

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**20 OCTOBER 2022**

### **ATTENDANCE OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Report from: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council

#### Summary

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within the Portfolio of the Leader of the Council, which all fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Leader of the Council being held to account.

#### 1. Budget and policy framework

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

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

#### 2. Strategic Leadership of the Council

##### **Achievements for 2021/22**

#### **2.1 The passing of Her Majesty The Queen, Elizabeth II and the Accession of His Majesty The King, Charles III.**

2.1.1 Over the previous period we have worked sensitively to ensure these events have been appropriately marked in Medway, with dignity and respect. I read the Royal Proclamation for King Charles III.

#### **2.2 Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations**

2.2.1 Medway celebrated this historic milestone with over 50,000 people attending over 100 events; a fitting tribute to Her Majesty. Unfortunately, in the face of a record number of entrants, and sad events in Southend on Sea, Medway was not successful with our Bid for City Status.

## **2.3 Freedom awarded to Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and Chatham Branch RNA**

2.3.1 At a Special Council Meeting, both charities were granted the highest civic distinction, the Freedom of Medway.

2.3.2 I also had the honour of receiving the funnel badges from HMS Chatham from Cdre Rob Bellfield.

## **2.4 Continuing response to the Pandemic and relationships with Health**

2.4.1 We have continued our outstanding efforts to chart a course through the Pandemic for Medway, and I pay tribute to our staff and our partners for all their endeavours.

2.4.2 I have played a leading role in establishing the Integrated Care System for Medway, with involvement in the Integrated Care Board and Partnership.

2.4.3 Through Greater North Kent we are actively lobbying Health colleagues to seek to improve access to GP services and to enhance the patient experience in primary care.

## **2.5 Child-Friendly Medway**

2.5.1 The Child-Friendly Medway programme is a significant driver for our Children's improvement journey and there have been a number of stand-out successes, not least our City Halls, Seeing is Believing programme and our Gaming Festival.

2.5.2 Our children's improvement journey continues apace, with a number of positive Ofsted monitoring visits over the recent period.

## **2.6 Putting Medway on the Map**

2.6.1 Although I was extremely disappointed we were unsuccessful with our City of Culture Bid, the groundwork we laid through the Bid was clearly effective as Medway's cultural Levelling Up Fund Bid was successful, bringing over £14m of investment to the Fitted Rigging House, Docking Station and Brook Theatre.

2.6.2 Our Place Champions continue their excellent work and are a vibrant and engaged group who meet regularly and tell the story of Medway to a wider audience.

2.6.3 Our Light Nights festival earlier this year was a spectacular addition to our events calendar and attracted over 60,000 people, with 1,000 performers and 500 children from 17 schools taking part in the parade.

2.6.4 I am also particularly pleased that we will be holding the rescheduled first Food and Drink Festival at the end of March/beginning of April – rounding out our festival offer.

## **2.7 Monumental Regeneration Programme**

2.7.1 Medway has powered through the Pandemic. We have maintained our momentum around the HIF project, in the face of recent delays, and our flagship regeneration site, Rochester Riverside, continues apace. IPM continues to progress with strong business interest and our myriad of schemes across Chatham, Medway's City Centre, progress at speed, with strong sales at Garrison Point and visible, significant progress at Chatham Waterfront. We acquired Mountbatten House and the Debenhams building.

2.7.2 We will be resuming our Medway1 programme early in the New Year; it represents an outstanding opportunity to showcase all that Medway has to offer to national developers, and we recently held our Design and Regeneration Awards, celebrating the quality and success of schemes across Medway.

2.7.3 We have submitted two further bids under the Levelling Up Fund, and we await the outcome around the end of the calendar year.

## **2.8 Delivering Front Line Services**

Our excellent partners Norse continue to deliver to very high levels against the most important contract for the Council – our highly valued waste contract. Norse has also continued to maintain our greenspaces to high standards, and we have secured 8 Green Flags this year.

2.8.1 Our work to deliver Splashes continues; it will be a new fun, family-friendly facility in the East of the Borough. Britton Farm Mall is now open for learners, providing top-notch learning and skills facilities, based on Gillingham High Street, delivered with the support of £2m Getting Building Fund (GBF) from the LEP.

## **2.9 Climate Change**

Our excellent Climate Change team continues to make great progress, and our work was recently ranked 31<sup>st</sup> out of all local authorities (circa 350).

## **2.10 External Relations**

I continue to progress Medway's interests through my attendance at:

- SE7
- Kent Leaders
- TfSE
- TEGB
- Key Cities
- Greater North Kent.

## **2.11 Homes for Ukraine**

We continue to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and we have welcomed over 160 arrivals in Medway. Our relationship with the Medway Help for Ukrainians charity is excellent, and the team has provided outstanding support for those arriving from Ukraine.

## **3. Communications and Marketing**

### **Achievements for 2021-2022**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

3.1.1 This was a year that saw us transition back from COVID measures to business as usual with an emphasis on getting our services back open and operating as normal as quickly as possible to support our residents and communities. As well as continuing to produce high quality and helpful COVID response and recovery communications we supported our services with campaigns to help them reopen safely and drive-up usage and memberships such as our sports services, libraries, Adult Education, and tourism. We also focussed on communicating our major corporate initiatives including our Climate Change Action Plan, our new Child Friendly Medway initiative, Medway's mammoth regeneration programme and our City Status bid.

3.1.2 The Communications Team was delighted to win the RCE Directorate Team of the Year Award during the year.

#### **3.2 Getting back to Business As Usual**

3.2.1 As COVID-19 restrictions gradually eased last year, the council's priority was to return to business as usual and better as quickly as possible, ensuring the best possible services for our local residents as well as supporting local businesses to get open and back in business. We supported the re-opening of the high streets by making sure all signage reflected the government's road map and the rules in place at that time. We also ran a strong 'stay local' message encouraging local people to shop local and support their local businesses. We took advantage of the Christmas period to run a strong shop local campaign promoting Medway's high streets including the light switch-ons. We reached more than 1.5 million people via social media and the Christmas in Medway landing page had 51,774 unique visits. Chatham and Rochester reported strong footfall increases of 23% and 15% respectively over their light switch-on weekends.

3.2.2 Earlier this year we created and installed some stunning artwork across our town centres. We developed a wonderful photo exhibition in The Pentagon using the empty shop fronts we have on the top floor showing how Chatham has developed over the years. We used some additional space around Chatham to highlight the mini exhibition and push people to go and have a look.

3.2.3 We also concentrated on the smaller shopping centres in Medway including Park Wood, Twydall, Walderslade and Lordswood. We produced a short film promoting all the things on offer in these areas such as cafes, pet grooming, fishing tackle shops, hairdressers, nail salons, butchers, charity shops etc. We wanted to remind people (and tell people) about all the great amenities they have on their doorsteps. We developed new 'Shop Local, Shop Parkwood' and 'Shop Local, Shop Twydall' jute bags for both high street locations. A total of 8,000 bags were produced and have been given out to local shoppers.

### 3.3 Reopening our services

3.3.1 **Tourism** – with the staycation the holiday of choice during the summer of 2021, we wanted to encourage visitors back to our heritage sites along with the many wonderful attractions in Medway. Our #WhoKnew campaign invited people to discover the unusual and unique places that Medway has to offer, from the views at the top of Rochester Castle to adrenalin filled river boat rides, go karting or riverside dining. We ran competitions in the media with local attractions which resulted in increased visitor numbers through the summer. The campaign generated huge social media engagement and visits to our Visit Medway website for more information. Other visitor destinations we featured also reported increased visits and social media traffic. Our campaign continued again this Spring with the launch of our "Do it, Be It, See It All in Medway" campaign which focused on all the things families can do in Medway from one hour's journey away. These included blogs, advertising, social media pushes and a credit card sized fold out featuring our venues. We saw 5,000 new users of our website and 7,500 new sessions.

3.3.2 **Sport** - Working with the Sports Team, we have run a number of phased campaigns through the year. As the centres gradually reopened, indoor classes returned, and children went back to school we ran campaigns focusing on "Me Time" – to get fit and get space for oneself.

At the start of 2022, the campaign became "It's Time" aimed at encouraging people to incorporate sport into our daily allocation of how we spend our time each day. The campaign asks people to think differently and not see sport as 'exercise time' but more of family time, fun time, time for their friends, play time or time for themselves.

The marketing campaigns aim to encourage people to take up our Premier Membership and had an immediate excellent result. The percentage of Premier membership sold compared to gym and swim soared from 16% in January 2019 and 27.4% in January 2020, to 72.5% in January 2022. Since then with continued running of the campaign the monthly income in August for one of our sports centres was 10 per cent higher than in January.

The Communications Team has ensured that local people have remained informed about the developments at Splashes, the closure, demolition in February and regular updates on redevelopment project, as well as ensuring they know which alternative sports centres they can continue to enjoy using.

2021 was the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Strand and to celebrate the event and encourage usage, we invited people to send in memories and images of the Strand through the years which we showcased in a digital album attracting 15,000 views and creation all the promotions for the celebratory weekend.

The team continued to support with the promotion of other sporting initiatives such as mini youth games, sports camps, Fit and Fed, crash course swimming, school swimming, wheelchair rugby and Watling Park football ground.

**3.3.3 Events and Festivals** - The events and festival programme in 2021-22 was imaginatively created by the Events team for the year to allow for the gradual return to normal life while keeping people safe – and they proved hugely popular. New events were created by the Events team and promoted by the Communications Team, that offered a fabulous array of days for all to enjoy and raised Medway's profile as a creative hub in the south east. Through joint marketing with organisers Fragers, the new Medway Rapture Gaming and Creative Festival sold out before the event and proved even more successful this year with more than 4,000 attendees and 90% satisfaction.

The Rainbow Effect, a series of outdoor artworks and online art installations resulted in excellent media coverage and nearly 10,000 views online and many visitors to the beautiful exhibits across Medway.

In September 2021, TOGETHER, a giant art installation, created by local business Lucid Creates, featured messages of hope and celebrated community and unity and lit up the riverside outside Chatham library and community hub. This was an extraordinary piece of artwork attracting thousands to see it while installed and put Medway on the map as a serious creative and cultural hub in the south east.

Our Christmas in Medway festival returned with a bang with visitors keen to enjoy one of the festivals we do so well. Packaging all our events (The light switch-ons, Rochester Market, Dickensian Christmas Festival, panto, Brook Christmas Show, heritage activities, shop local and Christmas at the Pentagon Shopping Centre) into one campaign, we promoted Medway as one of the best places to enjoy the Christmas festivities as well as encouraging visits to our paid for attractions. Marketing activity included booklets sent to schools in Medway and supermarkets across the Southeast, newsletters, banner at Rochester Castle, radio ads on Heart radio and KMFM, digital ads, DAX, bus advertising, inclusion in Medway Matters, What's On, Rochester Digital Totem and others. The markets also attracted national attention, featuring in national media and regularly on Tik Tok. The numbers were excellent – the market attracted more than 201,000 visitors over the eight days (approximately 50,000 more than 2019). The Dickensian Festival saw large crowds lining Rochester High Street with 80,000 estimated to have visited over the two days and superb online engagement throughout the whole period.

Medway's inaugural and iconic Light Nights took place over the February half term, gaining instant success and recognition for a superb unique event organised by our Events Team in conjunction with commissioned deliverers Emergency Exit Arts and Icon Theatre and others. The Communications Team led the coordination of all marketing for the festival with a tiny but highly effective use of the marketing budget. Primarily using digital channels, our promotions reached more than 700,000 people via our social media channels, attracted 23,00 visits to our web pages and many others through other channels with a total reach of around 1.7million people. More than 60,000 visited during both evenings with 90% satisfaction ratings and we are looking forward to running the event again in early 2023.

We also ran the marketing promotion for other festivals and events including English Festival, the Electric Vehicle event, Wild About Capstone, Medway Mile (2,701 places filled out of 3,000) and other smaller events.

A new brand has been developed for all our events and large activities called Medway Presents. This allows us to give a more cohesive approach to all our activities and events and highlight the Medway brand even further.

- 3.3.4 *Theatres and arts***– We supported the Theatres team to welcome back audiences to our theatres and to promote the new line ups of shows through the year using digital marketing campaigns as well as advertising in magazines and shopping centres. We also supported promotion of last year's pantomime that succeeded in selling almost as many tickets in 2021 as they did in 2019, despite a new outburst of COVID-19 in the run up to Christmas.

The Brook Christmas show was again beautifully illustrated by the Communications Team and promotion succeeded in sales almost matching 2019 figures.

We also continued to promote the wonderful exhibitions that took place in our galleries.

- 3.3.5 *Libraries*** – Our priority has been to encourage people to return to libraries and continue their love of reading with an aim of driving uptake of library and council services. We did this through campaigns focussed on reading, events and community services.

The Communications Team has supported the Libraries Team for events and group activities as well as digital communications. In addition to social media support, the regular themed digital newsletter has continued to be issued and attracts additional subscribers on each issue. By the end of the year, social media following for our libraries had increased by 245 since the first lockdown.

- 3.3.6 *MAE*** – As we came out of the pandemic, we supported the team in their recruitment for their online and free work skills courses with an emphasis on updating skills and retraining, along with vocational qualifications. We succeeded in reaching 70,000 people in the first quarter of the year. We created and distributed a new course directory supported by digital and social

media postings. We produced new signage for the exterior of the Rochester building and have been preparing communications for the launch of the new building at Briton Mall Farm.

### **3.4 Regeneration and Business**

#### **3.4.1 *Regeneration***

Future Hoo – it has been a priority to ensure that local people, particularly our Hoo residents, have been kept informed and encouraged to have their say on the proposals for the £170 million infrastructure programme on the peninsula in response to the challenging government housing target numbers we are required to deliver in Medway. The Communications Team ran integrated communications campaigns to promote consultations on the proposed road, rail and environmental improvements as well as other environmental projects. Communications included a virtual exhibition platform and online questionnaire, library and village hall advertising, advertising in local magazines and newsletters, our newsletters, social media posts and five engagement events.

#### **3.4.2 Regeneration projects -other communications projects included:**

- Chatham Waterfront space – engagement on proposals for the Paddock area.
- Innovation Park Medway (IPM) - supporting the services to engage with developers and businesses to encourage applications for development and support for a new IPM website. We have also promoted the milestones when the preparation of the ground works for the southern site and clearance of the Northern site were completed earlier this year.
- Communication on the Future High Street Fund projects taking place across Chatham.
- Keeping road users up to date on the progress of the Medway City Estate road improvements.

#### **3.4.3 *Business***

Ensuring that businesses were made aware of the different grants they were eligible for remained a priority for the team through this period, particularly the Additional Restrictions Grants targeted at the hospitality and skills and training sectors. We promoted this through widespread paid digital and social media marketing and radio advertising and website information and achieved the required number of applications.

#### **3.4.4 More generally the Communications Team has continued to support the Economic Development team with their drive for engagement with local businesses. Communication has been focused around delivering timely and practical messaging via the fortnightly newsletter. This is supplemented with social media on the dedicated business pages and Medway Council pages as appropriate. The newsletter has a constant engagement rate of circa 37% and subscriptions to the service have continued to increase. Topics covered have included COVID-19 support grants, green business, Solar Together, Business Advice Service, HMRC updates, Women in Business, webinars and events.**



We are active participants in the National Apprenticeship Week highlighting Medway Council's own successful apprenticeship programme but also linking with other businesses across Medway. The reach for our campaign this February was more than 274,000 people.

### **3.5 Environmental Services**

**3.5.1 Climate Change** – A communications action plan was created as part of our corporate Climate Change Action Plan and a number of streams of work have taken place during the year.

- With the Climate Response Team, we organised our first Climate Community Conversation during COP26 in November at the Corn Exchange bringing different community groups together to pledge different ways we can work together to make a difference. Attended by more than 60 people, we held workshops with attendees and discussed key areas and ideas on how we can work together. Smaller community networks are now being set up.

- Our Small Changes campaign aims to remind local people that by making small changes to our daily lives, we can all do our bit to combat climate change, from turning off light switches, to not running the tap while cleaning our teeth, to turning down the central heating by a degree or two and ensuring we have adequate insulation in our homes.

- During 'Walk To School Month' last October, local children were challenged through a communications campaign to walk the equivalent of the 416 miles from Medway to Glasgow. Local children walked a total of 13,860 miles saving an equivalent of 5.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

-We ran a competition with residents encouraging them to making improvements to air quality and campaigns through the year to encourage awareness of air quality through car sharing and cycling.

- The first Poet Tree competition was launched on 21 March. Supported by digital and social media, the initiative was to celebrate World Planting Day and World Poetry Day and run via primary schools and schools with primary aged children. We encouraged schools to engage the children creatively to help spread the word about climate change and inspire positive action in the Medway community via verse.

**3.5.2 Waste services** - We ran a number of campaigns to encourage Medway residents to recycle more and care for our environment. Our 'Sort it Right Campaign' saw a 167% increase in residents requesting blue and white bags. We know that local people are very opposed to fly tipping, and we carried out a major campaign in Spring 2021 encouraging people to report fly tipping, checking the company they employ to take rubbish away and reminding them of our HWRC facilities. Recycle Week 2021 promoted recycling and encouraged people to bring small electrical items to our HWRCs.

**3.5.3** Our Christmas campaign ensured that people were fullywell aware of changes to the collection timetables. Incorporating more of a visual aspect, we were

able to target those for whom English is not their first language. We used a range of communication channels to reach people in the run up to Christmas also ensuring that our messages reminded people what they could do over the festive period to reduce waste and recycle more. We received more than 10,000 views on our website pages and a total reach of 574,000 for our social media posts with most residents getting their waste out for collection on the right day during the festive period.

#### **3.5.4 Highways and road safety** - Campaigns included:

- The eScooter campaign raising awareness of the importance and legal requirements for safe riding had significant engagement, reaching over 107,000 people with 228 clicks to our website
- Drug Drive awareness, run with partners at KCC.
- We worked with colleagues in Transformation, Climate Response and Parking on a major campaign to support the launch of 34 Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) across three car parks in Medway. Posters advising of works were installed with wall decals with the initiative widely supported across digital and social media.
- We also promoted the installation of ANPR at Rochester multi-storey making users aware of what this would mean for their parking and payment methods.
- A campaign encouraging Medway residents to “Be Bright, Be Seen” when venturing out to stay safe on Medway’s roads.
- Working with partners in Kent we delivered another burst of the ‘Speak Out’ campaign encouraging (particularly young), drivers to ensure their passengers always wear a seat belt. All activity went across social media and digital newsletters and included animations and static graphics.
- -Awareness of the changes to the Highway Code earlier this year via social media and digital channels reaching 253,000 people.

**3.5.5 Greenspaces** - Work commenced earlier this year to launch a year-long campaign ‘Greening Medway’ to raise awareness of the extensive works the team undertakes. As part of this initiative there has been some myth busting and educational messaging. The objective is to engage the public with activity and ensure they are informed of the rationale for various activities. The communications plan includes support for the play area refurbishments, including official launch events and reopenings.

#### **3.6 Housing**

Marketing work for housing during the year included:

- A new explanatory brochure for landlords.
- Communications to support the new HRA development at Twydall.
- A new newsletter for the homelessness forum.
- Rent reminder postcard at Christmas time.
- Landlord Guidance booklet.
- Marketing campaign for the new “No Use Empty” initiative targeting the owners of empty properties.
- Communications support for the launch of the Green Homes Grant which resulted in a digital reach of 312,000 people with 357 clicks to our website.

### **3.7 Children and Adults**

- 3.7.1 We supported our Children's Services improvement journey with ongoing promotion of children's social worker posts and internal and external communications linked to Ofsted focused visits to the service.
- 3.7.2 We worked with the SEND team to promote awareness of the SEND strategy and ran a survey with parents, carers and young people to get their thoughts on the services they currently use. We also supported the service with the communications following the positive Ofsted visit last autumn.
- 3.7.3 The Communications Team has provided active support for our Youth Services Team promoting their summer sessions, achieving full bookings for more than 95% of our bookable sessions as well as half-term workshops. We also ran campaigns raising awareness of our youth parliament what the You Service offers. The team has also supported with the design and provision of different posters and other materials through the year.
- 3.7.4 The Communications Team helped to create a Medway Heroes in Time booklet encouraging residents to share stories on Medway's diverse history to support school curricula. The booklet was sent to schools and community groups and promoted widely through our different community channels.
- 3.7.5 *Other activity included*
- 16+ care leavers service support in particular promoting the service and corporate parenting as well as invitations for Christmas gifts for these most vulnerable members of our communities.
  - Support for the Eden House open day and an informative video produced following the event.
  - New monthly bulletins created for our schools' teams (Headway), Youth Services and Care Leavers.
  - Continued digital push for our Shared Lives service along with a refresh of materials including leaflets, stand and contact cards.

### **3.8 Public Health**

- 3.8.1 **COVID Response** - At the start of the council year 2021, the council was still providing extensive support in the community to keep residents safe. Our priority was to encourage regular twice a week symptom-free testing to combat further virus outbreaks. A heavy weight campaign using a range of channels highlighted the importance of testing to protect loved ones with channels such as NHS GP texting and radio ads proving highly successful in driving responses. This proved very successful in driving people to our pop-up testing sites across Medway. We also ran significant promotions encouraging people to pick up home tests from our collection sites. We targeted specific communities who had not come forward for testing, working in conjunction with local community groups, translating literature and posters to help raise awareness. Through the winter we worked in partnership with Kent County Council on the 'Protect Kent and Medway' Winter campaign – with a focus on a Kent wide out-of-home advertising campaign featuring a Medway

pharmacist. The campaign reminded residents to protect key workers from COVID-19 by practicing safe behaviours.

3.8.2. We promoted the huge range of initiatives being run by our busy Public Health team with active marketing and awareness campaigns throughout the year including:

- As services opened up, we created a new A Better Medway handout promoting key services distributed via our test centres and online.
- Promotion of our successful Medway Go holiday activities and food programme which supported 2,000 local children in summer of 2021.
- Mental Health Awareness Week promotions.
- Man v Fat new football league with 24 people signing up last September and all 44 places filled in January.
- Domestic Abuse campaign during the Euros 2020.
- Promotion of our Better-Connected service which supports the isolated and lonely over 65 year olds to reconnect in their communities as part of our social prescribing projects. The campaign was a remarkable success, increasing unique website entries by 1,008 per cent. The campaign consisted of organic social media activity, social media advertising, also supported by print advertising, and featuring case studies with clients and link workers. Overall, through digital advertising, we reached almost 40,000 new people with a modest budget of just £250.
- Healthy Workplaces campaign to encourage businesses to sign up for our programme.
- Promotion of Children's Mental Health Awareness Week with a theme of 'Growing Together' this year. We used the week to promote a number of key services across Public Health, Children's Services, Sport and Libraries that can support positive mental health for children. Our range of messages were aimed at families with children aged up to 16 years old. We used a variety of channels to reach people, mainly digital, with social media reaching 13,000 on Facebook and a 37 per cent open rate for our A Better Medway news bulletin.
- Suicide prevention campaigns- particularly targeted at Medway males aged 18+. Between October and January last year, nearly 700 individuals accessed one of the pages on our support hub with 247 people accessing our contact web page for help and advice.
- Warm and well winter campaigns as well as flu jab promotions.
- Promotion of the council's Medequip amnesty, enabling people to return medical equipment to NHS services.
- School booklets to help promote our family services to support health and wellbeing.
- Nordic Walking video creation and promotion.
- Stop Smoking Stoptober campaign that succeeded in attracted 245 referrals – a 14% improvement on the previous year.
- NHS Health Check and weight loss promotions.
- Healthy pregnancy campaigns.
- Support for Year 6 children about to start at secondary school.

### 3.9 Medway on the Map

- 3.9.1 A Medway on the Map action plan has been created to bring together the council's activities that combined act to help raise the profile of Medway as a great place to live, work, learn and visit. Many of these are covered elsewhere in this document for example our monumental regeneration drive.

These are other important initiatives that took place between 2021-2022.

- 3.9.2 We were delighted to welcome HRH King Charles III (Then Prince of Wales) and HRH Camilla, Queen Consort Camilla (Formerly Duchess of Cornwall) to Medway on 2 February. A visit to the new permanent Dickens exhibition turned into a major opportunity to invite The Queen Consort to open the exhibition and promote our rich connections with the author nationally by also holding a joint reading with Gerald Dickens for Medway school children and inviting the local Dickens groups to join us in costume for the event. The visit was a huge success with national media coverage including images in The Daily Telegraph, Mail Online, The Mirror, London Evening Standard and the Daily Express and the Duchess' media team describing our support as outstanding.

- 3.9.3 **Child Friendly Medway** - One of the early pieces of work on our Child Friendly Medway journey was the creation of a short video showing Medway Council's commitment to putting children at the heart of all we do. Managed by the Communications Team and created by Lavender Blue, the short film showcases some of the many things there are for young people growing up in Medway. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvL2uvXxhiQ>

The Communications Team has created the logo for the Child Friendly Medway initiative as well as other collateral used in projects and events run by the team.

The team has promoted many of the fantastic initiatives being run by the Child Friendly Medway team including their very successful City Hall events run at the Brook Theatre that have attracted more than 100 people to each event, their survey, Friday sports evenings at Medway Park and many others.

- 3.9.4 In March 2022 we were also pleased to welcome the Minister for Public Health, Maggie Throup and the Independent Reviewer of Tobacco to Chatham in March to showcase our Stop Smoking Services, pilot e-cigarettes and our illicit tobacco work. Medway is being hailed as a national case study for our excellent work in this area and there was a major piece in the Times following the visit.

- 3.9.5 **City Status Bid** – the Communications Team was charged with the drafting of the City Status bid working in conjunction with a small core group led by the Deputy Chief Executive. With the support of a large number of Medway businesses and organisations, a strong argument was created in a document that set out why we believed Medway deserves city status. Although

ultimately unsuccessful, the document is a strong showcase of Medway's great strengths as a fabulous place to live, work, learn and visit.

- 3.9.6 Medway also received national publicity for the launch of the new section of **the England Coastal Path** that opened between Grain and Woolwich earlier in the year highlighting some of the lovely walking areas in Medway.
- 3.9.7 Medway Council's Corporate management team was shortlisted for MJ Senior Leadership Team of the year,
- 3.9.8 Our Christmas Campaign saw Rochester Christmas Markets featured in The Times and Lad Bible's list of the top ten Christmas markets.
- 3.9.9 Our sports centres continue to host major national and international sporting events from the finals of the International Wheelchair Rugby broadcast live by Sky Sport to the hosting of International Dance Championships both at Medway Park and the hosting of the Adam Peaty Race Clinic at Strood Sports Centre.

### **3.10 Other projects**

- 3.10.1 **Household support fund** was launched on 19 November, initially with social media and digital newsletters. Engagement rates via this method was excellent, with strong local reach and active use of our website. The promotion proved so popular that we had to pause during the Christmas period to catch up on processing applications. We also developed an information leaflet that was used by our third-party partners, to help capture a wider group of people.
- 3.10.2 Medway Lottery launched in September 2021 and the team worked to raise awareness amongst local good causes that they could apply to become recipients of the Lottery takings and to sign up and help spread the word in Medway. Nearly 60 charities are now signed up as good causes.
- 3.10.3 Organised by the Communications Team the council Emergency SOS Day - welcomed members from Medway's emergency and related services to a celebration afternoon to thank them for all they do for local people and particularly all their superb work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.10.4 The Communications Team has designed the branding and all visuals for the Greater North Kent initiative.
- 3.10.5 In February this year, the council launched a major promotion of International Women's Day supporting the international campaign. As well as events in our libraries, our Sports Team developed an outstanding day of activities at Medway Park aimed at bringing women across Medway together to learn about looking after their health and wellbeing and staying active including visits from leaders from the world of sport and television. A digitally led awareness campaign resulted in 200 people joining us for the day.

- 3.10.6 The Communications Team created a four page booklet to promote services that are predominantly aimed at harder to reach audiences and included this in council tax bills this spring. The booklet, 'Discover more council services for you in 2022', provided information on a number of helpful services we offer.
- 3.10.7 The Communications Team supported the Safer Streets initiative particularly the recent campaign aimed at promoting women and girl's safety within sports. We also supported the promotion of the Safe Spaces scheme for Medway businesses allowing businesses to promote their premises as a safe space for anyone needing immediate help while out. We developed a new brand for the promotion and a new web page to raise awareness on how businesses can get involved.

### **3.11 Media**

3.11.1 The council's Media Team continues to provide an outstanding service ensuring that the council's messages are clearly and effectively communicated to the public via our local media services. They deal with a large number of enquiries each week covering all our services, many of them highly complex but their role is to ensure that the media has clear responses and understands the council position and any action we are taking. During 2021-22 the team responded to 647 media enquiries most of them needing to be turned around within around 24 hours.

3.11.2 The team also issues releases to ensure our proactive news is communicated and clearly explained. During the year, the Press Office issued 275 releases on many of the issues covered in this paper – that's more than five each week. Many of the releases take time to put together with relevant quotes from councillors as well as partners.

The team has also worked to secure national coverage of Medway Council's stories including the Royal Visit this year and our extensive events programme.

3.11.3 The Media Officers sit as part of the Kent Resilience Forum ensuring that Medway's emergency response to major issues such as COVID-19 and Brexit is well supported through clear communications to local people.

3.11.4 The Media Team also leads on many of the council's digital communications and we have seen usage of social media in particular grow in popularity enormously in recent years. We use a variety of channels including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linked In and for some services, Tik Tok. As well as corporate accounts for these channels we also have dedicated accounts for other services including sport, libraries, heritage sites, Visit Medway, archives, MAE, children's social workers, fostering and others.

User numbers for our corporate accounts are now as follows

Facebook	– 20,000
Twitter	- 22,800
Instagram	- 2,949

Linked In - 10,400

### **3.12 Internal Communication**

3.12.1 Excellent internal communication is vitally important at any time within an organisation to keep colleagues informed and engaged, but it has never been more so than during and recovering from COVID-19.

3.12.2 As the council emerged from the pandemic and it was agreed that new ways of working would be implemented as an outcome of the new practices adopted during the pandemic, the internal communications function worked closely with our HR team to ensure that all staff understood the new policy and how it affects them. A major communications campaign was implemented using emails, newsletters and our intranet MedSpace to explain the changes and the different options open to them.

3.12.3 With the new ways of working and with our colleagues located in many different places – the office, home, mobile working in other centres or offices and in our different service buildings – the Communications Team had to ensure that they can communicate with everyone in a clear, effective and timely way.

3.12.4 The team undertook a survey of all staff at the end of 2020 to understand views on communications and how colleagues prefer to be communicated and what they would like to hear about. Nearly 80 per cent of staff are satisfied with the communications they receive and more than 90 per cent are satisfied with communications within their teams. A number of recommendations were made and are being implemented to keep people in touch.

3.12.5 A matrix approach to communications is in place to ensure we cascade information through the organisation and that staff have the opportunity to have their say on matters of importance. Channels include:

- Quarterly Service Manager briefings
- Service Manager and Manager emails
- All staff emails
- In-house Intranet – MedSpace
- Two weekly email to all staff from the Chief Executive with a general news update on council events too.
- Quarterly videos for all staff featuring the Leader and Chief Executive answering staff questions.
- Medway Makers -run by HR – our in-house staff forum.
- AD newsletters – many Assistant Directors send regular emails to their entire teams updating them on news from the Directorate and Services.

3.12.6 The Internal Communications Team has also supported with communications on a number of initiatives for the council including:

- COVID-19 updates.
- Supporting the Climate Response Team launch and promoting in-house engagement activities.



- Supporting the council's Make A Difference Awards with all communications.
- Promoting and raising awareness of various commemorative days including Mental Health awareness, National Adoption week, Remembrance Day, The International Day of people with Disabilities.

#### 4. Finance

- 4.1. The global outbreak of Covid-19 caused significant volatility in financial and property markets which in turn impacted on the Council's on asset and pension fund valuations. These factors, along with changes in the regulatory framework mean that in common with most local authorities, the Council's external audit process continues to be subject to significant delays. The Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton concluded their audit of the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts, issuing an unqualified opinion on the financial statements in October 2021. The report concluded that that the Council had proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, except for the Ofsted's inspection report on the Council's children's social care services, which judged services to help and protect children in Medway to be 'inadequate'.
- 4.2. The Council's financial statements for 2020/21 were published in the Spring of 2022; the external audit of those statements is in the final stages, and we anticipate this will conclude in the Autumn. In the meantime, however Grant Thornton have concluded their work on the Council's value for money arrangements as part of the audit of 2020/21 and published an Interim Annual Report, considered by the Audit Committee on 5 October which again concluded that there were no significant weaknesses in the Council's financial sustainability and governance arrangements, however until Children's Services receive an improved Ofsted judgement, the auditors must note this as a significant weakness in our arrangements to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Portfolio Holders continue to work with senior officers to ensure the delivery of the Children's Services improvement plan programme and the latest Ofsted monitoring visit, held on 11 and 12 May 2022 recognised that Medway's Children's Services has now made 'significant progress' in the support and care provided to older children and care leavers, and that that senior leaders continue to 'focus purposefully' on Medway's improvement journey and remain determined to create 'sustainable improved services' for care leavers and older children in care.
- 4.3. The closure of the 2021/22 accounts has been completed, with the Capital and Revenue Budget Outturn considered by the Cabinet on 7 June 2022 reflecting an underspend of £3.911million, and that the budget requirement had been met without the planned use of reserves of £4.005million, meaning the Council's general reserves were £7.916million higher than projected as at 31 March 2022. Work is underway to prepare the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts and officers are working with Grant Thornton to schedule the audit of those statements in due course.

- 4.4. The first round of budget monitoring for 2022/23 was reported to the Cabinet on 23 August 2022. The capital monitoring report was the first in a new format providing more detail on the purpose, latest activity and funding of the Council's ambitious capital programme, which now stands at £472million and current projections see the programme being delivered within that budget, as the small overspend forecast will be corrected by the addition of grant and developer contributions to be recommended to the Council in November 2022. The revenue monitoring reflects the significant continuing pressures in Children's Services and Adult Social Care arising from higher than budgeted numbers of placements and unit costs, which are the primary drivers of the projected overspend of £12.566million. Portfolio Holders continue to work closely with senior officers on a package of measures intended to contain expenditure within the budget set by Council.
- 4.5. Over the Summer work began on the formulation of the Council's budget for 2023/24, with this work summarised in the Financial Outlook 2023/24 report being considered by the Cabinet on 18 October 2022. The report sets out the scale of the challenge faced by local authorities to balance budgets for the coming year, detailing a range of projections of the impact of inflation, utilities costs and increasing interest rates on the cost of financing our capital programme alongside pressures that continue to manifest in social care. We await the new Chancellor's announcements later in October for any further funding available for local authorities. In the meantime, Portfolio Holders and senior officers are working to identify a range of measures to balance the budget and progress will be reflected in the Draft Budget 2023/24 which will be presented to the Cabinet on 15 November.
- 4.6. Significant work has taken place across Finance to deliver financial support to Medway's businesses and residents, including through the Covid Additional Relief Scheme, the Council Tax Energy Relief scheme and the Household Support Fund which have been administered through our Revenues and Benefits service.
- 4.7. As part of a wider restructure of the Finance & Business Improvement Division, the Finance teams have contributed to the successful delivery of £500,000 saving reflected in the 2022/23 budget, and opportunities to continue to transform and improve the effectiveness of the service while reducing costs continue across the Division as we prepare the budget for 2023/24.

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#### Appendices

None

Background documents

None