

Questions and responses from the meeting of Cabinet on 29 July 2025

**Question A – Mike Evans, of Medway Food Bank, Rochester, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:**

“Medway Foodbank, Trussell Trust and The Joseph Rowntree Foundation are campaigning for an Essentials Guarantee, to ensure the Standard Allowance of Universal Credit is always sufficient to cover life’s essentials such as food, transport and utility bills.

We welcome the Government’s proposed increase to the Standard Allowance but believe there should be an independent process to annually recommend the Standard Allowance rate, based on the actual cost of essentials. This is the core component of our campaign and currently no independent process exists.

As cost-of-living pressures on Universal Credit claimants are the main driver of foodbank use in the Medway Towns, will Medway Council write to Liz Kendall MP with an indication of support for an Essentials Guarantee?”

Councillor Maple thanked Mr Evans for his question and the work that Medway Food Bank and Trussell Trust did across the community and referred to a recent meeting held with Mr Evans and other colleagues, along with members of the Cabinet on this very important issue.

Councillor Maple stated that the Council continued to recognise the cost of living crisis and the fall in income that the UK had experienced since 2021 and that despite extensive government support, household incomes were not still keeping up with increased costs and this was estimated to continue into next year and beyond. He stated that later on in this meeting, there was a report setting out the refresh of the Cost of Living Crisis Plan, a plan which was originally brought in as an administration within its first 100 days. This represented the second refresh of that plan and it brought together all the actions taken by the Council and partners to help mitigate the impacts that Medway residents were experiencing.

In addition, he stated that one of the recommendations in tonight’s report was for the Cabinet to agree for him to write to Liz Kendall MP to support the “Guarantee our Essentials campaign”, for which he was confident that Cabinet colleagues would be supporting later on because it was clearly understood from the evidence provided by Trussell that this was a campaign which should be highlighted to government. He also stated that for any resident, whether they had received support or not in the past, would be encouraged to read the plan to see the support offered by Council and partners.

Mike Evans asked a supplementary question by seeking assurance on what additional steps the Council would take in demonstrating their support.

Councillor Maple responded by stating that one of the things he would do immediately would be to publish the letter (to Liz Kendall MP). He stated that the Council had been very open and transparent and as a Cabinet, we’ve been clear, they had published as much as they could legally, as often as they could. He referenced that through the meetings with the local MPs that they would be raising

this issue and that colleagues from Medway Food Bank were at the recent National Trussell lobby of Parliament.

He concluded that from an operational perspective with the new plan, which he hoped would be agreed later in the meeting, that one of the things that the Cabinet would keep doing would be to make sure that residents were aware of organisations like Trussell, raising awareness of the local, regional and national campaigns as well as the work Medway Foodbank did alongside the Council.

**Question B – Richard Joyce, of Rochester, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:**

“There are three schools within a 5-minute walk of one another within the King’s School Street area. All of them have infant and primary provision and two of them are fee-paying, meaning their pupils come from a wider geographical area. By necessity, many parents will have to drive their children to school. To what extent was this factor taken into consideration in the design of the King’s School Street Scheme?”

Councillor Paterson thanked Richard Joyce for his question. He explained that the King's School Street Scheme had been developed with a clear understanding of the local context and in addition to the work carried out by expert officers, he stated that as a Rochester resident, as a parent, as a driver, as a Councillor from the area from over 7 years, he had a comprehensive understanding of the road layout including traffic patterns and the behaviour of those dropping off at local schools.

He explained that sending children to fee paying schools was a matter of parental choice, but making that choice did not grant a licence for able bodied parents to drive able bodied pupils door to door. Nor did it excuse the sort of disgraceful, selfish behaviour seen almost daily basis outside those schools, and that the prevalent use of cars as transport to certain schools presented a compelling reason to act in the interests of pedestrian safety.

He stated that the Council was approached by this particular school for assistance and enforcement, when efforts to police the behaviour of their own community proved inadequate. The rationale for school streets was to improve safety, reduce congestion and encourage healthier, more sustainable travel choices, particularly at the school gate where traffic could be at its most intense and hazardous during drop off and pick up times. Restricting access for able bodied children and parents to the roads next to school entrances would reduce the number of vehicles, which in turn would create a safer, calmer and more welcoming environment for children and families.

He explained that by limiting through traffic at key times, the Council would be able to reduce the risk of accidents, improve air quality and support a more active start and end to the school day. Council officers had worked and would continue to work closely with all three schools in the area. This would include supporting road safety education, helping to develop school travel plans. These plans would be tailored to each school’s circumstances and help identify practical ways to encourage walking, cycling and scooting, while still recognising the needs of those who must drive.

He stated that Rochester was well served by local buses and trains for those choosing to send their children to school in Medway from further afield. The Council also encouraged park and stride options, asking families to park a short distance away and walk the final leg of the journey. Officers would continue to assess feedback received from residents, schools and other stakeholders during the extended statutory consultation period. Any decision would be made with due consideration of the sometimes competing and contradictory views, needs and concerns of local people.

Richard Joyce asked a supplementary question citing freedom of information requests and comments from the Headteacher of St. Andrew's School regarding the lack of consultation on the proposals and stating that both St. Margaret's School and King's School were also unhappy with the way consultation had been taking place.

Councillor Paterson responded by stating the proposals had been publicised widely which had resulted in an alteration to the scheme in response to feedback by stakeholders, including those who attended events, such as the Headteacher of St Andrew's School. He did not consider the suggestion that the Headteacher's views had not been considered, given that the Council had not made a decision yet, was a statement that could be justified.

He stated that he would be considering all the contributions made to the consultation, as he had done so with the informal consultation which led to change to the proposal. He considered that there was significant engagement with schools and he had spoken to the Headteacher directly during the informal consultation.

**Question C – Angela Joyce, of Rochester, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:**

“Considering that there are three primary schools within the area covered by the King's Schools Street proposal, having made changes to include Roebuck Road prior to the statutory consultation, why did the Council not undertake an independent impact assessment or feasibility study, to ensure that displaced traffic arising from the changes would not endanger the health and safety of pupils at St. Andrew's and St. Margaret's, while protecting children at the King's school?”

Councillor Paterson responded by stating that the inclusion of Roebuck Road in the proposal which had gone out to statutory consultation, reflected feedback from local stakeholders during the informal consultation period. It was intended to enhance the overall safety and accessibility of the area for pedestrians. While an independent impact assessment was not commissioned ahead of the statutory consultation, the school streets project team carefully considered traffic displacement and the implications for road safety. This included the detailed assessments, site visits and professional input from council officers.

He explained that school streets reduced vehicle traffic around school entrances during peak times, promoting walking, cycling and other active modes of travel. School streets quite deliberately inconvenienced motorists who chose to access the roads outside schools at drop off and pick up times without good reason, forcing change in driver behaviour.

He stated that the development of the scheme was guided by the Department for Transport School Streets guidance, which highlighted the importance of understanding local context, engaging stakeholders and committing to ongoing monitoring and review.

He stated that in relation to St Andrew's and St Margaret's of Troy Town schools, the project team were keeping a close eye on traffic conditions and remained open to reviewing the situation. Should any significant concerns arise the Council would consider appropriate steps in consultation with the schools and residents, to ensure that any impacts are managed reasonably. Ultimately, the Council's goal was to create safer, healthier communities for all children across Medway and the Council remained committed to reviewing all schemes, post implementation based on real world data and making adjustments where necessary.

Angela Joyce asked a supplementary question in relation to the changes to the proposal for the King's School St scheme, to include Roebuck Road. Watts Avenue would now be the only road close to King's School and on the same side of the road open to traffic. St Andrew's School is situated on Watts Avenue and with this in mind, how could the Council justify the King's School street scheme, which deliberately sends displaced King's School traffic past St Andrew's School, both ways, increasing the risk to health and safety for pupils attending Saint Andrews in order to protect the pupils attending King's School.

Councillor Paterson explained that he would disagree with the assertion that this would send traffic along Watts Avenue stating that there was no logical reason why any King's school parent would try to drive along Watts Avenue as it would take them no closer to the school than a number of other roads. That was not to say that people did not behave irrationally, but in response to the suggestion that displacement was an error in the scheme, it was in fact a feature.

He explained that the whole point was to inconvenience motorists to the extent that they change their method of travel, there would be no convenient drop off point on Watts Avenue as that would be an illogical journey to make. He stated that this was the rationale behind the inclusion of all those streets in the scheme, as it took away a street like Roebuck Road, which is a de facto school entrance street with a pedestrian access to the top of Lockington Grove and King Edward Road.

He concluded by stating this was about taking decisions based around what would be rational decisions and removing that opportunity for parents.

**Question D – Councillor Perfect asked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Price, the following:**

“Could the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on the Council's plans to implement the Children's Social Care Reforms, in light of HM Treasury's recent announcement of an additional £1.1 billion in funding for children's social care reform and care placements through to 2029, as outlined in the latest Spending Review?”

Councillor Coombs, on behalf of Councillor Price, thanked Councillor Perfect for his timely and important question. The Council warmly welcomed the announcement in the 2025 Spending Review of an additional £1.1 billion in funding for Children's Social Care reform and care placements through to 2029. This investment represented a significant step forward in delivering the recommendations of the

Independent Review of Children's Social Care and aligns with the Council's local ambitions to transform outcomes for children and families in Medway.

Key elements of the national funding package included:

- £555 million through a new Transformation Fund (2025–28) to help more children remain safely with their families, reduce unnecessary care entry, and improve outcomes for looked-after children.
- £523 million per year (2026–29) to continue the Family Help programme, supporting multidisciplinary teams and early intervention services.
- £560 million in capital investment to expand and refurbish children's homes and foster care provision.

She explained that the reforms were underpinned by a shift in focus from crisis response to prevention and family support, with new duties on councils to support care leavers, and powers for the Department for Education to establish regional care co-operatives to improve placement sufficiency and quality. Locally, the Council was aligning our implementation plans with these national priorities. This included:

- Strengthening our Family Help model, ensuring families receive consistent, joined-up support from a lead practitioner.
- Preparing for the introduction of multi-agency child protection teams, as outlined in the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.
- Exploring opportunities to participate in the regional care co-operative model to improve placement commissioning and sufficiency.
- Reviewing our local residential and foster care estate to ensure we are well-positioned to benefit from the capital investment programme.

She advised that the Council was awaiting further guidance from the Department for Education on the allocation mechanisms and delivery expectations attached to this funding. In the meantime, officers were working closely with regional partners and the South East ADCS network to ensure readiness and alignment.

She concluded by stating that this was a pivotal moment for children's social care. The additional funding, if implemented with care and ambition, would offer a real opportunity to reset the system and deliver better outcomes for children and families in Medway.

**Question E – Councillor Tejan asked the Portfolio Holder for Social and Economic Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Mahil, the following:**

“Considering the proposed reclassification of employment land at Chatham Docks under the Regulation 19 Medway Local Plan, what are the top three potential negative long-term impacts on the economy, environment, communities, and the workers his Leader stood shoulder to shoulder with before May 2023, specifying which specific actionable mitigation strategies are you proposing for each?”

Councillor Mahil thanked Councillor Tejan for his question. He stated that he was sure that Councillor Tejan would appreciate the importance of getting a Local Plan in place and the consequences of not having a Plan. In that respect, the Council had received consistent advice from MHCLG for many years now that the Council must plan to meet Medway's growth needs. That brings with it challenges to deliver sites

for 24,500 homes, along with employment, education and all other necessary infrastructure. To achieve that growth would mean difficult decisions needed to be made on sites and that is clear in the Reg 19 which he believed that the Council had got that balance right.

In relation to Chatham Docks, the importance of the existing businesses there was recognised, but this was balanced that against the benefits from bringing forward that site for a mixed use redevelopment along with the opportunities for those businesses to relocate in Medway, or near to Medway, and the Council had reached out to those businesses to provide what advice and assistance it could.

He explained that the work on the Local Plan, and the identification of sites, started with a brown field first premise, to see what could be achieved in terms of acceptable growth within the Town Centres to help their revitalisation, and on the riverside sites in terms of continuing the regeneration which had taken place, along the Esplanade, Rochester Riverside, Chatham Waterfront, the Historic Dockyard, Chatham Maritime, Chatham Waters and Victory Pier along with, on the other side of the river, Medway Valley Park, Temple Waterfront and Strood Civic and Riverside. Few of these sites were accessible generally to the public 20-30 years ago and their regeneration had not only provided homes, but also open space, leisure, business and retail and opened up the riverside for the public of Medway. Consultation on the various stages of the Local Plan had consistently highlighted the public support for brown field first regeneration before considering green field sites.

He stated that the identification of North Gillingham for development, would continue the riverside regeneration that had been seen for the last 20-30 years, for example, it would link St Mary's Island through to the Strand. The redevelopment would provide for new employment opportunities on the southern part of the docks, for digital and creative industries with flexible workspace ready for the future as encouraged in national planning policy and would link through to the universities and the emerging docking station. Redevelopment would provide new sustainable green links which would link St. Mary's Island through to the commercial uses at Chatham Waters and through to the important leisure facility at the Strand.

The redevelopment would also facilitate the securing and upgrading of the old dock railway from Chatham Waters through to Gillingham centre and Railway station as a safe walkway and cycleway, providing a high-quality sustainable link from the riverside to Gillingham helping to assist the revitalisation and regeneration of the Town Centre. In addition, it would provide links back from Gillingham to the waterfront enabling the wider public to benefit from the riverside regeneration, while also knitting together the two wards either side of the former railway, enabling them also to benefit from the regeneration – and in this respect it must be remembered that these were two of the most deprived wards in the south east.

**Question F – Councillor Anang asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:**

“Under the previous Conservative government, initiatives such as the Period Products Scheme were introduced, ensuring free sanitary products in schools and colleges from January 2020. Since May 2023, what specific new actions has the Deputy Leader taken to address period poverty and continue supporting the advocacy she historically championed?”

Councillor Murray thanked Councillor Anang for his important question. She stated that the Council took period poverty very seriously and the Council's first initiative on this was led by Councillor McDonald, in his role on health scrutiny.

The Council had been able to introduce those measures in schools, noting many of Medway's schools were academies which could not be directed to provide free provision for period poverty, but they had done so in partnership with the Council who had worked right across the NHS system to do that, and she was pleased to say, as well, that lots of employers have joined us in that effort. She stated that it was now quite common now to go into a cafe and other kinds of retail facilities and find that there's free provision for people if they need protection.

She explained that her personal involvement was to ensure that Public Health stayed abreast of what was happening, working with the Portfolio Holder, schools, local colleges to make sure that there was provision, as well as the voluntary sector who had made a massive contribution to helping this through things like the hygiene bank, which had been supported and funded both through the Medway Lottery and through Members' ward funds from a number of Cabinet Members.

She concluded by stating that she would continue to monitor the situation to make sure that it continued to be funded, and particularly to make sure that young women and indeed young men have a strong awareness that this provision was available to them.

**Question G – Councillor Pearce had submitted the following question the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:**

“The Policy and Resources Committee of the former Rochester-upon-Medway City Council met on 13th January 1998. The Committee was asked if Charter Trustees should be established in order to protect Rochester's City Status – this was during a period of Local Government Reorganisation and the creation of the Medway Towns Council. Conscious of the consequences of not doing so, the Committee decided not to establish Charter Trustees. Rochester's city status then lapsed.

Should the Committee have established Charter Trustees in order to protect Rochester's city status, yes or no?”

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

Councillor Maple responded by stating that he was not on Rochester upon Medway City Council so he would not have been in a position to take a view on this particular matter. He stated that since he been an elected Member, and particularly in the last two and a quarter years, he had been focusing on the future for this organisation and the community, not the past.

He stated that he hoped that Councillor Pearce would join him and all of the other Councillors who cared about this place and all 285,000 residents. He referred to Local Government Reorganisation mark 2, and that he would work with anybody, including his Cabinet colleagues, colleagues from other political parties and no political parties, to ensure the legacy of Medway, the place, as the area moved into a position of a new unitary authority, which would be good for the people it serves, whoever would be leading it, because unitary authorities were the right approach to local government.

He stated that he knew who he hoped would be leading the new North Kent authority, and he hoped that it would be one of four unitary authorities for the region of Kent. He concluded by stating that he hoped that Councillor Pearce would come on this journey with him rather than considering matters of nearly 30 years ago.