

Record of Cabinet decisions

Tuesday, 14 January 2025

7.00pm to 8.06pm

Date of publication: 16 January 2025

**Subject to call-in these decisions will be effective from 24 January 2025
The record of decisions is subject to approval at the next meeting of the Cabinet**

Present:	Councillor Vince Maple	Leader of the Council
	Councillor Teresa Murray	Deputy Leader of the Council
	Councillor Tracy Coombs	Portfolio Holder for Education
	Councillor Simon Curry	Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration
	Councillor Nina Gurung	Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure
	Councillor Alex Paterson	Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement
	Councillor Louwella Prenter	Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness
	Councillor Adam Price	Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (including statutory responsibility)
	Councillor Zoë Van Dyke	Portfolio Holder for Business Management

In Attendance: Richard Hicks, Chief Executive
Jackie Brown, Assistant Director Adult Social Care
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place
Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director, Legal and Governance
Jon Pitt, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mahil.

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

Leader's Announcements

In relation to Priority Place status, the Government had set a deadline of 10 January 2025 for local authorities to respond. Councillor Maple had, with the Leader of Kent County Council, Councillor Roger Gough, co-signed a letter supporting Medway and Kent being part of the Priority Place programme. A decision in relation to this was expected by the end of January.

Council Maple had written a separate letter on democratic processes and the likely timetable for new unitary authorities. Councillor Maple said he was concerned at the potential of any Council having a seven year mandate. This would not be the case under any timetable proposed for Medway. The expectation was that a new Council covering the Medway area would be established by May 2028.

A report on the devolution and local government reorganisation proposals was due to be considered by Full Council in the week following the Cabinet meeting. This would include a proposal to establish a cross-party working group to consider the plans. Thanks were given to officers who had worked on the report. A successful all Member briefing had also been held in the week before the Cabinet meeting.

Public consultation, led by central Government, would take place in relation to devolution should Medway be selected as a priority place and there would also be future consultation on local government reorganisation. It was known that Medway Council was not big enough to continue as a Council in its current form at the end of the process. Service delivery to local residents by Medway Council would continue as planned until that point.

Record of decisions

The record of the meeting held on 17 December 2024, was agreed by the Cabinet and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Gurung declared an interest in agenda item No. 6 (Medway Food Strategy) as she is a trustee of Second Chance, a charity that is referenced in the Food Strategy. Councillor Gurung remained in the room during discussion and determination of the item.

Fostering Fees and Allowance Policy 2025

Background:

This report set out information about the updated Fostering Fees and Allowance Policy 2025 for Medway Foster Carers and asked the Cabinet to agree the updated Policy.

The report explained that the Medway Fostering Service continued to be a much-needed service provision in relation to children and young people who needed to be cared for by Medway Children's Service. The Policy had not been renewed in its entirety since 2021.

The Fostering Service was seeking to use the Policy change, alongside wider practice and organisational change to increase sufficiency of foster placements by recruiting new carers and supported homes hosts as well as retaining those currently registered with Medway.

A Diversity Impact Assessment had been undertaken on the Policy, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

Decision number:

Decision:

1/2025

The Cabinet approved the proposed changes to the Fostering Service Fee and Allowance Policy at Appendix 1 to the report, notable highlights as summarised below:

- **A scheme based on a defined maintenance element to meet the child's needs, and a separate reward fee based on a child's age and needs in the form of a tiered structure.**
- **An entitlement to 16 days paid leave for foster carers with children in the fostering home, or up to 24 days respite for foster carers approved for children with disabilities.**
- **Continuation of an annual skills and services payment based on length of service.**
- **An annual council tax contribution of £600 per household.**
- **An hourly rate of £11.94 per hour for providing support to the fostering service.**
- **Reduction in the threshold for paying milage to carers from 700 miles per month to 200 miles per month.**

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

Reasons:

The fostering service is operating within a fiercely competitive sector. There are as many children in care placed in Medway by other local authorities with independent fostering agencies as there are Medway Children in Care. Independent fostering agencies are actively recruiting in our area.

There is a national shortage of foster carers, with an estimated need for 10,000 foster carers. As at 31 March there were 86,630 children in care nationally, compared to 75,360 on the same date in 2017. The demand has increased exponentially.

This policy seeks to redress that balance in favour of Medway offering a more attractive package of weekly remuneration, both maintenance and reward elements, in addition to the improved additional offer.

Medway Council Fostering Service has undertaken a benchmarking exercise and sought feedback from Medway's own foster carers. Medway Council Fostering Service does offer added value and the opportunity for Medway families to care for Medway children.

As part of the review of the 'offer' to Foster Carers, consideration has been given to all areas of the Foster Carer payment package. The new policy has taken account of foster carers wishes, and where possible these have been listened to.

The Regulator of Social Housing - Inspection Outcome

Background:

This report outlined the Regulator of Social Housing's Judgement for Medway Council, following one of the first planned inspections to be undertaken in Kent and Medway against the new Consumer Standards, which took effect on 1 April 2024.

The report set out the findings from the inspection and confirmed the actions required to support the continuous improved outcomes for tenants across all areas of the Consumer Standards.

The Council had been awarded a Regulatory Judgement C2 grade. This was the second highest grade, out of four consumer grades. The specific wording for a C2 grade was that "Our judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed."

Thanks were given to the Portfolio Holder, officers and tenants for their work and the support provided during the inspection process.

A copy of the Regulatory Judgement was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

Decision number:

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the Regulatory Judgement issued by the Regulator of Social Housing following a proactive inspection of Medway Council.

The Cabinet supported the continuous improvement plan which included the actions required to address the improvement areas confirmed as part of the inspection process.

2/2025

The Cabinet agreed that the Tenants Panel and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Governance Group would monitor the progress against the continuous improvement plan, including being able to comment on progress updates in line with the plan, at each of its future meetings.

Reasons:

To enable the Cabinet to review and comment on the inspection findings

To facilitate the delivery of the actions required to support the continuous improved outcomes for tenants across all areas of the Consumer Standards.

Medway Food Strategy

Background:

This report requested Cabinet approval of the Medway Food Strategy. The report set out that the Strategy supported sustainability by promoting local food production, reducing food waste, encouraging sustainable farming practices, and ensuring equitable access to healthy, environmentally friendly food options, all of which contributed to long-term environmental and community well-being.

Implementation of the Strategy would bolster Medway's recognition as a Bronze Sustainable Food award recipient, making it one of only ten local authorities in the UK to achieve this award in 2024.

Officers were thanked for their enthusiasm in the development of the Strategy and the hosting of events across Medway. Joint working across Council teams was acknowledged, including the work of the Climate Response team, Environmental Engagement, Business Development and Adult Education.

The report had previously been considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 21 November 2024 and by the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 December 2024, the minutes of which were set out in sections 8 and 9 of the report.

A Diversity Impact Assessment had been undertaken on the Strategy, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

**Decision
number:**

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the comments of the Health and Wellbeing Board and of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out at sections 8 and 9 of the report.

3/2025

The Cabinet approved the Medway Food Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

Reasons:

Approval of the Food Strategy helps to create an environment that supports sustainable access to affordable healthy food.

Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025 to 2026

Background:

This report provided the Cabinet with details of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025 to 2026 announced by the Government on 18 December 2024.

The Provisional Settlement set out the referendum principles for 2025/26, which for Medway Council represented a core referendum threshold of 3% per year and as a local authority with social care responsibilities, the ability to set an Adult Social Care Precept of up to 2% per year without a referendum.

Medway's Draft Budget assumed a 4.994% uplift, in line with the principles confirmed. The final tax base (the number of band D equivalent properties in the area) which determined the amount of Council Tax which could be budgeted for, would be agreed during January 2025 using a delegation of the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Leader of the Council.

The report advised that as announced in the Autumn Budget, the small business rates multiplier would be frozen for 2025/26 at 49.9p while the standard business multiplier would rise by the CPI (Consumer Price Inflation) to 55.5p. Local authorities would be compensated for the loss of income arising from the decision to freeze the multiplier. Local authority baseline funding levels would rise by the increase on the standard business multiplier, weighted to the proportion of each local authority's multiplier split.

The report also provided details of the impact on other grants, set out at sections 7.3 to 7.8 of the report.

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

**Decision
number:**

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the implications of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in formulating its 2025/26 budget proposals.

Reasons:

The provisional levels of funding announced are a fundamental component of the 2025/26 budget, and their announcement is a further stage in the process to prepare a balanced budget for the coming financial year.

Connect to Work

Background:

This report set out details of a new large employment programme called Connect to Work (previously known as Universal Support), which had been launched by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP).

The Programme would be significant for Kent and Medway, aiming to reduce economic inactivity by supporting people into work. Kent County Council and Medway Council were required to submit a delivery plan to the DWP in order to receive funding.

The report explained that the Connect to Work programme was one of the initiatives launched in the new 'Get Britain Working' White Paper. The ambition was for a more inclusive economy which enabled people to get into work and to get on at work, ensuring employment opportunity for all. The Government aimed to take a more collaborative, locally led approach to tackling 'Hidden Unemployment', to support local people to realise their potential through local and national growth.

A Diversity Impact Assessment had been undertaken in relation to Connect to Work and was attached at Appendix A to the report.

**Decision
number:**

Decision:

4/2025

The Cabinet approved the creation of a delivery plan and delivery of the Connect to Work programme in Medway.

5/2025

The Cabinet agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Place to create the delivery plan and launch the Connect to Work programme.

Cabinet, 14 January 2025

Reasons:

The Connect to Work programme will have great benefit for the residents of Medway, providing high quality employment support to hundreds of Medway residents.

Audit Committee Chairperson's Annual Report 2023/24

Background:

This report set out the Audit Committee Chairperson's Annual Report 2023/24.

The report explained that CIPFA's Position Statement, Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022, set out the purpose model. To discharge its responsibilities effectively the Committee should: 'report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.'

The Annual Report for 2023/2024 was set out can be found at Appendix 1. The report provided an overview of the Committee's work during the year.

Decision number:

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the comments of the Audit Committee as set out at section 6 of the report.

The Cabinet noted the Chairperson's Annual Report 2023/24.

Reasons:

The Annual Report 2023/24 provides an overview of the Audit Committee's work during the year.

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Leader of the Council

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Date

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