

Medway Council
Meeting of Medway Council
Thursday, 19 January 2023
7.00pm to 10.17pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next Full Council meeting

Present: The Worshipful The Mayor of Medway (Councillor Aldous)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Barrett) Councillors Adeoye, Ahmed, Brake, Buckwell, Mrs Diane Chambers, Chitty, Clarke, Cooper, Crozer, Curry, Doe, Fearn, Filmer, Sylvia Griffin, Gulvin, Hackwell, Howcroft-Scott, Hubbard, Mrs Josie Iles, Jarrett, Johnson, Kemp, Khan, Lammas, Lloyd, Mahil, Maple, McDonald, Murray, Opara, Osborne, Paterson, Potter, Prenter, Price, Sands, Andy Stamp, Chrissy Stamp, Tejan, Thorne, Tranter, Mrs Elizabeth Turpin, Rupert Turpin, Van Dyke, Wildey and Williams

In Attendance: Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director, Legal and Governance
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services
Jon Pitt, Democratic Services Officer

537 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Browne, Carr, Rodney Chambers OBE, Edwards, Etheridge, Purdy and Thompson.

538 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Crozer declared an OSI in agenda item No.11 (Temporary Accommodation Purchasing) as he is the Chair of Trustees of AMAT UK, a supplier of supported housing and temporary accommodation to Medway Council. Councillor Crozer left the room during discussion and determination of the item.

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Councillor Doe declared an OSI in relation to any reference to Medway Development Company because he is the Chairman and a Director of the Company. Councillor Doe relied on a dispensation granted by the Councillor Conduct Committee to enable him to take part in any related discussion and voting.

Councillor Gulvin declared an OSI in relation to any reference to Medway Development Company because he is a Director of the Company. Councillor Gulvin relied on a dispensation granted by the Councillor Conduct Committee to enable him to take part in any related discussion and voting.

Other interests

Councillor Cooper declared an interest in relation to any reference to the GP Access Task Group due to her involvement in two of the organisations that had participated in the work of the Task Group.

539 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 10 November 2022 was approved and signed by The Worshipful Mayor of Medway as correct.

540 Mayor's announcements

The Worshipful The Mayor of Medway announced that former Councillor Richard Andrews had passed away. He had served first on Rochester-upon-Medway Council and again on Medway Council.

The Mayor advised Members of the passing of former Councillor Adrian Crowther, who had served on Rochester-upon-Medway Council.

The Mayor said that Wilber, the son of Councillors Elizabeth and Rupert Turpin, had passed away just before Christmas.

On behalf of the Council, the Mayor offered condolences to the families of all those who had passed away.

The Council held a minute's silence.

Councillor Crozer, who had recently been elected as a Councillor for Peninsula ward was welcomed to the meeting by the Mayor. She advised that Councillor Crozer and Councillor Sands had formed an Independent Group and that Councillor Crozer was Leader of the Group.

541 Leader's announcements

There were none.

542 Petitions

Public:

A petition was submitted on behalf of residents of Rainham. The petition called on the Council to repair a depression in Berengrave Lane and to seek compensation from the developer that it was claimed had caused it.

Member:

Councillor Rupert Turpin submitted a petition on behalf of members of the public living on the A230 Maidstone Road, Chatham and neighbouring roads. The petition related to speeding vehicles on Maidstone Road from the Ridgeway to the A229 junction.

Councillor Paterson submitted a petition on behalf of members of the public that called on the Council to work with the Post Office to secure new premises for Rochester Post Office, following the announcement that the current premises would close in November 2023. The petition requested relocation to either the Rochester Tourist Information Centre or Rochester Community Hub.

543 Public questions

Question A - Raza Griffiths of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

“Having a decent public transport system is the sign of a good, forward thinking city. At the moment the people of Medway get a terrible deal from its main bus provider Arriva. It is critically important to:

1. Have information which is accessible, accurate, up to date and for the right bus routes.
2. Change the law to give local people the ability, through their council, to take back control of their bus routes as we have seen in both Manchester and Scotland.
3. Get Arriva to have a system of refunds which is fair, transparent and easy to access when services go wrong, as they frequently do.

Could the Portfolio Holder explain what powers, if any, the Council currently has to ensure that bus companies, which provide an essential service, are delivering an adequate service?”

Councillor Filmer thanked Mr Griffiths for the question. He said that most bus routes in Medway were operated commercially and that the Council did not have direct powers over the companies that ran them. Where the Council provided a subsidy for a bus route to operate, the contract with the operator was a way of ensuring a good quality service was provided.

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The Council also had an Enhanced Partnership agreement with bus operators, which saw joint working to ensure Medway residents had access to good quality bus services and information. Feedback about bus services across Medway was welcome and issues raised and what improvements could be made would be discussed with bus companies at regular engagement meetings. Arriva had recently announced that they now had five new Euro 6 buses operating at the Gillingham depot and that these would operate on the 145 and 164 routes.

Question B - Simon Buckingham of Chatham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:

"I am aware of the actions of a specific private company going around with a Council logo on their uniform using, what some may consider to be "bully boy tactics". I have been assisting an elderly resident who has been unfairly fined by this organisation.

Does the Portfolio Holder accept that the tactics of District Enforcement, when they are not hanging out at the private Medway Motorway Services fining individuals, are likely to reduce people wanting to go to town centres?"

Question C - Damola Animashaun of Chatham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin:

"I want Chatham Town Centre to succeed. I'm very concerned to hear service charges for those businesses in the Pentagon are increasing by more than double inflation. This follows the previous year's increase also being well above inflation.

What does the Portfolio Holder say to a business considering moving out of the Pentagon due to this increase?"

Question D - Caroline McGrath of Chatham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:

"Every other road in Medway has potholes. I drive down these roads trying to avoid the big potholes and to try and avoid damage to my vehicle.

When is Medway Council going to address all these potholes?"

Question E - Paul Everitt of Chatham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, Councillor Brake:

"Why isn't more being done with Medway Maritime Hospital?"

Building more apartments more flats and houses, population growth getting bigger, but the hospital hasn't changed that much. Most of the hospital was built in the 1900s.

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The people of Medway deserve an up to date hospital.”

Question F - Julian Sutton, on behalf of the Medway Green Party, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (Lead Member), Councillor Mrs Josie Iles:

“Hoo Village, and indeed much of the rest of the peninsula, has suffered from the distressing effects of noisy and speeding motorbikes, quad bikes and cars for some years. It is easy to blame the youngsters for these problems, but what else is being offered for their recreational activities!

It is obvious that the quality of life for many peninsula residents is seriously affected by this anti-social behaviour. The noise of the motorbikes (some without licence plates or the rider not wearing a helmet) is deafening. This behaviour also makes the peninsula less safe and reduces the quality of peninsula residents’ lives.

It is a bigger problem than the Police can or wishes to deal with on its own. It will take a multi-faceted approach and, whilst we may wish for it to be, it is unlikely to be solved over-night. It will take investing in a long term coordinated plan to engage with the young population of the peninsula.

It is hoped that the Council has directed increased funding to Youth Workers and clubs to engage with the youngsters over recent years and that facilities are being planned to be constructed, ahead of further house building.

Therefore, what measures are the Council employing to engage with the young peninsula population, such as clubs and recreational activities?

If we do not change what we are doing, the problem will not go away.”

Question G – Kevin Fowle of Chatham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell:

“Can I request that the Weedswood part of my King George Road address be removed and the original Walderslade historical designation and the title deeds be reinstated. My property and those of a lot of King George Road from Walderslade Road to Brake Avenue existed long before the construction in the 1950’s of the Weedswood council estate. It and Wayfield are distinct areas, built as social housing.”

Question H – Peter Bonney of Strood submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:

“According to a recent report by the World Health Organisation the area of Central Strood bounded by the A2, Gordon Road and B2002, has at least twice the acceptable levels of pollution by Nitrogen Oxide (NO2) and Particulate Matter (PM2). This is caused by excessive traffic, especially when it is standing still or very slow moving.

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The A2 is not coping with the heavy weight of traffic heading towards the Bridge and so it constantly comes to a standstill. This is mostly caused by the totally inadequate crossroads at Gun Lane which needs a complete redesign.

Building huge numbers of flats and houses in Rochester along Corporation Street, Rochester Riverside and recently announced plans for more at Bardell Wharf can only be exacerbating the problem.

The heavily polluted area in Strood concerns houses, three junior schools, four infant schools, three nurseries and two large old people's homes all of whom are particularly susceptible to these pollutants and, incidentally, the schools are partly responsible for the high traffic levels in the area with the twice daily school run causing traffic jams and appalling driving behaviour within the residential area.

A residents' traffic survey carried out in 2019 highlighted the rat running problem and a petition was handed in to solve the problem but despite this nothing has happened. A 20mph speed limit was deemed unnecessary.

Let me restate the fact that, according to the World Health Organisation, the area has pollution which is at least twice as high as the acceptable level of traffic-based pollution. The area is overwhelmed by rat running through a street network, which is totally inadequate for that sort of traffic level. The traffic is the source of the pollution.

What does the Council intend to do to correct the problem?"

Question I – Stuart Bourne of Rainham asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

"On 21st July 2022 I asked a question to Councillor Doe at a Council meeting regarding the 13,842 trees that were planted and how many were currently still alive. Councillor Doe failed to answer the question because he said 'a full assessment has not been completed'. It is now nearly 6 months later. What is the current status of the assessment and the trees?"

Councillor Doe thanked Mr Bourne for the question. He said that a full survey was due to be completed in March and April 2023. This was the most appropriate time to undertake it as the trees would have started to leaf again. Survey results would be made available once it had been completed.

Question J - Vivienne Parker of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

"I note the amount of waste being deposited from the Kent County Council area at our household waste recycling centres.

Are Medway Council charging Kent County Council for this?"

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Councillor Filmer thanked Ms Parker for the question. He said that Kent County Council (KCC) did pay Medway Council for waste deposited from its area. The charge was based on the actual number of KCC users as measured by Medway's booking system.

Question K - Stuart Bourne, on behalf of Medway Liberal Democrats, asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

"The cost of living crisis and record increases in people's energy bills are forcing many people in Medway into having to choose whether to heat their homes or put food on the table. Many inspiring organisations, charities and churches across Medway are opening their doors as warm banks to help those in need. We would like to thank them all for their kind generosity in this time of economic crisis.

What is the Council doing to coordinate these efforts to ensure that there is a warm bank in every part of Medway and that people are made aware of them?"

Councillor Doe thanked Mr Bourne for the question and extended the Council's thanks to the wide range of organisations in the community who continued to support vulnerable people. There were some excellent local organisations who supported residents in relation to a number of issues, including the cost of living.

Councillor Doe gave a new example of how the Council was supporting community organisations through the issuing of small grants to organisations who chose to be listed on the Warm Welcome website. He advised that the Warm Welcome scheme was a national initiative that Medway Council was backing. It was hoped that the grant would pay any extra heating and utility costs that the relevant organisation may incur and allow them to open to residents who wanted to access a Warm Welcome space.

Having a single website that multiple partners could promote should also mean that more residents would be aware of where they could go to find a warm space.

Question L - John Castle of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:

"Flood warnings are currently not issued directly by Medway Council, instead relying on third parties to issue such warnings.

Given the frequency of flood warnings within Medway Council, especially the riverside communities, would the Council commit to publicising flood warnings affecting Medway?"

Councillor Hackwell thanked Mr Castle for the question. He said that the Environment Agency had the remit to warn and inform of any tidal flooding

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event. The Agency maintained the expertise and were resourced to carry this out.

For any significant potential flooding events, the Council guided residents to the Alerts and Warnings provided by the Environment Agency via the Council's social media channels and website.

Any residents who wished to sign up for flood warnings and alerts could do so at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings or by calling 0345 988 1188.

Question M - Alan Collins-Rosell of Gillingham asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

“Many people I've spoken to in Rainham are suffering greatly under the cost of living crisis. With skyrocketing energy bills, many are switching off their heating to save what little money they have.

I've already seen some great charities and churches, like St Margaret's Church in Rainham, open their doors and act as warm banks for people in need. But they can only do so much. One suggestion to assist people in need is to use the empty spaces in the Healthy Living Centre in Rainham as a warm bank, now that the cafe isn't operating, to act as a place for people to keep warm, recharge their phones or find out how they can be financially supported.

Does the Council have any plans to work with people at the Healthy Living Centre to implement this, or, if not, is there an alternative location being planned?”

Councillor Doe thanked Mr Collins-Rosell for the question. He agreed that there were some excellent charities and faith settings that offered excellent support to people during what was a difficult financial period for many residents.

Councillor Doe extended the Council's thanks to these organisations supporting people. The Council was not currently undertaking discussions with Rainham Healthy Living Centre, partly due to the different types of pressures that NHS and care settings were facing during winter months.

The Council was working in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including charitable and voluntary organisations. It had recently started to contact all voluntary and community sector groups to inform them of a new small grant scheme launched by the Council. It was hoped that this initiative would provide the necessary financial assistance for organisations to become Warm Welcome sites and be listed on the national Warm Welcome website.

Medway Council and its partners were promoting this website and it was hoped that residents who needed it would access this service.

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Question N – Nina Gurung of Gillingham submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin:

“I know from speaking to local residents they are concerned about community safety. There is reported consultation to reduce overall numbers of uniformed personnel on the streets of Medway.

Does the Portfolio Holder believe that consulting on having less uniformed personnel on the streets will make local people feel more safe?”

Question O – Alan Stockey of Rainham asked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

“Medway Council recently responded to questions put by the Medway Environmental Action Network (MEAN) concerning the Council's progress in engaging and influencing its primary contractors, key partners and Joint Ventures with regards to their combined carbon emission reductions across Medway.

If as has been stated, the Council's own carbon footprint is assessed as being 1.4% of the Medway total footprint, can the Council please provide a breakdown of the residual (98.6%) footprint, specifically illustrating their top 10 specific influence priorities in terms of their primary contractors, key partners and joint ventures?

We assume that this will be based upon the Council's assessment of carbon emissions incurred in delivery of services to Medway, unless an alternative method has been used to prioritise it.”

Councillor Doe thanked Mr Stockey for the question. He said that the Council's 2018/19 carbon footprint had been assessed as being 1.4% of Medway's total footprint. The methodology for this calculation was described in the Council's 2021 Climate Change Action Plan, which was available on the Council website.

Based on this methodology, the Council had not used the “residual footprint” to identify the top ten specific influence priorities. Instead, it was undertaking an assessment of the Council's Scope 3 emissions and would use this approach to inform further actions and projects to reduce emissions more widely across Medway.

A 6-month work placement student from the University of Kent had been appointed to support this action and part of the work would include setting out options for a preferred calculation and reporting methodology. The Council was also working with the Kent Climate Change Network to identify best practice and share learning.

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Question P - Bryan Fowler of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships, Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, the following:

“We are seeing the effects of Permitted Development Rights legislation being used for building projects in Medway. Planning Committee Councillors have expressed their dismay at how this bypasses consideration by this Committee.

As Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration, can you explain what Medway Council is doing to reduce the harm being caused by Permitted Development Rights?”

Responding on behalf of Councillor Chambers, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, thanked Mr Fowler for the question. She said that she shared Mr Fowler’s concerns regarding the use of the permitted development route. The Council had, over many years, consistently expressed concerns to Government and through responses to consultations.

Council officers had raised the issue through their professional channels to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the various professional institutes. Assurance had been provided by local MPs that they understood and agreed with the concerns expressed and examples had been provided to demonstrate the harm caused by the use of Permitted Development Rights.

Councillor Chitty said that, in response, there been some strengthening of the Permitted Development Rights criteria and the considerations that must be applied to such proposals, but that she did not consider this to have gone far enough.

Following recent comments made by the Secretary of State on ensuring the quality of development, the issue would be raised again with the MPs and in a meeting that was due to take place shortly between the Portfolio Holder and the Chief Planner from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Note: As Mr Buckingham, Miss Animashaun, Ms McGrath, Mr Everitt, Mr Sutton, Mr Fowle, Mr Bonney and Ms Gurung were not present at the meeting, the Mayor stated that they would receive written responses to their questions, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E, 7F, 7G, 7H and, 7N respectively, in accordance with Council Rule 8.6.

544 Leader's report

Discussion:

Members received the Leader's Report. The following issues were discussed:

- The improvement journey in Children's Services - The final Ofsted monitoring visit that was due to take place in the next month, ahead of a full reinspection in spring / Summer 2023. There had been significant improvements in areas such as leadership and staff training. While recruitment of staff remained challenging, capacity had been added to the Service to mitigate the risk of vacancies and there was a focus on staff retention and wellbeing. A cohort of newly qualified social workers were now in post. Concern was raised in relation to workforce planning, increasing demand and the need to ensure the Council received adequate funding.
- Higher Needs Block Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding – concern was expressed about the level of funding and why the amount available had decreased.
- Innovation Park Medway - The first building on the southern site was anticipated to be completed in 2024 while the first premises on the northern site were expected to be occupied in Spring 2024. £400,000 of funding had been secured from the Getting Building Funding towards the Runway Park. Events were due to take place shortly to celebrate the completion of infrastructure works and to announce the first tenants on the northern and southern sites.
- Strood Riverside - Designs for the floodgate had been finalised and shared with the Rochester Bridge Trust for approval and work was taking place to reinstate a path.
- Rochester Riverside – 440 units were now occupied.
- Future High Street Fund – a third party operator had been appointed to input into the design phase of the Innovation Hub and procurement for the design phase was imminent.
- Brook Theatre – Design work was underway for the refurbishment of the theatre with the theatre due to close in April 2023 to enable this.
- Levelling Up Round 2 – There was disappointment that the Council had not secured funding from the second round of Levelling Up despite having put in two bids. £14.4million had previously been allocated to Medway in Round 1 and bids would be made in Round 3.
- Gillingham was highlighted as an area of Medway that needed investment. Some investments already made were highlighted, such as the opening of the Learning and Skills Hub at Britton Farm.
- Work with Mid Kent College to look at investment in a College of Art to replace the University for the Creative Arts which planned to leave Medway.
- Greenspaces funding – the Council had been awarded £85,000 from the Levelling Up Parks Fund to deliver improvements at Luton Millennium Green.

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- Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) Highways – work had reached design stage 2. Initial assessment results had been received and environmental mitigation workshops had been held to identify the measures required.
- HIF Strategic Environmental Management (SEMS) – A review of existing survey data for Deangate parkland had been undertaken and feasibility studies had begun on the community park proposal. The Hoo Wetland reserve planning application was due to be determined in March 2023 and the SEMS Public Rights of way project would begin the feasibility phase shortly.
- Integrated Care Strategy – The Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy was being developed and would build upon work previously undertaken across the system.
- The Hoo Peninsula – concern was expressed that planned development could threaten wildlife. The previous closure of Deangate Ridge Golf course and the future provision of leisure services in the areas were also highlighted.
- Cost of living – concern was expressed about the cost of living, the affordability of council tax, the financial difficulties being experienced by some Medway residents and the need of some to access Warm Banks, which was a situation that it was suggested no one should be in.
- The Medway Tunnel – Concern about the Council's ownership of the Medway Tunnel and the cost of maintaining it. It was also stated that the cost of running the Tunnel was less than the amount of funding received.

545 Report on Overview and Scrutiny Activity

Discussion:

Members received a report on overview and scrutiny activity and raised the following issues during debate:

- GP Access Task Group – some Members expressed concern that the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee had taken the decision not to recommend its interim report and recommendations to Cabinet. Concerns were raised regarding how this would be seen by those who had participated in the review and the level of resources available to complete the work later in 2023. Other Members said that the decision was necessary due to the relatively small number of GPs that the Task Group had been able to engage with and that more detailed analysis was needed. It was also suggested that the Task Group report recommendations needed to be more Medway specific and that there was a need for the Task Group to meet a rural GP.
- Community Diagnostic Centre – the welcome news that development of a Centre was planned in Medway.
- Appreciation of the work by NHS staff, particularly Medway Foundation Trust (MFT) and the South East Coast Ambulance Service in the context of the current pressures. The innovative ideas that MFT were developing to address the issues faced were also highlighted.

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- Highway infrastructure and road safety – some concern was expressed regarding the condition of some roads in Medway, developers preventing access to car parks and the impact this had on a local youth theatre.
- Regeneration and the benefits that this would bring to the people of Medway.
- Black history in schools – the importance of teaching this in schools and a project taking place to help ensure this was achieved effectively.

Decision:

The Council noted the report.

546 Members' questions

Question A – Councillor Sands asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

“Since the creation of the unitary authority in 1998, Medway Council has spent considerable time, investment, and effort on aspirations for the urban area of the district - being awarded city status and the creation of a city centre in Chatham.

Little attention has been paid to the aspirations for the rural areas of the district, particularly the Hoo Peninsula. This area is a unique part of the scenic Kent landscape, covered with designations protecting its national and international wildness - critical for wildlife and important species such as the Nightingale with its strong cultural symbolism. This natural heritage is distinctive, worthy, and more than qualifies for wider designation in the form of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - as per Natural England's requirements for consideration.

The Hoo Peninsula would join the Kent Downs AONB - bridged by Higham, Shorne and Thong into Cobham. We share the topography of the Downs, with a number of distinctive ridges and vales extending out onto the Peninsula - the ancient Saxon word "Hoo" means the 'distinct heel-shape of the ridge of hills'.

I believe it is now the perfect time for the Hoo Peninsula to become an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - especially at a time with a more environmentally conscious public, the serious threat of climate change, habitat and biodiversity deterioration and a government that is looking at expanding or creating new designated areas. With its rich diversity of wildlife, the Peninsula has very significant potential for the expansion and creation of new habitats, including large scale rewilding.

Reputable environmental organisations such as Natural England, the RSPB and the Kent Wildlife Trust recognise the importance and significance of the Hoo Peninsula and its further environmental potential.

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Will this Council and this administration support the designation of the Hoo Peninsula as an AONB and join other organisations and residents in making this ambition a reality?"

Councillor Jarrett thanked Councillor Sands for the question. He said that much of the area was already designated as being of national and international importance for biodiversity and that this was protected under policy.

Medway Council had a strong track record of partnership working on environmental programmes on the Hoo Peninsula, including current work on the Housing Infrastructure Fund's Strategic Environmental Management Scheme, BirdWise, which Councillor Jarrett chaired and Whose Hoo.

It was unlikely that the characteristics and geography of the Hoo Peninsula would meet the criteria for an extension to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This had been discussed with the Director of the Kent Downs AONB in June 2022 at a meeting of the Council's Rural Liaison Committee and he had not encouraged such a proposal.

The AONB's Joint Advisory Committee had previously considered and rejected proposals for boundary changes to include immediately adjacent land. These decisions had been made on the grounds of feasibility and resources, including advice from Natural England that the process could take up to 10 years. The process for establishing a new AONB was lengthy, required significant resources and would be subject to an independent review.

Councillor Jarrett considered that many of the ambitions stated in the question were not reliant on AONB status and that there may be other ways to achieve the environmental objectives more quickly than undertaking a review of the Kent Downs AONB boundary or requesting the establishment of a new AONB. The proposal was therefore not considered to be an appropriate approach.

Question B - Councillor Johnson asked the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, Councillor Potter, the following:

"Following Kent Police's decision to remove the Police Schools' Team from Medway schools, which has resulted in the loss of the valuable work that the team undertook, what action has the Portfolio Holder taken to ensure the return of the team at the earliest opportunity?"

Councillor Potter thanked Councillor Johnson for the question. He said that whilst no school leaders had raised the issue with him directly, engagement between schools and the Police was an important matter. Councillor Potter was reassured by the partnership approach being taken by Kent Police to engage and consult with schools and academies on proposals under the neighbourhood policing model.

Whilst a local authority was not responsible for the decisions taken by Kent Police in how they structured their resources and delivered outreach support to Medway's schools, Medway Council continued to work closely with Kent Police,

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led by the work of the Portfolio Holder for Resources, which included Community Safety.

Question C – Councillor Maple asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:

“James Jamieson, the Conservative Local Government Association Chair, has called for the introduction of compulsory identification to be delayed until after May 2023. With the planned introduction of the compulsory requirement to produce identification to be able to play their part in Medway democratic processes, could you confirm the number of Medway residents who have been prosecuted for voting fraud in the last 10 years?”

Councillor Hackwell thanked Councillor Maple for the question. He said that the Electoral Commission reported on the number and types of cases of electoral fraud investigated and their statistics went back to 2010, although they only showed results by police area from 2018 onwards. Since 2018, there had been 17 cases of allegations reported in Kent, with only 1 in Medway itself. The Medway case related to local elections and resulted in no further action due to a lack of evidence. The specific nature of allegations would not be reported and there would be no guarantee that the Returning Officer would be informed of the case.

The introduction of Voter ID was designed to prevent ‘personation’, the crime of pretending to be someone else when voting. The Government, whilst acknowledging that levels of fraud were low, argued that every ballot mattered and that voter ID would protect voters from having their vote stolen.

Question D – Councillor Murray asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

“The recent wet and cold weather has had a severe impact on the already poorly maintained Medway roads. City Way, which currently spans three Council wards, is in a very poor state where inadequate repairs to potholes are now large craters making driving and cycling hazardous for road users. Instead of wasting Council taxpayers’ money on short-term repairs, can the Portfolio Holder tell me why he has not developed a more proactive road improvement policy instead of simply waiting for dangerous potholes to appear?”

Councillor Filmer thanked Councillor Murray for the question. He said that Medway’s highway network was extensive, making it one of the largest assets owned by the Council. The Council had a statutory duty to maintain the public highway but fulfilling that duty with such an extensive network could be challenging.

The recent cold and wet weather had impacted Medway’s roads, but this was a national problem rather than being Medway specific. Based on National Indicators, Medway’s Classified Network was in a better state than the national average. In the last year only 2% of A roads required maintenance compared to

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4% nationally and of Medway's B and C classed roads, 5% required maintenance compared to 6% nationally.

Councillor Filmer gave assurance that taxpayers' money was not being wasted on short-term repairs. For the safety of residents and road users, critical repairs were undertaken in the form of pothole patching. The Council also had a robust annual resurfacing programme which ensured that funding was spent responsibly by concentrating on the most deteriorated areas of the highways Network.

Question E – Councillor Hubbard asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

“The Strood Town Centre Forum, a body set up by Medway Council, has not met for more than seven years (not since the passing of the last independent Chairman) due to the political interference and lack of leadership from the Council's Portfolio Holder. The Forum is a partnership of Strood businesses and stakeholders working with Kent Police and Medway Council, officers and councillors. It is a platform to share information and explore opportunities to increase footfall, keeping Strood town centre relevant. During the Covid pandemic and again now in the cost-of-living crises, businesses are focused on their survival. Some long-term businesses and services have gone from the town centre. We need to reverse this trend.

When can we expect the Strood Town Centre Forum to reconvene?”

Councillor Chitty said that the Strood Town Centre Forum had not met for several years. The Forum was a partnership of Strood businesses and stakeholders working with Kent Police.

Council officers had tried to bring businesses together to resume the Forum but there had not been any positive response. This had been attempted again more recently, also without a positive response and could have been due to developments in Strood. There had been much regeneration work with many businesses coming into the town centre and surrounding areas. This had brought value and employment and names, such as Marks & Spencer were now present. The town centre had seen many changes, such as Strood Library relocating there and other services that had come into Strood.

Councillor Chitty said that this was fantastic for people wishing to make direct contact with the Council and that the changes had been popular. She concluded that it would be nice to see the Strood Town Centre Forum meeting again, but that she was not able to try to force people to do something that they did not want to.

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Question F – Councillor Paterson asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

“It is reported that the Post Office in Rochester is planned to leave its current site. Will the Portfolio Holder commit to working with the Post Office and with all members in Rochester (West and East) whose constituents rely on it, to find a suitable alternative on Rochester High Street?”

Councillor Chitty said that whenever there had been a proposal to close a Post Office previously, Medway Council and its Members had made strong representations in relation to these post offices.

The Post Office was important for the centre of Rochester and to lose it would be a tragedy for the people who depended on it. Councillor Chitty said there was agreement on this. She concluded that there was a need to work together to prevent the closure and to look at an alternative site.

Question G – Councillor Prenter asked the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, Councillor Brake, the following:

“The recent GP Task Group heard from health professionals that 85% of patients’ issues brought to GP appointments are socially, derived showing that poverty, poor housing, low pay and the resulting impact on mental wellbeing are having a serious impact on Medway residents. The Task Group also heard that where other services, such as those provided by the Council or commissioned from the voluntary sector are able to work in partnership with GP practices to focus support on identified patients, those impacted can start to turn their lives around. Can the Portfolio Holder assure me of his support for this innovative type of work and will he work to make the necessary resources available?”

Councillor Brake thanked Councillor Prenter for the question. He thanked Members of the GP Access Task Group for their work on the review. Sympathies were with GPs and NHS colleagues in view of the immense pressure they were under but there was also a need to do everything possible to ensure appropriate access to primary care and the provision of effective support. Additional work needed to be undertaken on the Task Group’s interim report and Councillor Brake looked forward to seeing this once the work had been completed.

It was pleasing to note in the interim report references regarding social prescribing. This work played a key role to support people who had multifaceted issues that went beyond a GPs normal scope. Social prescribing contributed to relieving pressure on GPs, and the wider NHS and social care system.

The newly established NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board brought the opportunity of a more joined up approach between the NHS, Council and other stakeholders. The creation of an Integrated Care Strategy for Kent and

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Medway, that was informed by local priorities, would also help to further stimulate innovation within Medway.

Councillor Brake said that he fully supported a joined-up approach across the health and social care landscape to support Medway residents in the best way possible. In the previous week, the Council's Cabinet had agreed to expand Medway's Benefits Team to offer a broader and more centralised Benefits and Financial Service. This would entail, initially, incorporating the Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service. Council officers had been asked to explore further opportunities to develop the service provided to some of Medway's most vulnerable residents.

Question H - Councillor Curry asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

"Medway's planning service team work tirelessly in areas such as development control, planning enforcement, and on the emerging local plan. Can the Portfolio Holder tell us what is being done to address the serious under resourcing and recruitment issues that this team faces at the moment?"

Councillor Chitty thanked Councillor Curry for the question. She agreed that Medway's planning team worked tirelessly and that resources were at a premium. There were currently a number of vacancies, some as a result of the recent resignations of key staff. Councillor Chitty was working with senior managers to agree what steps could be taken in the short and longer term to address this resourcing issue, minimise the impact on remaining staff and to continue to provide an outstanding planning service.

It was important to understand the reasons for Council officers leaving their jobs and although exit interviews were undertaken these were confidential and so did not provide feedback. Councillor Chitty was confident that the main factor was not remuneration and considered that behaviour towards officers was likely to be a factor, both relating to some Councillors and members of the public.

Councillor Chitty said that officers needed to be treated with respect and that it should be remembered that respect was earned rather than just being given and that there was a need to look deeper to find out why some officers were leaving the Council. She said that it was often not clear precisely why officers had chosen to move on and that while she recognised that for some, this would be due to financial reasons or being promoted, there was a need to look at the reasons and she hoped that all Members would give it consideration.

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Question I – Councillor Howcroft-Scott asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

“Can the Leader of the Council give an annual breakdown of the level of Revenue Support Grant received by Medway Council since 2010?”

Councillor Jarrett thanked Councillor Howcroft-Scott for the question. He said that in 2010 Medway Council had received £85.130million in Formula Grant from the Government, which was the funding stream that had been replaced by the Revenue Support Grant in 2014/15. The funding had reduced over time to the £7.308million expected to be received through the Revenue Support Grant in 2023/24. This was according to the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The table below, showing the amount of Formula Grant / Revenue Support Grant received each year since 2010, was circulated to all Council Members present at the meeting.

The funding shown in the table did not take into account the many specific grants awarded had been rolled into the Revenue Support Grant over time. The loss of Government Grant was, therefore, more than that set out in table. Councillor Jarrett said that the reason for this situation was overspending by the previous Labour Government.

Financial Year	Medway Council allocation £000s
2010/11 – Formula Grant	85,130
2011/12 – Formula Grant	86,096
2012/13 – Formula Grant	80,743
2013/14 – Formula Grant	76,147
2014/15 – Revenue Support Grant	52,379
2015/16 – Revenue Support Grant	38,784
2016/17 – Revenue Support Grant	28,031
2017/18 – Revenue Support Grant	18,504
2018/19 – Revenue Support Grant	12,306
2019/20 – Revenue Support Grant	6,053
2020/21 – Revenue Support Grant	6,151
2021/22 – Revenue Support Grant	6,185
2022/23 – Revenue Support Grant	6,380
2023/24 (TBC) – Revenue Support Grant	7,308

Question J – Councillor Khan asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, the following:

“Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that every polling station will have at least one female member of staff available from 7am to 10pm on May 4th for checking voter identification, recognising sensitivities that may require a female member of staff to carry out the check?”

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Councillor Hackwell thanked Councillor Khan for the question. He said that the Electoral Services team were currently contacting existing election staff about their availability for the Local and Parish elections on 4 May 2023 and calculating the number of staff required at each polling station, taking into account the new voter ID requirements, historic and expected turnout, amongst other factors. As far as possible, a female member of staff would be available at each polling station to assist voters who requested to have their voter ID checked by a female member of staff, if for example they had to remove head coverings. Should it not be possible to put this into place, it was intended that female polling station inspectors would be given delegated authority by the Returning Officer to carry out these checks. This was in line with Electoral Commission guidance, which was not mandatory.

Question K - Councillor Mahil submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin:

“In the proposal for the redevelopment of the open space at The Paddock in Chatham, does the Portfolio Holder have any idea what the annual maintenance costs will be, especially for the proposed water feature?”

Question L – Councillor Cooper submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:

“When does the Council expect to have a fully operational, affordable Ultra Low Emission / electric bus service operating in Medway?”

Question M – Councillor Van Dyke submitted the following to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:

“In its response to the Hoo development Framework consultation, the Medway Labour and Cooperative Group proposed that priority should be given to the establishment of an electric bus service from the new developments at Hoo into Strood Station. Does the Portfolio Holder agree with this new sustainable approach for the developments in Hoo, in the interests of Medway’s businesses, community and environment?”

Question N – Councillor Price submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:

“It is important that properties on our High Street are kept in good condition in order not to damage the appearance of our shared town centre space.

Could the Council please write to the owners of properties on Gillingham High Street who are failing to maintain their properties to a sufficient standard (such as 122-124 High Street, Gillingham) to remind them of the importance of a clean town centre?”

Question O – Councillor McDonald submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Services, Councillor Brake:

Will Chatham Town Centre ever get a healthy living centre?

Note: The Mayor stated that since the time allocation for Member questions had been exhausted, written responses would be provided to questions 10K to 100.

547 Temporary Accommodation Purchasing

Background:

This report set out the Council’s position and legal duties in respect of providing temporary accommodation and the strategic need for change in the current profile of provision.

The report presented the business case for commencing a pilot to purchase accommodation that would be used as temporary accommodation. The Council was recommended to agree to additional borrowing of funds to support the pilot.

The report asked the Council to agree and addition of £5,590,000 to the Capital Programme to facilitate the pilot to purchase approximately 20 two bedroom properties.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, supported by the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council agreed to add £5,590,000 to the Capital Programme (funded by prudential borrowing) to facilitate the pilot to purchase approximately 20 two bedroom properties.

548 Treasury Management Strategy Mid-Year Review Report 2022/23

Background:

This report provided an overview of treasury management activity since 1 April 2022 and presented a review of the Treasury Strategy approved by Council on 24 February 2022.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, supported by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

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Decision:

The Council noted the report.

549 Medway Youth Council Annual Conference Report 2022

Background:

This report provided the Council with the outcomes of the Medway Youth Council (MYC) annual conference 2022 following research into the impact poverty had on young people.

At its meeting on 5 January 2023, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that the report be reported to Full Council.

Councillor Kemp, supported by Councillor Lammas, proposed the recommendation set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council noted the Medway Youth Council Annual Conference Report 2022, which detailed outcomes of the Youth Council's research into the Impact of poverty on young people, along with the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out at section 4 to the report.

550 Change to the Constitution - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

Background:

This report set out that on 25 August 2022, the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee had proposed that going forward, the Committee would receive an annual strategic report in relation to Medway Norse, with the Regeneration, Culture and Environment (RCE) Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to consider an annual operational report.

At its meeting on 8 December 2022, the RCE Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that it wished to receive a Medway Norse annual operational report and agreed to recommend to Full Council a change to the Council's Constitution to facilitate this.

The Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Hackwell, supported by Councillor Kemp, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

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Decision:

The Council agreed the changes to the Overview and Scrutiny Rules set out in the Council's Constitution (Chapter 4, Part 5), as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

551 Allocation of Committee Seats

Background:

This report set out the position regarding the overall allocation of seats on Committees following the creation of an Independent Group and, separately, an increase in size of the Conservative Group.

The result of these changes was that two additional committee seats would be allocated to the Conservative Group, whilst the Labour and Co-operative Group would lose two committee seats. The Independent Group would be entitled to five committee seats in total.

Councillor Kemp, supported by Councillor Opara, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

- a) The Council noted the review of the allocation of seats on the Committees of the Council as set out in section 3 of the report.
- b) The Council agreed the allocation of seats on the Committees of the Council as set out in Appendix B to the report.
- c) The Council agreed the changes to outside bodies as set out in paragraphs 3.12.1 – 3.12.3 of the report.
- d) The Council agreed the membership changes to the Committees of the Council and outside bodies as set out in Appendix C to the report.
- e) The Council noted that the Licensing and Safety Committee would be asked to review the membership of its Sub Committees at its next meeting.

552 Schedule of Meetings 2023/24

Background:

This report set out a provisional programme of meetings for the 2023/24 municipal year for recommendation to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 24 May 2023.

Councillor Kemp, supported by Councillor Opara, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

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Decision:

The Council agreed a provisional programme of Council and Committee meetings for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report for recommendation to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 24 May 2023.

553 Use of Urgency Provisions

Background:

This report provided details of recent usage of urgency provisions contained within the Constitution.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, supported by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council noted the report with regards to the use of urgency provisions set out in the report.

554 Motions

Motion A – proposed by Councillor Gulvin and supported by Councillor Tejan

“Return of Investment Zones

Formerly known as Enterprise Zones, the aim of these special zones is to “assist the parts of Britain that had missed out in the last ten years” (Osborne, 2011). Medway was previously selected as part of a North Kent Enterprise Zone, with Innovation Park Medway, which will provide significant support to businesses and our local community and has attracted national attention and further investment into Medway.

The aim of Investment Zones are to drive growth and unlock housing across the UK by lowering taxes and liberalising planning frameworks to encourage rapid development and business investment. We did submit a bid but sadly, these were shelved in the Autumn Financial Statement and replaced by “research clusters”.

Therefore, as a Council, we urge government to re-think this policy and consider the vast benefits that come along with these zones.

We are committed to the businesses that are intrinsic to Medway and committed to being able to welcome as many businesses, new and old, as we can. We believe in our residents and any support we can provide is valuable.

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As a Council, we commit to:

- Writing a considered letter to the government explaining all the benefits this scheme has provided to businesses and urging them to reinstate the Investment Zones.”

Decision:

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Motion B – proposed by Councillor Osborne and supported by Councillor Van Dyke

1. “There were 32,541 recorded crimes in Medway between April 2021 – March 2022 (Kent Police Data November 2022).
2. There were 116 crimes per 1,000 people according to the Community Safety Partnership report agreed in December 2022.
3. The Victim Based Crime Statistics highlight Medway is the seventh highest Unitary Authority area across England for reported crime per 1,000 people.
4. There were 5,641 incidents between April 2021 - March 2022 of anti-social behaviour.
5. Kent Police have proposed Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) numbers to be cut as job losses to save £7m, cutting 70% of PCSO Numbers. The force has proposed to close 208 full-time equivalent PCSO positions, leaving 102 officers in post.
6. The HM Inspectorate of Constabulary Report (2022) concluded that Investigating Crime, Communication and responding to the Public and Managing Offenders were all areas of concern for Kent Police.
7. Proposals to establish local Community Payback Boards and supporting Magistrates with community participation in sentencing and redress have been brought forward by Crest Advisory.
8. Educational professionals and the wider community were very disappointed at the withdrawal of the schools’ policing team in Medway at very short notice.

Council further notes:

1. That several inner urban Medway wards are amongst the highest levels of reported crime in the South East region.
2. That Medway Council can support Kent Police by partnering on communication and engaging the public and managing offenders through

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greater engagement of Youth Offending teams and supporting Community Payback through probation.

3. That Redbridge Council has had significant success in improving community engagement with neighbourhood policing through the establishment of Enforcement Hubs.
4. The Council can review and report back on a proposal to partner with Criminal Justice partners and the Probation Service to support Medway and Kent magistrates in community sentencing.

Council resolves:

1. To write to the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to allocate an additional 80 Police officers to Medway from April 2023 in light of additional Kent Police Budget capacity with the reduction of PCSO numbers and focus on increased police numbers with the new Neighbourhood Policing model for Kent.
2. To propose to Cabinet that the Medway Community Safety Partnership has an independent chair with no formal party affiliation for the next term of office and that the Executive nominate such a person to ensure robust scrutiny of the PCC takes place without fear or favour.
3. To visit Redbridge Council and explore the Enforcement Hub proposal, engaging other community stakeholders in shared services to challenge crime, anti-social behaviour and environmental crimes.
4. To explore and report to Cabinet on proposals to better support Probation Services and community sentencing colleagues on public and victim engagement.”

In accordance with Rule 12.4 of the Council Rules, a recorded vote on the motion was taken.

For: Councillors Cooper, Crozer, Curry, Howcroft-Scott, Hubbard, Johnson, Khan, Lloyd, Mahil, Maple, McDonald, Murray, Osborne, Paterson, Prenter, Price, Sands, Andy Stamp, Chrissy Stamp and Van Dyke. (20)

Against: Councillors Adeoye, Ahmed, Aldous, Barrett, Brake, Buckwell, Chitty, Clarke, Doe, Fearn, Filmer, Griffin, Gulvin, Hackwell, Mrs Josie Iles, Jarrett, Kemp, Lammas, Opara, Potter, Tejan, Thorne, Tranter, Mrs Elizabeth Turpin, Wildey and Williams. (26)

Abstain: Councillor Rupert Turpin. (1)

Note: In addition to the Councillors named in the minutes of agenda item no. 2, Apologies for Absence, Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers was not present for the recorded vote.

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Decision:

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

Mayor

Date:

Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services

Telephone: 01634 332509

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk