

Public and Members' Questions and responses from the meeting of Cabinet on 16 December 2025

(Relating to Agenda Item No.5 - Article Four Direction – Houses of Multiple Occupation)

Question A – Paul O’Connell, of Gillingham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Simon Curry, the following:

“As a concerned resident in Gillingham I commend the proposals before the Cabinet to address, with immediate effect, the issue of HMOs in Medway but it is frustrating to see the increased number of C4s often by developers who have no connection with the area.

In Copenhagen Road in particular there are several properties, sometimes adjacent, which are being converted without the need for planning permission, under current legislation, from C3s to C4s.

Could the Member please inform me what action can be taken to carefully and regularly monitor these residences when they are fully occupied?”

Councillor Curry thanked the Council teams responsible for producing the draft Local Plan. He said that Under the Housing Act 2004, all Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) needed to comply with specific legal requirements designed to protect the health, safety, and welfare of occupants.

This included:

- Mandatory Licensing for larger HMOs (properties with five or more occupants forming two or more households and sharing facilities).
- Compliance with Management Regulations, which required landlords to maintain common areas, ensure fire safety measures were in place, and provide adequate amenities such as kitchens and bathrooms.
- Meeting the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) standards, which assessed risks such as fire, damp, overcrowding, and electrical hazards.

Once these properties were fully occupied, the Private Sector Housing team carried out inspections and took necessary enforcement action to protect residents and the wider community.

Medway was also working towards the consultation process for additional licensing, which would extend licensing requirements to smaller HMOs. This would give the Council greater oversight and control, ensuring that landlords met their obligations and properties were managed responsibly. The consultation was expected to begin in the coming months, and residents would be invited to share their views.

The Council was also prioritising enforcement resources to ensure that properties were monitored effectively and standards were maintained. As part of this, staffing levels were actively being reviewed within the HMO enforcement team to capacity to deliver robust monitoring and enforcement. From a planning perspective, the Council

was proposing to implement an Article 4 Directive on those properties with fewer than six occupants. This was on the Cabinet agenda for the current meeting.

If residents had concerns about overcrowding or property conditions, these could be reported directly to the Council for investigation. A lot of the best work done by the housing team was through local contact and communication, working closely with residents, either directly or through elected Members.

Paul O'Connell asked the following supplementary question:

"What you have referred to is a general response, can you be more specific how you will deal with issues that might arise?"

Councillor Curry said that the landlords of the properties were business people who wanted to run a legitimate business and there was a role for HMOs in the community which provided valuable accommodation. The Council wanted to retain development control so if there was a problem, enforcement could take place as quickly as possible. If there was a particular issue in Copenhagen Road, this should be raised through the ward councillor.

Councillor Louwella Prenter added that the general management of HMOs was being looked at. It was anticipated that consultation would start in January. The Cabinet meeting in October 2025 had agreed a proposal for Additional and Selective Licensing. This set out how the Council would have better control of HMO operation in terms of waste management and other issues that might affect local residents.

Public Questions

Question B – Neil Davies, of Chatham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Harinder Mahil, the following:

"Following the article in the Daily Express on November the 15th about the challenges facing Chatham High Street and the subsequent support this received online. Would the Council reconsider visiting its plans to propose a BID (business improvement district) for Chatham High Street to work alongside the Future High Streets Fund?"

In response, Councillor Mahil said that he strongly disagreed with much of the article and that the development of a Chatham BID would be welcome.

In 2024, the Mosaic Partnership had been commissioned by Medway Council to conduct a Business Improvement District Feasibility Study for Chatham Town Centre. The objectives of this study were to assess the business appetite, carry out a financial analysis, providing recommendations to the next stage of this process. The findings of this study revealed that whilst enough revenue could be raised, the business appetite to proceed to a BID was not available. The recommendation was not to commit to the next stage of this process, the ballot.

Following feedback from the Chatham businesses, key partners, and external stakeholders, in response to this study, the Chatham Town Centre Forum had developed a Crime Partnership board. A business led initiative, with considerable investment from Council, the uniformed street ambassadors had been deployed in Chatham High Street since July 2025, patrolling the High Street and surrounding areas from 10am-6pm, Monday to Saturday, Sunday 10am- 4pm. The ambassadors

engaged with individuals to promote positive behaviour, discourage anti-social behaviour; report incidents and environmental issues to the relevant agencies; support businesses in reporting crime and with assisting the public with local information, direction and enquiries.

Since this initiative had commenced, the High Street had seen a reduction in shoplifting and ASB, crime reporting from businesses had increased by 52%, resulting in additional police resources to the High Street.

The Chatham Town Centre would continue to support this programme and may in future years consider a business improvement district. This was ongoing discussion. The Ambassadors were a crucial part of proving this case. The FHSF programme had made significant improvements in the Public Realm, with the award winning Paddock and supporting the delivery of the James Williams Healthy Living Centre, Innovation Hub (Ascend), bringing St John's Church back into use as a key community asset, and purchase of the ex-Debenhams site. This had uplifted the High Street and was another part of making a future BID more likely once businesses were ready and happy to take this forward. The Council was committed to the long-term vitality of Chatham High Street.

It was necessary to recognise when it was appropriate to progress potential development of a BID and it was likely that there would be details of other funding streams in the coming year.

Neil Davies asked the following supplementary question:

“Would the Council join me in supporting Street Light UK, an organisation which supports both physically and mentally, sex workers, I think there are 284 sex workers in Chatham, to do something with the resources mentioned, to try to support that?”

Councillor Mahil said he was happy to work with partner agencies that would like to work with the Council and invited Mr Davies to get in touch with a view to arranging a meeting.

Councillor Paterson added that a bid for £20,000 to support the Chatham Ambassadors programme had been successful. This had previously been supported by Kent Police.

Question C – William Burvill, of Strood, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Education, Councillor Tracy Coombs:

“Given the ongoing delays in EHCP assessments, rising SEND costs, and concerns about ensuring that support is both timely and appropriate, what specific measures is the Council taking to reduce waiting times, ensure assessments are evidence-based and accurately targeted, manage SEND spending efficiently, maintain transparency and accountability, and ensure that the system is not being misused?”

In response, Councillor Coombs said that the Council recognised the pressures on the SEND system, and although there was still a lot to do, she was proud of the steps already taken to address delays, rising costs, and ensure integrity and improve the system in Medway.

In order to reduce waiting times for EHCP assessments, the Council had increased staffing, streamlined processes, and introduced digital tracking to improve case

management. Early triage was in place to prioritise the most urgent cases, which had made a substantial impact.

At the beginning of the previous academic year only 4% of EHCPs had been issued within the 20 week time frame. By the end of academic year this had increased to 54% because of the improvements made. Further investment would continue to improve this figure.

To ensure assessments were evidence-based and accurate, the Council had strengthened quality assurance, introduced moderation of plans, and ensured multi-agency panels reviewed complex cases.

In relation to managing SEND spending, the Council had a financial oversight group monitoring high-needs block expenditure, was investing in local provision to reduce costly out-of-area placements and benchmarked against regional and national data. The Government had allocated additional funding for this purpose. In August, the Cabinet had agreed funding for an additional 400 special educational needs places in Medway through a new secondary school for Danecourt and additional resource provision in both primary and secondary mainstream schools.

This was an excellent example of how investing in the sector now would lead to long term savings, through reduced costs, both in terms of payments to outside providers and the additional costs of transporting children and people long distances. Being able to attend a school closer to home was also beneficial to the children themselves.

The further announcement made by the Government in the previous week was welcome. This confirmed at least £3billion pounds invested over the next four years to create an additional 50,000 SEND places in mainstream schools across England.

The Council was also reinforcing intervention and SEND support at an earlier stage. This was not a statutory duty, but was considered to be the right thing to do to ensure children received the correct support at the earliest opportunity, which could often avoid escalation to more costly statutory plans and save money in the long term.

In order to ensure transparency and accountability, the Council shared performance dashboards with stakeholders, held regular engagement sessions with families and schools, and maintained audit and compliance checks. To prevent misuse of the system, Medway had strengthened multi-agency decision-making panels and attendance to ensure decisions were robust and evidence based.

In summary, the focus was on timely, high-quality support for children and young people, while maintaining financial sustainability and trust in the system.

No supplementary question was asked as William Burvill was not present.

Question D – Milo O’Connor, of Rochester, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Alex Paterson, the following:

“There are currently loads of potholes on the Old Rochester High Street where the old Rochester Station used to be. It’s a key road commuters use to travel through Medway. Especially cyclists, including myself to the gym. Do you have any plans throughout the New year to make the necessary long-term reparations to this crucial

road? The chains on my bike have become incredibly fragile as a result of some of the roads in Medway.”

In response, Councillor Paterson said that the relevant section of the High Street was within his ward, so he had a particular interest in ensuring it was looked after. He advised that the road was inspected on a weekly basis, and any defects identified are repaired accordingly to ensure it remains safe for all users, including cyclists. The most recent inspection had taken place on 9 December.

Councillor Paterson acknowledged that prioritisation of funding was a challenge. The road had been assessed against the criteria for resurfacing, and scored 90 points, which is a priority 2. In view of available funding, the Council was currently only resurfacing priority 1 sites which scored 135 points or more and therefore this had not been added to the proposed resurfacing list. Officers would continue to monitor this area closely.

The matter would be discussed with transport colleagues leading on the Bus Service Improvement Programme and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which would further identify any improvements required along this key route.

The Council appreciated the importance of this road for commuters and cyclists, and remained committed to maintaining it to a safe standard.

Milo O'Connor asked the following supplementary question.

“Were there specific bodies who reviewed the road?”

Councillor Paterson said that inspections were undertaken in a variety of ways, most recently the Council had started to do this using cameras on Council vehicles. This provided a more accurate picture of where there had been degradation. Because inspections were weekly it could be ascertained how quickly a road had deteriorated which enable it to be prioritised accordingly. There might be specific issues relating to that particular stretch of the High Street, possibly exacerbated by some of the freight traffic associated with the Rochester Riverside development. It was also a busy road and a bus route.

There were systems in place, but the Council did not have limitless funding. Where it had been given additional funding by central Government, that enabled some areas to be looked at that had not quite met the criteria.

Councillor Paterson gave assurance that inspections were taking place in a technical way and he encouraged the questioner to report any specific issues as weekly inspections might not pick up things that had happened at the end of the week.

Question E – Kevin Cox, of Gillingham, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Zoe Van Dyke:

“Why are Medway Council failing to respond under the Freedom of Information Act?”

In response, Councillor Van Dyke said that responding to FOI requests was a statutory requirement and that the Council took that obligation seriously. At the same time, officers must prioritise their core frontline duties, particularly in areas where services were under significant pressure.

This could sometimes affect the speed at which FOI requests were processed, especially when the information requested was complex and required input from multiple teams.

In the last quarter, the Council responded to 73% requests within the statutory timescale without compromising their core duties. The services were working together to improve FOI response rate.

The background to this question related to planning application MC/25/1112, Hawbeck Road, Parkwood and various exchanges between Mr Cox and the Council, with particular reference to a stopping up order:

Following communication from the developer confirming consent to develop the land, the Highway Service, acting under Section 116 of the Highways Act 1980, applied for the stopping up of highway land adjacent to 91 Hawbeck Road, Gillingham, on the grounds that the highway was no longer required.

A stopping up order, if approved, removed highway rights over the land concerned. The decision to remove highway land rights lay with the Magistrates Court.

In this case, payment for the stopping up order was received from the developer on 4 September 2025, and the formal process commenced on 15 October 2025.

On 31 October 2025, Legal Services confirmed that a court date had been requested to enable calculation of the statutory notice periods. However, they advised that, due to a backlog in court scheduling, it was unlikely that a hearing would be available before April 2026.

Once a hearing date had been fixed, the Council would serve notice of the hearing and during this 28 day period, local residents would be able to make representations in respect of this proposal and these would be considered by the Magistrates' Court prior to the Court determining the application.

No supplementary question was asked as Kevin Cox was not present.

Members' Questions

Question F – Councillor Ron Sands, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure, Councillor Nina Gurung:

“We are rightly proud of our military history, in fact Medway has one of the deepest and longest military history in Britain - over 450 years. Medway contains a concentration of forts unmatched almost anywhere in the UK.

As a young boy back in late fifties I and lots of local children of Hoo played on Cockham Wood Fort we had no regard to its history so much so I was always Robin Hood with my home made bow, and couple weeks ago I took my grandson to the fort. My how times have changed, he was protecting the fort as Spider-Man, dressed in Arsenal football Kit and the fort itself, deep in a battle of its own with the erosion from River Medway, the River it was built to protect.

Cockham Wood Fort has Scheduled Monument status and is on the heritage at risk register given it is in immediate risk of further rapid deterioration. It was built in 1669 by Sir Bernard de Gomme, considered the most important figure in English Military Engineering, so highly respected, he was buried at the Tower of London.

Much work on our rich military history is being done in regard to the Hoo Stop Line, the rare WW1 Anti-Aircraft gun and searchlight positions, the Kingsnorth Airship Station, along to the experimental trench works and munitions storage at Lodge Hill. We are currently the custodians of our military history and we must preserve as much as possible for future generations.

Therefore, will the Council form a working party looking into:

- i. securing the long term preservation of Cockham Wood Fort and assist in the development of a workable conservation plan through awareness and engagement.
- ii. conducting a new detailed conservation survey as well as getting copies of Historic England survey report last carried out between 2002/16.
- iii. starting a professional vegetation management plan clearing overgrowth without damaging the architectural fabric and to help reduce root damage.
- iv. engaging Kent Archaeological Society and/or local museums to carry out interpretation of the site.”

In response, Councillor Gurung said that Medway was proud of its rich military history, connections with the military went back 450 years.

The Fort was an important historical feature on the River Medway and was at risk as a scheduled ancient monument. This was a matter between Historic England and the land owner and Medway Council had little power to act on the matter.

The Council had contacted Historic England asking them what could be done and putting forward the suggestions set out in the question, but recognising that this would have to be led by Historic England rather than Medway Council.

The Council was willing to support where it could and Councillor Gurung would ensure that Councillor Sands was kept updated on Historic England's response and involved in any action moving forward. Councillor Gurung hoped that everyone would be able to enjoy the fort and appreciate its historical importance now and into the future.

The landowner could also consider making an application to the Shared Prosperity Fund, for example, to develop an Engagement and Awareness Plan.

Note: As the allocated time had been exhausted, written responses to questions G to K were provided after the meeting. These are set out below.

Question G – Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Turpin, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple:

“Further to the new plans for the Innovation Park Medway, please can you give a breakdown of money that has been spent to date, detailing the loan commitments and how this historic spend would have been necessary, or not, for the future of the site?”

Written response:

Thank you for your question. The total spend on the Innovation Park Medway scheme as at 31st March 2025 is £33.230million, of which £22.434million has been funded by borrowing. The majority of this spending was carried out before May 2023.

The indicative cost of this borrowing is £1.261million annually and it is proposed that loan repayments will eventually be offset by business rates generated by the site, which is a designated Enterprise Zone. The works carried out using this funding included improvements to the airport to release the IPM sites, enabling works such as utilities work as well as creating the runway park on Northern site and access roads.

As part of the IPM reset agreed in March 2025 detailed development appraisals were carried out which demonstrate the value these enabling works have brought to IPM. These will be retained in their entirety for Northern Site. The intention is to utilise as much as possible for Southern Site, however as the design work is in early RIBA 2 stage further surveys and design work is required to confirm the extent of what can be utilised.

Question H – Councillor George Perfect, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple:

“Can the Leader give details of whether the Cabinet will set out in its budget proposals for 2026/27 that it has a deliverable plan to eliminate the need for Exceptional Financial Support within the next two years, prior to local government reorganisation?”

Written response:

Thank you for your question George. We are currently awaiting publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement which we are expecting later this week. For the first time in a number of years this will be a multi-year settlement which will enable us to have more certainty about our funding over that 3 year period. This will in turn enable us to make plans to set a balanced budget, however this will not be an easy task given the continued pressures on services for vulnerable people and the long term impact of austerity in the 2010s on local government finance. When the proposed budget is published in February there will be an updated Medium Term projection which will set out the position for the period of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Question I – Councillor Mark Joy, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple:

“What is the projected interest burden, which the Cabinet has to factor in to its future budget proposals, from borrowing under EFS?”

Written response:

Thank you for your question Mark. The Council borrowed £20.239m in EFS relating to 2024/25 and projects a further need of up to £28.132m for 2025/26. EFS payments are made on the basis of a 20 year loan. For the current year's budget we factored in interest payments of £1.2m relating to the 2024/25 EFS requirement. The projected EFS ask for 2025/26, should that amount be required, would incur further interest costs projected at £1.6m, dependent upon the amount required and the PWLB interest rates as at 31 March 2026. So, in effect we will be building into the 2026/27 budget an overall projected interest payment of £2.8m.

Question J – Councillor Andrew Lawrence, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder of Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Alex Paterson:

“Can the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on the progress being made on Medway 2.0 against the agreed delivery schedule? In giving his answer, he should confirm:

1. The number of completed projects to be delivered this financial year.
2. The number delivered on so far.
3. The number that are currently behind schedule.
4. The budgeted savings expected and the value that has been realised.”

Written response:

There are 37 Medway 2.0 projects that we planned to complete in 2025/26.

Nineteen projects have been completed so far, including:

- the migration of our website and forms platform,
- implementation of automated invoice processing,
- launch of a staff wellbeing AI Agent,
- an upgrade and redesign of the Corn Exchange booking process,
- ensuring our website content is AI ready through webpage redesigns and information updates,
- the creation of a new Audit management system set to go-live in April 2026,
- and the installation of Route Reports cameras for Highways, to automatically monitor and assess the condition of the highway, utilising AI to prioritise repairs.

Each project is helping to support more responsive and joined-up services for residents.

There are sixteen further initiatives that are actively being delivered. These include:

- the e-form replacement project, which has already seen 43 forms replaced and associated workflows made live, with the remaining 35 forms in user testing and on track for implementation by March 2026;
- the full redesign and rollout of the Stage 2 corporate complaints process, due to go live before the end of December;
- the Waste service redesign, which will streamline processes and reduce system costs;
- the implementation of a new payment provider to provide a unified, cost-effective payment experience;
- and the setup of a modern data platform to enable joined-up data, improved reporting, and better insight for decision-making across the Council.

There are currently three projects behind schedule, due to combinations of issues linked to procurement processes and property restrictions. These are the data platform, digital Traffic Regulation Orders, and the Integrated Hubs project whilst we identify a suitable location for the first Integrated Hub.

There is no direct target for Medway 2.0 in 2025/26 as the projects are supporting services to achieve the One Medway Finance Improvement and Transformation Plan target of revenue savings of £11.3m and additional income of £17.5m across the

Council. The One Medway FIT Plan was at around 60% of the overall savings target of £28.8m at Quarter 2, which is excellent progress.

Medway 2.0 projects are also delivering time and efficiency gains, quality improvements, and better user experiences. For example, we are seeing a reduction in call volumes of 45% compared to our baseline year and digital transactions are above target. Improvements in core areas such as Adult Social Care have also been made by working collaboratively with the service, where the time taken to submit assessment to Mosaic reduced by 80%, from 12 days to 2.3 days.

In summary, Medway 2.0 is delivering on its commitments, with clear progress, financial benefits, and ongoing improvements for both residents and staff.

Question K – Councillor David Brake, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Vince Maple:

“Explaining why they have not closed the budget gap, can you provide a breakdown of savings realised from procurement reforms?”

Written response:

Thank you for your question David. As you will be aware the Council operates a category management approach to procurement, and a lot of our contracts are consolidated as a result. Whilst the team works with and supports the realisation of cost savings, a lot of benefit sits within our desire to achieve social value, be that via the use of local supply chains or the use of local labour.

The team supports wider cost savings by working with and constructively challenging specification deliverables, supporting effective decision making via governance, as well as by facilitating a strong early buyer-supplier relationship via preliminary market engagement events – by doing this effectively we prepare the market for our opportunities and in turn support the best market response.

Our tenders are all openly advertised and we utilise frameworks where practical. As such we have a great understanding of assumed rates and the widest possible relevant market reach.