

Questions and responses from the meeting of Cabinet on 8 July 2025

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

You are asked today to approve Medway's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), a document whose fundamental purpose is to provide a credible and effective strategy for improving air quality and protecting the health of residents. For any such plan to be considered robust, it must be deliverable and capable of addressing the most significant challenges it faces.

The council's own evidence base for the Draft Local Plan identifies that the single greatest future pressure on Medway's air quality is the plan's proposed housing growth. Specifically, the allocation of 5,710 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, which relies on the existing, congested A228 road network.

The council's Local Plan Air Quality Assessment only found the plan's impact to be acceptable on the critical assumption that a £170 million package of new roads and infrastructure would be built. As the Cabinet knows, this Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) grant has been withdrawn by the government, and the council's own viability evidence confirms that Section 106 contributions from the development cannot possibly cover this cost. The essential mitigation is therefore currently unfunded and undeliverable.

This has severe and direct consequences for the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at Four Elms Hill, an area which already contains existing homes and a primary school, and where residents are exposed to illegally high levels of pollution. While we note the intention to move the school, this does not solve the underlying problem. The summit of Four Elms Hill will remain a severe pedestrian, cycling, and traffic pinch-point, with the pelican crossing ensuring the continuation of stop-start traffic conditions—the primary cause of heightened emissions. The 'real world' impact of the Local Plan, without the HIF-funded roads, will be to force thousands of additional vehicle journeys through this exact location, inevitably worsening a situation that is already a public health risk.

Therefore, my question is:

Given that the primary driver of future air pollution—the Local Plan's housing growth—currently lacks a credible, funded mitigation strategy, on what specific grounds does the Cabinet consider this Air Quality Action Plan to be effective, deliverable, and legally sound when it is clear that its objectives will be completely overwhelmed by the foreseeable and severe negative impact on the Four Elms Hill AQMA, an impact for which the council has no deliverable solution?

In Councillor Curry's absence, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, responded. He stated that he thought everyone would agree that if there was no mitigation anywhere in Medway, and everyone remained wedded to the private car, then meeting growth needs would result in Medway's roads grinding to a halt with the congestion caused. Fortunately, the Local Plan had absolutely recognised the need for mitigation, and this had taken many forms, not just the highway improvements proposed at Four Elms. As Councillor Crozer had already mentioned,

moving the Primary school at Chattenden to a safer more sustainable location would facilitate and encourage more parents to walk their children to school and in turn have huge knock on health improvement impacts for young children.

Following work on the Hoo community infrastructure framework and liaison with the Parish Councils, the plan had identified community infrastructure that limited the need to drive on and off the peninsula - like a supermarket. Improved health provision, the Community parks, schools, improved community facilities, would all provide much needed facilities on the peninsula and avoid many vehicle movements on and off the peninsula. Similarly improving services and employment opportunities would also assist.

Public transport was a key part of the Local Plan and would involve new improved sustainable buses with priority measures to provide a public transport option that was effective and efficient, using electric buses to significantly reduce emissions. Similarly, many of the HGV movements would be significantly improved in relation to emissions. Specifically in terms of air quality, the ever increasing move towards hybrid and electric vehicles would bring further improvements.

Finally, in terms of the physical road improvements themselves, having a plan that identified where the growth (employment and housing) could sustainably go in Medway and setting out the mitigations needed, provided the best opportunity for securing funding for those mitigations. As Councillor Crozer would be aware, asking for funded improvements without identifying the benefits, greatly limited the likelihood of securing funding.

Question B – Nathan Ward, of Rainham, had submitted a question and his representative, Terry Whittaker, asked the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure, Councillor Nina Gurung, the following:

Does the Cabinet support 'Putting Rainham First' project which aims to secure £10m to protect, preserve and present the heritage, arts and culture of Rainham?

Councillor Gurung responded that she, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Curry as well as the Head of Culture and the Head of Economic Development Innovation and Town centres, as well as the heritage team, had been at St. Margaret's Church for the briefing of 'Putting Rainham First' which they had found heart felt. They had also given feedback and commended the vision put forward.

She added that culture, heritage, and community were woven throughout the One Medway Council Plan, recognised as powerful drivers of civic pride, economic growth, and social cohesion. The Cabinet was proud to support St Margaret's Church's Putting Rainham First initiative, an inspiring project that celebrated Rainham's creativity and heritage. Set within a unique and historic environment, the initiative brought people together, fostering a strong sense of belonging and helping to create a vibrant place that residents were proud to call home which she thanked the organisers for.

She gave assurance that Council officers were working closely with the project team, providing valuable guidance and support to help secure the £10m needed to bring this ambitious and community led vision to life. Community engagement had played a central role in bringing Rainham's reimagined journey and initiative to shape the future of the town centre forward. This collaborative process had led to the

development of a reflective piece that was now informing next steps. The work would help shape the shared vision to find a clear action plan and explore funding opportunities by embracing a core creation approach, ensuring that this long term regeneration project was rooted in the aspirations and needs of Rainham's growing population. Creating a vibrant town centre that truly served its community.

There was no supplementary question.

Question C – Mrs S Williams, of Gillingham, had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Simon Curry:

Considering the Medway Norse joint venture partnership has now been in place for over 10 years, I wonder whether Medway Council questions the effectiveness and whether money has genuinely been saved including whether there has been an acceptance of lower standards.

I am also curious as to whether tax paying residents of Medway have been receiving value for their money and can have pride in Medway.

Over recent years Medway has declined, it looks unkempt and sadly as this becomes more obvious to the residents of Medway, they will also do the same, the creep has already begun.

Medway Norse vehicles are seen in abundance out on the Medway roads each day. I wonder whether staff officers are out on the ground reporting all the necessary issues.

Executive officers and councillors drive around the towns and must see the rubbish, overgrown grass verges, overgrown pavements, overgrown street verges, trees hanging over pathways and roads. Public buildings/areas used to be serviced on an annual basis to uphold a standard of appearance. 'No mow' may is now on its way to July. Entering Rainham via the M2 is an example, litter, graffiti on signposts and overgrown grass verges are a disgrace. Areas of the carriageway on B2004 and several verge roads, namely A2, Beechings Way are knee deep in grass and weeds. Similar examples can be found in Chatham, Rochester, Strood and Frindsbury.

I can recall services when they were carried out by Council staff, there was a sense of pride and ownership. Unfortunately in recent times, it has become apparent that so many works are make do and bodge, rather than repair and permanently fix.

Can Medway Council honestly say that they have saved money and maintained their sense of Pride in Medway since entering into the Medway Norse Partnership, whilst still maintaining the same standards of upkeep to the Medway Towns?

In the questioner's absence the question was taken as read.

In Councillor Curry's absence, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, responded and advised that Medway Norse was a joint venture, a partnership between Medway Council and Norse nationally. The Council received a proportion of the profits every year which were derived from the commercial activities undertaken. Since its inception, the profit share arrangement had returned a dividend to the Council each year. All accounts were published by the Joint Venture if financial

details were required. The Council also published its own annual budget reports which could be interrogated and scrutinised and indeed were by the Councils' Audit Committee and the Business Support and Digital Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Medway Norse officers worked proactively with the Council's Environmental Services team, highlighting areas in need of attention. The Environmental Services' Contracts Team carried out regular street inspections across Medway following guidance set out by DEFRA. Roads identified as unsatisfactory were raised with Medway Norse to attend and bring back up to standard.

Residents were always encouraged to report litter and graffiti using the Council's online e-forms or via the Customer and Business Support Team on 01634 333 333 which defaulted to Medway Norse to action. If there were any specific areas which officers should be aware of, he urged the questioner to let the Council know and the team would liaise with Medway Norse to resolve promptly.

As the questioner was not present there was no supplementary question.

Question D – Councillor Hamandishe had submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple:

What would happen if The Labour Party decided to set up a politically directed "Department of Government Efficiency" comprising of party donors — outside of existing audit and scrutiny processes — and demanded access to all officer files, emails, and financial records? Would that be legal?

In the questioner's absence the question was taken as read.

In response Councillor Maple stated that for absolute clarity, he did not expect at any point the Labour Party to set up a politically directed department of Government efficiency compromise of local party donors, National Party donors, or indeed leaders of political parties. It was a nonsense, and from what had been seen in just the last 24 hours, it was grandstanding by the new administration from down the road, the other side of Blue Bell Hill. That week their chosen enemy had seemed to be children of the most vulnerable nature. The week before that their chosen targets were the LGBTQ plus community and before that, their chosen targets were Ukrainians who had been enjoying solidarity and support and were now not from the leadership of the other upper tier authority in the region.

He stated that he was very clearly aware of the GDPR consequences. The data harvesting consequences that had been seen from Elon Musk with the US version of DoGE. He stated that the right thing to do, and that he and Councillor Paterson had met with them just the previous week, was to bring in CIPFA, the sector led experts who had been in twice since this administration had begun. In a professional way, in a way which was respected by the local government. CIPFA had given the Council good advice and guidance, good support, and good recommendations to take forward which had been done. Some of the recommendations had been difficult. He stated that the current administration were getting on with dealing with the challenging financial circumstances the Council found itself in, not least because of the 91% cut this Council had had in its revenue support grant since 2010. The administration, led by him, were getting on with that, rather than the gimmicks and chaos being created by sacking people, or not sacking people, suspending people, or sacking a cabinet member quicker than Liz Truss had been sacked as Prime

Minister. This administration were getting on with good delivery of public services in Medway.

Question E – Councillor Spalding, had submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Teresa Murray:

The main Local Plan Regulation 19 document is 581 pages long including numerous appendices.

In addition to this main document there are twenty seven sets of detailed background papers.

The first draft of the Local Plan Regulation 19 document was published on 3 June 2025.

That same evening the Cabinet met to consider approving the draft plan document.

The final draft appeared on 18 June when it was circulated with the special council meeting agenda.

All three drafts apparently contained errors and missing documents.

Why did Councillor Murray, the Deputy Leader of Medway Council, apparently mislead the cabinet and those watching the meeting by saying “This plan has been, along with the planning officers, to my Health and Wellbeing Board” when it could not have done, and saying this was “A plan ready to go to the inspector” when clearly it was not?

In the questioner’s absence the question was taken as read.

In response Councillor Murray responded that she hoped she could put Councillor Spalding’s mind at rest that there was no conspiracy associated with the Health and Well Being Board discussing the local plan. Planning officers Dave Harris and Catherine Smith had both attended the Board on 21 November 2024 and had talked about the draft plan which was being prepared at the time and had shared the same information that was available to everybody in the public during the Regulation 18 consultation phase. She had wanted the Health and Well Being Board to understand why the plan was important, and what the risks to Medway were if the Council continued without one, and how the Council’s partners across the health and care family of Medway could help ensure that health infrastructure was a priority within the local plan and to also encourage members of the Health and Well Being Board to put in submissions outlining their anticipated needs and ideas. Minutes of these meetings were, as always, available on the Council’s website. At full Council she had also referred to the draft plan in the form it was presented for Council as ready to go to the inspector, which it would be after the current Regulation 19 consultation period. She reminded Councillor Spalding that the Council, under Labour’s leadership, had been commended for the thoroughness of the consultation on the local plan going above and beyond the efforts made by other local authorities.

Question F – Councillor Kemp, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple, the following:

For over a decade, the floral displays adorning the railings along the A2 in Rainham have been widely celebrated as a vibrant and welcoming gateway to Medway. This initiative, previously supported by the now-defunct Members Priority Fund, contributed significantly to the visual identity of the borough's eastern entrance.

With the removal of that funding source, and the subsequent withdrawal of the displays—much to the disappointment of both residents and visitors—Ward Councillors have stepped in temporarily, donating £1,000 from their Ward Improvement Fund allocation to sustain the displays for six months.

Given that these floral installations represent a borough-wide asset rather than a Ward-specific feature, and in light of similar displays being maintained in other areas—such as on the A2 adjacent to Jacksons Field—can the Leader of the Council, or the appropriate Portfolio Holder, confirm whether permanent, borough-level funding will be allocated to ensure the continuation of these valued displays in Rainham?

In response Councillor Maple stated that he would respond in two parts. Firstly about the previous funding. He stated that he had been very clear all along with colleagues, that this would be an administration of honesty, integrity, accountability and compassion. The problem with the members fund had been, as he had previously referred to it in the past, was it had been Alan's big pocket. If an e-mail was sent it depended on the mood whether you might get a response, quickly, less quickly, you might be asked for everything you may or may not be asked for evidence. He stated that that was no way to spend council taxpayers money. There should be a process as there was for all improvement funds, and as rightfully pointed out in the second part of the question. Therefore he would make no apology whatsoever for moving away from a funding scheme which had no rule, literally no rule book and was made-up as the former leader chose. That was not how this administration would run. Instead there would be processes and procedures and colleagues around the table might be frustrated by those processes and procedures, but all 59 councillors would be guided by them on the issue of funding for things within their ward.

He stated that, more generally, speaking as a ward councillor for formerly Chatham Central and now Chatham, Central and Brompton, for a number of years he had been really pleased to part fund, along with his fellow ward councillor the Christmas tree in Chatham town centre which definitely benefitted people far beyond the ward coming to see the fantastic pantomimes put on at the Central Theatre. People from across Medway and beyond enjoyed that tree, so he was very pleased to have funded that for a number of years from ward improvement funds. There were similar funded activities in other towns, and particularly if you had a town centre in your ward, there was likely to be some additional unique pressures which colleagues accepted. But there would be no additional funding for programmes of that nature. However he did recognise the important role that the ward improvement funds played in funding schemes like flower boxes and Christmas trees and under this administration ward improvement funds would continue to be there for the foreseeable future.

Question G – Councillor Wildey, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple, the following:

Can the Leader of the Council explain why we should believe that any policy will not get reversed in the next few months?

In response Councillor Maple stated that as a member of the Council, he was very happy to explain why people should have confidence in the current administration. Since being given the opportunity to serve nearly 800 days ago, they had been getting on with the business of supporting residents across Medway. That had meant making difficult choices because of the mess left by the previous administration. He did not blame the previous administration for the 91% cut in revenue support grant, but did blame the government of his party, not least because of Liz Truss's chaos that she caused to the economics of this country.

He further advised that that the current administration had stated that: Medway would have the lowest council tax in Kent, and Medway continued to have the lowest Council tax in Kent; that weekly bin collections would continue, and everyone's bins were being collected every week and a brilliant job was being done; that new jobs would be delivered, and new jobs continued to be delivered; that new green spaces would be built, and as mentioned to Councillor Crozer earlier, he had enjoyed planting trees at the Council's new park, for the residents of Medway. He advised that they were also working hard on the Hub scheme that would come forward before the next election. He advised that although it had not been a pledge, after more than 8000 days of not having a new local plan and it repeatedly not being delivered, and promises broken by the previous administration, the current administration had delivered a new Local Plan in less than two and a half years .

He was proud of the current administration and further stated that whilst they did not get everything right because they were human and made mistakes, at least they would accept when they made mistakes, and that absolutely the public of Medway could have confidence that the current administration was working hard for them every single day and would continue to do that.