



Serving You

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25 March 2025

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

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mahil, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward investment

Summary

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

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Committee are asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

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

- Employment
- Social Regeneration
- Inward Investment
- Labour Market Planning and Strategic Skills Development
- Markets
- Small Business
- Tourism
- Town Centres

3. Background

3.1. I am delighted to have taken on the Portfolio Holder responsibility for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment and I would like to start my report by giving thanks to the various staff who, day to day, run council services with exceptional commitment, enthusiasm, and care for the residents of Medway and the future opportunities available to them.

- 3.2. The Council and its staff have worked tirelessly to minimise the impact on residents of the financial situation that the Council currently faces but also the importance of delivering high quality statutory services, whilst seeking positive outcomes for residents of Medway.
 - 3.3. Our Economic Development initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering growth and innovation and providing support to businesses across Medway. Town Centres are the vibrant heart of communities, and the Regeneration and Town Centre Teams are instrumental in revitalising and nurturing these essential hubs of activity through key interventions such as Future High Streets Fund, High Street Heritage Action Zone and Levelling Up Fund.
 - 3.4. The Skills and Employment team equip residents with the necessary skills to thrive in today's dynamic economic landscape through Medway Adult Education and the Medway Apprenticeship Advice Service.
 - 3.5. The Strategy and Investment team continue to attract funding for the benefit of all Medway residents, including delivering a wide variety of social regeneration initiatives enabled through the Shared Prosperity Fund programme which supports pride in place for communities and marginalised groups across Medway, as well as delivering the Levelling up Fund programme focusing on growing the creative sector and providing workspace and jobs.
4. Providing political leadership and challenge
 - 4.1. My portfolio impacts all residents and communities across Medway, from directly supporting communities, stakeholders, businesses, and organisations, to attracting investment and maximising growth for all, and delivering on our Council priorities. Partnership working is imperative for promoting community engagement and maximising resources to deliver effective services tailored to the needs of residents.
 - 4.2. The Town Centres Board has continued to meet as a Cabinet Advisory Group steering and monitoring the Council's role in working to regenerate the town centres. A variety of initiatives and projects have been discussed and advice and strategic direction provided.
 - 4.3. Work continues with the National High Street Taskforce, Medway external stakeholders including Business for Medway, visits and support to Medway Businesses, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, FSB Kent, Medway Meetup group, Town Centre Forums, High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Cultural Consortia, Historic England, community groups and members.
 - 4.4. The Shared Prosperity Fund £1.8m programme has been extended by another year with an additional £600,000 funding awarded. Medway was praised by MHCLG for innovative use of the fund.

- 4.5. Medway is represented as a partner and upper tier authority of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), alongside Kent, Essex, East Sussex, Thurrock and Southend. SELEP is working towards its closure by end of March as mandated by Government, this includes closure of the SELEP Accountability Board, SELEP Strategic Board and SELEP Investment Panel. Medway has participated in five thematic workshops and various regional issues have been discussed at length to transition LEP responsibilities to Local Authorities in April and the formal Transition Agreement is now underway. As part of this work, significant legacy funding has been secured for Medway to continue investment in strategic economic growth.
- 4.6. Medway continues strong partnership working with Kent County Council (KCC) as Accountable Body through part of the SELEP transition arrangements, via the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) Board as a new Functional Economic Area mandated by Government. A joint Kent and Medway LEP Integration Plan was agreed by Cabinet and approved by MHCLG. Strategic direction for the region is set out in a new joint Kent and Medway Economic Framework (KMEF) seen by Cabinet in 2024. Work to deliver the ambitions in the joint KMEF is ongoing.
- 4.7. Work continues with our Higher Education establishments, supporting a joint funding bid, an upcoming joint AI and technology event as well as development of the Docking Station which recently celebrated a ground-breaking ceremony while linking key groups and developers adhering to the One Medway Charter.
5. **Championing the Interests of service users Medway residents**
 - 5.1. Quarterly meetings with the Business for Medway Board are held representing a range of businesses sectors and sizes across Medway, along with representation from the Federation for Small Business and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce sharing views on how best the Council can support the business community. I attended the latest meeting, hosted by Chatham Maritime Trust, receiving invaluable feedback from a range of local business representatives on our business support provision.
 - 5.2. Regular Town Centre Forum meetings provide opportunities for key stakeholders (include businesses) to collaborate and discuss Town Centre issues and input on key initiatives and projects such as events, safety, crime, and local regeneration projects.
 - 5.3. Key areas of focus for Town Centres Board have included updates on Future High Streets Fund programme of projects, HSHAZ programme, UKSPF programme updates and successes, Chatham BID Feasibility Study, Gillingham Cocreation Programme and Gillingham Taskforce, Rainham and Strood TC updates, National High Street Taskforce.

5.4. The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Year 3 delivery is underway. The SPF programme is made up of a network of partners, businesses, and not-for-profit organisations. The projects focus on supporting communities and local businesses. Our successful launch event at the Corn Exchange was attended by over 180 stakeholders and residents, who were asked to put forward their views and ideas for potential projects.

6. Support for key service areas

6.1. Town Centres

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

6.1.2. Work continued with the National High Street Taskforce with a well-attended event with local stakeholders to consider Gillingham town centres key issues and opportunities early in the year and a town centre tour and assessment.

6.1.3. The Council has supported the establishment of a new Gillingham Taskforce, adopting a multi-disciplinary internal and external partnership approach working with key stakeholders to drive forward the regeneration of Gillingham Town Centre. This has been championed by the local MP.

6.1.4. The Council has supported the development of a new Gillingham Community Panel and an innovative co-creation programme that takes a collaborative approach to creating a future vision and action plan for Gillingham. This has included a Love Gillingham community fun day and a series of interactive collaborative workshops to help shape the vision and action plan. The Town Centres Team have also undertaken a wider stakeholder engagement programme attending various partner and local events.

6.1.5. The Council has led the re-launch and refresh of the Rainham Town Centre Partnership and started a "Rainham Re-imagined" programme of work, utilising a co-creation approach to visioning and action planning Rainham's future regeneration with local stakeholders.

6.1.6. The Council has continued to support Strood, Chatham and Rochester Town Centre Forums, their regular meetings and key projects including a new Strood Heritage Trail, town centre greening initiatives, Chatham Business Improvement District Feasibility Study, Christmas trees, lights and festivities, community fun days and Chatham Chinese New Year.

6.1.7. The Council secured funding, officer resource and support from Historic England for a legacy Heritage Capacity Building Programme to continue the excellent work of the previous 4-year High Street Heritage Action Programme. The Capacity Programme will continue to drive forward future regeneration in the Chatham Intra Area, supporting the

establishment and operations of the new Intra Community Trust. The Programme will also aim to extend the co-creation approach and best practice from the Chatham Intra area to other town centres across Medway to support heritage led regeneration. A range of projects are being developed, and funding been sought and secured to enable this, including successfully securing and utilising UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support town centre regeneration and some of the associated projects.

6.1.8. Medway is now considered a priority area for Historic England for heritage regeneration. The Council is also supported the development of a successful Architectural Heritage Fund application which has enabled the trust to be created and continue their work. This an innovative approach supporting an external sustainable regeneration model.

6.1.9. Medway's markets continue to play a key role in bringing communities together and provide many socially inclusive activities. They encourage entrepreneurship and enterprise, provide a low-cost entry point for start-ups, and allow products to be tried and tested. A new Markets Strategy has been developed with plans to begin implementation of the actions within this in the coming year. The Council has continued to successfully operate in-house Gillingham Markets (Monday and Saturday) weekly, and a Farmers Market for Rochester every month (3rd Sunday). Additional resource in the form of two new posts will help to drive forward the markets strategy to grow and diversify the Medway markets offer over the next few years.

6.2. Small Business

6.2.1. Medway is uncommon in taking an annual business survey to measure business confidence, plans for hiring and premises needs. It guides the following year of business support and is currently live.

6.2.2. 40 years of Medway Business Awards was celebrated last year with excellent finalists and winners highlighting the diversity of size and industry we have locally.

6.2.3. Ascend Coworking is fully open, making up 15,000 square feet in the first floor of the Pentagon with the capacity to host 250 jobs. Three offices have been occupied starting with a local business working in generative Artificial Intelligence. An AI Accelerator programme to support local businesses to adopt AI productivity efficiencies, funded by a Shared Prosperity Fund grant is currently underway.

6.2.4. In person 1-2-1 business support began in August open to any Medway resident looking to start up or grow their business and recently celebrated over 100 entrepreneurs supported.

- 6.2.5. 31 fully funded Net Zero Audits have been implemented to assist businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 6.2.6. Partners for Growth received 51 grant applications in the past year with a roughly 50% grant approval rate for those looking to start up and grow in Medway. Those unsuccessful are guided to the business advice offer for further support with an invite to reapply again in the future.
- 6.2.7. Almost £20,000 has been awarded in Partners for Green Growth grants including two which also received a Partners for Growth grant and a joint bid of five companies on Medway City Estate looking to reduce their emissions.
- 6.2.8. The local supply chain continues to be supported by making connections with networking events such as Medway Business Meetup, Business for Medway and joint events with the Federation for Small Business.
- 6.2.9. Medway Business and Skills Showcase will be held again for a second year in June following on from the success of last years. It is moving to the Historic Dockyard to accommodate more attendees with a programme of speakers including Amazon, BAE and Kreston Reeves.
- 6.2.10. Local business events continue to be supported such as the Higher Education Conference, ZC Live, Women in Business Expo, Amazon Innovation Accelerator and upcoming World Class Medway.
- 6.2.11. Support continues to be given to Climate Change, Skills Team and Public Health in business outreach alongside Corn Exchange, Brook Theatre and St Johns Church of potential new revenue streams and business case analysis.
- 6.2.12. The regional digital technology and manufacturing industry grant and support scheme 'Made Smarter Adoption' has been developed to be implemented this year.
- 6.3. Investment
 - 6.3.1. The SELEP is working towards closure, as part of this workstream significant legacy funding of up to £2.4m has been secured for economic growth and strategic investment. A plan has been agreed with Members to continue strategic growth for Medway over the next three years, including resource to support social regeneration and development of key strategies including the River Strategy and Investment Strategy.
 - 6.3.2. In partnership with Kent County Council (KCC), Locate in Kent and Visit Kent were procured to provide support with Inward Investment and tourism. Highlights include the reoccupation of former Bose House, retention of Kreston Reeves, progress on MedwayOne, former

Kingsnorth, as well as Thamesport. There are ongoing discussions with potential new to area, larger employers.

- 6.3.3. An employment land needs assessment, as part of the local plan, is in development. Engaging with the Major Developers Forum and also consulting with major employment landowners to ensure we're supporting key industries sustainability for the future.
- 6.3.4. Kent and Medway Business Fund continues to build on its success with 2 recent Medway loans awarded totalling £822,770, representing 19% of all of Kent and Medway's allocation.
- 6.3.5. Central Government announced an intention to create AI Growth Zones, and an Expression of Interest was made to position Medway as a prime location to become one of the future zones.
- 6.3.6. A joint bid by local universities for £20 million in funding to support the development of the growing agri-tech economy with Medway's and KCC's support was, unfortunately, unsuccessful.
- 6.3.7. Levelling Up Fund £14.4m investment in our Chatham Package of culture projects continue to progress. Works on the Fitted Rigging House supported by the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust are complete and works on the Docking Station in partnership with the University of Kent, and Brook Theatre refurbishment are underway.
- 6.3.8. FHSF
Medway was awarded £9.49m in Spring 2021 from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver multiple projects in Chatham. The projects focus on diversifying town centre uses, development opportunities for vacant units in the town centre and supporting employment growth.

The grant funding was split across 6 projects in Chatham Town Centre;

- The James William's Healthy Living Centre. Integrating key community health services in a highly accessible location while supporting town centre diversification. The project is in the construction phase with completion expected Winter 2025.
- Ascend Coworking (formally known as the Innovation Hub). Re-purposing of redundant retail space within the Pentagon centre and delivering 15,000 sqft of SME-focused employment workspace. The project was awarded a further £300k Getting Building Fund (SELEP) towards the delivery of the hub. The business opened to clients in January 2025, following a successful launch event hosted by the Operator, Edgility, in November 2024. Further details referenced in 6.2.3.
- The Paddock Public Realm. To Improve access and create a vibrant City Square, creating a sense of place at a critical access point to the High

Street; seamlessly connecting the Pentagon and the Brook Theatre with the High-street and improve the viability of adjacent residential development. The project has also demolished the redundant bus station ramps next to the Pentagon Centre. The site re-opened to the public in August 2024, following completion of the improvement works.

- St John's Church. The Council have been working in partnership with the Diocese of Rochester to restore the Grade II* listed church. The improvements include providing facilities for events and classes, flexible meeting spaces for businesses, a café and continue as a place of worship. The project is in the construction phase, with completion expected Autumn 2025.
- The former Debenhams building. The delivery of 24, 237 sqft of commercial space (ground floor) that will activate the high street by increasing footfall in the town centre and provide employment opportunities. The Council received a further £730k funding from One Public Estate (OPE), Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF), which will facilitate the future delivery of residential units. The Council are currently progressing the OPE enabling works, with a contractor appointed in February 2025 and works expected to complete Summer 25.

The Brook Theatre. Improve the functionality of the spaces to support the development of Chatham's creative sector. The Council received further funding from the Levelling Up Fund (£6.5m) to improve the building's facilities and undergo an overhaul of refurbishment works to digitally upgrade and future proof The Brook to support Chatham's creative sector by upgrading spaces, and providing affordable office and co-working facilities alongside digitally enhanced rehearsal and performance spaces to develop their practice and enhance their business. The Council are in the process of appointing a works contractor (Thomas Sinden Ltd) who will undertake the improvement and refurbishment works. The contractor will mobilise on site March 2025 and should complete by Spring 2027.

6.3.9. Cabinet took the decision in February 2024 to pause the development at IPM on the basis that the commercial market has changed quite significantly in the current financial climate, the wake of COVID-19 and the way businesses now work. We took the opportunity to pause and review the best long-term opportunities for Innovation Park Medway to ensure the most sustainable options would move forward for both sites while also reducing the financial risk to the Council.

6.3.10. Officers appointed a consultancy to undertake the options assessments for the northern and southern sites alongside analysis of the best delivery mechanism to provide the most viable, sustainable options to the Cabinet to secure the best future for the development of both sites.

- 6.3.11. On Tuesday, 11 March 2025, Medway's Cabinet will decide on the recommendations for the future of both sites. The proposed development options coming forward are as follows:

Northern Site:

a mix of industrial and mid-tech (office and research) commercial space, with an interim use of the site until 2028 proposed under a lease

Southern Site:

the development of a viable care home and retirement units. Mid-tech commercial space will also be considered while further market testing for a care home is carried out.

6.4. Strategy

- 6.4.1. The Kent and Medway Economic Framework was agreed by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership covering a range of Kent and Medway's key industries in order to ensure that we're best placed for future funding or support offered.
- 6.4.2. The national Industrial Strategy Consultation received a response from Medway to ensure our key local industries are highlighted within the regional and national picture.
- 6.4.3. A pipeline of projects for investible propositions across Medway and Kent were jointly submitted to MHCLG. Across Medway this included proposals for: Innovation Park Medway, Medway TECH, Strood Riverside sustainable transport, Strood Riverside Housing, Gillingham Open Lines, Medway One, various transport schemes including A289, A288, M2 junction 4, flood risk infrastructure, Medway wide residential schemes, Heritage led public realm schemes, Repurposing Medway Town Centres, Medway Town Centre Regeneration, Medway No Use Empty, Docking Station and more.
- 6.4.4. External funding has been secured to continue the refresh of the Council's overarching Place Strategy 'Medway 2041'. Work on this will begin in 2025/26.
- 6.4.5. Funding has been secured to develop the Council's first Investment Strategy and work on this will begin in 2025/26. This is a new way forward for the Council, the Strategy will prioritise key investment opportunities, including private-sector partnerships, and be a driver for long term economic growth. Funding has also been secured to support key Investment resource.
- 6.4.6. A new streamlined approach to horizon scanning for current and upcoming investment opportunities will be taken, through funding secured for new software, which will help prioritise and ensure each service area is aware of available opportunities.

6.5. Social Regeneration

6.5.1. Medway was allocated £1.8m SPF through our MHCLG approved Investment Plan. Year 1 delivery focused on 17 projects delivered in-house due to the short delivery window. During SPF Year 2, the SPF team received 68 applications from a range of internal and external partners, which resulted in 26 Year 2 projects being supported.

6.5.2. After a successful launch event with over 180 attendees, and strong communications campaign for Year 3, the SPF team received over 120 applications for funding across the three available funds. In addition to the continuation of the Pride in Place and Feasibility Funds, Year 3 introduced the opportunity for local organisations to apply for people and skills related funding through our People and Skills Fund. Each application we received went through a rigorous selection process involving initial assessment sifting, scoring, moderation, with my sign-off as Portfolio Holder. This process resulted in a total of 55 projects being supported this year. Across the three funds, funding was given to an array of organisations across Medway, to enhance and support local community infrastructure, to support our local people and skills sector, promote, and encourage people to visit Medway, and help to build capacity for local community groups.

6.5.3. This year the projects supported include:

- 21 Together - Communication for Life
- AE Creative Hub CIC - A+E Lab Art & Tech Programme
- Age UK Kent Rivers - A Golden Celebration in Gillingham
- AJD Solutions - Love Where You Live
- Arts & Homeless International - AHI Professional Development Programme
- Chatham Historic Dockyard - Dockyard Film Location Tour
- City of Rochester Society - We Did It Medway
- Edgility Limited - Medway AI Innovate & Accelerate
- Electric Medway - Young Hack 2024-5
- Emerge Advocacy - Emerge Advocacy in Medway
- Funny Women CIC – Making Medway Merry!
- Hoo Peninsula Cares CIC - Pathways of Pride: Exploring Peninsula Heritage and Natural Surroundings
- Ideas Test CIO - Luton Lights 2
- Intra Arts Ltd - Zigzag Scrapstore
- Intra Community Trust - Intra Urban Greening Green Gateway
- Live Music Now Limited - All Together Now Series 2
- LV21 Limited - RiverSwell
- Medway Council Events Team - High Street Event Toolkit
- Medway Council - Celebrating St Alban's, Gillingham
- Medway Council - Civic Forum (Urban Room) Pilot
- Medway Council Library Team - People of Medway
- MEDWAY PLUS - DISCOVERING MEDWAY
- Mess ROOM CIC - Mess Room Creatives

- Mrs Baker's Medway Theatre Company Ltd - Medway Arts Tours Costumed guide training
- Mutual Aid Road Reps - Fighting Loneliness & Isolation with MARR
- Rochester Town Centre Forum - Rochester Christmas Lights Legacy
- See & Create CIC - SIGN and CREATE
- Slough Fort Preservation Trust - Fort & Community
- Sports Connect Community CIC - Medway Sports and Education Hub
- Spotlites Theatre Company Limited - Inspire ME
- The Halpern Charitable Foundation - Chinese New Year Festival '25 and Events support
- The Parochial Church Council Of The Ecclesiastical Parish of
- St Margaret of Antioch, Rainham, Kent - Medway Breathes
- The Rochester Diocesan Society & Board of Finance - St John's Open Space Project
- TPA Supported Living Ltd - TPA Hub
- Twydall & District Community Association - Twydall Hearts Project Phase 2
- Volunteer It Yourself - Volunteer It Yourself
- WALT – Weedswood and Wayfield Activities
- Wordsmithery - Medway River Lit – Rippling Out
- Future Coders SE - Social impact measurement tool
- Medway Council Planning Team - Feasibility Prototyping for Gillingham Design Code
- Medway Voluntary Action - Power of Youth
- Rochester Cathedral -Rochester Cathedral Community Sensory Garden
- Sateda Ltd - A Women's Resource Centre for Medway
- St Margaret's Church - Putting Rainham First
- Woodlands Warriors Wheelchair Rugby League - Winter Warriors Skills Enhancement Programme
- Girlguiding Chatham North District & Medway Division - Green skills and Outdoor Learning
- The Reanella Trust - The Resilience Recovery Relief Project
- Medway Council - Creative Health & Skills Health Program
- Napier Primary and Nursery Academy - TKAT Ace Plus
- All Saints Community Project Trust - Life Skills
- North Kent Mind - Skills and Support Programme
- Medway Diversity Forum - Creating Life Chances
- Volunteer It Yourself - Volunteer It Yourself
- ZC Social Media - Digital Medway

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

6.5.5. Following the news of an extension of the SPF Programme for an additional year, which resulted in a £600,000 allocation of funds to Medway Council. The SPF team is currently progressing work to launch Year 4 of the SPF in early Q1 2024/25. Work is underway to set up the process, in line with the strict

governance processes as set up in Year 2 involving the Council's Finance, Legal, Audit, Counter Fraud and Procurement teams.

6.5.6. We received praise from MHCLG on our SPF programme and were interviewed to provide detailed feedback on our scheme. Our SPF was viewed as an exemplar programme and was utilised by the LGA and Key Cities to help lobby Central Government into a positive decision on the extension of the SPF programme for an additional year. The council's programme was also raised as a great example programme in a specific adjournment debate on this topic.

6.6. Medway Innovation Centres

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

6.6.2. The Innovation Centre Medway (ICM) has 54 offices which are regularly fully occupied supporting a wide range of businesses, from support services like accountants, lawyers, IT and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to more delivery-based operations such as bomb disposal, engineering, and property development. The ICM is also a key meeting / course venue for schools, driver's courses, council family counselling services and health and safety courses.

6.7. Skills

6.7.1. The Kent & Medway Careers Hub continues to go from strength to strength. We have 30 enterprise advisers supporting 29 secondary institutions, including the college, SEND schools and alternative provisions. Schools are performing well in delivering Gatsby benchmarks, achieving an average of 6.0 benchmarks. The national average is 5.8.

6.7.2. Work has commenced on a new large scale employment programme called Connect to Work, which will be delivered across Kent & Medway, supporting people with disabilities, health conditions and other disadvantaged groups. It will aim to support approx. 400 people in Medway a year for at least 3 years. The delivery plan is currently being worked up and submitted to DWP. The skills team have also contributed to the Work & Health Strategy currently out for consultation.

6.7.3. With funding from the National Development Team for Inclusion, we have led the creation of a Supported Internship forum, designed to bring key stakeholders together to further Supported Internships in Medway. There are three key streams of activity being delivered. Two employer focused events have now run, two young people and parent/carer focused events and a series

of videos showing the incredible impact Supported Internships have for both businesses and young people with Education Health & Care Plans. A new marketing and communications strategy will continue promote all three delivery partners running supported internships and supported employment programmes in Medway.

6.7.4. The Medway Apprenticeship Advice Service continues to offer support, and we have set up an Independent Training Provider forum, with an accompanying action plan to improve our coordination with the world of training. The MAAS has recently joined the National Apprenticeship Hub to learn from other areas what works well in promoting apprenticeships, share good practice and stay up to date with national updates.

6.7.5. Year 3 of the SPF programme has successfully awarded 10 skills projects totalling over £145,000 supporting people to engage in life skills, training and/or in to work including targeted support for NEETS, people with mental health issues and the long term unemployed. The projects have focussed on addressing skills gaps in the construction and the health and social care sectors, as well as highlighting green skills and continuing to promote the importance of digital skills across all sectors. The projects have also helped to identify the skills within the creative sector and then promoted how those skills can support health outcomes within the community.

6.8. Tourism

6.8.1. Tourism and the visitor economy is a significant contributor to Medway's economy latest Visit Kent economic impact study showed that in 2023:

- Total number of trips (day & staying) 4,833,500
- Total visitor spend £265,084,000
- Total Tourism Value £345,445,000 – 97% of pre-pandemic levels
- Total actual tourism related employment 6,403 – 92% of pre-pandemic levels and 7% of all employment

6.8.2. After the closure of the Visitor Information Centre and Tourism Service in 2024, the Portfolio Holder is working with officers, led by the Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage, and strategic partners including visitor attractions, creative and heritage sectors, hospitality sector, Visit Kent, National Lottery Heritage Fund, English Heritage and Arts Council England to develop a new pragmatic visitor economy partnership. This new model will set a clear ambition supported by good governance and a strong plan of action, to enable Medway to be a leading visitor destination in the South East.

7. Conclusion

7.1. I continue to be fully supportive of the services and work which is being undertaken in challenging circumstances, and am committed to supporting continued progress in achieving growth for our residents and communities.

Lead officer contact

Sunny Ee, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Sunny.Ee@medway.gov.uk

Jessica Jagpal, Strategy and Investment Programme Manager
Jessica.Jagpal@medway.gov.uk

Anne Knight, Head of Economic Development, Innovation and Town Centres
Anne.Knight@medway.gov.uk

Daniel Ratcliff, Head of Skills, Employment and Adult Education
Daniel.Ratcliff@medway.gov.uk

Tay Arnold, Acting Head of Regeneration Delivery and Greenspaces
Tay.Arnold@medway.gov.uk

Paul Cowell, Head of Culture and Libraries
Paul.Cowell@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.