

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 November 2025

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, how they have and will undertake political challenge and leadership and what their priorities and ambitions are for the year ahead.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The area within the terms of reference of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, as set out in the Council's constitution is Climate Change

2.2 The Climate Change Action Plan is a key document underlying all of our activity.

2.3 This report provides updating information on the work of the Council on Climate Change, reflecting not only the work of the Climate Change team but also across my wider portfolio.

3. Background

3.1 As the Portfolio Holder responsible for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration I would like to start by expressing my thanks to staff, partners and contractors from all sections of my wide portfolio for their continued dedication and commitment and in working collaboratively across the various services to deliver on so many subject areas.

3.2 The five key areas of my portfolio that I am devoting most of my time are:

- Front line services delivery

- Local Plan
- Climate Action
- Public transport
- Greenspace Development

Other areas take up varying amounts of time, depending on particular issues.

4. Front Line Services

- 4.1. I oversee the street cleaning, recycling, waste collection, and waste disposal operations with an annual budget of £32m, services used by every Medway household, every week. Medway Council has a core statutory duty to provide these services and as an essential part of their delivery we are now developing a new Waste Strategy looking at improving the service, increasing our recycling rates and decarbonising our waste stream in partnership with our contractors.
- 4.2. Our aging collection vehicles have been replaced with the cleanest RCV fleet operated by Medway Council, with nearly 400t reduction in CO2 emissions expected from the latest Euro 6 diesel engines which are configured to reduce idling and include electric lifts & solar panels.
- 4.3. Our three Household Waste Recycling Centres open 362 days/year are available exclusively to Medway residents and the booking systems ensure residents a guaranteed slot to recycle and dispose of their waste in a safe manner with an average of 977 slots available across three sites every day.
- 4.4. In 2024/25, over 100,000 tonnes of waste were transferred and recycled or recovered annually, with 1.6% landfill and 37.2% recycled.
- 4.5. Medway Council's three recycling centres, operated by Medway Norse, have delivered outstanding customer satisfaction throughout this reporting period. Independent surveys, conducted by the Council twice a year, consistently demonstrate high levels of approval from site visitors. Over the past 12 months, the recycling centres achieved an impressive average satisfaction rating of 93%, reflecting excellence across key areas including site cleanliness, staff professionalism, and the availability of recycling points. These results clearly highlight the exceptional service provided by the Medway Norse recycling centre team and their commitment to maintaining high standards for our residents.

5. Public Transport & Active Travel

- 5.1. Medway's Local Transport Plan (2011-2026) sets out our overarching transport strategy and includes priorities and objectives for public transport and active travel, alongside highway maintenance, road safety and infrastructure capacity. Work on a new Local Transport Plan for 2027-2041 continues, with an initial round of consultation and engagement completed in November 2025. A baseline assessment report will comprise a summary of the current conditions for transport in Medway and provide a reference point

for the development of the vision and objectives that will underpin the new Local Transport Plan.

- 5.2. The current Local Transport Plan has continued to deliver on its priority for delivering a modern, sustainable and inclusive transport network for Medway. Our work with officers, consultants, and transport operators has been instrumental in advancing the ambitions set out in Medway's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which places passengers at the heart of a network that is reliable, accessible, affordable, and carbon-free.
- 5.3. Medway's bus patronage has shown a strong recovery post-Covid, rising from just under 3 million journeys during the pandemic to 7.8 million in 2024/25. This growth has been driven by BSIP funding, local promotions, and the national fare cap scheme. Despite economic challenges and a rise in the fare cap to £3, figures for the first quarter of 2025/6 remained consistent with last year. A small reduction in passenger numbers during the second quarter was reflective of a national trend but has been less pronounced in Medway compared to other areas of the country. This resilience reflects the effectiveness of Medway's targeted initiatives and continued investment in bus services, even amid economic pressures and changing retail patterns.
- 5.4. Following the publication of the updated BSIP, the Department for Transport confirmed a grant of £1.4 million for revenue spending and £2.6 million for capital improvements for 2025/26. This funding has enabled us to continue supporting enhanced evening and Sunday services on key routes, with additional services introduced in April 2025.
- 5.5. We remain committed to supporting socially necessary bus journeys, ensuring residents can access essential services such as healthcare, education, shopping, and leisure. Alongside our statutory concessionary travel responsibilities, we continue to subsidise routes that promote equal access across Medway.
- 5.6. Our popular Free Bus Travel Weekends continue to encourage public transport use, with the most recent event in June seeing a 32% increase in passenger numbers. Further weekends are planned in the lead-up to Christmas. Additionally, we are once again offering free summer holiday travel for children, allowing up to three children to travel free with a fare paying adult, helping families manage the cost of living.
- 5.7. The increase in use of public transport as a result of the concessions, subsidies and offer of free bus travel provides valuable health and wellbeing benefits and results in a reduction of congestion.
- 5.8. To improve infrastructure and reliability, officers and consultants have completed a corridor analysis of each bus route, resulting in a new Local Bus Infrastructure Plan (LBIP). This will guide improvements such as upgraded bus stops, traffic signal adjustments, and junction enhancements. The 132 route from Chatham to Hempstead is currently the focus of these works.

- 5.9. On 17 June, I launched the Vertical Meadow in Intra which, along with the co-located living roof bus stop, is intended to make the area more climate resilient and biodiverse. The launch was well attended and sparked positive discussions around future opportunities, including potential trials of a net zero bus stop and greening enhancements elsewhere in Medway to encourage public transport use and active travel. It also compliments plans for further greening of the area being led by the Intra Community Trust and funded through Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).
- 5.10. This initiative forms part of a wider programme of 24 bus shelter upgrades and refurbishments, together with improvements at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station, funded through our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant. To date, new living roof sedum shelters have been installed at locations including King Street (Gillingham), Brompton Road (near Medway Park and King Charles Hotel), Pier Road, and Luton Road (Luton Arches and Castle Road), with two more planned for Chatham Hill and Borstal. These shelters, supplied by GW Shelter Solutions, incorporate sedum green roofs that deliver environmental benefits such as improved air quality, reduced stormwater runoff, and increased biodiversity by creating habitats for pollinators. They also feature solar-powered lighting and eco-friendly materials, aligning with our sustainability goals.
- 5.11. Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is now approved and available via the Council's website. This ten-year strategy outlines key interventions to support walking and cycling across Medway, with focus on developing six of the higher priority routes this year to detailed design, using external Active Travel funding.
- 5.12. We are also finalising our refreshed five-year Sustainable School Travel Strategy, which will sharpen our focus on safer, healthier, and more sustainable school journeys.
- 5.13. With additional government funding secured, we are delivering a dynamic programme of activities including:
- National Walk to School Week and International Walk to School Month campaigns
 - The Think Smart loan banner scheme to address unsafe parking near schools
 - Resources to support Walking Bus initiatives
 - Promotion of the Modeshift STARS portal to help schools develop robust School Travel Plans
- 5.14. This work is being delivered in close collaboration with teams across the Council, ensuring alignment with shared objectives and maximising the benefits of sustainable travel planning.
- 5.15. A key driver of our strategic coordination is the Medway Active Travel Group, a cross-party forum comprising elected Members and officers from across the Council. Meeting quarterly, the group plays a vital role in:

- Aligning active travel initiatives with the LCWIP, BSIP, Local Plan, and Climate Change Action Plan
 - Reviewing and guiding the delivery of infrastructure and behavioural change programmes
 - Supporting funding bids and identifying opportunities for modal shift
 - Promoting integrated sustainable transport, including walking, cycling, and public transport
- 5.16. The group also reports to me, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, and other key bodies such as the Community Climate Working Group and Health & Wellbeing Board, ensuring transparency and accountability in delivering Medway's active travel ambitions.
- 5.17. I continue to support the work of the Transport for South East (TfSE) Partnership Board in my role as Deputy Chair. The work of the Board is crucial for lobbying for resources for our strategic transport planning and especially the Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

6. Greenspace Development

- 6.1. Medway has, once again, successfully secured eight Green Flag Awards and a Green Heritage Award with great results. The eight Green Flag sites are Hillyfields Community Park, Gillingham Park, Broomhill Park, The Vines, Capstone Farm Country Park, Great Lines Heritage Park, Riverside Country Park and Ranscombe Farm Reserve, which is managed by Plantlife. I wish to extend a huge thank you to everyone involved in securing these awards. Staff from Greenspace Development and Medway Norse work incredibly hard to make sure these parks are enhanced and maintained to a high standard with the much appreciated support of our dedicated volunteers from all the Friends Groups.
- 6.2. The Cozenton Park and Nursery project continues to progress. Following planning permission in January 2025, the old nursery site was cleared and funding from the Forestry Commission has helped with the initial set up of the community tree nursery. Volunteer workdays are underway, with trees already being grown from seed since Spring and a local tree seed collection will take place in early Autumn to add further trees to the project. The local community will have the opportunity to help design the new community garden space. The new allotment plots will be created in Autumn 2025. A specialist skatepark company will be appointed to consult, design and build a small extension to the existing skatepark to improve the facilities. The play area is also planned to be improved.
- 6.3. The phased delivery of Deangate Community Parkland is progressing with the tender for the first phase of works uploaded to the Kent Business portal in July 2025 for an 8-week period. The closing day for submissions was in

September and following this bid submission deadline, Medway received 9 compliant bids. The decision to award Ground Control Ltd was achieved at virtual procurement board in October 2025 following a GW3 report submission. The contract value is £647,408.64 for the Phase 1 works. This first phase of works is essential in implementing the planning permission to avoid elapse and will consist of; formalising the parkland boundary through fencing, installation of a new accessible path, remarking of the car park and various soft landscaping improvements. Following contract sign off in November 2025 construction is due to begin in early 2026 once Ground Control has had time to mobilise. A pre-start meeting was held with Ground Control in early November along with a photocall. All pre-commencement planning conditions except condition 10 were discharged In October following a decision notice from the Local Planning Authority. Condition 10 is the Construction Environmental Management Plan. This condition will be discharged by Ground Control Ltd as per the JCT intermediate works contract in place. Phase 1 is due for completion in late 2026 and further phases of works will be determined by remaining budget and future funding opportunities.

- 6.4. Temple Marsh is a monitored landfill site currently being transformed into a valuable nature reserve within Medway. Located in an area with limited access to natural environments and informal recreation, the site will serve the growing communities living nearby. Through collaboration with Kent County Council, an open space assessment was completed in late 2024. This assessment outlined recommendations to ensure the site's safe and sustainable development. All improvements will follow these guidelines to enhance public access while preserving the site's ecological value. Ultimately, this project will provide local residents with greater access to a key riverside green space and support biodiversity at Temple Marsh. Following essential enabling works, a design contract was awarded to Land Use Consultants (LUC) in June 2025. The design will look at creating all weather paths, seawall repairs to combat erosion and seek the views of the local community on further improvements. RIBA stage 1 has been completed with initial site analysis and concept designs generated and the project is now in RIBA stage 2 of the design phase. The Concept plans are being showcased during a 4-week consultation period which runs from 10th November – 8th December 2025 and will assist RIBA Stage 3 and the detailed design phase due to begin in December 2025. Construction works are expected to start in late 2026. Medway will be utilising its permitted development rights so won't be seeking a change of use planning permission.

7. Climate Change

- 7.1. I have continued to show leadership and support for the refreshed Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2028. The actions within the plan aim to reduce carbon emissions in line with the One Medway Council Plan objective to achieve net zero by 2050 and increase resilience against the impacts of

climate change for both Medway Council and Medway “the Place”. Several committees have been consulted on the plan including the Community Climate Working Group, the Climate Oversight and Implementation Board and RCE O&S and Business Support O&S. Cabinet adopted the refreshed plan in August 2025.

- 7.2. I continue to oversee the following groups, both of which are central to achieving our climate ambitions for Medway, “the place”:
- The Member Climate Change Working Party – the members have been empowered to start developing their own Climate Action Ward Improvement Plans with a target for the first one to be published by the end of the year. If this approach is successful with the group, I would like to encourage all members to develop Climate Action Ward Improvement Plans for each of the 24 wards throughout Medway.
 - The Community Climate Working Group – the group has had the opportunity to hear about and comment on developing strategies and work programmes including the Medway Food Partnership and Food Strategy, the refreshed Climate Change Action Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan. A separate project group has formed to look at a potential community energy project.
- 7.3. I participated in an ambitious activity at the beginning of the year to plant 3,600 tree plugs across 4 days, supported by funding from the Kent Plan Tree team as part of a Forestry Commission Local Authority Tree Fund and led by the Climate and Planning teams. Around 100 volunteers took part, including members of the Community Working Group, support from the Royal Engineers at Brompton Barracks, Council staff and ward councillors. The event strengthened community partnerships, particularly with Brompton Barracks, paving the way for meaningful collaboration on the climate agenda. The newly planted trees contribute to the development of Deangate Community Parkland and will help increase Medway's canopy cover in the future.
- 7.4. On 7 May, Medway's first Green Business event welcomed over 100 attendees and highlighted how sustainable strategies can drive growth and meet climate and customer demands. Speakers included local and international business leaders. The focus on sustainability in business was further amplified at the Medway Business and Skills showcase in June, with a Net Zero panel discussion.
- 7.5. I continue to work closely with the Highways Service to deliver on-street Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure across Medway. I'm pleased to confirm that Medway has been awarded £2.14million to support this initiative. Early Supplier Engagement has played a crucial role in shaping delivery, ensuring that the proposed charging locations are suitable and will not compromise existing parking arrangements, while remaining accessible to all users. Tender preparation is now underway, with a focus on securing a delivery partner capable of meeting the technical and operational

requirements of the programme. We are targeting contract award and mobilisation later this year, with physical installations expected to commence before the end of the current financial year.

8. Support for key service areas

- 8.1. Medway Council has a core statutory duty to collect waste and recycling from domestic properties, maintain litter-free streets, and provide accessible household recycling centres to residents of Medway. As one of the few universal services delivered to all Medway residents, it plays a vital role in enhancing the local environment and quality of life.
- 8.2. I have instructed officers to keep me informed of any developments within the waste industry. I will continue to champion these at Cabinet and Council level to support our climate agenda. This includes progress on waste strategy development, changes in legislation, and the identification of potential depot locations.
- 8.3. I visited the Southwark Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) during which, I observed how kerbside recycling collected in Medway is sorted and prepared for onward recycling. This provided valuable insight into the journey of our recyclable materials and the importance of maintaining high-quality recycling at the source.
- 8.4. The annual review of waste contracts was presented to the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 February 2025. The review covered the contract year from October 2023 to September 2024 and members thanked officers for the comprehensive report, recognised the high standard of waste services provided in Medway and thanked staff for their hard work. This report provided an overview of the performance of the following contracts:
 - Veolia Environmental Services – responsible for the disposal of residual and recyclable waste.
 - Medway Norse – responsible for waste collection, street cleansing, and the management of Medway's Household Waste Recycling Centres.
- 8.5. I've worked to support the development and delivery of Medway's sustainable transport agenda. This has included engaging with officers, consultants, and operators to help ensure the delivery of a more reliable, accessible, and affordable bus network. I've contributed to forums such as the Active Travel Group and quarterly meetings with our local bus operators, helping to ensure that transport planning and service delivery remains responsive to local needs.

9. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 9.1. I chair a fortnightly meeting with key Planning and related portfolio Members, with the Assistant Director, Culture & Community.

10. Championing the Interests of service users / Medway residents / Children and Young People

- 10.1. I've consistently supported initiatives that aim to benefit families, young people, and wider communities. This includes backing the continuation of free summer holiday bus travel for children and supporting the development of a Medway-wide all-operator ticket to improve affordability and access.

Lead officer contacts

Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture & Community 01634 333540

mark.breathwick@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None