

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26 March 2024

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Edwards, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, how they have and will undertake political challenge and leadership and what their priorities and ambitions are for the year ahead.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Committee are asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The areas within the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Economic Regeneration
- Social Regeneration
- Inward Investment
- Town Centres
- Markets
- Skills
- Small Business

3. Background

3.1 I am delighted to have taken on the Portfolio Holder responsibility for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment and I would like to start my report by giving thanks to the various staff who, day to day, run

council services with exceptional commitment, enthusiasm, and care for the residents of Medway and the future opportunities available to them.

- 3.2. The Council and its staff have worked tirelessly to minimise the impact on residents of the financial situation that the Council currently faces but also the importance of delivering high quality statutory services, whilst seeking positive outcomes for residents of Medway.
- 3.3. Our Economic Development initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering growth and innovation and providing support to businesses across Medway.
- 3.4. Town Centres are the vibrant heart of communities, and the Regeneration and Town Centre Teams are instrumental in revitalising and nurturing these essential hubs of activity through key interventions such as Future High Streets Fund and High Street Heritage Action Zone.
- 3.5. The Skills and Employment team equip residents with the necessary skills to thrive in today's dynamic economic landscape through Medway Adult Education and the Medway Apprenticeship Advice Service.
- 3.6. The Strategy and Investment team continue to attract funding for the benefit of all Medway residents, including delivering a wide variety of initiatives enabled through the Shared Prosperity Fund programme which supports pride in place for communities and marginalised groups across Medway, as well as delivering the Levelling up Fund programme focusing on growing the creative sector and providing workspace and jobs.

4. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 4.1 My portfolio impacts all residents and communities across Medway, from directly supporting communities, stakeholders, businesses, and organisations, to attracting investment and maximising growth for all, and delivering on our Council priorities. Partnership working is imperative for promoting community engagement and maximising resources to deliver effective services tailored to the needs of residents.
- 4.2 The Town Centres Board has continued to meet as a Cabinet Advisory Group steering and monitoring the Council's role in working to regenerate the town centres. A variety of initiatives and projects have been discussed and advice and strategic direction provided.
- 4.3 The Council has re-established the Strood Town Centre Forum, providing key stakeholders and businesses in Strood with a platform for engagement and collaboration, and ensuring parity across our town centres.
- 4.4 Work continues with the National High Street Taskforce, Medway external stakeholders including Business for Medway, visits and support to Medway Businesses, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, FSB Kent, Medway Meetup group, Town Centre Forums, High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Cultural Consortia, Historic England, community groups and members.

- 4.5 Medway is represented as a partner and upper tier authority of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), alongside Kent, Essex, East Sussex, Thurrock and Southend. SELEP is working towards its closure in March as mandated by Government, this includes closure of the SELEP Accountability Board, SELEP Strategic Board and SELEP Investment Panel. Medway has participated in five thematic workshops and various regional issues have been discussed at length to transition LEP responsibilities to Local Authorities in April.
- 4.6 This year via the SELEP, our Innovation Hub project in Chatham secured £300,000 Getting Building Fund (GBF). This was supported at Federated Board level through Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) where a joint offer of workspace projects across the region were put forward and successfully awarded funding.
- 4.7 Medway continues strong partnership working with Kent County Council through the KMEP as a new Functional Economic Area as mandated by Government. A joint Kent and Medway LEP Integration Plan was agreed by Cabinet in January 2024 and submitted to Government. Strategic direction for the region is set out in a new joint Kent and Medway Economic Framework, which will be coming to Cabinet in April.
- 4.8 The Medway Skills Partnership Board is in the process of being re-set with a fresh set of Terms of Reference underway.
- 4.9 The commitment to support small businesses led to Medway signing the Federation for Small Business Local Pledge early in the new administration. Ensuring access for over 14,000 local businesses to an elected champion and named officer to support them via consultations, grants, advice, and net zero support.
- 4.10 Last Autumn saw the relaunch of the Kent and Medway Business Fund providing 0% interest loans to small businesses of up to £600,000 with engagement in and promotion of the fund a high priority.
- 4.11 When the closure of Wilkos was announced, work was commenced to support staff at all four Medway stores. Sessions were set up for each store, with support provided from Skills, Employment & Adult Education, Household Support Fund, National Careers Service and Job Centre Plus. Through this, many Wilko staff undertook courses and received CV and job application support.
- 4.12 Medway's markets continue to play a key role in bringing communities together and provide many socially inclusive activities. They encourage entrepreneurship and enterprise, provide a low-cost entry point for start-ups, and allow products to be tried and tested. A markets policy is being developed with internal colleagues from licensing, street trading and legal to enable and promote street trading activities across Medway's Town Centres.

4.13 The Council has not previously had an Investment Strategy. This is a priority for next year to ensure we can deliver long-term economic growth for the benefit of our residents and communities.

5. Championing the Interests of Medway Residents

5.1. Quarterly meetings with the Business for Medway Board are held representing a range of businesses sectors and sizes across Medway, along with representation from the Federation for Small Business and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce sharing views on how best the Council can support the business community.

5.2. Regular Town Centre Forum meetings provide opportunities for key stakeholders (include businesses) to collaborate and discuss Town Centre issues and input on key initiatives and projects.

5.3. The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Year 2 delivery is underway. The SPF programme is made up of a network of partners, businesses, and not-for-profit organisations. The projects focus on supporting communities and local businesses. The successful launch event was attended by 130 stakeholders and residents, who were asked to put forward their views and ideas for potential projects.

5.4. The Medway Town Centres Strategy was developed and launched Spring 2023 at the successful and well received 'Re-imagining High Streets' event, where over 130 stakeholders attended to put their views and thoughts forward on regenerating Medway's town centres and high streets.

6. Support for key service areas

6.1 Key service areas in my portfolio include economic development, skills, business support, supporting our town centres and communities, and attracting and delivering on our investment programmes.

6.2 Economic Development

6.2.1 The 24-month Scale Up and Growth Entrepreneur programmes are close to the end of their lifecycle. The first cohort of five businesses on the Scale Up programme attracted £395,000 of investment. The Growth Entrepreneur programme, though smaller in scale, had a noted success 'Vanisher'. Which, after support and a Partners for Growth Grant, has taken a unit in Gillingham Town Centre.

6.2.2 The Partners for Growth Grant supported 36 businesses, awarding £28,500 to startups and small businesses looking to use the fund to grow in the past year. The fund, which was due to end March 2024, has been extended into 2025 utilising the Shared Prosperity Fund programme.

6.2.3 Two new green initiatives were launched in December 2023. The first initiative is fully funded Net Zero Audits to support businesses to reduce their carbon

footprint, evidence of which is increasingly important during procurement exercises. The second is a new grant fund, Partners for Green Growth, providing up to £2,500 to assist businesses in taking recommended steps to reduce their carbon footprint.

- 6.2.4 The Kent and Medway Business Fund relaunched in November and Medway is once again playing an active role under the new administration. After a successful promotional campaign, Medway is in the top quarter of expressions of interest in the fund, with an early success receiving funding being eco-friendly business Guscott Heating who are on the second Scale Up cohort.
- 6.2.5 The 24-month footfall improving awareness campaign of the Intra/Old High Street area has been a success with footfall recovered after the Covid19 pandemic and awareness of the businesses in the area noticeably higher.
- 6.2.6 Workshops on a variety of topics from online advertising to pitching to investors have been delivered in partnership with NatWest, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Kent Foundation, supported by the SPF programme.
- 6.2.7 To support the local supply chain, regular networking events have been hosted and sponsored with over 60 business representatives at each of the quarterly events.

6.3 Innovation

- 6.3.1 Support for Medway's food and drink industry in partnership with The University of Greenwich's Food Innovation Centre continues with the Growing Kent and Medway Food Accelerator programme where Medway businesses are disproportionately represented. An expression of interest for the funding of much needed kitchen incubation space has been submitted.
- 6.3.2 The Innovation Hub is due to open by Autumn, increasing footfall in the Pentagon Centre and providing much needed flexible space for startups and SMEs. With a new central and accessible location for both workshop delivery and 1-2-1 support.
- 6.3.3 Medway retains its entrepreneurial title with the highest number of new businesses in Kent (2,958) forming 1 in 6 of new startups in the County. For comparison this is followed by Dartford (1,628) and Maidstone (1,625).
- 6.3.4 The Innovation Centre Medway (ICM) has 55 offices which are normally fully occupied supporting a wide range of businesses, from support services like accountants, lawyers, IT and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to more delivery-based operations such as bomb disposal, engineering, and property development. The ICM is also a key meeting / course venue for schools, driver's courses, council family counselling services and health and safety courses.

6.3.5 The Innovation Studio Medway (ISM), constructed from storage containers with 15 offices and 17 storage units underneath is also fully occupied. This site attracts local businesses that need storage and office space and is targeted towards trades such as electricians, plumbing and heating and air conditioning contractors as well as locals attracted by the location of the site in proximity to home and the river.

6.3.6 We have taken the decision to review options for the future delivery of Innovation Park Medway (IPM). The market has changed significantly in the current financial climate, particularly with higher interest rates, and with COVID-19 impacting the way businesses now work. Demand was not sufficient and the business case for the original vision for IPM does not hold up. This options analysis will ensure the most sustainable future for the sites and to achieve the outcomes envisaged from the sites, chiefly economic growth, and high value jobs.

6.4 Town Centres

6.4.1 The Town Centres Board has met as a Cabinet Advisory Group, steering and monitoring the Council's role in working to regenerate the town centres. A variety of initiatives and projects have been discussed and advice and strategic direction provided.

6.4.2 The Medway Town Centres Strategy was developed and well received at the Re-imagining High Streets and SPF launch event in May 2023. The Strategy is a framework which supports a new way of working - embracing a behaviour of collaborating, co-designing and co-creating projects and solutions to key issues with internal and external stakeholders to help regenerate and re-purpose Medway's town centres so they are economically sustainable and fit for the future. This approach is now being applied through the delivery of a number of successful regeneration programmes and funding programmes including the SPF, with many new collaborative partnerships and more community led and bottom-up driven projects which also is strengthening local capacity and ownership of the regeneration agenda.

6.4.3 Work has been undertaken with the National High Street Taskforce, focusing on Gillingham as one of the most deprived areas in Medway to consider the needs, opportunities of the area and how to build a stronger collaborative partnership approach to taking this forward. Several place-making workshops have been undertaken and a further one is planned as well as support for Gillingham Co-creation pilot place-making programme going forward.

6.4.4 Medway has five unique town centres each with its own initiatives tailored for its residents, visitors, businesses, and stakeholders.

6.4.5 Across Medway, the Town Centre team have:

6.4.5.1 Coordinated installation of decorated Christmas trees across all town centres with a combination of Ward Improvement Funds (WIF) and business financial support.

- 6.4.5.2 Co-ordinated Christmas meet and greet characters activities with the libraries.
- 6.4.5.3 Undertaken quarterly vacancy rates monitoring and comparison with national rates.
- 6.4.5.4 Executive support and enabling function of 5 Town Centre Forums (TCF), increasing membership where possible and promoting collaboration between external and internal stakeholders.
- 6.4.5.5 Held first Town Centres Chairs meeting to facilitate information sharing and to spread best practice.
- 6.4.5.6 Organised the Re-imagining Medway's Town Centres event in Rochester.

6.4.6 Achievements in Strood:

- 6.4.6.1 Restarted the Strood Forum, managing meetings in Autumn and Winter and ongoing Forum communications.
- 6.4.6.2 Delivered a Strood Summer event.
- 6.4.6.3 Utilised S106 funding to replant and maintain large planters at Friary Place and ground works for a Christmas tree pit in new location in Friary Place.
- 6.4.6.4 UKSPF Year 2 TCF fund: Projects underway to install a new community noticeboard, introduce a new Strood Town Centre Community Trail, install additional town centre planting, and deliver a spring-time event in 2024.

6.4.7 Achievements in Rainham:

- 6.4.7.1 Managed Forum meetings 4 times per year, established events working group and ongoing Forum communications.
- 6.4.7.2 UKSPF Year 1: Supported delivery of a Rainham Easter event.
- 6.4.7.3 Utilised s106 funding to repair, repaint and revarnish benches in Rainham Shopping Centre.
- 6.4.7.4 Delivered a Rainham Summer event from TCM budget with business in-kind support.
- 6.4.7.5 UKSPF Year 2 TCF fund: Projects underway to install hanging baskets in part of Station Road, repaint handrails in Rainham Shopping Centre, install and maintain additional town centre planting, contribute towards toilet enhancements at St Margaret's Church, deliver a 6-week augmented reality trail and spring-time event and support 2024 Rainham Community Awards.

6.4.8 Achievements in Rochester:

- 6.4.8.1 Supported Forum meetings 4 times per year, committee meetings 4 times per year and ongoing Forum communications.
- 6.4.8.2 UKSPF year 1: Arranged public realm improvements in Eastgate Quarter.
- 6.4.8.3 Supported the Forum to engage with officers around major festivals and events in Rochester.
- 6.4.8.4 Supported the Forum to install their own Christmas lighting after a successful crowd-funding campaign.

6.4.9 Achievements in Chatham:

- 6.4.9.1 Support Forum meetings four times per year, committee meetings four times per year, provided administrative tasks and weekly TCF Chair meeting to discuss Town Centre issues.
- 6.4.9.2 Support the Love Chatham Events Group six times per year, provide the administrative tasks and lead on events and the regulatory documents.
- 6.4.9.3 Support the event group for Love Chatham Carnival, Super Saturday, Rabbit Run, Christmas Cracker and the Chinese New Year (CNY) with footfall data showing an additional 20% year on year.
- 6.4.9.4 Utilised S106 funding to repair, repaint public realm furniture and the collection of footfall data within 13 key locations sites.
- 6.4.9.5 Regularly met the PCC, Matthew Scott to discuss policing issues.
- 6.4.9.6 Developing key relationships with businesses in the HSHAZ area. HSHAZ eateries have had the opportunity to trade at the Chatham events.
- 6.4.9.7 UKSPF Year 2: Developing a BIDS feasibility study with external consultants.
- 6.4.9.8 UKSPF Year 2 TCF fund: 50% contribution to the Chinese New Year event with 50% being developed on greening and the trial of free parking for fast food drivers.
- 6.4.9.9 Worked with the Chinese Community to develop and showcase festivals.
- 6.4.9.10 Secured Safer Street funding to deliver training courses to the nighttime and hospitality sector.

6.4.10 Achievements in Gillingham:

- 6.4.10.1 Worked with the NHSTF for delivering a diagnostic report, workshops.
- 6.4.10.2 UKSPF Year 1: Supported delivery of a Gillingham Easter event.
- 6.4.10.3 UKSPF Year 2: 50% of grant to repaint benches with 50% to develop a Love Gillingham logo with a Community Spring event in 2024.
- 6.4.10.4 Developed a cross directorate officer working group to tackle the challenges in Gillingham.

6.4.11 Markets within our town centres provide not only economic opportunities but foster community interaction, cultural exchange, and a vibrant local atmosphere. We currently operate in-house Gillingham Markets (Monday and Saturday) a week, and a Farmers Market for Rochester every month (3rd Sunday). We are reviewing Medway's markets, viability and future options for development and growth.

6.5 High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)

- 6.5.1 As part of the HSHAZ programme for regeneration of the Sun Pier to Star Hill area, around 20 revitalise and repair grants were offered to property owners during the period, focussing on bringing vacant heritage buildings back into use, improving the visual appearance of the High Street and professional fees for enabling similar future projects. These include interior works at 351 and 341 High Street, Rochester to enable vacant commercial space to be brought back in to use, and new shopfronts at 42 and 60 High Street, Chatham.

- 6.5.2 Skills development opportunities for heritage construction skills in partnership with Heritage Brickwork Training Ltd were offered to both local residents living in historic homes and level 1 Construction students at NACRO Chatham. Other 50 attendees participated in the sessions, funded by Historic England via HSHAZ.
- 6.5.3 Through Autumn 2023, the Significance Led Development Framework and Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan went out to public consultation, resulting in both documents being approved for adoption by Cabinet in February 2024.
- 6.5.4 The community led Cultural Consortium formed as part of the HSHAZ programme have commenced a transition to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) as a legacy outcome of the project, supported by SPF. They were also successful in a Jointly bidding with Medway Council being awarded £165k Heritage Development Trust funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund to enable sustainable community and heritage led regeneration over the next 3 years.
- 6.6 Future High Streets Fund (FHSF)
- 6.6.1 The Council's £9.49m FHSF programme to deliver multiple projects in the heart of Chatham that will transform and re-shape the Town Centre by March 2024, is significantly underway.
- 6.6.2 The Healthy Living Centre in the Pentagon will help to diversify town centre usage and draw footfall to the centre, whilst also localising the health offer for residents.
- 6.6.3 Mountbatten Enablers include the City Square and Public Realm, which had two rounds of public consultation and will deliver accessibility and biodiversity planting.
- 6.6.4 Transforming Debenhams, the ground floor plans are to provide an active frontage and add vibrancy to the high street; with a residential development envisaged for the above floors.
- 6.6.5 Innovation Hub Medway, situated on the first floor of the Pentagon Centre will provide workspace for start-ups and SMEs in the town centre.
- 6.6.6 St John's Church, the Diocese is leading the work to bring this historic asset back into use as a place of worship, events space, and community hub. It has secured £2.2m additional National Heritage Lottery Funding.
- 6.6.7 The Brook Theatre secured FHSF for accessibility improvements and refurbishment. This FHSF is combined with the Levelling Up Fund programme to deliver a wider set of interventions.

6.7 Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 1

- 6.7.1 The Council secured £14.4m LUF Round 1 from DLUHC in October 2021 for the Chatham package. Three cultural projects aim to address the income, productivity and skills challenges Medway faces through investment in the cultural and creative industries, strengthening an existing cluster within Medway.
- 6.7.2 The Fitted Rigging House South £2.2m project delivered in partnership with the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust has been delivered. This the second phase of a project that will bring back into use a Grade 1 listed building, to deliver a mix of larger format office floorplates across 1,700sqm of commercial space, and aims to create a pathway for growth for creative industries to establish and upscale in Chatham and is already fully let.
- 6.7.3 The Docking Station £5.6m project delivered in partnership with the University of Kent recently secured planning and additional funding via the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The project will creatively repurpose an historic asset through delivering an innovative business incubation, research, and teaching facility, and will promote collaboration between industry and academia and will create c.700sqm of new employment space.
- 6.7.4 The modernisation and refurbishment of the Brook Theatre £6.5m LUF project will deliver 400sqm of affordable creative workspace to sit alongside digitally enhanced and upgraded accessible performance and rehearsal space. The building requires additional Council investment in necessary structural repairs.

6.8 Levelling Up Fund Round 2/3

- 6.8.1 Medway submitted two c. £20 million bids for investment to LUF round 2 for Gillingham Open Lines and Innovation Park Medway and were unfortunately unsuccessful in both. Government published an explanatory note on the assessment and decision-making process for LUF round 2, which states that ministers took account of which local authorities had received funding in the first round to help maximise the geographical spread of investment. This information was regrettably not provided to Medway Council at the beginning of the process. Despite this, we had visits from the Minister for Levelling Up, and DLUHC officers, who praised both bids. Both bids received positive formal written feedback from DLUHC and Department for Transport.
- 6.8.2 Government made LUF round 3 only available to selected unsuccessful round 2 bids and favoured priority places that regrettably did not include Gillingham.

6.9 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

- 6.9.1 Medway was allocated £1.8m SPF through our DLUHC approved Investment Plan. Year 1 delivery focussed on 17 projects delivered in-house due to the short delivery window.

6.9.2 After a successful launch event and communications campaign for Year 2, the SPF team received 68 applications from a range of internal and external partners. Each application went through a rigorous selection process involving initial assessment sifting, scoring, moderation, and Member sign-off.

6.9.3 This resulted in 26 Year 2 projects being supported. Across the Pride in Place and Feasibility Funds, funding was given to an array of organisations across Medway, to enhance and support local community infrastructure, promote, and encourage people to visit Medway, and help to build capacity for local community groups.

6.9.4 The projects supported include:

- Chatham Town Centre Forum - Chinese New Year Event
- Ideas Test - Luton Light Trail
- Entity Events - Events Uncovered
- Electric Medway - Young Hack
- We Are Medway - Cultural Sponsorship Catalyst
- Funny Women – Comedy in the Community
- Live Music Now – All together Now
- Emerge Advocacy – Emerge Medway
- Mess Room – Mess Room Creatives
- Mutual Aid Road Reps – Fighting Loneliness & Isolation with MARR
- Pathways to independence – Enhancing Support Services in Medway
- Twydall District Community Association – Twydall Hearts
- Child Friendly Medway – Signs of the Young Voice
- Town Centre Forum Funds – Chatham, Gillingham, Strood, Rainham (all forums that applied for UKSPF funding)
- Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust – Screen Tourism
- Intra Arts – Scrapstore
- Sun Pier House – Community Ownership Fund Bid
- Tiller & Wheel – Sun Wharf Regeneration
- High Street Heritage Cultural Consortium – Transition to CIO
- High Street Heritage Cultural Consortium – Intra Parklets
- Medway Events Team – Green Guide and Sustainability Toolkit
- Chatham Business Improvement District Development Fund
- Reimagining Town Centre's – Stakeholder Consultation Report

6.9.5 Alongside this, the council delivered an in-house package to support local businesses via the Economic Development and SPF team. This included Green Grants and continuation of Partners for Growth schemes.

6.9.6 Launch for Year 3 of the SPF will take place in Q1 2024/25. Work is underway to set up the process, in line with the strict governance processes as set up in Year 2 involving the Council's Finance, Legal, Audit, Counter Fraud and Procurement teams.

6.9.7 The Council received specific praise from DLUHC on our SPF programme and was invited to provide detailed feedback on the scheme.

6.10 South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)

6.10.1 The Council has benefitted from over £50m investment collectively through the SELEP via Local Growth Fund, Growing Places Fund, Getting Building Fund and Sector Support Fund. The projects have all been delivered and continue to be monitored and post completion reports submitted.

6.10.2 Government has mandated closure of LEPs by March 2024. Reporting on historic projects will be submitted direct to DLUHC.

6.10.3 A significant amount of work has taken place to support the transition of LEP responsibilities to local authorities, approved by Cabinet in January 2024. Post closure of LEPs, we will continue to ensure Medway receives our proportionate allocation of funding to ensure our economic priorities are supported.

6.10.4 We have managed to secure significant legacy funding from the LEP to ensure delivery of successful programmes such as the SPF can continue post 2024/25.

6.10.5 We will maintain strong relationships with Kent County Council, as the two upper tier authorities of KMEP and as one Functional Economic Area. A key priority for KMEP is to deliver our joint Kent and Medway Economic Framework KMEF.

6.11 Strategy

6.11.1 The Council undertook a Strategy refresh including Medway 2037, Town Centres Strategy, Innovation Strategy, Skills and Employment Plan and emerging River Strategy in 2022. A workshop was held for Members in Summer 2023, which also considered the One Medway Council Plan, amends to the emerging overarching Regeneration Strategy document Medway 2040 will be finalised in 2024/25.

6.11.2 The Council has not previously had an Investment Strategy. This is a priority for next year to ensure we can continue to deliver economic growth, to benefit our residents.

6.12 Skills

6.12.1 The Kent & Medway Careers Hub continues to go from strength to strength. We have 35 enterprise advisers supporting 28 secondary institutions, with more expecting to be onboarded soon. Schools are performing well in delivering Gatsby benchmarks, achieving an average of 6.8 benchmarks. The national average is 5.5.

6.12.2 The 50+ employment programme has been completed, with 67 participants joining the programme, all candidates received training from Medway Adult Education, ranging from Business Administration to CV workshops, digital

skills and customer services. 45 candidates regularly attended our job club, leading to 22 job outcomes and one business startup. Following on from this success we trained over 80 Chatham job centre staff on skills coaching, which included helping clients to realise their transferable skills and the value of them in workplace.

6.12.3 With funding from the National Development Team for Inclusion, we have led the creation of a Supported Internship forum, designed to bring key stakeholders together to further Supported Internships in Medway. There are three key streams of activity being delivered. An employer focused event, a young people and parent/carer focused event and a series of videos showing the incredible impact Supported Internships have for both businesses and young people with Education Health & Care Plans.

6.12.4 The Medway Apprenticeship Advice Service continues to offer support, and we have set up an Independent Training Provider forum, with an accompanying action plan to improve our coordination with the world of training.

7. Conclusion

7.1.1 I continue to be fully supportive of the service and the work which is being undertaken in challenging circumstances, and I'm committed to supporting continued progress.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.