survey](#) have been received since June 2020 and are being used to inform a new 5- year Medway EV Strategy, due to go to Cabinet by the end of this financial year. Officers have been working in partnership with KCC on the Kent 600 EV District Network project to deliver a consistent electric vehicle charging point network across 150 public car parks in Kent, including 30 in Medway. Procurement Board has recommended to approve the installation of the charge points via a 12-year concessionary contract.

24.17 A [Climate Change Communications and Engagement Strategy](#) was approved in August, actions from which are already underway. This includes an increased social media presence, regular monthly newsletter (currently at 759 subscribers, a 23% increase on Q1) and a schedule of events held during the COP26 period. A Climate Conversation event has been scheduled during November to encourage Medway's communities to come together to discuss how we can all take action against climate change.

25. Voluntary Sector

25.1 Since March 2020 Partnership Commissioning have been supporting VCS commissioned services to work with virtual models of service delivery, and where safe to do so, face to face service provision. This involved holding regular meetings with the Medway VCS 'Better Together' Consortium and the Wellbeing Navigation service, monitoring weekly updates and risks logs.

25.2 During this period:

25.3 **The Medway VCS Better Together Consortium contract** has been extended two years, to the 31 December 2023 to a value of £2.650m. The contract is crucial to support Medway Council and other health partners deliver key health and social care priorities, as it has shown throughout COVID. The Consortium worked collaboratively together and with other statutory, VCS and third sector organisations to ensure the right services, advice and information was available to Medway residents, highlighting the importance of a resilient VCS.

25.4 The consortium contract is made up of five services lots:

- **Lot 1** Infrastructure to support the Voluntary Community Services (VCS) Organisations in Medway, awarded to Medway Voluntary Action (MVA)
- **Lot 2** Local Healthwatch, awarded to Engaging Kent (now known as EK360)
- **Lot 3** Welfare, Debt and Advice Support Service including Local Welfare Provision (LWP), awarded to Citizens Advice Medway (CAB)
- **Lot 4** Carers Information, Guidance and Support, Young Carers and Carers Support Payments, awarded to Carers FIRST,
- **Lot 5** Visually Impaired Support and Information Services, awarded to Kent Association for the Blind (KAB), and is to be varied to include the children's visually impaired service from 1 January 2022

25.5 Since September 2020 Citizens Advice Medway (Lot 3) have incorporated several government grants into the LWP service at short notice on behalf of the Council, to a total of £706K: The Emergency Assistance Grant, the delivery of Winter Grant and the Local Support Grant, were monitored monthly. These grants helped those facing an immediate financial crisis and were struggling to afford food and other essentials household items due to the pandemic. The grants administration costs were kept to a minimum but placed a high demand on service provision.

- 25.6 **The Medway Wellbeing Navigation Service Contract** awarded to Imago Community has been extended 18 months, to the 31 March 2023 to a value of £675,076. Care Navigation forms part of the wider health and social care system. It links to the Medway Local Care Plan and forms an integral part of the wider voluntary community sector (VCS) services and the social prescribing agenda.
- 25.7 The contract supports NHS Outcomes Framework Domains and Indicators and the patient journey through the health and social care system. It provides support and signposting, enabling clients to access appropriate services to improve their health and wellbeing or those they care for, while supporting clients to manage their conditions so that they do not deteriorate or develop into clinical issues.
- 25.8 **The Home from Hospital (HfH)** Pilot service has been extended to the 31 March 2022. The service was awarded to the Royal Voluntary Service, with a total value of £154,317 of BCF funding. Commissioners are in the process of procuring a longer term HfH service provision to commence on 1 April 2022. The service provides practical and social support for hospital patients to return safely home after illness, surgery, or accident for up to eight weeks as part of an enhanced hospital support service. The intervention supports the priorities of the wider health and social care agenda and aims to improve health and wellbeing for older people and their experience of being discharged and reduce readmissions. The service also supports effective and efficient patient discharge where specific housing and/or social related issues have been identified.
- 25.9 In support of the Medway and Swale MOU, commissioners are working as part of the ICP to develop a VCS Framework that will enable a system wide integration with the Medway and Swale footprint and will support future commissioning of VCS services within Medway.
- 25.10 Since the launch of the Medway lottery in September 2021, 304 players have purchased 613 tickets, which would generate over £15,000 each year for 45 local good causes.

26. Medway Development Company (MDC)/Kyndi

- 26.1 Cabinet receives regular six-monthly reports on the performance of these Council owned companies. Members are invited to consider the previously published reports. These are set out below and will inform any questions Members have for the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services.
- 26.2 Reports to Cabinet were produced for the following meetings:

Kyndi/MDC - 2 February 2021 at agenda items 15 and 16:

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=4752&Ver=4>

26.3 Kyndi - 24 August 2021 at agenda item 9:

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=5066&Ver=4>

26.4 MDC – 16 November 2021 at agenda item 12:

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=5096&Ver=4>

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.