

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28 November 2024

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, specifically relating to Climate Change, 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 is 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 Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Climate Change.

3. Background

3.1. As the Portfolio Holder responsible for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration I would like to start by expressing my thanks to staff, partners and contractors from all sections of my wide portfolio and across the Council for their continued dedication and commitment and in working collaboratively across the various services to deliver on the climate agenda.

3.2. Climate Change is now a core principle in the new One Medway Plan, informing all work across the Council.

The four key areas of my portfolio that I am devoting most of my time being:

- Climate Action

- Local Plan
- Front line services delivery
- Public transport

3.3. Other areas take up varying amounts of time, depending on particular issues, and include embedding and championing the climate agenda within the work of the Business Support Directorate.

4. Climate Change

4.1 The Climate Response team has continued to lead on a range of projects with my support:

- I was delighted to attend one of three information sessions, delivered in partnership with Kent County Council and Dr Wim Melis from the Faculty of Engineering & Science at the University of Greenwich. The events built on a series of successful domestic retrofit events, delivered by the partnership in Summer 2023 as part of a Knowledge Exchange initiative offered by the University. The sessions aimed to provide impartial domestic retrofit advice to Medway homeowners and additionally a Whole Life Cycle Assessment event was held online. 40 people attended across the events and their feedback is currently informing the partnership offer for 2025. The partnership is made possible through the University of Greenwich's Knowledge Exchange
- 82 participants had solar panels installed on their property following the promotion of Solar Together Kent in Spring and Autumn 2023, expected to save 74,647 kilograms of CO₂ across all installs in the first year. The promotion of the campaign in Spring 2024 has resulted in 25 solar PV homeowner installations so far. The Autumn 2024 campaign closed to new registrations in November. At the time of writing, 244 Medway residents had registered for the scheme, with 8 residents and 1 SME proceeding to accept their personal offer.
- A vertical meadow has been installed alongside the living roof bus shelter on Intra supported by Clear Channel's Environmental Innovation Fund.
- Regular promotion of climate change campaigns and projects across Medway has continued through dedicated social media accounts and a monthly newsletter.
- The team also gave a presentation at the "Running Sustainable Events" day at Rochester Corn Exchange, attended the Mid Kent College Business and Showcase event, Sweeps Festival, Holy Trinity Church Eco Fair, Green Commuting event at Mid Kent College, Rochester Cherry Picnic, Major Developer's Forum, MHS Estate Day, Love Gillingham, Medway Food Partnership annual event and participated in the Electric Medway and Creative Medway "Our Climate of Crisis" panel event.
- The first-ever Medway Climate Ride, in support of the Cycle for Summer campaign, was attended by 14 cyclists. The 34-mile route started at Rochester Cathedral and aimed to bring people together to celebrate cycling as well as talking about climate issues.

5. The Local Plan and Planning Services

- 5.1 I am proactively steering the delivery of the new Local Plan. I am committed to getting our plan in place for Medway's communities, so we can manage growth, secure investment and address the climate agenda.
- 5.2 We have made meaningful steps in progressing our new Local Plan. We published a second, more detailed, Regulation 18 document for consultation in summer 2024. This detailed document set out the direction of policies for managing Medway's development, and options for planning growth across Medway, including a draft Climate Change policy which lies at the heart of the local plan.
- 5.3 We delivered a comprehensive consultation programme to engage people in planning for Medway's future. We held 10 public exhibitions in community venues across rural and urban Medway, where we spoke to over 600 people. We also organised additional specific stakeholder meetings including, for example, a Local Plan Environment Stakeholder workshop.
- 5.4 Our programme included a wide range of resources on our website and use of social media to directly contact thousands of people across Medway. There were over 20,000 visits to the local plan pages on our website during the consultation. My podcast with the Chief Planning Officer explaining the Local Plan consultation had 11,000 views. I set out our vision for new Local Plan in the short films produced for the consultation. This was supported by representatives from Medway's businesses, education, community, housing and cultural sectors, who endorse our vision for Medway. These two short videos attracted over 50,000 views. Our Communications team issued weekly e-bulletins to over 3500 subscribers and over 50 social media posts during the consultation.
- 5.5 We have published a number of technical reports as part of the consultation, to update the evidence base on the local plan. These include work on transport, landscape, open spaces needs, and waste. This evidence is critical to developing a sound plan, and informing decision making on the proposals in the new plan.
- 5.6 Over 500 people responded to the consultation, representing a range of interests, including local residents, voluntary groups, developers and statutory organisations. I am now overseeing the work to finalise the content of the Draft plan for publication next year.
- 5.7 A well-attended and very positive annual forum with Major Developers took place in July and covered issues such as the Regulation 18 consultation on the Local Plan, Biodiversity Net Gain update and Climate Change.
- 5.8 The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy concluded its consultation with a number of relevant responses, which resulted in a number of updates to the strategy. This has now been adopted by the Council and will be refreshed within 5 years.

- 5.9 A Property Flood Resilience Survey has been undertaken at Nelson Terrace and the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) is now working on a business case to submit to the Regional Flood and Coast Committee for funding on these options. Additional work has been undertaken at Bond Road and Cherry Tree Road to assess suitability of flood works. Southern Water are also investigating solutions for this and are working closely with Highways and the LLFA to develop schemes to alleviate flooding in the area.
- 5.10 The Surface Water Management Plan for Stoke has now been completed and the discussions on the new Local Plan options for the area will determine the most suitable option. Highways and the LLFA are ensuring that preparation works are completed prior to the winter months.
- 5.11 I am liaising with the Senior Tree Officer and stakeholders, such as the Climate Response team, in reviewing Medway's Tree Policy so that it fully addresses important matters such as tree canopy cover, the protection of valued trees and the important role that trees play in biodiversity and our adaptation to climate change. Separate to this I have been working with the Senior Tree Officer in establishing trees on the highway in Luton Road.
- 5.12 Medway is at the forefront of digital planning in the Country as part of the Government's Open Digital Planning Project and we are one of a number of Council's piloting work on Plan X, which was recently described by Ewan Mills (urban designer and digital specialist as "the most exciting thing to come out of the digital planning world". We are one of only 11 Councils to go live with Plan X guidance on "do I need planning permission" and we are one of four Authorities working together to create a digital flow to assist residents to report a breach of planning control. Following a year of designing and testing, Medway went live with this service on 1 July 2024. The first month of being live showed a 23% reduction in invalid reports of alleged breaches of planning control. This will be the future of planning moving forward and looks to free up planning officer time to focus on the actual assessment of planning applications and investigating acknowledged breaches.

6 Front Line Services

- 6.1 I oversee the street cleaning, recycling, waste collection, and waste disposal operations with an annual budget of £27m, services used by every Medway household, every week. Medway Council has a core statutory duty to provide these services and as an essential part of their delivery we are now developing a new Waste Strategy looking at how we can improve the service, increase our recycling rates and decarbonise our waste stream in partnership with our contractors.

7 Public Transport and Active Travel

- 7.1 This year I have worked with Officers to update Medway's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which sets out our vision for a modern, sustainable public transport network that is reliable, accessible, affordable and carbon free. It includes a commitment to work collaboratively with partners to put passengers at the heart of everything we do, supporting equal opportunity of access to employment, education and other key services.
- 7.2 Following the publication of the updated plan in July, the Department for Transport confirmed a grant of £761k for supporting public transport in Medway, meaning residents and visitors continued to benefit from additional evening and Sunday services on key routes, alongside a new summer holiday service to our leisure facilities and country parks in July and August 2024. We were also able to offer free summer holiday travel for children this year, on all buses in Medway. Three Medway Free Bus Weekends will take place this year, to coincide with the 'Catch the Bus Month' and 'World Car Free Day' campaigns in September, and during the run-up to Christmas in December. The latest bus workshop was held on 5 November, it was well attended, and we had positive discussions with the bus companies.
- 7.3 In addition to our statutory responsibility for providing concessionary travel, we continue to support the wider bus network by subsidising socially necessary journeys that give residents access to health, shopping, education and leisure facilities. An upgrade to CCTV at the Chatham Waterfront Bus Station and a programme of LED lighting improvements at many bus stops across Medway will increase safety and security for passengers.
- 7.4 The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan is now in the latter stages of development, following a period of public consultation at the beginning of the year, and will provide a ten-year plan for the delivery of cycling and walking interventions. We have also received further government funding for Active Travel initiatives, which we are using to deliver a programme of activities to encourage and promote walking and cycling. These include the promotion of National Walk to School Week, International Walk to School Month, the Get Cycling in Schools programme in collaboration with the Bikeability Trust and the Walk Once a Week initiative. We have also produced new Walking Bus resources for schools across Medway, providing all the tools needed to help initiate and set-up Walking Buses, including site risk assessments and access to fluorescent tabards.
- 7.5 Our Safer, Healthier Streets initiative has progressed this year, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras at several locations to enforce traffic restrictions such as 'no entry' signs, pedestrian only zones and yellow box junctions. Supporting the Police with enforcement will make our roads safer and less congested, in line with our transport and climate change priorities. The implementation of our first seven School Streets across Medway in March, with temporary access restrictions for vehicles at peak times, will have helped to create a safer environment for children and parents

to travel to school, reducing parking problems and congestion for residents, improving air quality and promoting sustainable travel. Public consultation will be taking place shortly for a second phase of School Streets.

8 Greenspace Development

I have continued to support greenspace development including:

- 8.1 The Cozenton Park and Nursery project continues to progress. A consultation took place in early summer with over 330 responses to the initial proposals. External funding has been successfully secured from the Forestry Commission to help set up a community tree nursery on part of the old nursery site. A planning application is underway for the change of use of the old nursery site which will include the community tree nursery, community garden and allotment plots. If permission is granted, works will be underway on the nursery later this winter and further improvements to the wider park will follow in 2025. Engagement continues with local community groups to help support the long-term establishment of the community tree nursery and garden.
- 8.2 The Open Space Study has now been completed to review the quantity and quality of all of Medway's open spaces and was out to consultation as part of the Local Plan this summer. This study will help ensure high quality open spaces are provided as part of new housing developments coming forward. Also as part of the study, an action plan is underway to increase the number of allotment plots to provide more growing spaces for Medway's residents.
- 8.3 Planning was granted to turn the former golf course at Deangate into a Community Parkland which will provide an exciting opportunity for wildlife and recreation acting as a gateway to explore the Hoo Peninsula. This application covered a total of 43.3 hectares within the former golf course boundary. £1.1m has been secured from s106 contributions to help develop and maintain the site. Following some excellent liaison with the local community by our team a new Friends Group for Deangate has now been established. Deangate is being considered as a potential site for the planting of circa 3500 tree whips as part of a partnership project with Kent County Council made possible through the Local Authority Tree Fund.

9 Providing political leadership and challenge

- 9.1 I take a strategic overview of the Council's sustainable transport activities, bringing together Climate Change, Public Health, Transport, Air Quality and other steering groups to facilitate the development, delivery and monitoring of Active Travel schemes and initiatives, including the promotion of behavioural change and the delivery of effective infrastructure. I am also now the Vice-chair of transport for the Southeast. In this capacity I am able to lobby more effectively for infrastructure funding for our road and rail networks.

- 9.2 I continue to oversee the replacement of the current weekly waste collection fleet championing a procurement strategy for 46 new compacting refuse collection vehicles at Cabinet in March and April 2024 which is due to be delivered for £12million, representing a significant saving to £17million added to the Council's capital programme, funded from borrowing. Delivery of the Council-controlled waste fleet is due to begin Q4 2024/25, enabling the earliest possible realisation of the environmental benefits associated with the new vehicles in line with the Climate Change Action Plan, and our emerging Waste Strategy, estimated to save up to 397t of CO₂ per year compared to the current fleet configuration, helping to increase air quality and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- 9.3 I will be working closely with Medway Norse to improve the allotment facilities. Allotments are important community growing spaces and enhance health and wellbeing of Medway residents as well as supporting the climate change agenda. This year Medway Norse have begun to evaluate plots which historically have been too large and challenging for residents to maintain, and where appropriate, vacant plots are subdivided into manageable sizes for allotment users.
- 9.4 I recently invited Dr Wim Melis, from the Faculty of Engineering & Science at the University of Greenwich to meet with the Gun Wharf Refurbishment project team to identify opportunities to consider retrofit and sustainability within the developing plans. A working group will be established to review the preliminary feasibility study, which I will continue to oversee.
- 9.5 Climate Change is now a core principle in the new One Medway Council Plan. Our current Climate Change Action Plan (published in 2022) sets out over 250 actions across all of our service delivery areas. I have shown leadership and support in the refresh of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan during 2024, liaising with officers and the Community Climate Working Group to identify 5 priority areas:
- Knowledge and Empowerment
 - Energy
 - Sustainable Travel and Transport
 - Resource Efficiency
 - Green and Resilient Medway
- Focusing on these priorities will support, both Medway Council and Medway "The Place", to achieve the aims of:
- Reduced carbon emissions
 - Increased resilience against the impacts of climate change
- 9.6 The Climate Response team are currently working with officers across the Council to draft revised actions, with my oversight. The first draft of revised actions will be shared with the Director of Place in October, with opportunities for core working groups, boards and partners to comment

further. Following internal governance approvals, the refreshed plan will be submitted to Cabinet in June 2025 for approval.

- 9.7 I have requested the Climate Response team include an action in the refreshed plan to develop improved procedures and guidance on the consideration of climate change implications and wider outcome benefits within decision making reports. This will support officers to explore opportunities to mitigate and reduce climate impacts where possible so that we may all collectively work to ensure projects and policies are meeting the Council's commitment to net zero.
- 9.8 Work will also be required to evaluate the Council's progress against its First Carbon Budget and calculate the financial cost and value of our climate work, including natural capital.
- 10 **Championing the Interests of service users / Medway residents / Children and Young People**
- 10.1 In March I attended the launch of a project called Refresh Medway, featuring artwork made up of quotes from Medway's young people around climate change and put up in Gillingham on Pier Road, and in Strood town centre. The project, led by the Medway Cultural Education Partnership and delivered by Zest Theatre alongside local delivery partners, delivered workshops in schools and youth settings to encourage young people to explore climate change. It is so important that young people have the opportunity to speak, and have their voices heard, about what climate change means to them and their aspirations for the future.
- 10.2 In May, I was delighted to join the Leader at our annual event for School Crossing Patrol officers. The School Crossing Patrol Service makes a vital contribution towards keeping our young people safe on their journey to school and promotes active, sustainable travel for children, parents and carers.
- 10.3 The Administration support weekly waste collections for Medway residents and I regularly meet with officers from waste services to stay abreast of technical and legislative developments which could improve the Council's recycling performance. I am heartened to see over 90% of garden waste is correctly recycled but, despite the efforts of the environmental engagement team, a significant quantity of food waste and recycling continues to be disposed of in black sacks, destined for incineration.
- 10.4 The Council has recently completed a public consultation on the vision for the Climate Change Action Plan refresh. The consultation questions were available for completion online and via the Citizen's Panel survey. Over 400 people responded, with 80% of respondents in agreement with the draft vision and priority areas. These views are informing the refreshed action plan.

- 10.5 I oversee the Community Climate Working Group and the Member Climate Change Working Party. The input of both groups, and their wider networks, will be central to achieving our climate ambitions for Medway, “the place”.
- 10.6 I formed the Community Climate Working Group in August 2023. The group supports messaging and initiatives for carbon reduction and climate resilience and helps shape the Council’s work on climate change by acting as a critical friend on behalf of Medway’s communities. Made up of representatives from key sectors (such as local activists, businesses, and faith groups), the group meets quarterly. Officers have attended during 2024 to update the group on the Council’s emerging plans for EV charging infrastructure and the draft Local Plan. The group has also met to discuss the opportunities and challenges around domestic retrofit in Medway and feedback is being used to inform plans for further work in this area. Some members of the Community Climate Working Group met in November to discuss ideas and next steps for a community group-led climate project.
- 10.7 The Member Climate Change Working Party was formed in November 2023. Members have been assigned the role of ambassadors for the climate agenda, with the aim of supporting and encouraging local climate action within their communities and networks. Representatives from the Rural Liaison Committee are on the group as well as ward members. A Climate Action Ward Improvement Plan template has been developed to help each member develop an impactful action plan for their ward/parish. Members have been encouraged to review their ward profile data to identify challenges and opportunities specific to their ward which they may choose to address through their Climate Action Ward Improvement Plan. The intention is for them to report their progress three times a year. If this approach is successful, I would like to encourage all members to develop Climate Action Ward Improvement Plans for each of the 24 wards throughout Medway.
- 10.8 As work progresses on the refreshed Climate Change Action Plan, I am keen to work closely with the Climate Response Team and Data and Design Team to develop a publicly accessible dashboard. The aim of the dashboard will be to provide transparency on Medway’s progress with climate action (by the Council and Medway “the Place”) and to inspire and encourage Medway’s communities to take action.

11 Support for key service areas

- 11.1 Medway Council has a core statutory duty to collect waste and recycling from domestic properties, keep streets free from litter and refuse and provide recycling centres. It is one of the few universal services provided to all 279,800 Medway residents and makes a tangible difference to the environment in which we live. There are more than 17 million waste collections annually in Medway. The purchase of a new fleet of Refuse Collection Vehicles has been completed, the fleet will make a significant contribution to the Council’s Climate Change goals.

- 11.2 I have instructed officers to keep me abreast of any development in the waste Industry which I will champion at Cabinet and Council to drive the climate agenda forward, including waste strategy development and potential depot locations.
- 11.3 I have supported officers to establish a new Climate Oversight and Implementation Board, chaired by the Director of Place, which will meet quarterly. The Board has responsibility for ensuring accurate reporting, monitoring and risk management of the Climate Change Action Plan. The Board met for the first time on 1st October 2024 to agree the Terms of Reference, review the risk register and discuss reporting requirements. A reporting tool will be established to enable clear and regular updates against the refreshed Climate Change Action Plan, like the One Medway Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan reporting framework.
- 11.4 The Climate Response Engagement Officer has completed their training to become a Carbon Literacy trainer and is now mapping the offer for Council staff. Alongside this, climate training slides have been developed for the Medway Managers portal.
- 11.5 I have supported the Climate Officer to attend a fully funded Climate Finance Learning Programme (in partnership with the University of Oxford). One of only 13 out of 25 successful applicants in the South East, it is anticipated that the relevant knowledge and tools will be imparted to seek opportunities for climate finance.
- 11.6 Along with Councillor Jones, I recently met officers from Kent County Council (KCC) that have direct responsibility for the management of the Kent Pension Fund, to hear more about the work undertaken to evaluate the fund's exposure to climate risk. The Kent Pension Fund Committee (KPFC) has agreed an ambitious policy package to address climate risk, including a headline net zero target of 2050, supported by a refreshed Responsible Investment policy. KCC officers have offered to keep myself and Cllr Jones, in his role on the KPFC, apprised of progress against the programme every 6 months. There may be a re-organisation of Pension Fund Committees, which would potentially affect the programme, though it is too early to provide any details.

Lead officer contacts

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