

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 12 June 2025

6.30pm to 9.22pm

Record of the meeting

Present:	Councillors: Field (Chairperson), Cook (Vice-Chairperson), Campbell, Etheridge, Filmer, Lawrence, Myton, Nestorov, Peake, Vye and Williams
Substitutes:	Councillors: Brake Howcroft-Scott
In Attendance:	Councillor Zoë Van Dyke, Portfolio Holder for Business Management Adam Bryan, Director of Place Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place Bob Dimond, Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism & Heritage Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration David England, Head of Valuation and Asset Management Ian Gilmore, Head of Regulatory and Environmental Services Paul Morgan, Regional Operations Manager for Waste Water Network Mike Russell, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Kent Stuart Steed, Environmental Protection Officer

59 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Doe and Councillor Hamilton.

60 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 25 March 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

61 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

62 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

63 Member's Item

Discussion:

The Chairperson explained that he had requested the Members item as he felt it would be useful for the Committee to meet with Southern Water to discuss the issues outlined in the report and thanked colleagues for attending.

Mike Russell and Paul Morgan explained their roles at Southern Water and explained that Tom Williams (Regional Operations Manager for water network) was unable to attend due to a family emergency.

The Committee was then given a presentation by Southern Water highlighting how they engaged with the community, services provided, the business plan, investments and projects in the waste water network and medium and long term plans.

Members raised the following queries:

Pentagon Centre Flooding – Members expressed concern about the issues caused for the Town Centre and lack on investment. Paul Morgan explained that £400k had been set aside this year to work on the pumps at Waterfront Rats Bay as the site is very old and Southern Water are looking at investment in the next period to revamp the whole station. Officers requested a meeting at a senior level with Southern Water to discuss the impact of flooding on the Pentagon Shopping Centre. Southern Water were also asked to confirm the catchment area for Waterfront Rats Bay.

Disposal of sludge – Members were concerned about the disposal of sludge if it could not be spread on farmers fields. Paul Morgan will refer this query back

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to the treatment team at Southern Water and respond to Members outside of the meeting.

Low water pressure at Allhallows – Members queried whether a water tower was planned for Allhallows due to the low water pressure and Southern Water agreed to refer this query back to Tom Williams and respond to Members.

Balancing investment against prices - Mike Russell explained that the price increase this year had been around 40% however in the previous 5 to 10 years the price had hardly increased. The Committee were informed that whilst Ofwat protected consumers this had left an investment gap and blocked certain levels of investment however it had been agreed not to increase prices as sharply over the next 4 years. Mike explained that essential tariffs for benefit claiming residents which are 40% lower, had seen investment doubled and information on essential tariffs could be found on Southern Water's website.

Care Home with no water supply – An issue was reported to Councillors when a Care Home in Cuxton had no water and Members and officers had to support vulnerable residents during this incident. Southern Water responded to say that this should not have happened, and they would look into the incident if officers could provide further details.

Climate Change – The Committee were informed that work is ongoing to use solar power and be more energy efficient where possible as well as reducing leaks by 50% and Mike Russell offered to provide further information regarding climate change outside of the meeting.

Salaries and Bonuses – Members queried the level of bonuses and salaries paid to senior staff. Mike Russell explained that Southern Water has not paid dividends to its stakeholders in the last 8 years however salaries needed to be competitive to ensure senior staff were able to improve the business.

Reed Street, Cliffe pumping station – Members were disappointed that the pumping station was not on the list for planned maintenance and asked if it would be in future. Paul Morgan offered to find out about the location and report back to Members.

Co-ordination of works/road resurfacing – Members expressed concern about works on roads that have recently been resurfaced or worked on and queried whether any lessons could be learned. The Committee were informed that officers do collaborate with Southern Water as well as other utility companies regarding planned works, however emergency works did arise and need to be repaired as soon as possible. Officers explained that the repairs made to road surfaces following works had to be to the same standard as prior to the works and they were inspected and corrected if not sufficient.

Customer Scrutiny Committee – Members queried how the Customer Scrutiny Committee that was chaired by Councillor McDonald would make a difference. Mike Russell explained that the Chairperson has met with the Chief

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Executive at Southern Water and site visits were planned to ensure the panel understood the business and the challenges it faced so that they were best placed to challenge Southern Water. Mike offered to come back to Members with more information on how the panel's work will feed into an executive level.

Percentage of overall investment for Medway – Members queried how much of the overall investment was planned to be spent in Medway and Mike Russell agreed to come back to Members on this.

Housing development and water supply – Southern Water informed the Committee that they have a 5, 10, 25 and 50 year plan and would share the plan with Members.

Impact of National Insurance rises on investment – Mike Russell agreed to come back to Members with information on this.

Employment opportunities and Apprenticeships for Medway Residents - Mike Russell agreed to respond to Members outside of the meeting.

Helping residents to lower bills – Mike Russell informed the Committee that there were dedicated customer service officers to assist residents and will provide Members with further information about the help and assistance that was available.

Decisions:

- a) The Committee is asked to note the comments from Southern Water in response to the Member's item.
- b) Southern Water were requested to provide further information in response to Members queries including meeting with officers regarding the Pentagon Centre flooding, low water pressure at Allhallows, Reed Street pumping station, supply for new homes, percentage of investment in Medway and employment opportunities and apprenticeships.

64 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Van Dyke, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions and comments as follows:

Progress with property disposals - The Portfolio Holder explained that officers had been recruited, agents/auctioneers had been appointed and non-

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operational properties disposed of so far had exceeded valuations. Officers informed the Committee that targets for disposal income were likely to be exceeded.

Medway 2.0 – The Committee was informed that officers were now progressing the movement of files over to SharePoint to enhance the flow of information between services and to digitise paper files wherever possible. Single points of contact are also being utilised for services such as nuisance vehicles.

Healthy Living Centre – Officers reported that the decision to reassign funds from Strood to the Healthy Living Centre was made by the Integrated Care Board.

Gun Wharf – The Portfolio Holder reported that the RAAC had now been tested, and roof repairs were underway. Officers added that the works were at the end of stage 2 (concept designs) and were now moving to stage 3 overlaid with the RAAC improvement works. Officers explained that savings would be made by remediation works to allow for investment elsewhere in the property and the aim was to complete the works at Gun Wharf by the end of 2026. Officers said that a hybrid working model would be adopted as there would not be enough desks for all staff including those at Broadside that needed to be moved to Gun Wharf. Members asked that consideration be given to creating community spaces in the building. Members asked to be sent a list of teams that had moved back in to Gun Wharf.

Brook Theatre Progress – The Committee was informed that the hoardings had been put up and work had started with completion due early 2027 and aiming for opening in May 2027.

Decisions:

- a) The Committee noted the report.
- b) Members requested information on the Teams that had now moved back into Gun Wharf.

65 Climate Change Action Plan 2025 - 2028

Discussion:

Officers informed the Committee that the plan includes practical measures that are already in place and Members noted previous investments such as LED lighting and the living bus stop roof in Chatham that contribute towards making improvements.

Members queried progress with on street electric vehicle charging points and were informed that officers were currently procuring a delivery partner so that implementation and construction can be progressed. Officers agreed to provide further information on timelines and funding outside of the meeting.

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Members requested that the link to the full survey results of the public consultation on page 10 of the Climate Change Action Plan be updated as not currently a valid link.

Decisions:

- a) The Committee commented on the proposed Climate Change Action Plan and supporting documentation and noted that the Cabinet will be asked to agree the Plan on 26 August 2025.
- b) Officers were requested to provide further information on EV charging points implementation timelines and funding.
- c) Officers were requested to ensure that future Climate Change plans include information on relationships with wider partners.

66 Medway Air Quality Action Plan 2025 - 2030

Discussion:

Members queried the impact of diesel engines on air quality, the possibility of electric buses and the how air quality outside of Medway has an impact.

Officers explained that emissions were now reducing due to the introduction of Euro 6 vehicles and for larger vehicles emissions abatement technology was in place.

With regards to electric buses officers informed the Committee that that main barrier to this was the lack of suitable electric depot.

Officers explained that external factors that impacted Medway were mainly short-term pollution episodes and residents with health conditions affected by poor air quality can find out when episodes were likely to occur using the Air Quality Forecast Service at www.kentair.org.uk.

Members sought clarification that the Local Plan was supported by a Strategic Transport Assessment and corresponding Air Quality Assessment that considered increased traffic modelling and was emissions compliant. Officers explained that whilst they had offered advice and been involved in the Local Plan process, this would be a question for Planning officers to respond to.

Decisions:

- a) The Committee commented on the proposed Medway Air Quality Action Plan 2025-2030 and noted that the Cabinet will be asked to agree the Action Plan on 8 July 2025.

- b) Members requested a copy of the Local Plan Strategic Transport Assessment and corresponding Air Quality Assessment which form part of the Local Plan.

**67 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary
- Quarter 4 2024/25**

Discussion:

Members noted that Local Government Reorganisation had been added to the Risk Register as a new risk.

Members queried where fixed penalty notices and moving traffic enforcement fines were reported. Officers explained that data for this was included in the published parking account that is produced annually.

In response to a query regarding action being taken to increase employment in Medway, especially for young people aged 18 to 24, officers agreed to respond outside of the meeting.

Decisions:

- a) Members are asked to consider the Q4 2024/25 progress of the performance indicators used to monitor progress of the Council's priorities, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) Members are asked to note the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
- c) Officers were requested to provide information on action being taken to increase employment for young people aged 18 to 24 outside of the meeting.

68 Petitions Report

Decision:

The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer actions in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

69 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered the work programme.

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Decisions:

- a) The Committee noted the report and agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix A to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the action log as set out at Appendix B to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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