

## **Regeneration, Culture & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**26 February 2025**

### **Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture & Leisure**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nina Gurung, Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture & Leisure

#### Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture & Leisure. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, how they have and will undertake political challenge and leadership and what their priorities and ambitions are for the year ahead.

#### 1. Recommendations

1.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

#### 2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The areas within the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture & Leisure, as set out in the Council's Constitution are:

- Festivals and Events
- Medway Theatres
- Rochester Corn Exchange
- Culture Development
- Archives
- Libraries and Community Hubs
- Heritage
- Medway Sport

### 3. Background

- 3.1 I am delighted to have taken on the Portfolio Holder responsibility for Heritage, Culture and Leisure and would like to start by expressing my sincere thanks to all our staff members, managers, Heads of Service and senior leaders for their hard work, dedication and commitment to deliver outstanding services within the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Portfolio for the residents of Medway, throughout the year.
- 3.2 In the context of the ongoing difficult financial situation that the Council is trying to address, I ensure that the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Heads of Service, managers and team members remain highly ambitious in wanting to deliver the highest standards of service that the residents of Medway deserve and expect, whilst recognising the acute need for us all to be highly diligent, creative, and proactive in working together closely both internally as well as through careful, positive collaborations with external partners, so that there is no additional financial burden to the Council.
- 3.3 Achieving this within the limited current budget and resource is no ordinary feat and therefore I exhort all residents in Medway to join me in recognising and appreciating the monumental efforts from the incredible team members, leaders and Heads of Service in delivering the highly impressive list of services that are outlined below across my Portfolio.

### 4. Festivals and Events

- 4.1. The Festivals and Events Team have once again successfully delivered their free, wide-ranging programme of festivals and events throughout last year for the residents of Medway, which again hugely promoted our tourism, local businesses and Pride in Place.
- 4.2. Despite challenging weather conditions, our Rochester Sweeps Festival welcomed over 50,000 visitors. 86% of the audience told the festival atmosphere was very good or good and 75% agreed the event created a sense of community spirit. The economic impact of the festival on the local economy is estimated at over £3million.
- 4.3. In partnership with The Historic Dockyard, the team delivered important civic events such as Medway's D-Day memorial ceremony and the Armed Forces Day 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations which attracted over 7,000 visitors. They co-ordinated the Freedom of the City marches and Remembrance Sunday parades and ceremonies across Medway.
- 4.4. The team developed the Rochester High Street Community Advisory Group consisting of residents, businesses and community groups to ensure that festivals and events in Rochester are inclusive and beneficial to all community partners e.g. the addition of an expanded Christmas Market which this year reached from the Castle Gardens and down the High Street.

- 4.5. When the sad but necessary decision had to be made to cancel the Dickensian Christmas due to very strong winds from Storm Darragh, all partners were continuously consulted as we monitored the weather reports; they have all expressed how valued this made them feel, as they recognised that we had done everything within our means to try and keep the Dickensian Christmas open if it was safe to do so.
- 4.6. On a positive, even with a cancelled weekend, Rochester Christmas Market was visited by over 130,000 people, and our extended market opening time for the last weekend was appreciated by all, even earning a double-page spread and mention in The Guardian. The economic impact of the Rochester Christmas Market on the local economy is estimated at over £5 million. For the first time, we introduced an inclusive, 'relaxed' Christmas Market session for our community members which was again welcomed by everyone. We have listened to feedback and will try to bring a relaxed session on at least one weekend day this year.
- 4.7. Our events team also provide important guidance to community groups about funding applications. They delivered 'Events Uncovered', a free 9 day free event management training attended by 100 individuals. Additionally, through seeking funds from all available options, the team in turn funded diverse array of community events such as Medway Pride, the milestone Thomas Aveling 200<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, Medway Culture Carnival, Chatham Carnival, Boing Medway, Sticks 'n' Stones Festival, Electric Medway, Fort Amherst Summer Proms etc. The small yet strong team also supported Dino Day, Illusion of Nature by Electric Medway, Porchlight is 50 event, Romanian Market, Cliffe Woods Fireworks and Friends of Watts Meadow Xmas Get Together.

## 5. Medway Theatres

- 5.1. It gives me great pleasure to share that our Central Theatre goes from strength to strength- In 2024/25, the theatre saw over 136 dance, music, comedy and performances, even drawing in A-list comics like Rob Beckett, Jimmy Carr, Al Murray, and Ben Elton selling out; this will continue into 2025 with John Bishop and Jason Manford among many others.
- 5.2. Another proud moment was the 4 Star review from National Theatre newspaper- The Stage- for Jack and the Beanstalk pantomime, which was one of our bestselling pantomimes ever, with over 26,000 tickets sold.
- 5.3. The refurbishment of the Brook Theatre reached an important milestone in 2025. On 19 November Cabinet agreed to award the contract for the refurbishment of the Brook Theatre to Thomas Sinden Ltd. This approval was subject to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) agreement to extend the Levelling-Up fund funding period past March 2025 to March 2026. This was formally agreed on 31 January 2025.

5.4. The Mobilisation Phase will start on 5 March with the build programme likely to start 8 weeks later and last approximately 79 weeks from May 2025 to December 2026 with full reopening in Spring 2027.

## 6. Rochester Corn Exchange

6.1. We are trying to make The Rochester Corn Exchange commercially self-sustaining; it is positive to note that there has been an increase in room hires, bar sales and business initiatives and the team delivered the financially successful Christmas Party, also marking the venue as an all-year elite party and entertainment place for businesses and private groups alike.

6.2. The following table shows number type and number of events across 23/24 & 24/25 and you can see an increase of 32% in bookings.

Type of event	2024/25	2023/24	% increase
Weddings	12	5	58%
Conferences & Meetings	77	46	40%
Events & Celebrations	36	43	-19%
Public programme events	30	22	27%
Community events	27	22	19%
<b>Yearly total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>32%</b>

## 7. Culture & Creative Industries Development

7.1. Medway is an exciting creative arts and culture hub. Our Head of Culture and our Culture Development Team are highly ambitious for Medway and have been instrumental in supporting the development of Creative Medway as an umbrella organisation encompassing 90 members of Medway's creative community along with health, education and voluntary sector representatives aimed at exploring opportunities and focusing on solutions for challenges within the sector.

7.2. The team continues to play a key role in building capacity, providing project development, funding advice, creating new partnerships and connections within the creative sector, with over 65 advice and support sessions with organisations, groups, businesses and individual creatives over the first three quarters of the year.

7.3. Crucially, Creative Medway co-ordinated the hugely successful Medway Culture Fest 24, showcasing our Borough as an important cultural centre with that celebrated creativity throughout the year, and raised the profile of Medway's culture and creative sector. Some prominent events included the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Historic Dockyard, 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Medway African

Caribbean Association, Icon Theatre's phenomenal Ghost Ships production. The Medway Culture Fest 24 hosted over 250 events with news stories picked up by BBC News Online, ITV Meridian Breakfast, Radio Kent, KM Online, Guardian, KMTV, and Medway Messenger among others.

- 7.4. The programme consisted of small and large-scale community events that included site specific theatre productions, audio trails in high streets, singalongs under arches, songs and scones, masterclasses with fashion designers, magical creature trails and whodunnit podcasts. Our three local universities came together to award honorary doctorates and degrees celebrating the outstanding contributions to local culture made by designer Dame Zandra Rhodes RDI, Medway African and Caribbean Chair, Carol Stewart, former Historic Dockyard CEO, Bill Ferris CBE, Mid-Kent College CEO and Medway Place Board Chair, Simon Cook, Graphic Novelist, Alice Oseman, drag queen, River Medway, and TV personality, Dr Ranj Singh.
- 7.5. Significant partnership programmes across Medway also received external funding from Central Government, Arts Council England and others, including Medway Arts and Homeless Forum, Medway Change Makers cultural volunteering programme & Make Waves young producers programme in partnership with Ideas Test, our local Creative People and Places organisation.
- 7.6. Medway Creative Health Programme, is our new three-year Arts Council England funded project that will bring together creative and health professionals to test, explore and develop creative engagement programmes that positively support improved mental and physical health and early prevention priorities.
- 7.7. The Team continues to support the growth of commercial creative businesses through the development of The Docking Station, a digital creative hub for Kent and Medway, led by University of Kent Institute of Culture & Creative Industries and funded by Levelling-Up Fund, Arts Council England & National Lottery Fund and the Create Growth South East programme to support creative businesses to explore and secure commercial investment opportunities.

## 8. Medway Archive Centre

- 8.1. We are proud that our Medway Archives Centre celebrated 25 years of CityArk, the first public-facing digital archives collection management system in the UK. We take pride that at its launch in 1999, Medway was the first Archives searchable online system. Today, Medway's Archives and Heritage collections are hosted on new systems but maintain digital content from the original CityArk alongside our ever-expanding digital collections.

8.2. The Medway Archives team has put in place several measures to improve customer experience, including the installation of a new microfilm scanner/reader and a reorganisation of the Archives Centre study room to increase space and enable improved access to collections previously held in satellite locations. The team continues to offer high quality professional research services alongside a range of exhibitions and events, including most recently hosting an exhibition in conjunction with Medway Sport showcasing the area's sporting heritage.

## 9. Community Hubs and Libraries

9.1. Our Libraries and Community Hubs remain trusted, welcoming and accessible community spaces, with customer satisfaction rating in 2024/25 between 99% & 100%. This demonstrates high public confidence in the service and work of staff members.

9.2. With more than 700,000 people visited our Libraries and Community Hubs last year, we saw over 800,000 items borrowed. 2024 was our best Summer Reading Challenge ever, with more than 3,000 children and young people participating and reading 35,000 books. The Teen and Adult reading challenges also grew significantly, driven in part by increased teen engagement activities.

9.3. More than 103,000 people attended library events in 2024, with attendance now outperforming pre-pandemic statistics by a significant margin, demonstrating the value of our diverse offer.

9.4. Alongside free access to the internet used primarily for education, job search and socialising by various service user groups, our range of digital services now include free streaming of TV, film and theatre performance in partnership with British Film Office and National Theatre. Library PCs were used more than 52,000 times and close to 25,000 logins to library wi-fi were recorded in 2024. Wi-fi printing has been introduced in several libraries and community hubs enabling customers to print direct from their own devices.

9.5. We are proud that our library and community hubs also continue to offer a wide array of community events. Alongside more than 130 regular weekly events, the service has worked with partners on a range of community focused events and initiatives.

9.6. The award-winning Repair Café, delivered in partnership with the Environmental Engagement Team and supported by Medway Men in Sheds and dedicated volunteers, has gone from strength to strength, expanding library locations and adding sessions focused on repairs of children's items. In 2025 other council services will be using The Repair Café to engage with residents and the offer will be widened to include a clothing exchange and the

first Youth Repair Café.

- 9.7. We are also incredibly proud of the highly successful Wordsmithery's Medway River Lit Festival that took place in November 2024, with a wide range of authors, illustrators and poets appearing in Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Chatham Community Hubs including globally acclaimed names such as Sir Ben Okri, Chloe Timms, Zahra Barri and Ben Aaronovitch.
- 9.8. We also launched the first ever Medway Youth Poet Laureate scheme for poets aged 11 to 17. The three winning entries were displayed in Chatham Community Hub. November's Wigmore Lecture was delivered in partnership with Wordsmithery as part of the festival, with bestselling author Barbara Havelocke speaking about her novel *Estella's Revenge*, a dark Gothic retelling of Estella's story from Dickens' *Great Expectations*.
- 9.9. Creative and cultural activities continue to feature significantly through the year, ranging from initiatives for older customers such as Songs and Scones in partnership with Live Music Now and the Culture Development Team and a full programme of lectures and talks delivered through the Wigmore and Medway Archives lecture series; to events for young people ranging from theatre performances provided by Applause Rural Touring to art and craft workshops, author visits and an expanded range of activities for World Book Day delivered with the Child-Friendly Medway team.
- 9.10. Working in partnership with Environmental Services to deliver the Electrical Waste recycling scheme, Medway residents recycled more than 18,000 electrical items (over 9 tonnes) through donation points in libraries and hubs, reducing electrical waste that might have gone to landfill.
- 9.11. Additionally, the service also worked with the Integrated Community Equipment Services team to offer ferrule (rubbers ends) replacements on mobility aids as part of the Council's falls prevention drive.
- 9.12. I am proud that our libraries continue to offer essential and safe space for services to engage face to face with residents. Welfare Reform, Housing, Deaf Services, Public Health and more holding regular surgeries and drop-ins. Staff have contributed to the development of Medway's literacy strategy and the promotion of literacy and a love of reading at all ages remains a core priority for the service as a means to drive educational attainment, skills development and improving wellbeing.
- 9.13. In line with our commitment to promote Child Friendly Medway, our Libraries team also support Child Friendly Medway Team sessions such as regular Doodle and Draw sessions, other fun activities and author visits as part of World Book Day events to promote child literacy and a love of reading for pleasure. This is aimed at improving outcomes for our children and the

enhancement of the existing cultural and creative engagement offer for children and young people in Medway.

- 9.14. Medway Libraries received £400,000 funding from Arts Council England's (ACE) Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF) last year which will fund improvements to public libraries across Medway over the next two years. These include new equipment such as high-definition projectors, digital PA systems, and support partner events such as Medway River Lit Festival, new microfilm scanner/reader for Medway Archives etc.
- 9.15. Summer 2025 will see the launch of a new pop-up mobile library and a dedicated home delivery service for library customers. Future projects will include the supply of self-service kiosks, digital play tables for children and the creation of a digital makerspace to offer residents the opportunity to access technologies such as 3D printing and VR equipment, provided as part of the University of Kent's Docking Station development programme.

## 10. Heritage

- 10.1. The Heritage Team continue to work hard to promote our rich heritage and customer experience. Our ancient monuments and listed buildings are historically important and are an essential part of Medway's economy and identity, providing essential reasons why visitors choose to come to Medway.
- 10.2. In The Guildhall Museum, an admission charge was introduced and we reviewed the visitor journey and feedback, leading to several upgrades such as ground level décor, window vinyls, and signage. Maps were updated, and interactive elements for children, like tool benches and a reading corner, were added. Longer-term projects, such as a multimedia guide and try-on costumes and the introduction of scents were introduced to enhance the Hulks Gallery experience. Over Christmas the popular Elf trail was reintroduced with added craft sessions and a festively decorated Member's Room to increase dwell time and value for money. We continue to monitor this.
- 10.3. At Rochester Castle, the gates to gardens were widened for a more inviting entrance and easier access for large vehicles. The space below the shop in the Keep was vacated for interpretation and the lodge is now used as a staff room and storage. Scents were added to the Castle Keep, enhancing visitor understanding, with additional interpretation in the Food Store, Cesspit, and Chapel. A Medieval storyteller was brought in during holidays to increase footfall and dwell time, but it didn't impact income. Visitor signage was upgraded, and Rochester Castle saw a 19% income increase compared to pre-COVID levels.
- 10.4. Upnor Castle has reduced its opening days to five (Wednesday to Sunday) as part of the council budget savings programme. To enhance visits, events like



soldier reenactments and visits by historical figures were organised, but poor weather and staff shortages led to only 69% of the target visitor numbers being met. Visitors enjoyed an improved welcome with a new digital totem, a refitted cannon, and dressing-up clothes. A new multi-media guide will launch in April 2025, featuring expert interviews and imagery. Future projects include dressing the Barrack Block and new signage. The team is working with Historic England and English Heritage on maintenance to prepare for the spring reopening.

- 10.5. Eastgate House has reduced its opening days to weekends only, except during school holidays and December, as part of the council budget savings programme. It has achieved 68% of its target, with weddings performing well at 72%. Improvements include dressing the kitchen for ground floor weddings, new rose beds, and repainting pillars. The pond is awaiting repair. Events have exceeded targets by 7%, with a mix of returning and new shows. The 2025 programme includes temporary and permanent exhibitions, with a new Dickens Chalet exhibition planned.
- 10.6. Education and outreach are vital components of museums and heritage attractions for several reasons. They help connect the community to the museum, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural awareness. They provide unique learning experiences that inspire both children and adults, often linking to school curriculums and addressing societal challenges. Educational programs can engage isolated, vulnerable, and marginalised groups, offering them opportunities to participate and gain new experiences. Heritage education contributes to the economy by attracting visitors and enhancing their experience, which can lead to increased revenue. Engaging with museums and heritage sites has been shown to improve mental and physical well-being. Overall, these programmes ensure that museums remain relevant, accessible, and beneficial to a wide range of audiences.
- 10.7. This year the heritage team has worked with:  
Schools:
  - Sessions at the museum, Eastgate House, Rochester Castle, and Upnor Castle
  - Primarily for primary, special, and secondary schools
  - National Lottery Heritage Fund funded 'Horrible Histories' project on Crime and Punishment with two local primaries
  - Approximately 8,500 engagementsHome Education:
  - 3-4 groups visit the museum monthly
  - Kent Family Learning for home-educated teenagers
  - Visits to Rochester Castle, Temple Manor, Upnor Castle, and Old Brook Pumping Station

Adult Groups:

- WI, U3A, historical societies: evening and daytime outreach
- Visits to Temple Manor, Rochester Castle, and Old Brook Pumping Station
- Annual U3A themed study day
- Ongoing sessions with 'Aztec' for adults with learning disabilities
- Two funded projects with The Mess Room for adults to create and display work inspired by the museum collection

Docking Station Project:

- Partnership with The Historic Dockyard and University at the Docking Station facility and Kent Police Museum
- New school sessions and educational materials for teachers
- Digital copies of objects and digitally recreated historic environments

10.8. In November 2023, The National Lottery Heritage Fund named Medway as one of twenty UK Heritage Priority Places. The ten-year programme responds to local need and opportunity, supporting places to use heritage to build pride in place, inspire local communities and power regeneration. As part of the initial one-year initiation phase, we are supporting Medway's heritage community to shape a long-term shared ambition for heritage in Medway with the intention of working towards a new heritage strategy and new sector and community led body.

10.9. On 13 July at Rochester Corn Exchange over 100 people from 60 organisations attended our first open public meeting about the future of heritage in Medway. Using the Open Space technique, 21 conversations took place over four hours, including the launch of our Medway Heritage Place Fund.

10.10. From all the conversations, five emerging themes were identified to form the basis of the next stage of discussion:

- Heritage and community identity
- Infrastructure and accessibility
- Promotion and visitor economy
- Health and wellbeing & environment
- Collaboration, partnerships and resourcing

10.11. Officers have been delivering continued engagement across the sector that develops a network to support cross-site, cross-interest collaborations and project ideas, including a series of roundtable discussions that develop the emerging themes and community ownership further.

10.12. At the public meeting, officers launched a funding programme offer of grants between £250 to £15,000 to support individuals, groups and organisations to deliver projects which have a strong heritage focus and celebrate Medway's

high streets, town centres, houses and estates, parks and green spaces, the River Medway and our cultures and traditions.

10.13. Over two rounds, 111 applications with a total request of nearly £900,000 for a pot of £110,000 was received, out of which the panel agreed to fund 23 applications, representing a good geographic and thematic spread and awarded £111,800 to, for example:

- Rikard Osterlund, photography to bring to life the history of the nationally significant former Mill Road Skate Park in Gillingham through oral history, collecting ephemera, a zine and a mini exhibition
- Kate Devine to deliver a project focussing on the history and significance of the former Rainham Pottery in Rainham High Street with shop window displays, research and creative commissions
- Open History co-produce a film project telling stories of Medway's working-class history
- Medway Towns Gurdwara Sabha to fund opportunities for young people to take part in Punjabi and Sikh cultural activities including Gatka, cooking and music
- Gillingham Football Club Supporters' Association to fund volunteer heritage skills training and the creation of video content for a new voluntary-led Gillingham Football Club Museum
- A group of young people from Grain to research and create an escape room experience for other young people based on a historic Medway crime

10.14. Successful applicants are taking part in a skills development programme and work with professional mentors over the coming months to support their project delivery.

10.15. Officers have commissioned a heritage assets audit to map and analyse Medway's tangible and intangible heritage assets to understand their ownership, condition and the expertise of the owners and conveners of Medway's heritage.

## 11. Cozenton Park Leisure Centre

11.1. The first new Medway Council sports centre in more than 30 years opened in the Summer. Cozenton Park Sports Centre was officially opened on Tuesday, 16 July by The Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Medway, Brigadier Peter Gilbert QVRM TD DL VR and The Mayor of Medway, Cllr Marian Nestorov, and opened to the public on Wednesday, 17 July 2024.

11.2. The new centre has been built with sustainability and energy efficiency in mind. Among the features included are:

- Air source heat pumps
- Triple glazing
- 347 solar panels
- Insulation
- LED lighting
- Microfiltration, meaning the centre uses up to 40% less water than traditional sports centres

11.3. The number of memberships taken out has already exceeded 2,300, with the overwhelming majority taking out a Premier membership. This helped the centre achieve a record monthly income figure (including those from the former Splashes sports centre) in December.

11.4. Fitness class capacity is between 22-45 people depending on the class type and equipment needed, with approximately 85% of classes full, with regular waiting lists for spaces.

11.5. Our daily Member Lane Swims are currently fully booked.

11.6. Twelve local primary schools attend for swimming lessons with our instructors delivering lessons to over 400 pupils each week.

11.7. The new café contract is currently being finalised and it is anticipated the cafe will be open in time for Easter.

## 12. Dance International

12.1. The finest Latin and Ballroom dancers from more than 60 countries were at Medway Park from Sunday, 29 September to Wednesday, 2 October when the centre hosted the International Dance Festival.

12.2. The centre welcomed 10,000 competitors over the four days of competition, with events running each day from 6am until 2am the following morning. The International Dance Festival judges are the most renowned in their field and this year, included the BBC Strictly Come Dancing head judge, Shirley Ballas.

## 13. Medway Sports Awards

13.1. The achievements of sporting stars from across Medway were celebrated at the Medway Sports Awards, sponsored by Willmott Dixon, which took place on Friday, 13 December at Rochester Corn Exchange.

- 13.2. The prestigious awards highlight the fantastic achievements of local clubs, teams, individuals and coaches, as well as volunteers and schools. The Medway Sports Awards shine the spotlight on Medway's finest sports people and the dedication of everyone involved in sport in Medway, recognising our sporting champions past, present and future.
- 13.3. More than 250 people attended this year's celebration evening, which was hosted by former England Rugby player, Shaunagh Brown.
- 13.4. Former England Rugby player and captain, Rachael Burford, and three times Olympic fencer and Medway's former Director of Public Health, James Williams, were inducted into the Medway Sports Hall of Fame.
- 13.5. Olympic gold medallist Nathan Hales was named Sportsperson of the Year.
- 13.6. The awards cover achievements from 1 October 2022 to 31 October 2024.
- 13.7. The winners in each category were:

Sportsperson of the Year, sponsored by Willmott Dixon

- Gold - Nathan Hales
- Silver - Moses Itauma
- Bronze - Katherine Batts

Junior Sportsperson of the Year, sponsored by MidKent College

- Gold - Isabelle Priestley
- Silver - Matilda Woodhead
- Bronze - Joseph Watson

Club of the Year, sponsored by Bauvil

- Gold - The Meapa Gymnastics Club
- Silver - Chatham Table Tennis Club
- Bronze - Medway Artistic Swimming Club

Junior Club of the Year, sponsored by Kent Online

- Gold - Kent Crusaders Basketball Club
- Silver - Anchorians Football Club
- Bronze - Jumpers Trampoline Centre.

Team of the Year, sponsored by Grain LNG

- Gold - Chatham Town Football Club Men's 1st Team
- Silver - Holcombe Hockey Club Women's 2nd Team
- Bronze - Lordswood Cricket Club Men's 1st Team

Junior Team of the Year, sponsored by Bubble and Scruff

- Gold - Chatham Town Football Club under 10s Team
- Silver - Kent Crusaders Academy Boys under 18s Team
- Bronze - Sir Joseph Williamson Mathematical School hockey under 16s Team.

Coach of the Year, sponsored by Active Kent and Medway

- Gold - Tom Coyd MBE
- Silver - Mark Roughsedge
- Bronze - Cristiana Stanciuca

Official of the Year, sponsored by ALLTask

- Gold - Ann Hopkins
- Silver - Amand Edgley-Pearce
- Bronze - Jamie Bond

Primary School of the Year, sponsored by Medway Sport

- Gold - Swingate Primary School
- Silver - Thamesview Primary School
- Bronze - Bligh Primary School.

Secondary School of the Year, sponsored by A1 Events

- Gold - The Rochester Grammar School
- Silver - The Hundred of Hoo Academy
- Bronze - Brompton Academy

Unsung Hero, sponsored by The Laurence Plummer Foundation

- Gold - Jennifer Barker
- Silver - John Dudgeon
- Bronze - Graham Robertson.

13.8. The next awards will be in December 2026.

## 14. Past, present and future exhibition

14.1. An exhibition to celebrate Medway's sporting success is now on display at Medway Archives Centre.

14.2. The exhibition was curated and launched at the Sports Awards 2024 in celebration of Medway's proud sporting heritage. Medway Sportspeople and clubs kindly donated items from their sporting careers including clothing,

memorabilia, signed photographs, official programmes and fixture lists.

14.3. The exhibition also included a specially commissioned illustrated mural by local artist 'Designed by Esther', depicting some of 'Medway Greats' including boxer Moses Itauma, Olympic gold medallist Nathan Hales, Paralympic gold medallist Charlotte Evans MBE and England rugby players Shaunagh Brown and Rachael Burford.

14.4. The exhibition will continue until Saturday 12 April. Items on show include past Gillingham FC and Chatham Town football programmes, Olympic 2012 memorabilia, signed basketball from Medway's NBA player Ryan Richards, signed Adam Peaty Race Clinic photo and swim hat, trophies and Esther's beautifully illustrated mural.

## 15. Sports centre capital investment

15.1. In addition to the multi-million investment in Cozenton Park, the Council is committed to improving customer facilities across all sports centres.

15.2. At Hoo Sports Centre, through a combination of Government grants and S106 funding, there will be improvements to the energy efficiency of the centre through the installation of modern gas boilers, as well as an improved customer experience with the modernisation of the changing rooms. This work is due to take place over the Summer.

15.3. At Medway Park and Strood Sports Centre, a range of improvements are being undertaken, funded through a £1.5m saving in the anticipated cost of building Cozenton Park Sports Centre.

15.4. The saving will be used to expand the gym at Medway Park, modernise the wetside changing rooms at Strood Sports Centre, update the teaching pool at Medway Park, provide a new, modern sports hall floor at Strood Sports Centre, improve the wetside changing facilities at Medway Park, and re-lay the 3G football pitches at Strood Sports Centre.

15.5. A number of these projects are already underway, with a series of improvements for customers coming into effect in the coming months. Works are timed to minimise disruption to customers.

15.6. A new children's water splashpad is being installed at The Strand, to replace the outdated paddling pool, which had gone beyond its natural lifespan.

15.7. The new splashpad will provide a range of water features for children. Works have begun and are anticipated to be completed by Easter. Once testing is completed this will enable the new splashpad to open in time for May half-

term, in line with when the main Strand swimming pool begins its summer season.

## 16. Strood Sports Centre Christmas Day opening

- 16.1. Strood Sports Centre staff were deservedly commended by residents across Medway and thanked by the full Council for selflessly stepping in to help families affected by the loss of water in Strood at Christmas time.
- 16.2. The Strood Sports Centre opened on Christmas Day and Boxing Day to enable affected families to make use of the changing rooms' shower facilities. We are grateful in particular to senior sports centre manager, Paul Johnston, who co-ordinated the centre opening, as well as all the team members who stepped up to help, including Louisa Coggins whose son ended up opening his Christmas presents at the centre!

## 17. Tennis courts funding

- 17.1. Medway Council and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) have announced a partnership to invest in and refurbish public park tennis courts in Chatham and Gillingham.
- 17.2. In total, eight park tennis courts will be renovated at The Strand in Gillingham and Maidstone Road Sports Ground in Chatham, with investment of £174,158.34.
- 17.3. Alongside the investment, Medway Council and Medway Sport will also work with the LTA to deliver a range of activity across the park sites. Potential activities include weekly organised Barclays Free Park Tennis sessions for all ages, playing levels and experience where equipment is provided, meaning that people will not need someone to play with or their own racket. Local Tennis Leagues will also provide friendly, sociable, opportunities to get active through local competition.
- 17.4. A new annual tennis pass will also be introduced, alongside pay and play and free court time to ensure that the courts are maintained at their new high standard for years to come.
- 17.5. Work at both sites has started and is anticipated to be completed by Spring 2025.
- 17.6. As part of the project, the Council also sought funding for Deangate sports area, but the bid was rejected by the LTA as it deemed there was insufficient demand.



## 18. Parkrun

18.1. Discussions have been held with Parkrun about staging a weekly run at Deangate. However, organisers have currently decided against proceeding with the site.

18.2. The adult Parkrun continues at the Great Lines, and the junior Parkrun is held at The Strand.

## 19. Pitches

19.1. The service, along with colleagues in the Greenspace development team, has been working with the Football Foundation to identify opportunities to improve the quality of grass football pitches across Medway.

19.2. Subject to capital match-funding of £359,000 being approved by the Council over the next five years, the Football Foundation will give Medway a grant of £683,000 to improve 63 grass pitches across 17 sites in Medway.

19.3. The sites include:

- Barnfield playing field
- Beechings Cross
- Beechings Way
- Borstal Recreation Ground
- Cliffe Woods Recreation Ground
- Cozenton Park
- Deangate Ridge sports area
- Great Lines
- Hempstead Recreation Ground
- Hook Meadow
- Kings Frith
- Knights Place
- Luton Recreation Ground
- Rainham Recreation Ground
- Ryetop Playing Field
- Snodhurst Bottom
- Watling Street

19.4. Grass pitch improvements form part of a wider piece of work being undertaken in partnership with Kent FA and the Football Foundation, which is also looking at improving the provision of 3G all-weather pitches across Medway and the development and improvements to the sports pavilions.

## 20. Active Parks

20.1. Medway Sport is developing proposals for the introduction of designated Active Parks across Medway.

20.2. These will include a range of paid-for and free facilities and activities designed to create outdoor hubs for physical activity through effective development and subsequent usage of our open spaces, encouraging greater health and

wellbeing and hopefully reaching new participants who don't wish to use more traditional sporting facilities.

## 21. Medway Mile

- 21.1. The highly popular Medway Mile 2024 took place on Friday, 12 July at Medway Park, bringing more than 3,000 participants of all ages together for a celebration of fitness, community and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.
- 21.2. This year's event featured 42 activities from local club partners and a new route through Gillingham High Street. The mass participation mile, elite races, and family-friendly activities created an inclusive and energetic atmosphere.
- 21.3. Alongside the mass run, the event offered six live performances on stage including by the Salvation Army band, and delicious food from local restaurants.

## 22. Mini Youth Games

- 22.1. The Mini Youth Games series offers Medway primary schools the opportunity to participate in ten different sports across 21 event days over the course of the academic year. Sports on offer are hockey, basketball, badminton, swimming, table tennis, netball, tag rugby, football, kwik cricket and athletics.
- 22.2. For providing local sporting support, we are thankful to Holcombe Hockey Club, Crusaders Basketball, Black Lion Swimming Club, Chatham Table Tennis Club, Medway Badminton Club, Medway Rugby Club, Anchorians FC and High Halstow Cricket Club, plus support from Rainham School for Girls, Mid-Kent College and Medway Sport Young Leaders.
- 22.3. So far, the following 55 primary schools have taken part in at least one event:

Academy of Woodlands; All Faiths; Balfour; Barnsole; Bligh; Brompton Westbrook; Bryony; Burnt Oak; Byron; Chattenden; Cliffe Woods; Cuxton; Deanwood; Elaine; English Martyrs; Fairview; Featherby; Gordon; Halling; Hempstead; High Halstow; Hoo St Werburgh; Horsted; Kingfisher; Lordswood; Luton; Miers Court; Napier; New Horizons; New Road; Oaklands; Oasis Skinner Street; Parkwood; Riverside; Saxon Way; St Andrew's; St Augustine of Canterbury; St Benedict's; St Helens; St James; St Margarets; St Margaret's at Troy Town; St Marys; St Mary's Island; St Michaels; St Thomas More; St Thomas of Canterbury; St William of Perth; Swingate; Thamesview; The Pilgrim School; Twydall; Wainscott; Walderslade; Warren Wood.

## 23. Active inclusion and diversity

23.1. Medway Sport seeks to include a number of programmes and activities which encourage and support accessibility and inclusion for different community members or groups with various needs, ages and backgrounds. These include:

23.2. Disability Youth Games (DYG) - Four sporting competitions are offered within our DYG programme including swimming, football, skiing and summer games. Anchorians FC supported the football, Capstone Ski Centre supported the Skiing, and Rivermead School supported the summer games.

23.3. The following primary and secondary schools have taken part in one or more DYG competition:

- Abbey Court, Rowhill, Warren Wood, Danecourt, Twydall and Aspire.

23.4. Women and girls

- Weekly Muslim yoga with female instructor
- Weekly Back to Netball with England Netball
- Walking netball at Strood Academy - weekly session ran for six weeks. (currently looking for a new coach to continue)

23.5. Older people

- Walking football at Strood Sports Centre and Medway Park
- Walking Cricket at Strood Sports Centre
- Chair yoga at Strood Sports Centre and Hoo Village Institute
- Homes for Independent living senior session - weekly at three locations.

23.6. Low Socio-Economic Groups

- Street Cricket. Free weekly session for ages 8 to 15 years
- Drop-in Football at Strood Soccer Centre with Child Friendly Medway. Free weekly sessions for ages 7 to 14 years
- Mini Youth Games After School Club. Weekly free session for 7-11 year-olds
- Hoop into Basketball weekly session with Kent Crusaders. Low-cost activity for ages 7-16 years
- Free school holiday sports club for children on benefit related free school meals
- Summer of Sport - a number of free or low-cost activities for families and the community during summer months.

23.7. Mental well-being

- Calm Football at Strood Academy - weekly free session for men

23.8. Disability and SEND

- Multi-sport disability club - weekly low-cost session

#### 23.9. Vulnerable adults

- Genesis Homeless Football - weekly free session at Watling Park
- Asylum Football - weekly free session at Watling Park

#### 24. Providing political leadership and challenge

24.1. In having Portfolio Holder responsibility for a number of non-statutory services against the backdrop of significant financial pressures, I have advised officers to continue to prioritise wide-ranging activities which deliver beneficial services for residents and visitors alike, while reducing the financial demands on the Council, so as to make key aspects of my Portfolio operationally self-sufficient.

24.2. I have regular meetings with senior officers and Service Managers so that I am kept informed of performance, quality and challenges. I also regularly undertake visits to events and centres to raise service morale as well as to observe first-hand the impact of our services and where possible, obtain direct feedback from service users and frontline officers.

24.3. I seek clear service delivery plans and follow-up reports from senior officers to ensure effective oversight of key projects, advising against drift or delay. I also seek clear explanation when various factors -including external factors- need to be considered in taking decisions forward.

24.4. Additionally, I keep abreast of key stakeholder events, launch events, workshops and attend these regularly. I also chair steering committees, and provide clear vision aimed at securing long-term positive outcomes for Medway and her residents.

#### 25. Championing the Interests of service users / Medway residents / Children and Young People

25.1. In delivering a range of Council services I encourage our officers and staff members to always be highly professional, approachable, helpful, responsive and invested in serving our communities. I believe in leading by example and make myself available and visible to community members, groups, staff and leaders, so that I can listen to and consider views from all sides.

25.2. I believe in being present, calm, empathic and providing effective leadership, support, decisiveness, direction, reassurance and motivation, including through the challenging times. As such, during unforeseen challenges, I have made myself immediately available for senior officers to easily communicate and seek advice/decisions in a timely manner and cascade these where needed. Good teamwork, effective use of resources, skills, alongside being timely, thoughtful, and listening to feedback are attributes I highly encourage for frontline staff and senior managers alike.

- 25.3. I am conscious that alongside experienced officers' views and expert recommendations, there will always be a variety of opinions on how such facilities should evolve, and I receive a range of correspondence on numerous aspects.
- 25.4. I have listened to service users feedback and advised officers to widen our inclusive events and sports activities so that our events and facilities are as accessible as possible for all our residents. I am delighted that be it at our sports centres, children's pantomime or large annual events such as Rochester Christmas markets, our teams are delivering wider relaxed, inclusive sessions than ever before.
- 25.5. I advise our officers to engage fully with correspondents in a timely manner, to ensure all views are heard, even if it is not always possible to accede to specific requests- when this is the case, I advise officers to offer clear explanation to the correspondents.
- 25.6. I have advised senior officers that planning and application for funding community-based projects and events should be equally prioritised for all parts of Medway.

## 26. Conclusion

- 26.1. The services within my Portfolio are hugely important in making Medway a vibrant, exciting and enjoyable place to live and to visit. I continue to be fully supportive of the service and the work, which is being undertaken in challenging financial circumstances, and am committed to supporting continued progress in unlocking the huge opportunities that can provide long-term benefits for Medway and I look forward to working with colleagues and partners to bring these to fruition.

## Lead officer contact

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