

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support and Digital Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 19 June 2025

6.30pm to 9.18pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Tejan (Chairperson), Hamilton (Vice-Chairperson), Bowen, Brake, Browne, Finch, Hackwell BEM, Jones, McDonald, Perfect and Mark Prenter

Substitutes: Councillors:
Campbell (Substitute for Nestorov)
Mrs Turpin (Substitute for Pearce)

In Attendance: Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer
Bob Dimond, Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism & Heritage
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services
Emily Lane-Blackwell, Licensing Manager
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer

96 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nesterov and Pearce.

97 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

98 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

99 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI)

There were none.

Other significant Interests (OSI)

There were none.

Other Interests

There were none.

100 Chairperson Announcement

The Chairperson welcomed new Members, Councillors Perfect and Nesterov for the municipal year, to the Committee. The Chairperson also congratulated Councillor Hackwell on the award of a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the recent King's Birthday Honours.

101 Taxi Tariff Review Policy

Discussion:

The Licensing Manager introduced the report, she highlighted the consultation process the Council had undertaken with the Medway Licensed Taxi Drivers Association and the subsequent scrutiny of the proposals by the Licensing and Safety Committee.

The following issues were discussed:

Review timescale – it was asked whether holding a review of tariffs every two years was adequate given potential changes in economic conditions such as inflation which would significantly impact drivers' earnings. The Licensing Manager explained that a review of tariffs was a substantial piece of work, the team did not have the resources to complete a review annually. A review every two years was considered appropriate, however, if there were significant changes in economic conditions which required a review, the policy provided for an emergency review.

Consultation – in response to a question how the Council would be able to ensure it got responses from a range of drivers during a future review, the Licensing Manager explained that drivers had to provide contact details to the Council for insurance and inspection purposes so the Council could be confident that drivers would have the ability to take part in any consultation.

Pricing – the Committee discussed tariffs for customers; the Licensing Manager stated that a comparison of a 2-mile journey was regularly provided across the UK. Medway was currently the 6th highest price within Kent area and 74th highest in the country.

Transport Policy – it was asked how the policy aligned with Medway Council's other transport policies in particular ensuring transport was sustainable, accessible and affordable. The Licensing Manager undertook to review this and provide a briefing note to the Committee.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the responses received during the consultation, officer's associated comments and the outcome of the requested further engagement with regard to the draft Taxi Tariff Review Policy.
- b) The Committee considered the Taxi Tariff Review Policy and submitted comments to Cabinet.
- c) The Committee noted the proposed minor amendment to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy 2021-2026, to reflect the introduction of the Taxi Tariff Review Policy.
- d) The Committee considered amendments to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy and submitted comments to Cabinet.
- e) The Licensing Manager to provide a briefing note to the Committee outline how the policy would align with wider Council goals to promote sustainable, accessible and affordable travel.

102 Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2028

Discussion:

The Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response introduced the report. This was the third iteration of the plan and was focused on providing deliverable targets for the Council led by services.

The following issues were discussed:

Public Sector emissions – it was asked why the reduction in emissions in the 'Industry, Commercial and Public Sector' lagged behind other sectors. The Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response stated that the Council did not have direct influence over the sector, so its role was to provide knowledge and empowerment to others to reduce emissions. The team had recently been represented at a number business events to promote pragmatic green policies.

Funding – in response to a question whether services were properly funded to undertake the necessary work to fulfil the work in the plan, the Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response stated that the services had responsibility for funding their own plans so he could not speak to any financial risk. He added that progress by services against the plan was reported to the Climate Oversight and Implementation Board, which had senior officer representation.

The Chief Operating Officer added that the Council did not have a significant discrete budget with respect to Climate Change, services had their own budget to complete actions in support of the plan rather than a centralised budget. The role of the Council was principally to provide education.

Left behind communities – it was asked what how the plan would encourage left behind communities, officers stated that the focus of the plan was on empowerment and expanding knowledge of residents to enable them to make small modal shifts. Officers were in discussion with the Portfolio Holder about opportunities to bring forward options for future actions.

Progress reports – the Committee discussed how performance was monitored, the Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response explained that the team received quarterly update reports and produced an annual report including an update on emissions which could be provided to the Committee.

Link with other policies – it was asked whether the Council could promote green policies across Council activities for example could the Council increase areas which have ‘no idling cars’ signage, free bus weekends and storage for recycling in planning applications for new homes. The Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response undertook to discuss with other services and provide an answer following the meeting.

A Member asked how the Climate Change action plan aligned with other Council policies and to what extent they considered Climate Change implications in policy development. The Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Change Response stated that the team worked with services to ensure the climate change implications on Council reports were relevant.

Voluntary Sector – The Head of Sport, Greenspaces and Climate Response was asked to comment on work with the voluntary sector. He stated that the Council tried to provide practical assistance and support.

Decision:

- 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) The Committee requested a briefing note how the Council further green policies across the Council in policy development such as additional car idling car signage and in consideration planning applications.

**103 Compliment and Complaints Report, Business Support Department 1
April 2024 - 31 March 2025**

Discussion:

The Chief Information Officer introduced the report which summarised compliments and complaints received by the Business Support Department in the last financial year. He highlighted the high number of compliments received in the year which had outstripped complaints. In addition, the service was developing a feedback policy and working on changes to stage two complaints to improve responses.

The following issues were discussed:

Compliments feedback - Members welcomed the improvements outlined in the report and the additional use of automation software to reduce officer time; further information was requested how the Council feedback compliments back to staff. The Chief Operating Officer stated that staff receive the feedback personally, successes are celebrated in a quarterly newsletter for staff in his division, and this was also fed into the Council's Make A Difference Awards. He believed practice was similar across the different divisions within the Council. The Chief Operating Officer added that many of the compliments received related to the improved wider welfare service which was a testament to the service.

Stage 2 complaints – it was commented that the number of stage 2 complaints which had been escalated because the complaint had not been fully addressed or actions not completed was disappointing. The Chief Information Officer acknowledged this was an area for improvement, further training was being provided to assist officers when responding to complaints. He added that the service redesign of stage two complaints which included some automation would release staff to provide a more focused response and improve service delivery.

Benchmarking - in response to a question whether the Council benchmarked its complaints and compliments with comparator boroughs, the Chief Information Officer explained that the Council did complete this comparative review and undertook to provide data to the Committee outside the meeting.

Anonymous and persistent complaints – responding to questions regarding anonymous complaints, the Chief Information Officer stated that these were passed to the relevant services as a service request and investigated at that stage. With regard to persistent complainers, the team review previous contact with the Council, including the volume and extent of contact prior to anyone being labelled as a persistent complainer.

Accessibility – a Member commented that making a complaint on the website could be made easier, and the addition of contact numbers would be helpful. The Chief Information Officer undertook to review the ease of access of contact information on the website. Complaints were made directly to the CABS team to make it easier for members of the public to provide feedback unless the CABS team was the subject of the complaint. The Council was dedicated to making it as accessible as possible for residents, complaints could be made online, in person over the telephone, by sign language or with the assistance of the Community Interpreting Services.

It was asked whether demographic data was available in relation to complaints. The Chief Information Officer stated that complainers are invited to provide optional demographic data. This could be provided to the Committee, it was the experience of the team that complaints were broadly in line with the population of Medway.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

104 CIPFA Assurance Report

Discussion:

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the report. He highlighted this was the second CIPFA report, the first resilience report was positive and made some recommendations which the Council had implemented.

The fieldwork for the second report took place between July and September 2024 and was released in March 2025. The report again praised the leadership of the Council and found no significant governance failures.

The following issues were discussed:

LATCOs (Local Authority Trading Companies) – in response to a question regarding the performance of LATCOs and the recommended changes to Kyndi, the Chief Operating Officer stated that the Shareholder Board had been put in place to improve transparency. The Council was focused on improving the Business Plan which had recently been agreed. Kyndi's performance would be reviewed and held to account against the business plan.

A Member asked why Norse contracts remained unsigned, the Chief Operating Officer acknowledged that the changes to Norse and Kyndi Boards were taking longer than was hoped. With regard to Norse a new letter of intent and new Service Level Agreements were in place, with services continuing as currently until April 2026. He acknowledged that the provision of £26m in services without a contract was a risk for the Council, however, Norse was committed to Medway, which remained one of its biggest contractors.

Medium Term Financial Plan – the Committee discussed the projected funding gap for 2028-29, it was asked whether there was a plan for the medium term to bridge this gap. The Chief Operating Officer stated that central government had advised there would be a multi-year settlement which would enable the Council to plan more effectively. The budget in February included demographic and economic assumptions for the next three years and those remained in within expected parameters. The medium-term financial outlook would include provision for future financial plans and it was the Council's ambition to balance to 2026-27 budget without the requirement of Exceptional Funding Support

Waste Strategy and Adult Social Care - further information was requested regarding progress in relation to a new waste strategy and savings in Adult Social Care. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the report had been completed in 2024, but published in March. During that time the FIT Plan had progressed and included significant activity which had been undertaken to right size adult social care. There had in the last nine months, been some slippage

so some of the savings plans had not been delivered in full, however the full effect of those savings would be delivered in the year ahead.

The Chief Operating Officer added that in relation to waste services the FIT Plan had proposed the development of a strategy for the Council to collect and dispose of its own waste. However, Local Government Reforms may provide further opportunities for Medway, without the need for significant investment so this action was in abeyance.

Decision:

The Committee noted the findings of the CIPFA Assurance Report 2024/25.

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

Discussion:

The Chief Information Officer introduced the report which summarised the performance of services under the remit of the Committee. Four-year targets meant that trends were difficult to perceive in some areas, but all available data had been provided.

The Chief Information Officer stated that the report also updated the Committee on the strategic risk summary. One risk had been added in the last quarter relation to Devolution and Local Government Reform.

The following issues were discussed:

Presentation and training – Members commented that it would be helpful to review how the information is presented to aid Member understanding of the data. This would promote effective scrutiny of performance and whether the Council was on track to meet the targets set out in the One Medway Council Plan.

The Chief Information Officer stated that similar feedback had been provided by other Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It was his intention to make changes to the performance report to aid presentation; this would be gradual but would begin for quarter one 2025/26.

The Chief Operating Officer added that he welcomed the feedback received from this and other Committees. He added that he wanted to ensure Members were empowered to provide scrutiny and challenge to progress against the One Medway Council Plan and risk register summary. The presentation of the report would be developed and additional training for Members arranged.

Escalation of Risk – in response to a question how the Council ensured risks were escalated in a timely fashion, the Chief Information Officer explained that the risk register was reviewed regularly. In addition, monitoring of the risk

register had recently been strengthened with a new Corporate Management Risk group of senior officers.

Cyber Security – it was asked how strategic risk 37 (Cyber Security) was managed given recent examples of cyber-attacks, the Chief Information Officer explained that the risk is kept under review and a review of cyber security policy had recently taken place. The risk was rated as unlikely, catastrophic to reflect the nature of the issue as a managed risk.

Decision:

- a) The Committee considered 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) The Committee noted the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
- c) The Committee requested further training for Members in relation to monitoring performance and risk.

106 Capital and Revenue Outturn and Annual Debt Write Off Report 2024/25

Discussion:

The Head of Revenue Accounts introduced the report. The report presented the final capital and revenue position for the 2024-25 financial year and a summary of debts written off during the year.

The final overspend for the 2024-25 financial year had reduced from projections in the previous quarter and had been funded through Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) of c£5.5m, this brought the total EFS for the financial year to £20.2m.

The irrecoverable debt written off during the year totalled £3.6m which accounted for less than 1% of total debt.

The following issues were discussed:

Year-end financial position – Members welcomed the improved financial position, a Member raised concern that Children and Adults Services Department continued to overspend the budget each year.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Department was delivering on its savings targets. The Exceptional Financial Support had provided the Council with an opportunity to invest in rightsizing services and promote a more stable workforce. He added that the Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan (FITP) and the range of activity undertaken has given officers much greater confidence in achieving the required savings.

Medpay – in response to a question why Medpay had not been completed, the Chief Operating Officer explained that there had been some delay due to HR workloads, however, he was confident that Medpay would be completed for all roles below Service Manager level by end the of the quarter.

Dedicated School Grant – further information regarding the Dedicated School Grants was requested. The Chief Operating Officer explained that the Council had a robust deficit action plan which had significantly improved the financial situation. The plan was for the deficit to be cleared by the end of the current financial year, at this stage monitoring suggested this would not be quite met and the deficit would stand at £1.5m by the end of 2025-26. Reserves would be in place to meet this need if required. This was a better position than many local authorities and was a testament to the work of officers engaging with schools and the additional work to reduce the backlog in ECHP Plans.

Investment – an update on capital investment was requested, the Chief Operating Officer stated that two properties were in the process of purchase in relation to temporary housing and he believed that the £42m investment may deliver closer to 200 units than the 150 initially planned.

PCN Debt – a Member commented that wider consideration of ensuring repayment of debt to the Council may be useful and in particular any communications which may assist in reducing the amount of debt write offs. The amount of PCN debt written off was noted and it was asked what the causes were for the rise. The Head of Revenue Accounts stated that he would need to discuss with the relevant service and undertook to provide the information following the meeting.

Reserves – The Committee discussed general reserves; the Chief Operating Officer stated that he would target of reserves of 5% of revenue which would align with good financial management in other local authorities. The Medium-Term Financial Outlook would include a reserve strategy.

Exceptional Financial Support – The budget projections provided for further EFS in the current year and for £10m in 2026-27. It was the ambition of Corporate Management Team that no EFS funding would be required in 2026-27. The multi-year settlement from central would assist in achieving this and the assumptions made in the Budget projections in February remained in place.

The Head of Revenue Accounts added that in the current financial year Adult Social Care remained the area of highest risk in budget monitoring.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the 2024/25 revenue and capital outturn position as summarised in Section 4 of the report, the Council's reserves position as summarised in Section 13 of the report and the debts written off against provisions as set out in section 14 of the report.

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 June 2025

- b) The Committee noted that on 3 June 2025 the Cabinet agreed to recommend that Council agree to transfer back to General Capital Receipts the unspent balance on the amounts earmarked through the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Section 12 of the report:
- £544,076 originally earmarked for Children's Social Care improvement,
 - £148,709 originally earmarked for Adults Social Care Improvement, and
 - £165,230 originally earmarked to support the wider transformation programme.
- c) The Committee noted that on 3 June 2025 the Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council the removal of £34.170million from the Innovation Park Medway Scheme as set out in section 11.3 of the report and as reported to the Cabinet in March 2025 and per decision 45/2025.
- d) The Committee notes that on 3 June 2025 the Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council that £2.400million of the underspend on the Pentagon Future Capital Works scheme be used to fund a new scheme to deliver further improvements to the Pentagon, as set out in section 11.3 of the report including:
- Replacement of a section of roof (R14),
 - Refurbishment of 205 high street,
 - Upgrades to fire exits and windows to the bus lane,
 - Repair and resurfacing of the service road, and
 - Repairs and resurfacing to the car park.
- e) The Committee noted that on 3 June 2025 the Cabinet agreed to recommend that Council agrees to remove the remaining unspent balance of £431,000 from the Pentagon.
- f) The Head of Revenue Accounts to discuss with colleagues and provide further information to the Committee regarding the causes of the rise in PCN related debt.

107 Annual Review of the Council's Petitions Scheme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report, he highlighted that there had been fourteen petitions during the year, which was slightly fewer than the year before and six petitions during the year had been rejected.

The following issues were discussed:

Accessibility – it was asked whether any resources or communications were available to encourage the use of the petition scheme including hard to reach communities. The Democratic Services Officer explained that the scheme is not ordinarily promoted and undertook to investigate ways in which the use of the

scheme could be promoted by the Council and to provide a guide to using the scheme for the public and Members.

Causes of fewer petitions – in response to a question if officers were aware of any causes for the reduction in petitions and if usability was a cause, the Democratic Services Officer explained that the number of petitions did vary year to year, this was in part due to the electoral cycle and whether there was a particular issue of public concern. Although the numbers were lower than the previous year there were no known issues related usability of the scheme or e-petition software.

Online petitions – in response to a question whether external online petitions were accepted, the Democratic Services Officer stated that they were not currently accepted because external websites which hosted petitions were currently unable to provide the Council with all the information required in the scheme. It was agreed that Democratic Services would review and bring proposals for amendments to the scheme to a future meeting of the Committee.

AI – it was asked if the development of AI was a risk to the integrity of petitions. The Democratic Services Officer stated that e-petitions on the Council website required members of the public to register with the site. The Head of Democratic Services undertook to review the potential effects of AI on e-petitions with assistance of the Chief Information Officer and colleagues.

Responses – it was asked how the Council could assure itself of the quality and clarity petition responses, the Democratic Services Officer stated that the majority of petitions related to highways issues and therefore the team had significant experience of dealing with similar types of requests. The summary of responses was published on a regular basis and responses were in his view clear in providing outcomes. It was also positive that there had been no requests from the public for a committee review of the petition outcome.

Member awareness of petitions – A Member asked if Members could be made aware of petitions in their ward to so they could provide assistance to petitioners if required. The Democratic Services Officer stated that ward Members and the relevant Portfolio Holder should receive an email when a petition is received which deals specifically within their ward and undertook to ensure that this was the case going forward.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the annual review of the petitions scheme.
- b) The Committee requested a briefing note on how the scheme may be promoted by the Council.
- c) The Committee requested a user guide to assist Members and the public in using the scheme.
- d) Officers to consider the potential affects of AI on the petition scheme.

- e) Officers to review the scheme and bring proposals to a future committee meeting.

108 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report. He highlighted that the schedule for Portfolio Holders to be held to Account had been agreed and was included in the work programme.

Decision:

- a) The Committee agreed the provisional work programme at Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the work programmes of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees at Appendix 2 to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332051

Email: steve.dickens@medway.gov.uk