

Medway Council
Meeting of Medway Council
Thursday, 23 January 2025
7.00pm to 12.16am

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 Nestorov)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Hamandishe) Councillors Anang, Animashaun, Barrett, Bowen, Brake, Browne, Campbell, Clarke, Cook, Coombs, Crozer, Curry, Doe, Fearn, Field, Gilbourne, Gulvin, Gurung, Hackwell, Hamilton, Howcroft-Scott, Hyne, Jackson, Jones, Joy, Kemp, Lammass, Lawrence, Mahil, Mandaracas, Maple, McDonald, Murray, Myton, Paterson, Peake, Pearce, Perfect, Louwella Prenter, Mark Prenter, Price, Sands, Shokar, Spalding, Spring, Stamp, Tejan, Mrs Turpin, Van Dyke, Wildey and Williams

In Attendance: Richard Hicks, Chief Executive
Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director, Legal and Governance
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services

627 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Etheridge, Filmer and Hubbard.

628 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

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629 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 was approved and signed by Worshipful the Mayor as correct.

630 Mayor's announcements

The Worshipful the Mayor of Medway announced that former Councillor, Ken Webber, had recently passed away. He had served as a Councillor between 1986-2007 in Rainham, both on the former Gillingham Borough Council and on Medway Council.

Former Councillor Webber had also served as Mayor in 2005-2006 and as Deputy Mayor in 1999-2000. The Mayor offered condolences to the family on behalf of the Council.

The Mayor also announced that Councillor Hackwell's wife, Jacqui, had passed away. Jacqui had worked for the Council since 1998, most recently within the Adult Education Team and had also served as a Patient Governor at Medway Maritime Hospital from 2018 to 2024. The Mayor offered condolences to Councillor Hackwell and his family on behalf of the Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Gurung for collaborating with the Mayoral office to organise the Dickens Parade of Mayors and dignitaries. The parade had not taken place due to the weather, but the Mayor hoped that his successor would consider taking this initiative forward.

The next Mayoral event would be an adaptation of Puss in Boots on Thursday 30 January. A Quiz night would be held at Medway Rugby Club on 21 February and the Annual Mayor's Ball would take place on 11 April.

Tickets for all events were available through the Mayor's office.

The Mayor, supported by Members of the Council, moved a suspension of Council Rules. This was to facilitate continuation of the changes set out below to how the meeting would be run.

Decision:

The Council agreed to suspend Council rules to facilitate the following changes:

- a) Public questions would be extended from 30 minutes to 40 minutes with a reduction in the time allocations for the Leader's Report from 35 minutes to 30 minutes and the Overview and Scrutiny activity report from 25 to 20 minutes.
- b) Public questioners unable to attend this evening had been allowed to send a representative to read out their question or the Mayor would put

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the question on their behalf. Only public questioners attending in person would be able to ask supplementary questions.

- c) The order of business had been changed as indicated on the Agenda. In summary the agenda item on motions would be taken after public questions. Any information reports or reports for noting would be the last agenda items.
- d) Limit the number of speakers per motion to the proposer and seconder, plus up to 10% of each group (rounded up) as follows;

Labour and Co-operative Group – 3

Conservative Group – 2

Independent Group – 1

Independent Members – 3

The same number of speakers would be allowed for each amendment to a motion.

631 Leader's announcements

There were none.

632 Petitions

Public:

There were none.

Member:

There were none.

633 Public questions

Question 7A – Peter Skudder, of Gillingham, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Louwella Prenter:

“I hear that the travellers in Wigmore / Bredhurst have been given permission to stay, I am concerned as this could impact the value of our properties and have not seen any consultation with residents in the area, or any contributions that they are making to the local Council if the land was sold to them. How long will they be staying?”

In response, Councillor Prenter said that the Council had granted a licence to occupy for a specific period of time. The occupants had failed to leave at the end of the period which had resulted in the Council taking legal proceedings to

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recover the possession of the site. The Court had set a final hearing date for trial of 19-21 February 2025. The land remained in the ownership of the Council.

No supplementary question was asked as Peter Skudder was not present.

Question 7B – Robert Wyatt, of Cliffe, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:

“Could the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement please give an update on the Council’s progress with pothole repairs to date including information about any additional funding from the Government to tackle potholes?”

In response, Councillor Paterson said that during the current financial year, the Highways Team had repaired 4,800 potholes and carried out more than 2,385 highway inspections. The Team would continue to be responsive to further reports of defects and work to ensure all inspections were carried out on time.

The additional funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) for potholes in the current year was £401,000 of Network North funding, which was diverted from HS2. It was understood that there was no further HS2 funding available at the end of the current financial year.

For 2025/26, £1.289m had been allocated from the DfT for road maintenance, which included resurfacing works.

Robert Wyatt chose not to ask a supplementary question.

Question 7C – Carolyn Hart, of Gillingham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“Could the Leader of the Council give an update on what is being done to support those who may need additional assistance but might slip through the net following the Government’s decision to means test Winter Fuel Allowance?”

In response, Councillor Maple said that a range of activities had been undertaken or were planned to encourage take up of Pension Credit and to highlight the wide range of support available to Medway’s Pensioners.

Through the Cost-of-Living Crisis Response Plan, the Council had purchased a tool called the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT), and this had been used to identify Medway residents in receipt of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction who may also be entitled to claim Pension Credit. These 440 residents were sent a letter from Councillor Murray, as the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, to explain how to claim Pension Credit and to outline the support that Medway’s Financial Welfare Team could provide.

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An event had been hosted at the Pentagon Centre on 21 October 2024. Whilst the primary focus of the event had been about maximising Pension Credit take up, the opportunity had also been used to invite other Council services and key partners to show the wide variety of support available to Pensioners. This included partners from the DWP, MVA, Age UK, Carers First, Imago and Southern Water, alongside the Council's Benefits and Financial Welfare Teams, Housing Services, Public Health, Medway Integrated Community Equipment Services and Medway Adult Education.

The award winning Benefits and Financial Welfare Team had been attending community events and accepting specific invites to events where pensioners would be present. This included events with Naushabah Khan MP, Medway Matters Live, visits to church groups, pensioner luncheons and prominent community spaces, such as the Net in Walderslade. These events had all been well received and had enabled officers to communicate the wider support available to residents.

In December 2024, approximately 1,600 pensioner households had been identified in Medway who were not eligible for Pension Credit but were in receipt of housing benefit, or the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Each household received a payment of £200 and they had been informed via a joint letter from Councillors Maple and Murray. This payment had been funded through the Government's Household Support Fund. As of 14 January, 90% of the payments had been claimed through the safe and secure Post Office Payout system.

Medway Council would be continuing to operate the Household Support Fund throughout the winter, with over £1million allocated to support all residents in financial hardship, including support with energy costs. Officers would continue to identify and engage positively with Pensioners who required additional support this winter.

Carolyn Hart chose not to ask a supplementary question.

Question 7D – Liubov Nestorova, of Gillingham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“What is the Council doing in terms of improving Gillingham High Street?”

In response, Councillor Maple said that he was pleased to be working on some exciting plans to rejuvenate and regenerate Gillingham Town Centre.

Officers had worked with the National High Street Task Force and key external stakeholders in the last year to address the challenges facing Gillingham High Street. This programme had identified key areas of focus and actions for supporting the regeneration of the town centre.

The work of the Gillingham Town Centre Taskforce had continued. Chaired by the MP for Gillingham and Rainham, Naushabah Khan, the Gillingham Town Centre Taskforce had been created with senior Council officers, partners and key

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businesses to discuss the issues facing the town centre and to work on actioning some of the key priorities for Gillingham High Street.

The taskforce met bi-monthly, and partners would continue to meet regularly to help ensure the town centre was a better place for everyone, from residents and visitors to businesses and young people.

Some successes from this taskforce had been the refurbishment of new lamp columns, the repainting of the Town Centre benches and the very successful Love Gillingham event. A second Love Gillingham was being planned for July 2025.

The first Gillingham Co-Creation Community Panel had taken place in autumn 2024 as part of Medway's ongoing regeneration work to transform the town centre.

The programme was being run by Design-South East and BPTW, who had been commissioned by the Council to deliver a co-creation project with Gillingham's residents and businesses. The workshop included 40 panel members featuring residents and individuals who worked in Gillingham. The panel discussed opportunities to improve the High Street and looked at the most challenging issues currently affecting the area, including concerns around safety, cleanliness and green space improvements. The Panel would help to shape the future of Gillingham Town Centre, making it a better place to live, work, learn and visit for years to come.

Councillor Maple said that there was a huge amount of enthusiasm and support for Gillingham amongst the businesses and its community. The final workshop would take place on Saturday 1 February, where the community panel would develop a Gillingham Town Centre Action Plan that would identify a clear vision with projects for the transformation of the area over the coming years.

Liubov Nestorova asked the following supplementary question:

"Do you think all of this is easier to achieve working with a Labour MP and a Labour Government?"

Councillor Maple said it was tempting to give a one word answer of yes. He said he was incredibly proud of what the three local MPs were doing in Parliament. It was the current Council administration, when in opposition, who had said there should have been two bids for the Future High Streets Fund, one for Gillingham and one for Chatham. The then Council administration had refused to do that, only putting forward Chatham. The current administration prioritised those areas that needed support. From this perspective, Councillor Maple was pleased to be working with a Government that he said recognised a Council that was trying to put right the wrongs that had been in place for the last 20 years.

There was an absolute determination on the part of the people of Gillingham to work with the Council to make their community the very best, and Councillor

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Maple hoped that whoever was elected on 6 February 2025 would be part of that journey.

Question 7E – Sultana Bhatti, of Gillingham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“I have been made aware that a ceasefire motion continues to be opposed within the Labour Group.

The International Court of Justice found that there was a plausible case of Genocide as far back as January 2024 and the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for key Israeli individuals, including the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in November. These rulings were not made lightly and indicate grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

The Medway Palestine Solidarity Campaign has consistently lobbied the Council to call for a ceasefire, the banning of arms licenses with Israel (export and import) and for international law to be upheld.

Can the Leader of the Council please ask why Medway Labour continues to oppose any ceasefire motion being accepted onto the agenda at Council meetings, particularly as other councils, including Manchester and Maidstone, have passed their own motions, and continue to do so?”

In response, Councillor Maple said that he welcomed the progress made internationally over the last few days and highlighted that there was also a motion in relation to this issue elsewhere on the Council agenda.

Councillor Maple said he recognised that any Councillor could suggest a motion, however there were also clear rules brought in during the Covid pandemic to limit the number of motions which could be brought forward by political groups. There was only one motion from each political group on the current Council meeting agenda. It was an internal matter for each group to decide the process for submitting a motion.

Councillor Maple said that motions put onto the agenda in the name of the Labour and Co-Operative Group were submitted through a democratic process, as was the case for the motion submitted to this meeting that thanked hardworking staff in Strood for the role that they played over the Christmas period.

Sultana Bhatti chose not to ask a supplementary question.

Question 7F – Saboor Ahmed, of Gillingham, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson:

“As a resident of Gillingham for 25 years, I understand the parking issues in the area very well. With much of the area under permit restrictions, and with pay and display charges up 185%, the cost of parking a car for local families,

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households and those using the High Street is becoming a significant burden, at a time when everything is going up. Furthermore, shopkeepers are saying the Council's increases in parking charges are impacting their businesses in the High Street, this was something that was raised again in recent months with the then Councillor for Gillingham South, and MP, Naushabah Khan. To date no action has been seen to be taken on these matters.

With all of the above in mind, I ask the Portfolio Holder to listen to calls to reduce the cost of resident parking permits and to reintroduce the free parking sessions for the High Street, therefore, will he now act to help local families with the cost of living, and to support local businesses?"

In response, Councillor Paterson said that after 14 years of what he considered to be neglect by the previous MP and more than 20 years of inaction by the previous Council administration, he would have considered it a novelty to hear Conservative opposition Councillors claim to be speaking up on behalf of Gillingham residents.

Councillor Paterson said that the numbers quoted in the question did not add up and that homeowners had been left paying hundreds of pounds more in monthly mortgage costs. This would have a far more profound impact on the cost of living than a few pence more on parking charges. It was suggested that the questioner might like to do his sums again.

Medway's parking permits were currently significantly low in cost compared to neighbouring authorities in Kent. A resident permit currently cost £33 per annum. This equated to a little over 60p per week or 9p per day. These extremely modest charges reflected the fact that operating these schemes to protect parking spaces for Gillingham residents brought with it operational and delivery costs and it would be unfair to expect other council tax payers, who did not benefit from the schemes to bear the costs of subsidising them.

A piece of work had recently been carried out around town centre parking in Medway, which, showed the number of car park transactions were consistent with previous years and therefore unlikely to be the reason for any perceived impact on business.

Councillor Paterson paid tribute to Naushabah Khan MP and her former ward colleagues for their support of the Love Gillingham initiative, which had culminated in a fantastic positive event in September 2024, which brought the whole community together. The current administration was building up Gillingham in partnership with its residents.

No supplementary question was asked as Saboor Ahmed was not present.

Question 7G – Trish Marchant, of Gillingham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

"Will the Leader, Vince Maple, advise if, as part of the devolution changes, there is any intention to revise the election process to a fairer voting system

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which would be proportionate to voters' wishes, so that the electorate across the new unitary authority will be represented equally. Noting that at the 2023 locals, Labour took control of the Council with just 10% of the available vote."

In response, Councillor Maple said that the rules regarding election processes were a matter for the Government. In relation to directly elected Mayors, Councillor Maple believed that second preference voting should be used as that would ensure a stronger mandate for the person selected. He said that most people understood and respected the first past the post electoral system and that his views were different from many others in his party. It was for all people involved in elections to encourage and inspire people to vote. Councillor Maple said that he would wish to retain the current electoral system for electing unitary authority Councillors.

Two sets of public consultation would be undertaken. Any individual, political party, resident group, parish council, council group or anybody else would be entitled to make their submissions, initially on the Mayoralty, and later on local government reorganisation.

Trish Marchant asked the following supplementary question:

"Does Councillor Maple not think that there would be greater engagement with the electorate if there was proportional representation or a fairer voting system as it would encourage more people to vote if they knew their vote actually would be counted and they would have representation of some sort on the Council, especially considering the lack of consultation so far and public awareness around the upcoming potential merger with Dartford and Gravesham?"

Councillor Maple said that he took a different view on the map and that whether it was Dartford, Gravesham, Swale or anybody else, it would be for the 1.9m residents in the region to share their views. He said that he wanted to inspire people to vote and for them to vote on 6 February 2025.

All political parties could look at the percentage of votes they had received. While Labour had taken control of the Council with 10% of the total available vote, Councillor Maple wondered what percentages of the vote the other parties would have secured in that election.

Question 7H – Onyx Rist, of Rainham, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

"I would like to ask Councillor Vince Maple to ensure that Gillingham is protected in any decision regarding devolution. Gillingham's former Liberal Democrat councillors warned that the Unitary Authority, now known as Medway (our Council) would mean that Gillingham is forgotten. This has happened given the lack of investment that Medway Council has given Gillingham in comparison to Chatham or Rochester.

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I want to ask Councillor Maple to rectify that, and ensuring that Gillingham gets the investment it desperately needs in any deal, in doing so, making sure any elections that may need to be postponed are quickly held within a matter of months?”

In response, Councillor Maple referred Onyx Rist to the answer he had provided to question 7D.

No supplementary question was asked as Onyx Rist was not present.

Question 71 – Matthew Broadley, of Chatham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“On 30th November, a Council leader addressed the Kent Association of Local Councils and spoke about the democratic deficit that the UK has in local government, particularly when compared to the rest of the world. This Council leader stated that should Kent switch to wider Unitary Authorities, this would not only exacerbate this democratic deficit, but would also reduce the democratic accountability of the system.

The English Devolution White Paper is set to almost double the existing democratic deficit, with the resident to councillor ratio in Medway expected to increase from approximately 3,500 to over 6,000.

Can you please confirm who it was that made those representations to the Kent Association of Local Councils?”

In response, Councillor Maple confirmed that the former Council Leader who had raised the issue was the former Leader of Swale Borough Council, Andrew Bowles. Councillor Maple said he had been pleased to answer his question when he had posed it during a wide-ranging conversation at the Kent Association for Local Council’s AGM.

Matthew Broadley asked the following supplementary question:

“Given that the main decisions have already been made behind closed doors, how can the residents of Medway and Kent take this local democracy review seriously and feel that their voices will be heard?”

Councillor Maple said that very few decisions had been taken to date and that he considered that the death of democracy had been somewhat overinflated. Medway already knew that unitary authorities worked, having had over a quarter of a century of experience.

While Councillor Maple did not agree with all decisions that had been made by the Council, the one thing he had never had to do when someone had called him was to say that he was not their Councillor and that they would need to speak to another Councillor. This was what happened in other parts of Kent.

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On the issue of the Mayoralty, there would be a public consultation. Councillor Maple encouraged Mr Broadley and anybody else who wished to, to make their contribution heard and that these would be considered carefully. It was not yet known when the consultation would be, it could be in a couple of months' time should Medway be admitted to the priority programme. It was anticipated that the Council would find out before the end of January 2025.

Councillor Maple said that Medway Council would do everything it could to ensure that all people could play their part, should they chose to, and that this could be made as easy and straightforward as possible. It was suggested that if any conversations to date had been behind closed doors, then there were others who had also been behind these doors.

Councillor Maple said that he would personally work with everybody, regardless of political party and that he wanted the best deal in the conversation for the 1.9 million people. He was pleased to be proposing the establishment of a cross-party working group later in the meeting and considered that it was the right thing to do to have the 14 Council leaders write to the Government to indicate their wish to make progress on this matter. The doors were open here in Medway ready to have these conversations and Councillor Maple urged everybody to play their part as the process moved forward.

Question 7J – Doug Bray, of Chatham, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

“Under what rationale do you justify your request to delay elections and extend the Councillor terms, which is beyond the democratic mandate that residents voted for and in doing so explaining what steps will be taken to uphold democratic integrity and maintain public confidence?”

In response, Councillor Maple said that he had not requested a delay to any elections in the current year, in fact the opposite was the case. Councillor Maple had written to the Minister of State, Jim McMahon, to make it very clear that he did not believe it was appropriate for any councillor, of any council, of any political persuasion, to have a 7-year term of office. This was a possibility if the Kent County Council elections and many other elections across the country were postponed with no clear indication of when councils would cease to exist.

In his letter, which he would publish on his X feed, Councillor Maple was clear that his working assumption was that Medway Council would cease to exist in 2028 and, therefore, the shadow elections for the new authority that would look after the 285,000 residents would be in 2027. He considered that it would be acceptable at that point for a one-year extension with the clear indication that the Council would cease to exist. That was very different to the situation that a number of councils across the country found themselves in. It was a matter for those individual Council Leaders and Cabinets as to the decisions taken and the representations made, but Councillor Maple was very clear on his views around the principle of a 7 year term of office.

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There was the possibility of a 1 year extension of the term of office for existing Councillors, but Councillor Maple had not made any request and he would seek the support of all Councillors to do that at the appropriate moment. Medway had three upcoming by-elections in February 2025 and Councillor Maple looked forward to conversations on the wider issues later during the Council meeting.

No supplementary question was asked as Doug Bray was not present

Question 7K – Bryan Fowler, of Chatham, asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

“Mindful of the recent decision to grant a Premises Licence to an Off Licence in a designated Cumulative Impact Area, what assurances can you give to the Public Health Team, the Police and public, that Medway Council still supports the Cumulative Impact Policy?”

In response, Councillor Murray said that whilst she was unable to comment on the specific case as it was subject to an appeal, Mr Fowler was right to seek reassurance. It was very important that all parts of the Council understood and supported the objectives of the Cumulative Impact Area, in line with the commitment to prevent poor health, tackle health inequalities and provide opportunities for all residents to improve their health.

Councillor Murray said that the Licensing Committee was determined to play its part in supporting the Cumulative Impact Area and that the Committee was in the process of setting up a working group to ensure the Committee would be fully informed about the Cumulative Impact Area’s purpose and reach, as well as exploring how best to reflect these in licensing policy and decisions. This work would also involve police colleagues and other partners.

Bryan Fowler asked the following supplementary question:

“Going forward, how will you ensure that the locally produced policy continues to be operated in future, especially as it appears from papers on devolution, which we’re going to be discussing later on, suggest that Medway councillors, all of you, have already made your minds up that we do not want a/our unitary authority to continue in existence?”

Councillor Murray said that Mr Fowler had been completely misinformed. On the contrary, it was anticipated that everybody else in Kent would be looking to Medway for leadership. Medway was very proud of the unitary authority and considered it to be the most efficient and democratic form of local government. This would continue under a new mayoral authority. Between now and then, the Licensing Committee and all staff would be working to achieve the very best they could for Medway.

Councillor Murray said that there should not be concern. There was a lot of misinformation about devolution, which was why Councillor Maple had put it onto the Council’s public agenda for discussion later in the meeting, so that people would have the opportunity to hear what was going on.

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Question 7L – Jeremy Spyby-Stearson, of Chatham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

“Whilst I welcome the long overdue development of the site of the old Strood Civic Centre, I am alarmed to see no council housing being delivered as part of the development. We had the opportunity, through the Medway Development Company, to deliver a mixed-housing development that could have included a proportion of council housing, to accommodate some of those desperate families who have been on the council house waiting list, sometimes for years.

With the fire sale of the Union Place Car Park (Chatham) and Temple Street Car Park (Strood), it appears that we are missing opportunities to meet this housing demand. I can only assume that this is having a detrimental impact on the delivery of affordable and social/council housing across Medway as profit becomes more important than meeting local housing demands.

What measures are Medway Council taking to ensure that we do not miss these opportunities going forwards?”

In response, Councillor Curry said that the delivery of affordable homes was vital within schemes to provide for balanced communities, but also to help address the affordable housing crisis that existed across the country, including in Medway.

In respect of the Civic Centre site, the costs of developing this site, due to dealing with land issues, made it unviable to deliver affordable homes through the planning system. The Council would deliver the required affordable homes on this site, outside of the planning process, using grant funding.

Regarding Union Street Car park, it was the intention of the Council to work with the purchaser to deliver much needed homes and affordable homes.

Similarly, in relation to Temple Street Car park, the Council was working with the purchaser in relation to it forming part of a wider development to bring significant improvements to Strood Town Centre, which would include the provision of much needed affordable homes.

Councillor Curry said that there must be a general acceptance of there being a desperate need for many more affordable homes in Medway, but there was also a real issue currently with registered providers, who were the usual leaders in the delivery of affordable homes, and their inability to deliver affordable homes in sufficient numbers through the planning process. In this respect, Medway Council, as planning authority, was leading the way in the South East to find solutions, in partnership with developers, registered providers, the Council itself, affordable providers and Homes England. This would ensure the continued delivery of these much needed homes, often currently outside the usual planning process.

Jeremy Spyby-Stearson asked the following supplementary question:

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“In respect I think when we talk, and I think in this question I made it quite clear, when we talk about affordable housing, I’m specifically saying Council housing. Does the Councillor feel that Medway Council’s ability to prioritise council housing is set back by the Labour Government’s growth at all costs mindset towards the economy?”

Councillor Curry said that he did not think it was and he considered that Medway Council was doing its best on all fronts.

634 Motions

Motion A – As Councillor Etheridge had submitted apologies for the meeting, the motion was proposed by Councillor Lawrence and supported by Councillor Tejan:

“The Council notes that on the 30th October 2024, Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP, delivered the largest tax raising budget since the Second World War with the biggest burden falling on businesses. The £40bn tax raising measures included adding inheritance tax to farmers, as well as increases including inflation busting national minimum wage rises, national insurance increases and higher capital gains tax liabilities. The national insurance rises alone will cost business more than £24bn and will be devastating for the charity sector and vulnerable residents dependent on Council services provided by the private sector.

The Council further notes that each one of these measures affects families living in Medway who have worked hard to create businesses to pass on to their loved ones. The impact of the Budget has been a plunge in business confidence, economic output going into reverse, inflation increasing, and hiring rates down.

Medway’s economy is dependent on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and it is important that this sector thrives for the future of our community and future economic wellbeing.

For farmers, this is especially galling as farming is capital-intensive with extremely low margins and will mean the end of family farming across the country. It will affect the country’s food security, biodiversity and employment opportunities as farmers reduce investment.

The Council believes that the Labour government have committed shameful betrayal of working people and let down farmers by breaking their promise not to raise taxes nor introduce a family farm tax.

The Council resolves to request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary of State for Business and Trade, and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline the Council’s dismay at the recent Budget and call on the Government to stop the family farm tax.

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The Council further resolves to request that the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment engages with local businesses and farmers to understand the impact of the budget and to better understand what the Council can do to support them.”

Decision:

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

Motion B –

A Member questioned whether the motion should be permitted to be considered by the Council on the basis that it was so far removed, it should be considered to be de minimis as the motion would, if passed, amount to a direct interference with a local business and it was not for Medway Council to interfere with any business in those circumstances.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the rules in relation to motions at Council meetings were contained within Rule 10 of the Council’s procedural rules within the Council’s Constitution. Paragraph 10.1b dealt with motions involving debate. A debate could take place in relation to a motion that related to the Council’s responsibilities or the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area. The motion being proposed did consider the economic wellbeing of the area. There was no requirement for it to be wholly in relation to economic matters or only a de minimis level. Officers had little discretion when motions were received as to what was included in the meeting agenda.

Paragraph 10.2 of the Council’s procedure rules stated that motions that required notice must be signed by at least one Member of the Council and received at least seven working days before the meeting. The motion submitted had complied with these rules and related to the economic wellbeing of the area. Officers considered motions received with an enabling interpretation and did not seek to limit or excessively rule out matters. The Monitoring Officer and his colleagues were satisfied that the motion received fell within the scope of the rules set out at paragraph 10.1b and therefore the advice was that the motion was in accordance with the Council’s procedural rules.

The motion was Proposed by Councillor Shokar and supported by Councillor Spalding:

“The horrific attacks on 7th October by Hamas in Israel have resulted in a war against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and on Lebanon. While the actions taken by Hamas cannot ever be justified, the current military campaign by Israel against the Palestinian and Lebanese people is unconscionable and cannot continue.

Over 46,000 people have been killed in Gaza, of whom around 60% are women and children, and over 3,000 people in Lebanon, also many of them civilians. The actual figures, however, are considered to be far higher. The capture and recapture analysis, presented in the Lancet Medical Journal suggests a 41% underreporting of traumatic injury mortality. A total death toll of over 180,000

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could be expected when including indirect causes such as starvation, lack of medicines and disease.

The International Court of Justice has said there is a plausible case that Israel's actions amount to genocide and the United Nations has recently stated that Israel's blocking of aid in Gaza is genocide. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime, Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and ex-Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant for war crimes.

Many Medway residents are appalled and traumatised at what has been happening in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon, and have supported repeated protests here in Medway as well as joining the many huge demonstrations that have taken place in London over the last 15 months.

The UK is required by both international and domestic law not to supply weapons to States that are committing genocide and crimes against humanity, yet our Government has failed to stop all sales of weapons to Israel. BAE Systems, a major employer in Medway, is manufacturing some of those weapons. Though BAE Systems is an important asset in Medway, providing employment and much-needed technological apprenticeships, this doesn't make them immune to upholding international humanitarian law. It's also important to ensure Medway employees at BAE Systems are not involved in producing such weapons for such crimes.

An end to the fighting and international leadership to work for peace in the region is needed urgently and it is extremely important that Medway sends a clear message to the Government and BAE Systems in support of this. Medway has a history of showing solidarity for international citizens in times of conflict, as seen by the tremendous support for Ukrainians. To abandon the Palestinians at their time of most need would be morally indefensible. It's our duty to apply scrutiny and pressure to the full extent on those involved in providing weapons that are being used to commit mass atrocities. Failure to do so could imply a degree of complicity by the Council."

Therefore, the Council resolves:

1. To call on the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs:
 - a) to press all parties to agree:
 - i) to an urgent permanent, bilateral ceasefire in Gaza, Israel, West Bank and Lebanon and to work tirelessly to resume a just and sustainable peace process.
 - ii) to guarantee that international humanitarian law is upheld and that civilians are protected in accordance with those laws.
 - iii) to allow the Red Cross immediate access to hostages and detainees in Gaza and Israel and to ensure that all aid is allowed

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into the region including unfettered access to medical supplies, food, electricity, other fuel and water.

- b) to suspend all arms exports to Israel given the plausible case for genocide and illegality of the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.
- c) to implement sanctions including travel bans and asset freezes against those involved in maintaining Israel's unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- d) to exercise international advocacy for the right of return and compensation for all Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

2. To write to BAE Systems and ask them to:

- Adhere to the "UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights" and the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)
- Cease their business relationship with Israel and ensure that no products are used to violate civil liberties or human rights overseas.
- Commission an immediate internal report on whether their continued business relationship with Israel is compatible with international law or BAE Systems Product Trading Policy, knowing that Israel is committing war crimes and breaching international law."

There was a brief meeting adjournment during discussion of the motion due to a technical issue.

Decision:

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

Motion C – proposed by Councillor Mrs Turpin:

"Chatham Docks is under threat of development from landlords Peel Land and Property, who continue to claim that the site is no longer financially viable, despite having used their ownership of the land to demonstrate their commitment to employment when applying for residential planning permission on the adjacent Chatham Waters site.

The Docks has a 400-year history but in last year's Regulation 18 consultation the Chatham Docks site appeared in the Council's preferred Spatial Growth Option - The Blended Strategy.

This Council notes that:

- Chatham Docks is a thriving commercial port which directly provides 795 skilled local jobs.

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- The Docks indirectly supports an additional 1,440 jobs through the supply chain.
- The businesses located at Chatham Docks make a significant positive contribution to Medway's economy, with £89 million of annual investment into Medway. The Docks use environmentally sustainable methods to transport goods, which would otherwise be exported by road.
- The closure of Chatham Docks would have a disastrous impact on the employees and their families because they would either lose their jobs or have to relocate; and some of the businesses at Chatham Docks are physically unable to relocate due to the nature of their operation.
- Medway's Local Plan has not yet been approved, and previous iterations have been criticised for failing to designate sufficient levels of employment land.

This Council resolves to ask the relevant officers to consider to remove the Chatham Docks site from the Council's preferred option in the forthcoming Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Draft Plan to safeguard employment, skills and the local economy and re-designate Chatham Docks as solely for employment use before the Local Plan is submitted for approval."

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Council could consider two types of motion under its Council procedure rules, either procedural or those that required debate. Where a motion required debate, it must be in relation to the Council's responsibilities or the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area. Provided that a motion drafted met that requirement, was signed by at least one Member and delivered to the Chief Executive seven working days before the date of the meeting, that motion would be entered in a book open to the public for inspection and listed on the agenda. The motion submitted had satisfied those requirements and therefore was listed on the agenda.

On Tuesday 21 January 2025, the Monitoring Officer had received an e-mail from the Chief Planning Officer, advising extreme caution in progressing with the motion as the Council was part way through a consultation exercise in relation to the Local Plan and would not wish to jeopardise the progress of that due to legal challenges that might be faced as a result of Members that may be considered to be biased or pre-determined.

Having considered this e-mail, the Monitoring Officer sent the following e-mail on Wednesday 22 January 2025 to Councillor Mrs Turpin, the Chief Executive, Richard Hicks and the Chief Operating Officer, Phil Watts. The e-mail was also copied to the Deputy Monitoring Officer, Vicky Nutley and the Head of Democratic Services, Wayne Hemingway.

"Good evening Councillor Turpin

My attention has been drawn to the motion that you have submitted to be debated at the council meeting tomorrow night. I apologise for the lateness of the email and the advice contained herein. I also apologise to both Richard and

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Phil as I have not had chance to consult with them as my two statutory officer colleagues.

The motion requests the council to make a determination on the Chatham docks site contained within the draft local plan which is currently in the process of a statutory consultation and responses are being evaluated. Under the councils rules for the conduct of council meetings there is nothing improper about the motion. However, there are serious legal implications which need to be considered and explained to all members if the motion is moved and seconded, to be debated.

If the motioned is moved and seconded I shall have no alternative but to provide advice to all members that

1. Participation in the debate and or voting may, subject to the contribution by each individual member, exhibit predetermination and bias on their part whilst, the consultation exercise is still live / responses are being considered and evaluated.
2. Formulating a view on an aspect of the local plan at the meeting on Thursday night would be premature, not based on the consideration of the full facts and would probably be determined by the High Court as the Council acting irrationally and unreasonably (i.e. the legal grounds to succeed in a claim for Judicial review.)
3. There is a significant and substantial risk that the statutory consultation may be subjected to legal challenge and a significant risk that we would not be able to successfully defend such a challenge. Further, in the event of such a challenge and our likely inability to defend the council an award for costs against the council is likely to be made.
4. I would need to seriously consider if my statutory duty as Monitoring Officer is invoked, i.e. the council seeking to make decision that is unlawful. If that is invoked, I am under a statutory duty to produce a report and present it to full council at meeting held for that single item.
5. Any member who debates and votes on the motion, would need to recuse themselves when the plan comes back to council to move to the next stage (reg 19) to seek to safe guard the legal procedure the council is obligated to follow. However I suspect it will not get to this stage as the reg 18 consultation would have been challenged and held to be unlawful.

None of the above options is without risk, reputational damage and satisfactory. To avoid personal and corporate embarrassment I would suggest that the motion is withdrawn. Whilst there is no formal process to do so, it can be achieved by not moving the motion. Any consideration of the site, its uses and revision to the reg 18 plan, can properly be made when the results of the consultation on the local plan return to full council.

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Unfortunately I am out of the office all day at a hearing and have limited opportunity to step out of that engagement but Vicky has been copied into this email if you wish to have a discussion. Alternatively, I could try to ring you when we have comfort breaks but these are very short and will not facilitate a full conversation.

Could you please let me know by return how you wish to proceed?"

The following response had been received from Councillor Mrs Turpin on the morning of 23 January 2025. This had also been copied to Councillors Crozer, Sands, Pearce and Williams:

"Dear Bhupinder,

To say I am disappointed by your email is an understatement. To send me this at 11pm the night before council is unacceptable when the Agenda has been published for over a week. I am in work all day and also have very little time to discuss this with anyone. I will however attempt to call Wayne and or Vicky in my lunch break.

Elizabeth"

The Monitoring Officer had since spoken to the Deputy Monitoring Officer, Vicky Nutley. She had a conversation with Councillor Mrs Turpin earlier in the day and proposed an alteration the motion which could be discussed at the Council meeting. That had been shared with Councillor Mrs Turpin but the suggested alteration had not been moved at the meeting, the original motion had been moved.

The Monitoring Officer had also had a discussion with a Councillor, whom he understood may second the motion. Should they second the motion there would be a risk that they too could be determined to have pre-determined the issue and to have bias on this matter. The Monitoring Officer had left it to the Member to consider whether they wished to second the motion or not.

A Member said that the motion asked officers to consider to remove the Chatham Dock site from the preferred options rather than to actually remove it. Therefore, the Monitoring Officer was asked to consider altering his advice.

The Monitoring Officer said that the motion did ask officers to consider to remove Chatham Dock site from preferred options and redesignate as solely for employment use before the Local Plan was submitted for approval. There was a substantial and significant risk. While there might not be a challenge and it might not be successful, the advice was provided based upon what Members had said in the Chamber historically. The Council was well progressed along the legal route to adopting a Local Plan. The Monitoring Officer was seeking to manage the risks that might be presented by having a debate and asking officers to limit the options in appraisals that went forward. Whether officers followed that request or not, the request was clear, it was asking officers not to

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present the totality of options available and therefore the Monitoring Officer's advice was as he had given previously.

In response to a Member question about what the impact would be of Members abstaining in a recorded vote on the motion, the Monitoring Officer suggested that would be the safest course of action as voting for or against suggested that a Member had come to a particular conclusion.

Concern was raised that a significant number of abstentions in any recorded vote could lead to the motion being inadvertently agreed. The Monitoring Officer said that should the motion be agreed by the Council, he would need to consider whether it was unlawful and if so to bring a report to a future Council meeting setting out his conclusions and requesting the Council to consider alternative options.

The meeting was adjourned for further consideration of the issue.

Following resumption of the meeting, the Chief Executive advised that he had spoken to the Leaders of the three political groups and in view of the concerns and questions raised, it was proposed that consideration of the motion be adjourned to allow external legal advice to be sought. Should the advice confirm that the motion could be considered, it would be brought to the April 2025 meeting of Full Council. The brief for this advice would be shared with Members and should the motion be discussed at the April Council meeting, the Independent Group would be entitled to submit a further motion to that meeting.

Decision:

Consideration of the motion was adjourned to the Council meeting due to take place on 24 April 2025 to enable external legal advice to be sought.

Motion D – proposed by Councillor Spalding and supported by Councillor Pearce:

“In addition to its rich military, industrial and power generation heritage, Medway has a long history of farming.

These are farms which provide award winning produce not just locally, but to major supermarkets too.

This excellence is not just restricted to Medway. Throughout Kent our farmers grow the necessities and the pleasurable.

A few miles down the road a family run farming business provides over thirty four tonnes of strawberries to the Wimbledon Championships.

Farming has been under threat from central government house building targets as landowners such as the Church Commissioners seek to sell off farmland to developers in the name of short term profit.

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Now family farms face threat from the current government's changes to agricultural property relief.

This Council believes that farmland and family farms should be protected so they can continue to provide first rate produce to feed the nation and to provide a continuing green lung that is so vital in maintaining good air quality.

This Council calls on the Government to protect farmland and family farms by:

- a) Ensuring building and construction on Farmland only occurs in the most exceptional circumstances.
- b) Reverse the changes to Agricultural Property Relief.

This Council requests the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to jointly write to:

- a) The respective Secretaries of State stating this Council's wishes.
- b) The three Medway MPs asking them to lobby ministers to ensure the above."

Decision:

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

Motion E – proposed by Councillor Field and supported by Councillor Van Dyke:

"On the 23rd of December, a burst water main in Strood led to the loss of running water supply to over 1,000 households. The majority of homes had their supply reinstated on Christmas Eve, but come Christmas Day, 50 properties were still without a running water supply.

Many of Medway Council's staff will have been looking forward to their own Christmas break, but in the face of the crises affecting the people they serve every single day, mobilised to support to make sure people had the information they needed, worked with Southern Water to ensure people had access to bottled water, and even took the extraordinary step of opening up Strood Leisure centre on Christmas Day and Boxing Day to allow those still without running water the ability to take a hot shower.

This Council recognises the extraordinary efforts of all staff involved in providing this support and requests that the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council write to those involved to pass on its thanks and gratitude."

Decision:

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

635 Leader's report

Discussion:

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

- The Care Quality Commission inspection of Medway's Adult Social Care provision, which had rated the Council as 'requires improvement'. Medway's score was only a small amount below 'good' and there was confidence that the score would be higher if the inspection was undertaken now.
- The inspection of Medway's Social Housing provision by the Regulator of Social Housing. The Council had achieved a score of C2, which was the second highest grade.
- Hosting of the successful Rochester Christmas Market, which was now in its 15th year and this year had been visited by over 130,000 people.
- The English Devolution White Paper – the cross party approach was welcomed. Around 40 Members had attended a cross party Member briefing. It was considered that Medway would be well placed going forward due to it already being a unitary authority.
- Recent events held including the Medway Business Awards, Medway Sports Awards and the Make a Difference Employee Recognition Awards.
- National level recognition of the Council's Safer Streets initiative and of the Public Health team.
- The sending of a letter to Baroness Sharon Taylor asking the Government to consider granting Medway city status.
- Thanks were given to Jane Ringham, Head of Member Services and Elections, for all her hard work. Jane was due to retire shortly and Members wished her a happy retirement.
- The continued development of the Medway Local Plan.
- Exceptional Financial Support provided to the Council and concern about associated interest payments.
- The Plough Sunday Service held at Rochester Cathedral.
- Ensuring good access to Primary Care and the need to consider those not able to use digital channels.
- Christmas waste and recycling collections, which had been good this year following previous challenges.

636 Members' questions

Question 10A – Councillor Spalding, asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

“On 8 July 2024, the new Labour Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, in her first speech promised 300 additional planning officers across the country.

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Chatting about this to the new MP for Rochester and Strood, I was advised that in Medway's case this did not have to be a planner but could be a much needed Planning Enforcement Officer.

Could the Portfolio Holder confirm Medway has received the funds to recruit and pay for an additional officer and when the person is likely to be in post or was this simply another case of the Labour Party making a promise and not keeping it?"

In response, Councillor Curry said that it was great news that the Chancellor had recognised the need to properly resource planning departments with the officers and skills necessary to make sure all local authorities had a Local Plan in place as soon as possible. It was also good that the need had been recognised for there to be staff within the development management team of sufficient experience and with the skills to properly process within the necessary timescales, the significant number of applications for sustainable development that would be needed to deliver the homes Medway and the country needed, in the right places, with the right infrastructure.

The Government had specifically set aside a £46m package of investment to recruit and train 300 graduate and apprentice planners. The Council would be looking at the relevant criteria and submitting a bid shortly.

There was also £14.8m set aside to support Local Authorities with Local Plan delivery and Green Belt review, subject to meeting all the necessary criteria. While Medway did not meet the criteria of Local Plan delivery, nor on its own, the criteria for Green Belt review, as part of cross border working with Gravesham, Medway would be submitting a bid for funding to support the green belt review.

The Government was also funding the not-for-profit Public Practice, whose aim was to assist local authorities to recruit mid and senior level professionals by matching candidates to vacancies. While Medway did not have such vacancies at present, having recently undergone a successful recruitment campaign following a re-structure of the planning service in 2024, it would, if necessary, utilise public practice in the future. That recruitment campaign had included filling the important Derelict and Empty Properties officer post within the planning enforcement team.

The Council has been successful in securing £750k of funding to support advancements in digital planning, for which Medway was now one of the leading councils in the country. Officers were currently rolling out a series of training evenings for Members on digital planning to show how it could assist ward Councillors in helping their constituents. This would be the way forward for planning authorities and would help free up professional staff from more mundane tasks so that they could focus on their areas of professional expertise.

In this respect of the use of digital, the introduction of how to report a breach of planning permission had already reduced the number of invalid complaints,

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such as schemes that already had planning permission or did not need planning, by over 30%. This meant that Planning Enforcement staff, rather than having to spend significant time checking whether a complaint was valid, only to find there was no breach, could then focus their considerable expertise on actually investigating the acknowledged breaches and resolving them.

Question 10B – Councillor Pearce, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“In October 2022, Councillor Maple said (to the Medway Messenger): “What makes the latest proposals more galling is that it’s Medway Council’s own development company now proposing to rip off residents.” and “It cannot be right that developers proceed with building in Medway without making the right contributions to our infrastructure.”

A planning application to build 195 flats on the former Strood Civic Centre site was approved last month by the Planning Committee, without any Section 106 contributions proposed by the applicant - the Council’s own development company. According to the viability assessment, Medway Development Company is expected to make several million in profit from the development. Can the Leader of the Council explain why the Medway Development Company is still ripping off residents?”

In response, Councillor Maple said that Medway Development Company was not ripping off residents and he referred to the response he had given to question 7L for the wider context of the site.

Question 10C – Councillor Mandaracas, asked the Portfolio Holder for Education, Councillor Coombs, the following:

“Could you please tell me how many parents have contacted Medway Council requesting a school place for their child following the announcement, and introduction, of the removal of VAT exemption from private schools?”

In response, Councillor Coombs said that despite claims that state schools would be overwhelmed by applications for places for children attending private schools, following the removal of the VAT exemption, she could confirm that there had been fewer than 10 enquiries from parents of pupils in private schools. Many of these enquiries had been of a general nature rather than requesting a school place for their children and there had not been a notable number of children actually moving school.

Question 10D – Councillor Tejan, asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Van Dyke, the following:

“Can the Portfolio Holder tell the Council what proportion of the Council’s revenue spend is spent on staff salaries for 2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025? In giving her answer can she split this between gross pay, pension contributions, additional allowances, and sick pay?”

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In response, Councillor Van Dyke noted the efforts of Council officers during the recent water outage in Strood North and welcomed the proposed 5% pay increase for staff. Whilst the Council might always need some locum staff, there had been reliance on a number of expensive locums to maintain services, creating significant financial pressures.

This figures provided in response to the question were based upon payroll data recorded in the Council's financial management system for general fund services, it excluded information relating to schools and the Housing Revenue Account.

The 2024/25 forecast figures were based on an extrapolation of actual spend in the year up to December 2024, shown as a proportion of the total budget for the year, in order to make the comparison to prior years meaningful.

Note: the table below was circulated to Councillors during the meeting.

Table 1 – Payroll spend as % of Outturn/Forecast Outturn

	22/23 % of Outturn	23/24 % of Outturn	24/25 % of Forecast outturn
Gross Pay	16.0	16.7	16.8
Pension	2.9	3.0	3.2
National insurance	1.7	1.7	1.7
Sick Pay	0.5	0.5	0.6
Additional Allowances	0.1	0.1	0.1
Apprenticeship Levy	0.1	0.1	0.1
% of Outturn/Forecast Outturn	21.2	22.1	22.5

Table 2 – Payroll spend total split by type

	22/23 total (£)	23/24 totals (£)	24/25 totals (£)
Gross Pay	62,611,623	66,679,899	74,954,340
Pension	11,337,898	12,122,545	14,416,428
National insurance	6,536,688	6,758,074	7,761,813
Sick Pay	1,779,472	2,081,258	2,464,451
Additional Allowances	462,646	570,960	612,674
Apprenticeship Levy	322,756	344,965	386,861
Grand Total	83,051,084	88,557,702	100,596,567

Budget	£391,932,000	£399,815,000	£447,460,000
Outturn/Forecast			
Outturn			

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Question 10E – Councillor Lawrence, asked the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Mahil, the following:

“The Labour Budget on the 31st of October 2024 delivered the largest tax increases since World War II and have had a dramatic impact on growth, employment and investment. When the Labour Government came to power it inherited the fastest growing economy in the G7. Post budget Britain is highly likely to be facing nil growth in the short/medium term.

Can the Portfolio Holder set out his own analysis of the Budget's likely impact on the Medway economy with particular reference to private sector employment and investment?”

In response, Councillor Mahil said that the claim that the Labour Government had inherited the fastest growing economy in the G7 was not true and that when the Conservative Party had been asked by an independent fact checker what they had based this on, they had not responded.

Councillor Mahil said that if an economy was crashed and brought to a standstill, it would then grow quickly. Two key points that businesses were raising were that they did not like surprises and wanted stability and investment. Two days before the Council meeting, the Telegraph Newspaper had reported that the UK had just toppled Germany as the number one investment spot in Europe. This included a growth forecast and the claim that the UK would be the fastest growing major European economy over the next two years, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) saying that growth was now expected to accelerate to 1.6% in 2025 and 1.5% in 2026, outstripping fellow European economies in Germany, France and Italy.

The second thing that businesses mentioned was that they wanted a workforce that was skilled and healthy. The number of long-term sick in the economy had reached far too high a level. There was a lack of skills and work that was needed straight after COVID was not done.

Councillor Mahil was pleased to see the Government looking at the workforce, the industrial strategy and healthcare, as one connected whole. Businesses understood that a healthy workforce would see multi-fold returns in productivity and improvement in the vitality of business.

A major employer in Medway that had been critical of the October 2024 budget, was the supermarket Morrisons. They claimed that the additional £75million that they would have to pay in national insurance contributions would lead to job losses and higher prices. Councillor Mahil said that the private equity firm that had bought the firm, CDNR, should have considered the margins that they had when buying a critical piece of infrastructure in the UK. The company had been loaded with debt to reduce the corporation tax but at the same time the businesses still relied on publicly maintained roads and a workforce that was kept healthy and educated by the public purse.

Question 10F – Councillor Spring, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:

“Gillingham and Rainham is amongst the “top five most dangerous towns in Kent”. For the whole of England, Wales and Northern Ireland as a whole, this area is the “32nd most dangerous major town”. Of those, the most common crimes which are those actually recorded are violence and sexual offences.

The figures for 2023 had 5,114 offences or to put it another way just over 14 a day in Gillingham and Rainham alone. I turn to my ward where month on month we appear to be having more crimes reported. It is beyond acceptable. In the past three months alone (August, September and October), Rainham North has had 254 serious crimes reported or 2.8 per day in those 92 days; that is nearly three serious crimes reported every day. Your predecessor made bold claims that you were stamping down on this. I would not say stamping down more lightly dabbing a toe, if that. You and your party locally and nationally are letting my constituents and the public down. Crime is rising in Rainham North, and they are amongst the worst in the whole of Kent and the country. More needs to be done.

What are you going to do to stop or prevent these violent and sexual offences and other serious crimes from increasing in my ward?”

In response, Councillor Paterson said that it was disappointing to be asked for comment on another Councillor’s ward rather than his own. He commented that if Councillor Spring felt let down by what had not been fixed in seven months under a new Government, then his own disappointment regarding the 14 years of the previous Government was significant.

Medway Council approached the broad issue of crime through the Community Safety Partnership, which brought together the key agencies involved in crime prevention and community safety work, namely; Medway Council, Kent Police, the Probation Service, Kent Fire and Rescue and the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board.

Each year an annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment was undertaken to collate and analyse data and crime patterns, the most recent one having been carried out in Autumn 2024. Following last year’s 4% decrease in recorded crime, there had been a further decrease of 9% between April 2023 and 2024. In addition, cases of Anti-Social Behaviour had declined in the 2023-2024 period, falling by 3%.

The Neighbourhood Model established by Kent Police had continued to develop, with there being beat officers for every ward in Medway, as well as a Child Centred Policing and Neighbourhood Task Force Team. This had seen greater partnership links, with beat officers able to establish effective relationships with key stakeholders in their area, improving communication and the sharing of intelligence. The issue of violence against women and girls had

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been highlighted as a priority in the 2024 assessment and the partners had undertaken a number of important projects in this area.

On the broader issue of violent crime, Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit reported reductions in public place serious violence, including involving those under 25, across the County, which had been sustained since 2021. The reduction that had been seen in Medway was around 15%, which was very positive.

The issue of violent and sexual offences was an area of concern both nationally and locally, and Councillor Paterson reassured Councillor Spring that it would remain an important priority for the partners in the Community Safety Partnership.

Question 10G – Councillor Wildey, asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

“Can the Deputy Leader update the Council on the outcomes of the Care Quality Commission’s (CQC) assessment of Medway Council’s Adult Social Care Service and in doing so, what actions will be put in place to drive improvements within the service?”

In response, Councillor Murray thanked Councillor Wildey for the positive comments he had given to the media when the result of the Care Quality Commission’s Assurance inspection had been announced in the previous week. The rating received had been ‘requires improvement’, but at 59%, this was only 4 percentage points away from a Good rating. In the nine areas of the judgment, six were rated requires improvement and three were rated as Good. The inspection had started in March 2024 with on-site visits in August 2024 and Councillor Murray was grateful to the Adult Social Care team, partners in the health and care family, the providers commissioned by the Council as well as those being cared for and their family carers who had participated in the process.

Councillor Murray said that when Labour had won control of the Council in 2023, senior officers had made it clear that Adult Social Care was operating at Inadequate. Self-assessment and outcomes had indicated this was so, with the division being woefully under resourced, having endured cuts in a reorganisation in 2017. This had left it short staffed and unable to meet legal obligations on waiting lists and assessments at a time when demand was rising and continued to do so.

Councillor Murray had gained support from Cabinet colleagues for additional investment of £2.5m and had worked with senior officers to plan a restructuring to improve management accountability, put better financial controls in place, restore vital back office support and recruit 80 new staff. This would go live at the beginning of March 2025 and Councillor Murray was very proud of the way staff had responded so positively to new challenges. Their pride in their work was specifically noted by the CQC and in just over a year they had already lifted the service to get close to a good rating.

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These were the actions in place to drive improvement before the CQC inspection was announced and together with ongoing support from the LGA's Partners in Care, Medway's own Improvement Board and Oversight Board, as well as continuing to introduce new assistive technologies to help maintain people's independence for as long as possible, the Council would continue through a much strengthened self-assessment process and improvement plan to ensure that residents in Medway would have the very best services possible.

Question 10H – Councillor Anang, asked the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Mahil, the following:

“Gravesham Borough Council has recently secured UK Government funding and are currently offering grants of up to £1000, to new existing tourism and hospitality businesses in the Borough. The Medway Labour and Co-Operative Group being the “darling group” of the Prime Minister and being a champion of Small and Medium Business (SMB), I would like to find out from the Portfolio Holder if they have plans of securing such funding from Government to support the tourism and hospitality businesses in Medway?”

In response, Councillor Mahil said that it was good to see Gravesham Borough Council offering business grants. Medway already offered several grants open to tourism, hospitality and other businesses and organisations. For example:

- Partners for Growth and Partners for Green Growth schemes offered up to £2,500 for businesses to start up, grow and reduce their carbon footprint.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Grant, which in 2024 enabled the biggest Chinese New Year Parade in the UK outside of London, with a footfall due to it counted at over 4,000 people. It also enabled a £500 grant scheme for businesses in the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) following on from the HSHAZ revitalise and repair grant scheme granting up to 80% of costs towards improving hospitality business shopfronts and helping towards the opening of a new café and bakery.
- Medway Heritage Place grant funding programme funded 24 heritage projects a total of £110,000 in 2024 supporting initiatives with a strong development focus, including new visitor economy experiences and interpretation to support tourist visits. The majority of this was available from funding which the Council had successfully lobbied the Government for, that had been successfully leveraged against in further rounds to spend on Medway and tourism in Medway specifically.
- Medway had various group workshops for businesses, start-up business space and the Medway Business and Skills Showcase, which compared favourably with the offer of district councils.

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Question 10I – Councillor Hyne, asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

“The Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) commenced operations on the 1st of July 2022. In the ICB’s latest report for 2023/2024, the organisation spent £2,196,726 on redundancy payments for just 28 staff. Three staff received £160K each and six staff received £132K each. In the same period, the Chair’s salary increased from £55K-£60K to £70K-£75K and the Chief Executive’s salary increased from £175K-£180K to £245K-£250K.

In light of the on-going financial pressures in the ICB and the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System is this good use of public funds?”

In response, Councillor Murray said that she did not intend to comment on the redundancy settlement, as those who had lost jobs would have benefited from local agreements which were individually offered and settled through an agreed process.

ICBs had been set up in 2022 under the last Conservative government and the salaries of senior ICB staff were determined by a local Remuneration Committee, with the views of the Secretary of State to be sought if the salaries of senior executives exceed £250,000. Salaries of senior executives were intended to reflect the size and health complexity of the population each ICB served.

Councillor Murray considered that in view of the impact of austerity under the previous Government and the resulting cost of living crisis, these very high salaries did compare unfavourably with those of frontline NHS staff and in Councillor Murray’s view, there was room for greater democratic accountability on executive salary spend. Going forward, greater consideration should be given to value for money for performance at ward level.

Question 10J – Councillor Field, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry:

“Could the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration please update the Council on waste collection for the recent Christmas period?”

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

Question 10K – Councillor Jones, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (including statutory responsibility), Councillor Price:

“The Labour Government announced its plan for a new National Youth Strategy, in November 2024, designed to put young people at the centre of decision-making on policies affecting them.

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What more does Medway Council need to do, in collaboration with our partners, to better tailor and target resources, to meet the objectives of the Strategy? Such as creating the means to achieve greater benefit to young people's lives outside the school gates, as well as continued learning, volunteering, or earning opportunities (as appropriate) and to ensure our neighbourhoods are safer for all residents?"

Question 10L – Councillor Mark Prenter, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

"Does the Leader of the Council agree with recently promoted material being posted through Medway doors by the Conservative Party that Council staff should receive a real terms pay cut?"

Question 10M – Councillor Mrs Turpin, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

"Following the planning inquiry that took place regarding 250 homes in Cliffe in May 2023, the Leader of the Council agreed to a post inquiry meeting to learn from the process and discuss a lot of concerns Committee Members had had throughout. To date this meeting has not happened. Please can the Leader of the Council reach out to the Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Residents Development Group and arrange a time to meet with them?"

637 The English Devolution White Paper: Devolution Priority Programme

Background:

This report set out details of the Devolution White Paper, which had been published by the Government on 16 December 2024. This focused on the following areas:

- Implementing a new framework of Government that makes devolution from the centre the default;
- Integrated funding settlements;
- Devolved control of transportation, housing and skills;
- More local oversight of delivering climate change commitments;
- Joining up public services and moving towards prevention; and
- Reorganising local government and moving towards a single tier structure.

Medway Council had responded to the proposals by the Government deadline of 10 January 2025, setting out the desire to be included in the first tranche of authorities to move forward with the policy, the '[Devolution] Priority Programme'.

The report explained that it was now necessary to consider how to position Medway Council most strongly in the conversations that were beginning in earnest around the real impact of devolution and, more specifically, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), across Medway and the wider Kent area.

Council, 23 January 2025

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, supported by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decisions:

- a) The Council noted that the Leader of the Council wrote to Minister McMahon on 10 January 2025, indicating the Council's preference to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.
- b) The Council agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to establish the appropriate support and resource to deliver this programme of change (inclusive of recruitment to new posts as deemed necessary).
- c) The Council agreed to establish a Member Working Group which would work closely with officers and to agree its membership and terms of reference as set out in paragraphs 4.4 - 4.7 of the report).

638 Adoption of Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Plan

Background:

This report presented the Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Plan for formal adoption by the Council.

The Council had held a referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan in the parish of Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden on 7 November 2024. The majority of voters were in favour of the plan, so the plan now needed to be recognised as 'made'.

The Neighbourhood Plan formed part of the development plan for Medway and would be used to help decide planning applications in the Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Area.

The Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, supported by Councillor Stamp, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

A Diversity Impact Assessment had been completed in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan. This was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

Decision:

The Council approved the Hoo St Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Plan (as set out at Appendix 1) be 'made', as part of the statutory development plan for Medway Council.

639 Review of the Constitution

Background:

This report set out a review of the changes as to how full Council meetings are conducted and proposed to make some permanent changes. It was also proposed to trial some further changes with regards to public and Member questions at Council meetings.

This report also recommended the following changes to the Constitution:

- Inclusion of an overview and scrutiny task group protocol;
- A revised Ward Improvement Fund criteria and;
- Employee Scheme of Delegation (minor change).

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, supported by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decisions:

- a) The Council approved the changes to the Council Rules as set out in Appendix A to the report in respect of changes to the arrangements for conducting full Council meetings. (**Note:** This recommendation would be taken forward without discussion for debate at the next ordinary meeting of the Council, as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report).
- b) The Council noted the further changes for trialing how public and Member questions are dealt with, as set out in paragraphs 3.5-3.10 of the report.
- c) The Council approved the inclusion of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Protocol in the Constitution, as set out in Appendix B to the report.
- d) The Council approved the revised Ward Improvement Fund Criteria, as set out in Appendix C to the report.

640 Appointment of Director of Public Health and Assistant Director, Children's Social Care

Background:

This report asked full Council to support the appointment of the Director of Public Health, following the decision made by the Appointments Committee on 6 December 2024.

This report also sought approval to recruit to the vacant post of Assistant Director, Children's Social Care.

Council, 23 January 2025

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, supported by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decisions:

- a) The Council supported the appointment of Dr David Whiting as the Director of Public Health, which had been agreed by the Appointments Committee on 6 December 2024.
- b) The Council approved recruitment to the role of the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care.

641 Arrangements for 2025/2026 Municipal Year - Selection of Mayor and Deputy Mayor and Schedule of Meetings

Background:

This report set out the results of the calculations under Council Rule 20 to select the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the 2025/2026 municipal year.

The report also set out the provisional programme of meetings for the 2025/26 municipal year.

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

Decisions:

- a) The Council noted the entitlement of the Conservative Group to nominate a Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the 2025/2026 municipal year and that the entitlement would be accepted or declined at the Council meeting on 27 February 2025.
- b) The Council agreed a provisional programme of Council and Committee meetings for 2025/2026, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, for recommendation to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 14 May 2025.

642 Public Space Protection Order - Dog Control

Background:

This report covered the outcomes of the public consultations carried out seeking views on the introduction of a Medway wide Dog Control Public Space Protection Order. The Council was requested to agree the introduction of a PSPO.

The report explained that the introduction of the PSPOs should help to control several issues that arose as a result of people failing to exercise proper control of dogs in public places.

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The PSPO included controls on dog fouling, defining areas where dogs were not permitted – such as playgrounds; and requiring dogs to be on leads in some public spaces across Medway and over the long-term improve the quality of life for residents, visitors, and local businesses.

This report had previously been considered by the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2024 and by the Cabinet on 29 October 2024. the relevant minutes and decisions of which were set out at sections 6 and 7 of the report below.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, supported by Councillor Browne, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decisions:

- a) The Council noted the comments of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in section 6 of the report and the decisions of the Cabinet, as set out at section 7 of the report.
- b) The Council approved the introduction of a Medway wide Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to control the behaviour of dogs.
- c) The Council approved Option 3, hybrid enforcement, as the mechanism of enforcing this PSPO. This activity would be delivered within the existing service resources and would be performed as an adjunct to the existing duties and statutory responsibilities.

643 Report on Overview and Scrutiny Activity

Background:

This report provided a summary of the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees since the last report to Council on 17 October 2024.

Councillor Tejan, supported by Councillor Howcroft-Scott, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

The reports considered by the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the previous three months were highlighted.

Decision:

The Council noted the report.

644 Treasury Management Strategy Mid-Year Review Report 2024/25

Background:

This report provided an overview of treasury management activity since 1 April 2024 and presented a review of the Treasury Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024.

The report had previously been considered by the Audit Committee on 26 November 2024, the minutes of which were set out at section 9 of the report and by the Cabinet on 17 December 2024, the decisions of which were set out at section 10 of the report.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, supported by Councillor Browne, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council noted the comments of the Audit Committee set out at section 10 of the report and the decisions of the Cabinet set out at section 11.

645 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 Maple, supported by Councillor Van Dyke, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council noted the use of urgency provisions as set out in section 4 of the report.

Mayor

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