

Cabinet

18 November 2025

Task Group: Air Quality, Public Transport and Active Travel

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Teresa Murray, Deputy Leader for the Council
Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Report from: Adam Bryan, Director of Place
Dr David Whiting, Director of Public Heath

Author: Stephanie Davis, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

The report asks the Cabinet to consider the final report of the in-depth Air Quality, Public Transport and Active Travel Task Group. The Cabinet is asked to consider the findings and recommendations of the Task Group.

The report was considered at the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 October 2025 and by the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 October 2025 the draft minutes of which are set out at sections 8 and 9 of the report below.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the comments made by the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 October 2025 set out at section 8 of the report and agree an additional recommendation that officers will continue to work with public transport operators to improve public transport services.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is asked to note the comments made by the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 October 2025 which are set out at section 9 of the report, and agree that for all future scrutiny reviews, a member of the Corporate Management Team is identified to lead or sponsor the project.
- 1.3. The Cabinet is asked to approve the content and agree the recommendations as set out in sections 10.15, 17.4 and 22.2 of the final report of the in-depth Air Quality, Public Transport and Active Travel Task Group, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

- 2.1 The recommendations are aimed at improving air quality in Medway to ensure better health outcomes.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1 Under Chapter 4 of the Constitution (Part 5 – Overview and Scrutiny Rules - paragraph 21.1 (xviii)), each overview and scrutiny committee has the responsibility to appoint time limited Task Groups to undertake in-depth reviews within the overall programme of reviews agreed each year by the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to make recommendations to the Council, Leader and Cabinet as appropriate. The topic of this review is within the remit of this Committee.

4. Background

- 4.1 In June 2011 the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to exercise a more pro-active role than previously in prioritising the programme of in-depth scrutiny review work. This followed a Council decision that a maximum of three reviews or themed meetings can be undertaken annually across all four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, in light of shrinking capacity across the organisation. This represented a shift from the previous position of multiple Task Groups with no fixed timelines running at any one time.
- 4.2 In line with best practice, the Committee also decided to adopt a more systematic approach to the selection of topics, with nominations submitted by each Committee, taking into account suggestions and advice from Directors and Deputy / Assistant Directors.
- 4.3 The Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 26 October 2023 agreed to select this topic for an in depth scrutiny review. Due to the breadth of the topic, the Task Group identified three strands to focus on and agreed on Air Quality, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Asthma.
- 4.4 Task Group meetings were attended by Councillors Bowen, Brake, Crozer, Field, Jackson and McDonald.

5. Scope of the Review

- 5.1 The Task Group's Terms of Reference were as follows:
Air Quality – how the wider Council services contribute to air quality ambitions and reporting.

Public Transport and Active Travel – Principles of how Public Transport and Active Travel can contribute to better air quality in Medway

Public Health – Asthma (which we know is exacerbated by poor air quality)

- 5.2. To support consideration of the Terms of Reference, the Task Group agreed a number of key lines of enquiry which can be found at Appendix 1 to this report.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Task Group

- 6.1. The recommendations of the Task Group are presented at sections 10.15, 17.4 and 22.2 of Appendix 1 to this report.

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The recommendations are not carried out	The report and recommendations are in addition to other work that is taking place to tackle this issue and the recommendations in this report may not be prioritised or undertaken	The recommendations are aimed to enhance the work already being undertaken to improve the issues identified in the three strands of work and have been written in a way that complements some of the work and actions already being undertaken.	CIII

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 8.1. The above Committee considered the report on 9 October 2025, and the draft minutes of the discussion are set out below:
- 8.2. Discussion:
- 8.3. The report set out the work and recommendations of the Task Group on air quality, public transport and active travel and the process and next steps were summarised for the Committee.
- 8.4. Members raised the following issues:

- 8.5. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) – Members were concerned that LTNs would not improve poor air quality which was improving anyway as diesel cars improved. The issue was caused by public service vehicles, heavy haulage and volumes of traffic on local roads when there were problems on the M2.
- 8.6. The role of public transport and low levels of usage – Members stated that bus usage had still not returned to pre-Covid 19 levels and the introduction of LTNs would cause more congestion for public transport and not encourage residents to use public transport. Members acknowledged the importance of improving public transport services and would like to see this recognised in the recommendations.
- 8.7. Limited impact of the proposed recommendations – Members were concerned that the recommendations would have limited impact on air quality and that to improve air quality it would be necessary to ban the most polluting vehicles from driving through central Medway.
- 8.8. Officers acknowledged the impact improved vehicle euro ratings was having on air quality and how challenging it was to attribute specific actions to the improvement of air quality. Officers informed the Committee that when LTNs were considered by the Task Group negative feedback was considered as well as positive feedback on schemes elsewhere.
- 8.9. Officers informed the Committee that improving public transport relied on partnership working and the Bus Service Improvement Plan was now in place and there were close working relationships with the bus operators. Officers explained that the role the Council had to play was in resolving bus issues caused by traffic congestion and plans were being developed to address traffic congestion.
- 8.10. Decision:
 - a) The Committee considered the report as set out at Appendix 1 and provided comments as set out above.
 - b) The Committee approved the content and recommendations of the report that fall within the remit of the Committee and referred it for consideration by Cabinet on 18 November 2025.
 - c) The Committee requested that an additional recommendation be added to the report stating that officers would continue to work with public transport operators to improve public transport services.

Note:

Councillor Lawrence requested that his vote against the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods recommendations under section 17.4 of the Air Quality, Public Transport and Active Travel report be recorded in accordance with Council rule 12.6.

9. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 9.1 The above Committee considered the report on 14 October 2025, and the draft minutes of the discussion are set out below:
- 9.2. Discussion:
- 9.3. The Chairperson of the Task Group introduced the report which set out the findings and recommendations of the review into air quality, public transport and active travel.
- 9.4. Concern was raised about the rise in particulate matter pollution. The Senior Public Health Manager confirmed that this was reducing in Medway and explained the emphasis Medway was putting on the importance of individuals to reduce their own personal exposure to air quality, particularly indoor air quality.
- 9.5. The Chairperson commented that there had been lessons learned from the review in relation to process, for example, the scope had been too broad and had impacted on the Task Group's ability to effectively scrutinise the issues. The Principal Democratic Services Officer confirmed that since the review had begun, the Council had approved a Scrutiny Review Protocol as part of the Council's constitution which also recommended review scopes to be narrow and deep. The Chairperson added that the review would have benefitted from a member of the Corporate Management Team being nominated to lead or sponsor the review.
- 9.6. Decision:
 - a) The Committee approved the content and recommendations of the report that fell within the remit of the Committee and referred it for consideration by Cabinet on 18 November 2025.
 - b) The Committee also recommended Cabinet to agree that for all future scrutiny reviews, a member of the Corporate Management Team is identified to lead or sponsor the project.

10. Climate change implications

- 10.1. The Council's Air Quality Action Plan complements the Climate Change Action Plan in many areas and there are expected co-benefits for public health and the environment in tackling air quality and climate change in a co-ordinated manner.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. Any service improvements as a result of the recommendations of this report will need to be delivered from within existing budgets. The work of the Task Group was supported by Democratic Services and officers from the Children and Adult Services and Regeneration, Culture and Environment Directorate.

- 11.2. There is a small budget held by Democratic Services to meet some of the cost associated with the reviews undertaken by the task groups. The only cost associated with this review was for the cost of the consultant involved in the stakeholder event. This cost was shared with Regeneration Culture Environment Directorate.
- 11.3. The work of this Task Group was framed to complement rather than duplicate work already underway.

12. Legal implications

- 12.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Air Quality Public Transport and Active Travel Task Group report
Appendix 2 Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None