



Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

29 January 2026

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Van Dyke, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management. 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. Recommendation

1.1. The Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The areas within the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Complaints Policy and Management
- Customer and Business Support (CABS)
- HR
- Internal Audit and Counter Fraud
- Legal

3. Background

3.1. My portfolio covers most of the strategic support services that are so vital to enabling the rest of the Council's services to deliver for our residents. Managing our business well is fundamental to securing financial sustainability for Medway Council and I am very proud and grateful to the staff in my portfolio.

4. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 4.1. I meet regularly with the officers responsible for managing the services in my portfolio. I am briefed on the day to day activity and performance of each service, am engaged in the development of the services and any transformational change, and discuss risks, issues and opportunities.
- 4.2. In addition to the work of the services in my portfolio, I am a member of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority and also contribute to the following groups:
 - Climate Change Working Party
 - Ethical Framework Informal Working Party
 - Member Development Advisory Group.
 - Ward Improvement Fund Review Working Party

5. Championing the Interests of service users and Medway residents

- 5.1. I'm proud that the HR service supported the Council and the Unions to agree a 5% cost of living increase for Medway Council staff, more than 80% of whom live in Medway. The work of the team to support the MedPay review which will continue into next year, will be instrumental to improving the Council's staff recruitment and retention rates, in turn enabling us to improve the delivery of our services for residents.
- 5.2. I receive and monitor monthly performance reports in respect of the customer contact channel, complaints and Blue Badges, in particular. Performance across the year has been very good, with customers dealt with promptly and effectively. I am satisfied that the service closely manages performance and addresses any adverse deviation, quickly and thoroughly.

6. Support for key service areas

6.1. Customer and Business Support (CABS)

- 6.1.1. CABS provides the authority's primary customer contact channel and a centralised administration support function, so is an essential part of the delivery supply chain, interacting with most council services and many customers. CABS operates on a blended role basis, moving resources to where most needed. CABS incorporates the Customer Relations Team (CRT), the Community Interpreting Service (CIS) and delivers the Blue Badge service for Medway residents. The service is keen to explore new ways of working and the use of technology, such as AI, and is committed to supporting Medway 2.0.
- 6.1.2. Customer Contact Management: CABS manages the first point of contact for advice and information, and for service requests, including, but not exhaustively for Revenues and Benefits, Social Care, Planning, Housing, Home Choice, Environment, Waste, Highways, Leisure, School Admissions,

Free School Meals and School Transport, and Libraries. In the period 1 April – 31 December 2025 CABS dealt with an average of 20,778 phone enquiries per month, across all phone lines, achieving around 88% calls answered year to date. As well as helping residents to access services and information, activity includes promoting and supporting self-serve where possible, an example being My Council Tax Online.

- 6.1.3. Administration: Administration support is provided to a range of council services. Tasks include, as examples, minute taking, assessing and processing bus pass applications, document scanning/indexing, document uploads, land searches and finance support.
- 6.1.4. Between April and December 2025, CABS supported 1,770 social care meetings and made 8,920 social care referrals. Some 1,109 integrated discharge and 'Home First' cases were handled by CABS, supporting the council and NHS with hospital discharges into care arrangements.
- 6.1.5. Compliments, Complaints and Feedback: The Customer Relations Team (CRT) provides a professional management and reporting service in respect of all customer feedback, i.e. comments, compliments and complaints. It supports complaint handlers across the authority, placing an important focus on learning from complaints to improve service delivery. The CRT acts as the interface with relevant Ombudsman and as guardian of complaint response thoroughness and timeliness. The Customer Relations Manager has continued to deliver regular Customer Complaint training and operates a pan-council Complaint Handlers Group, to better understand complaints performance and promote shared learning.
- 6.1.6. The CRT continues to implement the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Codes, and in the last year, the team developed and launched a new Feedback Policy and launched this on the council's website. Additionally, the team improved the support available for colleagues by developing an area on Medspace which provides guidance, policies and procedures, and performance information. The team introduced mandatory complaint awareness training for all staff who have contact with external customers, alongside the existing training available for complaint investigators. This has had a positive uptake, and the Customer Relations Manager is now developing a training video intended to make access to training easier.
- 6.1.7. Continuing the theme of improvement, the team collaborated with the Service Design Team to develop a workflow in Jadu for corporate stage 2 complaints, aimed at enhancing the customers' experience and offering processing efficiencies. Both the training video and the new stage 2 process are anticipated to be launched in Q4.
- 6.1.8. The council received 402 compliments in the first three quarters of the year compared with 1,162 stage one complaints about its corporate services. This represents almost three compliments for every new complaint received. There were 251 escalations to stage two (20.5%).

6.1.9. Performance for stage one corporate complaints reached 88%, exceeding the council's 10 working day response target of 80%. Performance for responding to the more complex stage two corporate complaints reached 76% at the end of Q3, achieving the council's 15-day response target of 75%.

6.1.10. Children's and Adult's Social Care received 37 compliments compared with a total of 205 new complaints, representing more than five complaints for every compliment received.

6.1.11. Social Care complaint performance remained strong. Children's Social Care complaints achieved a response rate of 100% for statutory complaints and 84% for non-statutory complaints, against a target of 75% answered within 20 working days. Adult Social Care achieved 86% for statutory complaints and 89% for non-statutory complaints, against the same target.

6.1.12. The Community Interpreting Service (CIS): offers translation and interpretation in over 60 languages to help provide equal access to services to those for whom English is not their first language. This extends beyond the authority, with the NHS, schools, refugee resettlement, and other public services being prominent clients. During the period 1 April to 31 December 2025, CIS received:

- 7,817 requests for interpreting and translation services, of which:
- Face to Face interpreting appointments numbered: 2,595 (33% of total demand)
- Remote (telephone or video) appointments totalled: 4,937 (63% of total demand)
- Translation assignments amounted to 285 (4% of total demand).

6.1.13. CIS interpreters supported 160 services, including Medway Council, the NHS, and other clients. CIS worked with the supplier to develop and launch the 'Vista' system to manage CIS appointments, billing and interpreter payments. The CIS team, working with urgency, helped to bring about these changes, which are already realising efficiencies and offering greater capacity for future business growth.

6.1.14. Blue Badges: CABS manages the council's Blue Badge service in line with the Department for Transport's legislation, offering an online application process with digital assistance when needed. Against a 12-week processing target, the cumulative year to date performance (Jan – Dec 2025) is 90% (6,455) processed within target and 28% (2,020) within better than target (processed within six weeks).

6.1.15. Conclusion: Customer and Business Support (CABS) plays a significant part in facilitating Medway residents and visitors to easily access council services and information. Reporting to the Head of Customer Experience, and working as part of the Information Section, the onus is on continuous improvement and modernisation, promoting customer self-serve, but whilst retaining customer choice of contact methods. The administration element of

CABS offers services a resilient, flexible, centralised administration resource, allowing them to focus on core activities.

6.1.16. I am fully supportive of the service and the work undertaken, and I am committed to supporting continued progress towards ease of access to council services, to customer choice and to the efficiencies and reliability that a centralised administration service offers. The team has a significant part to play in the delivery of the authority's Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan, and Medway 2.0, improving service and saving costs.

6.2. Internal Audit and Counter Fraud

6.2.1. The Internal Audit (IA) team provides independent assurance over the council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control, through the delivery of assurance reviews across various council services. These reviews are selected via an independent audit needs analysis to ensure that IA resource is aimed at the areas of highest risk to the Council meeting its objectives.

6.2.2. IA assurance activity is driven by workplans that are approved by the Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis and the volume of assurance reviews to be completed is based on resources projected to be available. The plan is amended in year as necessary to reflect any changes in predicted resource, with all revisions to the plan agreed by the Audit Committee.

6.2.3. The Audit committee received the annual report and Chief Audit Executive's opinion for 2024-25 in September 2025 with final performance against key targets for 2024-25 (as of 31 March 2025) as follows;

- 76% of estimated resources delivered;
- 63% of the agreed assurance work delivered (target 95%); and
- 88% of management actions implemented by the agreed date.

6.2.4. The team had significant resourcing issues throughout the year, leading to the low outturns against target and a limited assurance opinion. The Audit Committee was kept up to date on these issues throughout the year and action being taken.

6.2.5. The Global Institute of Internal Auditors introduced a new set of Global Internal Audit Standards, which for the Public Sector were effective from April 2025 after additional public sector interpretations and requirements were identified by CIPFA. The service undertook a self-assessment against the new standards, concluding that they fully conformed with 46 of the 52 standards, partially conformed with a further five and did not conform with one. An action plan was presented alongside the assessment to advise the Audit Committee what was being done to address the conformance gaps and progress against that action plan will be provided in July 2026, although the action to address the one area of non-conformance has already been completed.

- 6.2.6. A survey is issued each year to gauge the satisfaction with internal audit services, the most recent of which identified positive satisfaction from 88.2% of people that responded.
- 6.2.7. Moving into 2025-26, the team has been fully staffed since June 2025, and has been working on the agreed internal audit plans, and good progress has been made to date while also putting significant effort into clearing the backlog of ongoing work from 2024-25.
- 6.2.8. The Counter Fraud (CF) team provides counter fraud and investigation services, which are outlined in an annual plan with four core areas of activity, which includes fraud awareness and prevention, pro-active and reactive activity.
- 6.2.9. The Audit Committee received the 2024-25 annual report in September 2025, which outlined the following results;
 - Fraud risk assessments completed across multiple council services, leading to the production of a fraud risk register;
 - Collaborative pro-active activity with Parking Enforcement resulting in the recovery of five expired blue badges and the issue of six PCNs,
 - 212 investigations concluded in year
 - £121,436 of historic Council tax identified (resulting in additional £88,397pa in future years),
 - Notional savings of £105,558 linked to the recovery of a council Property and cancellation of a temporary accommodation placement due to non-occupation, and
 - Prevented losses of £103,100 linked to a blocked right to buy application.
- 6.2.10. This represents total savings of £431,749 against outturn costs of £243,605 for Medway's share counter fraud team, which includes resource for internal grievance/disciplinary matters. This represents good value for money.
- 6.2.11. Moving into 2025-26, fraud awareness sessions have taken place with a number of council teams and school finance officers and officers have attended Medway Live events to raise awareness with the public. A process to review fraud risk assessments will be taking place and an updated fraud risk register presented to the Audit Committee, which will then be used to inform the counter fraud work plan for 2026-27.
- 6.2.12. Further pro-active work with Parking Enforcement led to more than 100 badges being checked at various locations across the borough, resulting in the confiscation of 24 badges and issuing of 12 penalty charges for misuse, and visits to all out of borough temporary accommodation placements have also taken place.
- 6.2.13. The new Economic Crime & Corporate Transparency Act 2023 introduced a new offence of 'Failure to Prevent Fraud, which came into force on 1 September 2025. This offence occurs when and an employee, agent, subsidiary, or other "associated person" commits a fraud intending to benefit

the organisation, and the organisation did not have reasonable prevention procedures in place. The only defence is for an organisation to demonstrate that they had reasonable prevention procedures in place at the time the offence of fraud was committed. Home Office guidance was issued to provide clarity around 'reasonable' fraud prevention procedures.

6.2.14. While the likelihood of any fraud being committed that could benefit the Council is limited, the potential impacts if the risk were to materialise were significant, so the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud undertook an assessment of the council's overall fraud prevention arrangements against the Home Office guidance. While the outcomes were largely positive, a number of actions were identified to strengthen the Council's position should it ever be required to defend itself.

6.3. Legal Services and Local Land Charges

6.3.1. The Local Land Charges team continue to provide excellent customer service. Post the transfer of part of the register to HMLR they have actively sought opportunities to assist in other areas of the Council particularly in planning looking to use their skills to assist in areas such as Tree Preservation Orders.

6.3.2. Legal Services have continued to have a period of stability which has followed from the successful restructure and the implementation of Medpay for the teams. This has seen a turnaround from a low point where the team were 80% locum to figures today of just 14% of staff within the team not being permanent.

6.3.3. The Place half of the team continue to operate a shared service model delivering a legal service to Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) which covers the whole range of District Council functions. The team continue to successfully balance the competing priorities of both Councils.

6.3.4. We have increased resource in the areas of Adult Social care and SEND to assist our client teams in dealing with the enormous pressures they are under. Sadly our senior lawyer in the adults team has chosen to retire and will be much missed by both the team and the clients, but we have been able to successfully succession plan and her successor is already in place to ensure a smooth transition.

6.3.5. The Childcare team continue to experience an increasing number of complex cases, especially those where there are either large numbers of children (family sizes in excess of 8 people) or where there are allegations of non-accidental injuries.

6.3.6. Overall the case load across the disciplines remains very high with the team carrying circa 1400 cases at any given time.

6.4. HR Services

- 6.4.1. Medpay Review
- 6.4.2. Significant progress has been made this period on the rollout, refinement, and operational transition of MedPay Performance, Progression and Pay (PPP) programme across multiple services.
- 6.4.3. Implementation of MedPay PPP for most teams has been completed, where required, employment contracts were reviewed, and additional contractual considerations, such as holiday pay rates and a revised payment schedule are being reviewed.
- 6.4.4. Work has also commenced with senior leaders on their transition into MedPay PPP. This includes updating job descriptions and producing Career Professional Frameworks for each senior role to ensure alignment with the new framework.
- 6.4.5. Finally, the MedPay PPP MedSpace pages are being updated to support the shift into business-as-usual, ensuring managers and staff have access to clear guidance and resources as implementation embeds across the organisation, this is not just procedural but also cultural, ongoing training is available for leaders.
- 6.4.6. Organisational Change
- 6.4.7. HROC whilst rolling out the pay review has also been focussing on major organisational redesign, TUPE planning, workforce strategy development and strengthening core workforce planning infrastructure.
- 6.4.8. Significant progress was made across multiple service redesigns, including Culture, Libraries & Heritage, Sports, Greenspaces & Climate Response, and the full Regeneration Culture and Environment service review. Cross agency work also continued, with collaboration involving English Heritage, Kent County Council (KCC) Pensions and KCC Planning colleagues to shape options for delivery.
- 6.4.9. Capacity building work advanced through support to the expansion of the Communications team and the creation of new organisational change post implementation resources for managers. Workforce planning capability also increased through the development of a dedicated MedSpace page.
- 6.4.10. Strategic workforce initiatives continued, including completion of the draft Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy, a review of Children Social Care Workforce Strategy and work across a number of services to enhance senior leadership capacity. Active participation in the LGA Retention Reset Programme supported ongoing efforts to strengthen staff retention across the organisation.

6.4.11. Equality

- 6.4.12. This year has seen strong progress across the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda, with a focus on cultural events, governance, data improvement and preparation for key organisational initiatives.
- 6.4.13. Collaborative work with the Black and Global Majority Support Group resulted in a successful programme for Black History Month, including communications and a main event at Gun Wharf. In parallel, a staff focus group was held to explore experiences of workplace and community tensions, supporting the organisation's commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful culture.
- 6.4.14. HROC presented the Annual Equalities Board progress report to CMT. Agreements were reached in principle on dedicated time for forum chairs and future budget allocations to strengthen EDI delivery.
- 6.4.15. The draft EDI Calendar has been reviewed and shared with the Equalities Board, this details the focus for the next 12 months
- 6.4.16. A review of EDI data across the employment cycle has taken place, with system amendments planned to improve future reporting. Work also began with Communications on the upcoming 2026/27 Declaration Campaign, aimed at encouraging staff to update their protected characteristic information to help inform priorities for 2026/27.
- 6.4.17. Ongoing support continues for the Equalities Board, Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) programme, and staff forum groups to ensure sustained progress and engagement across the organisation.
- 6.4.18. Health and Safety and Wellbeing
- 6.4.19. Corporate Health & Safety has recently moved to HROC, so we are currently appointing to the role, however we have completed a full review of the current accident and incident reporting process, identifying opportunities for improvement. We are continuing to review guidance for DSE assessments ahead of Gun Wharf closure and plan additional training and a launch in the coming month.
- 6.4.20. HROC lead on the Healthy Mind and Wellbeing Group who have been analysing the wellbeing findings from the recent staff survey to inform future wellbeing activity. Throughout the period, a number of key health and wellbeing campaigns were supported and promoted, including World Mental Health Day, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Menopause Awareness, and Stress Awareness Day.
- 6.4.21. The organisation achieved Bronze accreditation in Healthy Workplaces, reflecting commitment to employee wellbeing. In addition, other activities have commenced, for example support was provided for Talk Money Week in partnership with the Money and Pensions Service (MAPS), promoting financial wellbeing across the workforce, and we hosted two employee

benefit fayres as well as supporting the Medway Live staff events, promoting our people promise.

6.4.22. Recruitment and resourcing

6.4.23. The Recruitment & Resourcing function has now been consolidated into a single, resilient team, with permanent and temporary recruitment aligned under the same Recruitment Officers. This realignment strengthens continuity for recruiting managers, improves reporting, and enhances budget control by ensuring coordinated transitions from temporary to permanent staffing.

6.4.24. We have implemented a new recruitment platform, Tribepad. This has provided us with a Medway Careers Hub. Weekly drop in sessions are supporting recruiting managers in effectively using the portal, and further work around data is currently being progressed.

6.4.25. Work is ongoing to embed MedPay PPP changes across recruitment, including the development of new guidance and forthcoming policy updates. MedSpace pages have also been refreshed, with clearer responsibilities and contact points, and further enhancements planned as processes evolve. These improvements collectively strengthen the recruitment experience for both managers and internal candidates.

6.4.26. Recruitment activity to Dec 31 2025

Recruitment Stats (Corporate) -

Adverts Posted	495
Permanent Contracts Issued	468
Casual Contracts Issued	63
DBS' Processed	2176
Acting up/Additional Duties	127

6.4.27. Seven schools have purchased the administration services, and 5 schools have purchased the advertising package, for 2025-2026.

Recruitment Stats (Social Care) -

TOTAL (01/04 - 31/12)	TRACS	Adult's Services		Children's Services		SEND		Corporate
		Total	Permanent	Locum	Permanent	Locum	Permanent	Locum
Onboarded Adverts posted CVs processed Interviews arranged	460	136	36	181	49	14	13	31
Offers made	536	111	37	193	124	30	19	22
Offers accepted	6176	993	870	2280	1138	304	271	320
Offers accepted	1886	397	149	970	168	78	37	87
Offers accepted	523	147	43	204	57	20	17	35
Temp to Perm Appts	472	135	39	186	46	19	15	32
Temp to Perm Appts	25	13		8		3		1

Social Media Stats -

TOTAL (01/04 - 31/12)			
LinkedIn		Facebook	
Impressions	23763	Views	5547
Reactions	927	Engagement	70
Page Views	232	Interactions	32
Unique Visitors	126	Total Followers	606
New Followers	137		
Total Followers	442		

6.4.28. Learning & Development (L&D)

6.4.29. Activity this year has focused on strengthening apprenticeship provision, responding to national policy changes, and maintaining financial oversight of the levy.

6.4.30. The annual Apprenticeship Celebration Event was held in Rochester and continues to grow, reaching oversubscription once again and bringing together training providers and employers to recognise learner achievement.

6.4.31. Following Government budget announcements, significant changes to Apprenticeship Levy rules have been confirmed, including the removal of the 10% top up and a reduction of allowable levy spend to 12 months. These changes require a shift in internal processes to more closely align with the L&D approval policy. Apprenticeships will remain a priority, but an expression of interest process will now ensure each request is robustly justified.

6.4.32. As of 31 December, the organisation has 78 apprentices in apprenticeship posts and 144 staff undertaking upskilling programmes, with total levy spend at £3,953,805.74 and total commitments at £5.88 million. Despite pressures, the organisation remains on track to ensure no levy funds are returned to Government.

6.4.33. As of 31 December 2025 there were 566 courses arranged to be delivered. Of this, 459 were delivered and 111 were cancelled or rearranged, of which 88 were internal.

6.4.34. Elearning is a key delivery channel for us, with 4,351 people accessing 832 courses.

6.4.35. Employee Engagement

6.4.36. This year saw focused activity across staff engagement, organisational culture, workplace improvement and ongoing embedding of new benefits.

6.4.37. Work on the Staff Survey has progressed, with results reviewed and key concerns identified around bullying, harassment and discrimination. To gain

deeper insight and shape targeted actions, a dedicated focus group has been established.

- 6.4.38. Insights from the survey are now informing updates to the Employee Engagement Strategy, ensuring future actions are aligned with staff priorities and organisational culture goals.
- 6.4.39. Exploration of new staff benefits continued, including supplier meetings for a financial wellbeing platform (Stream) and an electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme, supporting the organisation's aim to expand its benefits offer and enhance staff financial wellbeing.
- 6.4.40. As part of the Gun Wharf Improvement Board, work has begun on reviewing senior manager feedback on workspace and desk requirements, contributing to the wider redesign and optimisation of office accommodation.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. I am proud of the diligent work of staff and progress made in the services within my portfolio and continue to be fully supportive of the services and the work which is being undertaken in challenging circumstances, and I am committed to supporting continued progress in the coming year.

Lead officer contact

Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer phil.watts@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None