

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 MARCH 2022

MEDWAY 2037 STRATEGY REFRESH

Report from: Sunny Ee, Assistant Director for Regeneration
Author: Jessica Jagpal, Strategy and Economic Investment Programme
Manager

Summary

The Council is undertaking an intensive programme of strategy refresh and development spanning regeneration, economic development and employability and skills.

SQW was successful in the tender process and appointed to undertake the programme of strategy refresh and development. Members will recall, SQW presented the approach being taken in developing this strategy suite to the January 2022 RCE Overview and Scrutiny Committee and feedback was sought to inform the drafting process.

Since then, significant progress has been made and SQW has now, after extensive internal and external stakeholder engagement, prepared a first working draft of the strategy suite issued for Officer review in mid-February 2022, with the exception of the River Strategy, which is being produced from scratch and will follow in the Summer

Summary documents of each of the strategies are appended to this report, these include Medway 2037, Innovation Strategy, Town Centre Strategy, Skills and Employability Plan, and the River Strategy.

SQW will present these detailed summaries to the March 2022 RCE Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The committee are requested to scrutinise the summary documents and provide comment and questioning on the presentation.

1. Budget and policy framework
 - 1.1. The Council secured funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant Fund (ARG) to aid with the refresh of Medway 2035. SQW were successful in the

tendering process in Autumn 2021 and have led on the stakeholder consultancy for Medway 2037 on behalf of the Council, overseen by Assistant Director Regeneration.

- 1.2. The Medway 2037 refreshed strategy suite responds to key societal, socio-economic, and political agendas which are now highly material to Medway's growth agenda including Climate Change, Levelling Up and technological challenges and opportunities, whilst also ensuring the Council is positioned to capitalise on both existing and emerging funding opportunities for the economic regeneration of Medway and delivering growth for all.
- 1.3. The Medway 2037 refreshed strategy suite also responds to the inherent opportunities following the securing of £170m of HIF funding which will be transformational for the Hoo Peninsula and forms a core part of the Council's growth and economic development agenda.
- 1.4. The strategic documents will embed Medway Council's ethos to eliminate unlawful discrimination, actively promote equality of opportunity, growth for all, and foster good relations between different sections of the community through improving the quality of life and opportunities for everyone. Diversity Impact Assessments will be incorporated at key junctures to ensure all requirements of the Equalities Act 2010 are satisfied.

2. Background

- 2.1. The programme of work to refresh the suite of strategies commenced in October 2021 and, with the exception of the River Strategy, will complete by 31 March 2022 with additional time to be allowed for final design of both online and printed versions and any final internal edits.
- 2.2. Post inception, SQW has:
 - Developed detailed scopes for each strategy workstream
 - Facilitated a strategy workshop with Service Managers
 - Undertaken detailed review and analysis of existing strategies
 - Reviewed wider initiatives and policy agendas
 - Undertaken various consultations with internal and external stakeholders
 - Produced draft strategies which consider comments received through extensive engagement
 - Produced summary documents of each strategy
 - Worked with officers to identify priority projects and prospective funding opportunities.
- 2.3. A comprehensive review and analysis of existing strategies was undertaken. Medway 2035, Skills and Employability Plan 2035 and the accompanying action plans were previously adopted by Medway Council, and these strategies have been refreshed as opposed to rewritten. The Innovation Strategy, which was adopted by the Council in 2014, has been substantively rewritten. There has never been a finalised Town Centres Strategy before,

only a draft prepared in 2018, and the use of town centres has also evolved considerably during the pandemic, so this has involved a considerable rewrite. Comments from stakeholders including DMT and CMT have been received and taken into consideration in preparation of each of the draft strategies.

- 2.4. Design work on the above strategies is currently underway and will be finalised and incorporated in advance of the strategies going to Cabinet. The exception to this is the River Strategy. On this, there is still significant work to undertake, including an extensive inventory of existing river infrastructure and a robust assessment of the local and regional appetite for both commercial and leisure markets. Due to consultancy capacity this will begin in earnest in April 2022. In parallel, SQW will continue to draft the River Strategy, but the final draft informed by the infrastructure and market assessment, will continue into Spring with adoption planned into Summer. A bid for use of the Feasibility Fund will be presented to Corporate Strategic Property Board in March to fund the final strategy.
- 2.5. Summaries of each of the draft strategies are appended. SQW will consider comments and continue to finalise the draft strategies until 31 March 2021, due to the ARG funding deadline for their work. The River Strategy work will continue into Spring. Officers will continue to hone, and work on the design of the documents once content is finalised. The final suite of completed strategies will be taken to Cabinet in June 2022.

3. Overview of the draft Strategic Documents

3.1. Medway 2037

- 3.1.1. Medway 2035 is the Council's current core economic and regeneration strategy. This, and the accompanying action plans were adopted by the Council in 2018. The document is well considered and conveys a robust vision and strategy that clearly articulates Medway's economic development and regeneration priorities. As such, the scope of work required a refresh and update rather than a full-scale re-write and has now developed into Medway 2037.
- 3.1.2. The structure of the draft Medway 2037 document is comprised of six key priorities; Destination and Place-making, Inward Investment, Town Centres, Business Accommodation and Digital Connectivity, Sector Growth and Improving Employability. Alongside the key priorities sit three cross cutting themes; Climate Change and Net-Zero, Creativity and Innovation, and Growth for All. Rationale behind the changes in the priorities and addition of the cross cutting themes are detailed within Appendix 1 Medway 2037 Summary.
- 3.1.3. Key agendas also incorporated into the draft Medway 2037 document include Levelling Up, Post Covid Impacts and Perception with the aspiration of raising Medway's profile. Throughout stakeholder engagement, other key themes highlighted include, Creativity, Culture, Health and Wellbeing, Child Friendly City and Leisure and Tourism, and have been incorporated.

3.1.4. Under the draft Medway 2037 over-arching document, sits the strategy suite (Town Centres Strategy, Skills and Employability Plan, Innovation Strategy, River Strategy) which includes explicit alignment and interlinkages between the component strategies with a single, consolidated action and delivery plan that is focused and streamlined, with an emphasis on deliverability.

3.1.5. The draft Medway 2037 strategy suite is aligned with other relevant strategies and picks up on relevant interlinkages to ensure growth for all. It embeds the principles of the Climate Change Action Plan 2021 throughout the strategy suite, and connects the Medway Cultural Strategy, Child-Friendly Medway initiative, emerging Medway Tourism Strategy, and emerging Sport Strategy and emerging Local Plan.

3.2. Town Centres Strategy

3.2.1. A draft Town Centres Strategy was prepared in 2018 which included a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) analysis of each of Medway's principal town centres and the identification of priority objectives and actions to support the strength, growth, and resilience of each town centre. This strategy was never formally adopted, although has been used as a reference point by the economic development team.

3.2.2. SQW's role has been to update the strategy and develop a detailed Action Plan to guide the implementation of agreed objectives. To update the strategy SQW has undertaken a review of regional and national strategic context, high level evidence reviews of town centres' performance, looked into current trends and challenges facing town centres nationally, had over 30 consultations with town centre stakeholders and businesses, and undertaken a SWOT analysis of each of Medway's town centres. The Action Plan focuses in particular on the revitalisation and appropriate re-use of empty / derelict properties and the cross-over with Local Plan objectives (e.g. change of use, and town centre master plans).

3.2.3. SQW has captured each of Medway's five unique town centres' identity and defined their role. Overarching priorities were identified and informed the delivery plan. A summary of the draft Town Centre Strategy, including overarching projects and initiatives, as well as those specific to each town centre, can be seen at appendix 2.

3.2.4. Medway's vision for town centres is: To create a prosperous, attractive, vibrant and sustainable waterfront city centre for Chatham and the town centres of Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham in a way which embraces their distinctiveness; enables growth for all with no one left behind; provides diverse and high-quality shopping, leisure, living and working environments and experiences for residents and visitors; enables businesses to flourish, create and innovate; Medway's economy to grow and the quality of life to improve.

3.2.5. Members are asked to comment on the overarching vision and ambitions of the Strategy, thoughts on the emerging projects and initiatives proposed in the summary document, and whether anything else should be included.

3.3. Skills and Employability Plan

3.3.1. The Skills and Employability Plan 2035 was adopted by the Council in 2018 and required a refresh to ensure it remains fit for purpose and aligns with the wider economic development and strategy suite being developed.

3.3.2. The 2035 vision that local people of all ages will have the skills and experience to take up job opportunities generated through growth and inward investment, informed the refresh. The refresh also considered progress made in delivering on the priorities and objectives defined in the Skills and Employability Plan for Medway 2035, economic opportunities, transformational themes, labour market insight, policy change and stakeholder consultation feedback.

3.3.3. A refreshed vision has been proposed: Raising aspirations, realising potential, supporting sustainable growth. The proposed vision is supported by five key priorities; Raising and responding to employer demand, Developing progression routes for young people, Building an adaptable and resilient workforce, Ensuring employment, education and training opportunities for everyone, and Leading by example as a major employer. Detail on the proposed priorities, rationale and areas for focused intervention is captured in the Skills and Employability Plan Summary, Appendix 3.

3.4. Innovation Strategy

3.4.1. The Council adopted an Innovation Strategy in 2014 which principally focused on the way the Council's innovation assets could proactively deliver innovation outcomes and support SMEs. The Innovation Strategy required a substantial re-write.

3.4.2. Innovation is recognised in the draft Medway 2037 core economic development and regeneration strategy, as a key theme cutting across all six of Medway Council's identified priorities. Through stakeholder consultation, the link between creativity and innovation was emphasised, and the cross-cutting theme has been adapted to Creativity and Innovation.

3.4.3. The draft Innovation Strategy includes sections dedicated to defining innovation, a review of the wider context including the Government's recently published Levelling Up white paper, Innovation Strategy, and plan to 'build back better', Medway's economic baseline, Medway's innovation ecosystem, and barriers to innovation in Medway.

3.4.4. The proposed vision for innovation in Medway is: To establish Medway as a prominent centre of business innovation and high value employment, connecting, maximising and growing the assets we have and sharing the benefits of innovation with all businesses, communities and places. We will

support innovation and growth in our key and potential future growth sectors including advanced manufacturing and engineering, construction, the creative industries, food-tech and hydrogen, identify and nurture emerging opportunities associated with the twin drivers of the transition to the net zero carbon economy and increasing technological advances.

3.4.5. The proposed priorities for innovation in Medway are identified as: supporting our businesses to innovate, start up, grow, relocate, providing and supporting others to deliver the right spaces for innovation, and pursuing and supporting emerging opportunities. The Delivery Plan proposed deliverables are grouped according to the three proposed priorities.

3.4.6. Further detail on the draft Innovation Strategy proposed vision, priorities and delivery plan, is provided in Appendix 4 Innovation Strategy Summary.

3.5. River Strategy

3.5.1. The Council does not have either a draft or an adopted *River Strategy*, so this has been commissioned in its entirety. SQW has worked on an outline of the proposed scope, including the evidence base currently under preparation. The proposed River Strategy will be predicated on a robust and objective evidence base, which has been commissioned by the Council to underpin both the River Strategy and the draft Local Plan. The evidence base has been commissioned separately and is being prepared by a specialist consultancy.

3.5.2. The River Medway is at the heart of the area's identity but is arguably an under-used or appreciated asset. Accordingly, greater prominence is afforded in the draft Medway 2037 regarding the opportunity for the River Medway, and indeed the River Thames, to play a more significant but viable role in supporting economic growth and contributing to the life and experience of the Medway communities.

3.5.3. Work has already commenced on the River Strategy relating to areas outside of the scope of the separately commissioned evidence base, such as a review of other relevant policy and strategic agendas including, environment, ecology, leisure, tourism, and planning. The majority of the strategy work will be delivered in parallel to, and following the completion of, the evidence base described above. The SQW River Strategy scope and programme is detailed in Appendix 5 River Strategy Scope Summary.

3.6. Identification of Priority Projects

3.6.1. SQW is working closely with the Council's Interim External Investment Manager, to develop tools which can be easily used by the Council on an ongoing basis to ensure the Council is ready to respond to future funding and partnership opportunities.

3.6.2. The proposed tool is comprised of two components:

- A project pro forma template setting out clear project information requirements to enable consistency for comparison and provide the

baseline for future business case development. This is being developed in alignment with the HM Treasury Green Book guidance for business case preparation which forms the basis for all Government funding bid templates.

- A prioritisation tool with a weighted scoring system to compare projects and identify priorities for the Council in terms of pursuing prospective funding opportunities.

4. Climate change implications

- 4.1 In April 2019, Medway Council declared a climate change emergency. The council is committed to making Medway carbon neutral by 2050 and has developed an action plan to facilitate making a 'clean and green environment'. The aim is to ensure that climate change is incorporated and embedded into all relevant policies, strategies, plans and contracts.
- 4.2 This programme of strategy refresh and development is responding to Medway Council's adopted Climate Change Action Plan, specifically Key Priority Action 2 (Public Sector Decision Making) which includes a sub-action to embed climate change in all relevant Council plans and strategies.
- 4.3 SQW have worked closely with Council Officers to embed climate change throughout the Medway 2037 strategy suite.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Approval was granted to use £100,000 of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) received from Central Government to fund the cost of the Medway 2037 Strategy. However, it is imperative that any payments allocated to the ARG funding are incurred prior to the 31 March 2022 when the use of this funding stream finishes. To date, circa £35,000 has been paid, and the remainder is on track to be spent in line with the funding deadline.
- 5.2 Any additional work beyond the current scope would incur further cost beyond the 31 March 2022 deadline for spend, and as such, cannot be funded from ARG.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications for this report.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the report and accompanying summaries of the strategy documents. Comments from Members are welcomed on the

proposed suite of Strategies and on the presentation at the meeting, to be delivered by SQW.

Lead officer contact

Sunny Ee, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Email: sunny.ee@medway.gov.uk
Tele no: 01634 338121

Jessica Jagpal Strategy and Economic Investment Programme Manager
Email: jessica.jagpal@medway.gov.uk
Tele no: 01634 331544

Daniel Ratcliff, Skills and Employability Manager
Email: daniel.ratcliff@medway.gov.uk
Tele no: 01634 338399

Anne Knight, Economic Development and Town Centres Manager
Email: anne.knight@medway.gov.uk
Tele no: 01634 338177

Peter Garrett, Greenspaces Manager
Email: peter.garrett@medway.gov.uk
Tele no: 01634 331141

Appendices

Appendix 1 Medway 2037 Summary
Appendix 2 Town Centre Strategy Summary
Appendix 3 Skills and Employability Plan Summary
Appendix 4 Innovation Strategy Summary
Appendix 5 River Strategy Scope Summary

Background papers

Medway 2035
https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/455/medway_regeneration/2

Skills and Employability Plan 2035
https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200341/medway_for_business/941/skills_and_employment

Medway Innovation Strategy 2014 – 2019 <https://innovationcentremedway.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/strategy.pdf>

Cultural Strategy 2020 – 2030 <http://medwayculturalstrategy.co.uk/the-strategy/#:~:text=Medway%E2%80%99s%20Cultural%20Strategy%20runs%20from%202020%20to%202030,them.%20It%20is%20based%20on%20two%20core%20beliefs%3A>

Local Plan -

https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200149/planning_policy/519/new_medway_local_plan

Chatham Town Centre masterplan (November 2019) –

https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4524/chatham_town_centre_masterplan

Gillingham Town Centre masterplan (November 2019) –

https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4525/gillingham_town_centre_masterplan

Strood Town Centre masterplan (December 2019) -

https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4523/strood_town_centre_masterplan